



Policy Scan

AN EXPLANATION OF MOVEMENTS TOWARD YOUTH SERVICE IN EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract

This regional report examines movements toward national governmental policies that involve young people in community service and volunteerism in 15 countries of Eastern Europe, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In the past, studies examining this region had neither identified whether national youth service policies (NYSP) exist, nor examined the factors that promote or hinder movements to create such policies. Research for this report reveals that none of these countries have a national policy that involves youth in community service. However, research described in this report identifies movements that exist to develop policies in 7 of the 15 countries, including Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Macedonia, and Serbia & Montenegro. Respondents in these countries indicate that domestic and international nongovernmental organizations lead the NYSP movement by providing formal opportunities for youth to serve, and that an increasing number of youth recognize the value of such service programs. Respondents identified the main barriers to NYSP development, including the general lack of youth-focused policies, lack of research on best practices for creating and implementing youth policies, shortage of financial resources necessary to fund policies and programs, lack of awareness in society and among government leaders of the benefits of youth service, and social-political background in countries that do not have a history of youth service and volunteerism. This report concludes with recommendations concerning the development of NYSP that respondents make to policy makers of their countries.

Introduction

The main premise behind government policies that support youth programs and activities is that when given an opportunity for meaningful involvement in society, youth take advantage. Well-designed policies that implement and sustain community service and volunteer programs provide youth the means for engaging in meaningful, pro-social activities. Such policies also provide opportunities for youth to acquire practical skills, confidence, and experiences in collective action for community improvement. The term national youth service policy (NYSP) refers to a governmental legislation, regulation, or set of strategies that provide opportunities for youth to engage in service. NYSP create and implement programs that operate locally (e.g. in the community), nationally (e.g. in a town other than the local community), or internationally (e.g. in another country).

The Global Youth Service Policy Scan is an ongoing exploratory research study performed by Innovations in Civic Participation in Washington, DC. The purpose of the study is threefold:

- To determine the status and climate for NYSP in each country around the world;
- To assess the stages of NYSP, including movements, creation, development, implementation, and sustainability;
- To assess the future prospects for NYSP.

A previous regional report from the Global Youth Service Policy Scan assessed NYSP in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Research revealed that in 2004, 13 of the 19 countries in the LAC study had a NYSP. Examining the many form and models of NYSP in LAC countries, the study demonstrated that some service policies were formed within the body of a pre-existing national youth policy, others were framed within educational policies, and still others were instituted under separate legislation. The report identified movements to develop policies in the other LAC countries that did not have a NYSP. The LAC report can be found on Innovations in Civic Participation's website, www.icicp.org.

The present regional report examines finding from the Global Youth Service Policy Scan in countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Questionnaire responses were received from individuals in 15 countries of this region, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In the past, studies concerning this region have not identified the existence or non-existence of NYSP in individual countries. Furthermore, research has not examined factors that promote or hinder movements to create national policies that engage youth in service. The purpose of this report is to develop a knowledge base by providing descriptive information on the status of NYSP movements in Eastern European countries and to explore the context within which NYSP can emerge and thrive.

Method

Study Scope

Prior to the beginning of this study, the authors set the study scope to include all countries in the Eastern European and Balkan region (from hereon referred to as the Eastern European region). The research employed an exploratory and open-ended methodological approach, which allowed for the emergence of themes that had not been theorized in advance. Questionnaires were designed to reflect the different stages of NYSP, from inception to full operation. These stages include the movement towards development, the creation, the implementation, and the sustainability of NYSP. Although this study gathered factual information regarding the nature and configuration of NYSP in Eastern European countries, the study also incorporated perceptions, viewpoints, and/or beliefs that were grounded in the professional experience and expertise of respondents working in the field of youth service and policy.

Criteria for selecting respondents to the questionnaires

The authors selected respondents with substantive experience in youth policy, youth, service and/or volunteerism, or policies in their respective country. The objective of the questionnaire was to secure multiple responses from each country in order to validate the accuracy of the content relating to youth service policy. The authors did not aim for a large sample of respondents with only minimal knowledge of the topic. The authors sought respondents from multiple and distinct domains to ensure a representative assessment of youth service policy and to showcase differing viewpoints where appropriate.

Definitions

This study employed a working definition of NYSP that defined the topic more broadly than narrowly. This approach allowed for inclusive depictions of the various forms and configurations of NYSP that exist around the world. Following are definitions for the various components of the term NYSP, including the core elements, characteristics, stages, and levels of NYSP.

Youth: The United Nations General Assembly defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive. However, understanding that the definition of youth may differ from country to country, this study defines youth to include persons younger than 15 and older than 24 (but not older than 30).

Service: Service is defined as a period of *intensive* and *substantial* engagement and contribution to the local or national community, recognized and valued by society, with *minimal* or *no* monetary compensation to the participant (Global Service Institute, 2002). This study interprets the term broadly to include various forms such as community service, civic service, volunteer service, service learning, service required by educational institutions, and others.

Policy: Policy is defined as an approved and documented government legislation, regulation, law, or strategy

Core Elements of NYSP

- Is approved and documented by the government as a legislation, strategy, law, regulation, etc;
- Is implemented (put into action) through new service programs or already existing service programs;
- Defines the purpose and role of young people's service;
- Provides opportunities for young people to participate in service programs under the auspice or guidelines set forth by the policy.

Characteristics of NYSP

- Is often created by a government body;
- Can be created within a general youth policy or as a separate legislation or strategy;
- Is generally implemented or put into practice in collaboration with NGOs;
- Generally establishes sufficient structure and framework to sustain service programs;
- Can seek to engage all youth or a specific youth population (e.g. students, disabled youth);
- Often includes other components, such as:
 - ◊ A legal framework for youth servers and organizations that provide programs;
 - ◊ Training for youth servers and program administrators;
 - ◊ Incentives for youth to serve and for organizations to provide service opportunities;
 - ◊ Restrictions on youth servers and organizations;
 - ◊ Partnerships among youth organizations that increase opportunities for youth to engage in service.

Stages of a Youth Service Policy as Defined by this Research

Movement to develop a youth service policy. The period of time when there is a valid attempt to create a NYSP.

Creation of youth service policy. The period of time when a policy is officially approved and documented by either a government body or a non-governmental organization.

Implementation of youth service policy. The period of time following the approval and documented creation of a NYSP. More specifically, the phase during which a NYSP is formally enacted or brought to life (e.g. programs launched and youth involved in service under the auspice of the NYSP).

Sustainability of youth service policy. The capability of a NYSP to continue over time despite factors that may hinder the effectiveness of youth service program(s) (e.g. changes in government or political climate, financial or organizational difficulties, failure of programs, loss of interest, etc).

Data collection

Data collection for the study occurred between August and December of 2004. The names of participants, specific institutions, government offices, universities, and agencies were withheld to ensure confidentiality. In August of 2004, the authors distributed 168 emails requesting participation from individuals in 28 countries of Eastern Europe who had been pre-selected based on internet searches as experts on youth, service, and policy in their respective countries. By December 2004, 34 questionnaires (20%) had been returned from respondents in 15 countries. Nine of the responses could not be included in this report, as the information could not be vali-

COUNTRY	Total # of Respondents	NGO	Government
Albania	2	1	1
Armenia	2	2	
Azerbaijan	2	2	
Belarus	1	1	
Georgia	2	2	
Estonia	2	2	
Bosnia & Herzegovina	2	1	1
Macedonia	1	1	
Moldova	2	2	
Poland	1	1	
Romania	2	2	
Russia	1		1
Serbia & Montenegro	3	3	
Turkmenistan	1	1	
Uzbekistan	1	1	
TOTALS	25	22	3

Table 1. Number of questionnaire respondents per country and number of responses by non-government or government positions.

dated. Although the goal of data collection was to receive 3 or 4 questionnaires from each country to compare perspectives from individuals in different professional sectors, low response rates prevented such a comparison.

Of the 25 individuals whose responses were included in this report, 22 worked for private civil society organizations (e.g. NGOs). Few responses came from individuals in public institutions (e.g. government agencies), possibly due to the lack of youth service policies in the Eastern European countries. Because NGOs serve as the primary leaders of NYSP movements in Eastern Europe, it is theorized that individuals working for these organizations were more likely to respond to the questionnaire.

Overview of Results

Respondents indicated that zero of the 15 countries in Eastern Europe reviewed in this report have a NYSP. Respondents did indicate that movements to develop such a policy exist in 7 of the 15 countries, including Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Macedonia, and Serbia & Montenegro. The following country summaries present a synthesis of responses that respondents provided to the questionnaires. The summaries describe the status of each country's movement to develop a NYSP, factors that facilitate the movement, factors that hinder the movement, suggestions on how to advance the movement, and additional comments made by respondents related to the NYSP movement in the respective countries.

Albania

The two respondents indicated that there is currently no NYSP in Albania and that there is not yet a formal movement to establish one. Both respondents stated that a NYSP would “probably” be created in the future. One respondent observed that Albanian youth are “more involved in volunteer service and community action than in the past,” a change that increases the likelihood that Albania will develop a NYSP.

According to the respondents, government policies have not yet responded to the needs of youth, and thus are “neglecting the largest percentage of the population in Albania.” However, the respondents noted that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) do provide volunteer opportunities for youth, filling the important role of establishing programs that provide formal opportunities for youth to “learn and survive successfully” as citizens. Recent events in Albania may also have a positive effect on youth service. Both respondents indicated that the fall of Communism in the early 1990s has led to the “eagerness of young people to travel abroad, gain new experiences, and improve their lives.” The respondents noted that “youth of Albania have faith in their potential as the rising generation of a country in transition.” Respondents described the “hope of better education and greater competency as a favorable ground for the development of youth service and service learning programs.”

“Youth of Albania have faith in their potential as the rising generation of a country in transition.”

The respondents provided their perspectives on recommendations for those involved in the movement to create a NYSP. One respondent emphasized the need to “sensitize” (raise the awareness of) governmental authorities regarding the potential of youth service. Both respondents noted that government offices, commercial structures, and public institutions should engage in the formal promotion of youth service programs. One respondent commented that NGOs should lead the NYSP movement, lobbying government officials to take action. This respondent also recommended that policy makers examine NYSP models from other countries, using international experts and other international youth service policies to inform themselves of different practices.

Both respondents noted Albania's movement to create a “general youth policy,” which is driven in particular by youth NGOs and the Albanian Youth Council. The respondents noted that these organizations have strengthened their capacities in recent years, and have collaborated with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to present the Albanian Parliament with the Final Draft of National Youth Strategy on December 17, 2003.

Armenia

The two respondents indicated that there is neither an existing NYSP in Armenia nor a formal movement to create one. One of the respondents commented that service could “potentially be a strategy for youth development.” However, addressing fundamental issues including poverty, economic development, and education were noted by these respondents as “taking priority” over youth service. Both respondents noted that Armenia's general youth policy does nominally include the term “service,” al-

though no formal programs or service opportunities exist within its framework. Nevertheless, the respondents indicated that this youth policy increases the likelihood that the country will someday adopt a NYSP.

Describing the history of youth service in Armenia, the respondents explained that several youth movements and youth associations emerged after the country's independence in 1991, only to fail soon afterwards. The respondents noted that funding had been the main obstacle to these initiatives, as young people often had to cover travel expenses and submit fees for serving. Since then, youth organizations in Armenia have made effort to develop partnerships with other organizations in Europe. Local youth service has been limited in recent years, as fewer organizations focused on community assistance to those in need.

One respondent noted that another obstacle to youth service in Armenia is the history attached to the term "service." Community service had been used to promote ideological goals under the Soviet system, and the government had instituted mandatory service through organizations such as the Komsomol (Communist Youth Union). A negative reaction to the term "service" remained even after the Soviet collapse. The respondents explained that service organizations created in the early 1990s attempted to alter this negative perception by providing opportunities for youth to engage in short-term service experiences abroad. Programs that take Armenian youth to Romania have been particularly successful. The respondents mentioned the Youth Pilgrimage and the New Armenia Humanitarian Support Center as examples of programs that create opportunities for service, especially for disadvantaged youth in Armenia.

The respondents explained that the eventual creation of a NYSP depends on the formation of a "network of organizations that can work together on local or national levels." Similarly, the respondents noted that organizations involved with youth "need to be better coordinated in their efforts." Both respondents had several suggestions for policy makers, including "a media awareness campaign to promote youth service as well as a policy to provide formal service opportunities." The respondents also recommended "organizational capacity building, increased cooperation among youth organizations, increased institutional infrastructure to support and finance youth service, and increased government support for youth-focused NGOs."

Youth service has been limited in recent years, as fewer organizations focused on community assistance to those in need.

One of the respondents noted that the implementation of Armenia's general youth policy was a "chaotic process" that began in 1998. They noted that government structures working in the field include the Department of Youth Policy Development, which distributes funds among youth NGOs, and Ministerial agencies that implement youth projects. One respondent indicated that there "is an initiative to draft new legislation and implementation strategies for Armenia's youth policy." The other respondent noted that there are "governmental structures trying to coordinate the youth policy and support youth activities." Despite limited finances, the respondents revealed that there has been "considerable movement in providing opportunities for the youth sector." Lastly, one respondent stated that the national youth policy in Armenia "has contributed to cooperation and integration on an international level, allowing for partnerships between youth organizations in Armenia and those in Europe."

Azerbaijan

Despite the absence of a NYSP in Azerbaijan, the two respondents indicated that "one would be created in the future." One respondent stated that there is a need for a NYSP as a potential solution for unemployment and as a means to increase youth engagement in civil society. The other respondent described a "need for a NYSP to provide positive opportunities for youth, explaining that youth aged 15-35 comprise 60 per cent of the country's population." This respondent also noted that the Azerbaijan Ministry of Youth has an internal paper on youth service.

Both respondents noted that there are many NGOs supporting youth initiatives that have an interest in promoting youth service. The respondents emphasized the need for a "network that would fa-

cilitate the cooperation and exchange of ideas among programs that work with youth and education.” The respondents commented that government agencies such as the Ministry of Youth should be responsible for creating a NYSP.

Both respondents had suggestions for policy makers. The respondents commented that a NYSP “should provide adequate funding for programs.” They also suggested that a NYSP “should consist of a collaboration between public and private sectors through which volunteer organizations and other NGOs implement government policy.” The respondents emphasized the role that youth leaders should have “in the preparation and development of a NYSP.” Similarly, the respondents commented that a NYSP “should address the needs of youth, incorporating their perspectives into the policy.”

NYSP “should consist of a collaboration between public and private sectors through which volunteer organizations and other NGOs implement government policy.”

One of the respondents made additional comments on Azerbaijan’s general national youth policy created by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism in 1994 (youth policy website available at www.nayora.az). In 1999, the Government held the first National Youth Forum “with the objective of solving problems related to youth and creating opportunities for youth development.” Each year Azerbaijan celebrates a “youth day in life” with different youth activities including service projects.

Belarus

The respondent indicated that Belarus has a general youth policy which includes broad statements that “encourage service involvement as strategy for youth development and for addressing community needs.” However, the policy “does not provide support programs or frameworks through which youth can engage in service.” In Belarus, the concepts of youth service and volunteerism are closely related to activities of youth civil society organizations. In recent years, workshops have brought together major stakeholders in private and public institutions to facilitate the movement to create a NYSP. The respondent noted that the main obstacle to the creation of a NYSP is the “negative connotation of the term service.” The people of Belarus tend to associate the term with ideologies and political systems of the past.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The two respondents indicated that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) does not have a NYSP. However, both stated that there is a movement to create such a policy, and one respondent specified that the movement has “existed for around three years.” Both respondents noted that there are now “increased opportunities for service through university student organizations as well as other organizations such as the Youth Communicate Centre, which works in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Culture.”

“Increased opportunities for service through university student organizations.”

Describing former youth service programs that had operated through the Communist Union of Yugoslavia, one of the respondents stated, “In former Yugoslavia we had a very developed youth community service program, one of the best in the world. Practically the whole country was built by young people in so-called work actions.”

Both Respondents pointed to the recent civil war as the main obstacle to the creation of a NYSP.

Estonia

Both respondents indicated that there is neither an existing NYSP in Estonia, nor a formal movement to create one. Both respondents stated that a NYSP “would be important for the youth in Estonia.” The respondents recommended that the government and NGOs “collaborate on the establishment of a policy.” They also pointed out the need for workshops on the topic of youth service.

No other information was provided by these respondents.

Georgia

Both respondents indicated that there is currently no NYSP in Georgia. One respondent indicated that there is no movement to create one whereas the other indicated that it was unknown whether there was a movement. However, both agreed that there are “signs of youth activism in Georgia.” The respondents explained that the country’s youth became “more active after the revolution, and that many younger individuals have recently become ministers and parliamentarians in the government.” One respondent noted that several NGOs are working in the field of youth service. Both respondents suggested that policy makers should “initiate seminars, workshops, and round tables to bring together those interested in the fields of youth and service.”

No other information was provided by these respondents.

Macedonia

The respondent indicated that there is a formal movement to create a NYSP in Macedonia. The respondent noted that in past years there have been “meetings organized by the government through the Agency for Youth and Sports, by NGO representatives, and by youth themselves.” The respondent explained that these meetings “identified problems faced by youth, legitimized youths’ efforts, and set the frame for a participative policy that would involve youth in society.” Commenting on how service provides youth with practical experience that cannot be found in academic settings, the respondent stated, “youth, especially those with the Faculty diploma, do not have the practical skills to meet the needs of the companies or business sector.” The respondent believes a NYSP will help address the need for practical skills.

The respondent also noted that there is currently a movement in Macedonia that emphasizes the need to “provide opportunities for young people to participate in society.” Such a strategy would help reduce crime rates among youth as well as rates for youth unemployment.

Macedonia still faces the aftermath of a socialist system in which “service” had indicated the provision of government assistance for matters both public and private.

The respondent stated that in order for a NYSP to be created, there is a need to overcome the country’s history as a part of the former Yugoslavia. Macedonia still faces the aftermath of a socialist system in which “service” had indicated the provision of government assistance for matters both public and private. The respondent also made the following recommendations for policy makers of the country: the invitation of foreign experts and consultants to share information on best practices in developing and implementing NYSP, the involvement of NGOs in the movement to advance service and develop policy, and the launch of an awareness campaign to alert government officials of the potential of a NYSP.

Moldova

Both respondents indicated that there is neither an existing NYSP in Moldova, nor a formal movement to create one. One of the respondents noted that leaders in both government and civil society organizations are “in the process of creating a general youth policy.”

The respondents explained that youth volunteerism in Moldova is a new field in need of further development. However, both respondents emphasized the need for youth service. One of the respondents indicated that the creation of a NYSP would benefit youth by providing access to information, knowledge, and professional experience. One respondent commented that Moldovan youth “would be willing to participate in social projects on a volunteer basis, provided there were appropriate incentives.” The other respondent stated that the future creation of a NYSP would “define legal rights for volunteers, motivating young people to participate in community service.”

The respondents discussed several obstacles to the NYSP movement in Moldova. One key obstacle is the “lack of awareness and opportunities, as youth do not realize the importance of being involved in community service, and only a small number of organizations encourage such youth participation.” One of the respondents noted that “democracy and civil society are relatively new concepts in

“Youth do not realize the importance of being involved in community service, and only a small number of organizations encourage such youth participation.”

Moldova and that there is less of a focus on initiatives involving youth coming from youth organizations and the government.” The respondents stated that both government and civil society should promote youth involvement in service projects.

The respondents had several suggestions for the creation of a NYSP. “A public awareness campaign would need to reach government officials and the country-wide population of youth, informing them of the importance of youth involvement in service.” One of the respondents suggested that “civil society should organize a roundtable

discussion with local authorities and representatives from the government and business sectors to propose the drafting of a paper defining a NYSP.” Such a paper could be followed by a “dialogue with government officials regarding funds needed to implement a NYSP.” This respondent noted that one step in this process would be to “form a group or council of young people and organizational leaders to design, promote, and lobby for the approval of such a NYSP.” Finally, the respondent emphasized the need for “deliberation between those who design and those who implement the policy.”

The other respondent recognized the need for collaboration between local authorities and civil society organizations in creating a NYSP. This respondent listed the roles that the private sector should carry out with regard to a NYSP: “the identification of societal needs, the training of youth to provide high quality service, and the coordination of youth engagement.” The respondent also stated that any NYSP would need “to motivate youth to engage more actively in the development activities in their communities.”

Lastly, the respondents noted the existence of several volunteer organizations, which are located mostly in the urban areas of Moldova. Examples provided by the respondent included the Young Journalists from Moldova Center, which allows youth to “involve in projects connected with the media” and the Center for Information and Protection of Child’s Rights from Moldova, which enables the youth of Moldova to “share their knowledge with children and help children in need of support.”

Russia

The respondent indicated that there is currently “a formal movement to create a NYSP in Russia.” The respondent described the movement as an objective of Russia’s national youth policy to nurture educated, active citizens and to further the activities of youth-focused organizations.

The respondent described many advances in the movement to create a NYSP. A website on youth voluntarism (<http://www.volunteer.ru>) has been promoting large-scale projects such as the Spring Week of Good and Global Service Day, which were organized in 2002, 2003, and 2004. These projects were designed to “stimulate civil society, increase support and awareness of youth service initiatives, provide healthy standards of living, and strengthen partnerships between society and government.” Public policy conferences have also been held in different regions of Russia, signaling another area of advance in the field of youth service.

The respondent noted that “Russia’s Ministry of Labor and Social Development has recently formed a civil society workgroup, which consists of representatives from the national government, public organizations, and society-oriented business institutions.” The workgroup’s main objective is to “advance public initiatives to increase the efficiency of public social policy and to realize projects that contribute to the well-being of Russia’s general population.” The workgroup aims to “develop mechanisms for an inter-stakeholder partnership to solve socially meaningful problems and to create a state policy supporting voluntary initiatives in Russia.”

The respondent listed many obstacles to the creation of a NYSP. Main obstacles include the

“Russia’s Ministry of Labor and Social Development has recently formed a civil society workgroup, which consists of representatives from the national government, public organizations, and society-oriented business institutions.”

lack of financial support for volunteer organizations, the lack of coordination in volunteer activities, the need for positive public opinion of volunteerism, and the lack of leadership and training.”

Serbia and Montenegro

All three respondents indicated that Serbia does not have a NYSP. Two of the respondents noted existing movements to create a NYSP, and the other respondent indicated that the movement toward NSYP has been slowed due to the “more pressing needs” that policy makers must address in Serbia and Montenegro.

The respondents noted some advances in the NYSP movement while also indicating that significant progress has yet to be made. One respondent commented that the movement is “just beginning to take shape.” Two of the respondents discussed how youth-focused groups and organizations are leading the movement to create youth programs and influence policy-making decisions in the government. One respondent provided an example of a youth NGO network called the “Youth Coalition of Serbia, which is led by a student union.” Another respondent noted the existence of a national agency for youth development working under the Ministry of Education. This respondent also discussed a program of the “Youth Council of Belgrade called BUNT! (an acronym for Belgrade in New Wave), one of the largest youth organizations working on the development of a national youth program.” Finally, this respondent noted that “the newly elected President of Serbia has promised to devote more attention to the challenges faced by youth.”

Each respondent listed key obstacles to the movement and creation of a NYSP, including the “lack of a youth-focused government agency, the lack of funds to implement a NYSP, and the low-

Country	NYSP	NYSP Movements	General National Youth Policy
Albania	No	Yes	In process of development
Armenia	No	No	Yes (service included nominally)
Azerbaijan	No	No	Yes
Belarus	No	Yes	Yes (service included nominally)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	No	Yes	Unknown
Estonia	No	No	Unknown
Georgia	No	No	Unknown
Macedonia	No	Yes	Unknown
Moldova	No	No	In process of development
Pakistan	No	No	In process of development (service included nominally)
Russia	No	Yes	Yes
Serbia & Montenegro	No	Yes	Unknown
Turkmenistan	No	No	Unknown
Uzbekistan	No	No	Unknown

priority status of NYSP in the government.” Each of the respondents listed the lack of a central ministry for youth as “the key hindrance to a NYSP.” Although the government has a small department for youth under the Ministry of Education, the respondents noted that this department lacks “real authority, resources, and influence to implement any youth related policy.” One respondent stated that commitment to youth issues is non-existent in the government. Another respondent commented that there is “no national front of youth organization that can lobby and push the government to start dealing with youth issues more efficiently and to develop some concrete steps.” This respondent also observed that a government program focused on youth has ceased to exist after the fall of Serbia’s totalitarian regime. One of the respondents discussed the lack of funding for “start-up activities” as another major obstacle to the NYSP movement. This respondent discussed the lack of concrete support by umbrella youth service organizations and commented that a NYSP is not a top priority for the Council of Europe or the European Commission. Another respondent specified the most pressing youth concerns as child and youth poverty, education, and other social problems such as substance abuse and health. This respondent noted that “frequent political change and economic difficulties also create obstacles to the NYSP movement, drawing the country’s attention away from its youth.” This respondent also noted that “government officials still lack the awareness of NYSP despite the existence of successful international models.”

“Government officials still lack the awareness of NYSP despite the existence of successful international models.”

Each of the respondents made several suggestions on how to advance the development of a NYSP. Two of the respondents focused on “increasing the awareness of service and facilitating collaboration in the NYSP movement.” One of these respondents recommended a “large national forum of united youth organizations to create a better climate in the public to put more pressure on the government.” Such a national forum “would pressure the government to cooperate with local NGOs in the advancement of a NYSP.” The other respondent noted the need for government-led discussions and an election in parliament that would help build consensus among stakeholders.

One of the respondents stated that any NYSP movement should take place as a joint effort between “national agencies and NGOs as well as taking part of a global campaign for youth.” Such a joint effort would “ensure the involvement of relevant government ministries such as the Ministries of Education, Trade and Tourism. Another respondent discussed at length the need for adequate funding.” The respondent stated:

“For years I have been strongly supportive of idea of young people serving their communities through precisely defined volunteering services that are managed, supported, and coordinated through efforts of the state and non-governmental institutions. The biggest challenge is of course how this would be funded, and I do not see any solution except that concrete support and motivation must come either from the Council of Europe or the European Commission’s Youth Program. Without involvement of these most relevant factors in the creation of any youth policy, I do not think that policy makers at the state level would make any effort in the direction that would result in national youth service policy.”

Commenting on the climate for a NYSP in Serbia, this respondent also stated:

“After the fall of communism 15 years ago, many youth NGOs were founded in Yugoslavia. Student movements against the Milosevic regime during the years 1992-2000 had a great role in empowering young people to speak for themselves. During the period of his rule, the Milosevic Youth council of Serbia (a supreme youth organization) collapsed under repression and was controlled by the regime. Independent youth NGOs, mostly led by the Student Union of Serbia, provided the only real place for youth to perform volun-

teer work. In 2000 the change to democracy improved the situation. Today, youth NGOs are not under any repression of the state. Also, young men can instead go to the army or serve in state institutions as civil servants. Almost every public state institution is at present open for male (not female) recruits. Youth can do volunteer work in several organizations, mostly in organizations which are doing humanitarian work.”

Turkmenistan

The respondent indicated that there is neither a NYSP nor a movement to create one in Turkmenistan. The respondent does believe that a NYSP will be created one day, as there is a need for youth service. The respondent indicated that “educational awareness, training, and a legal base” are all needed to advance the NYSP movement.

The respondent noted that national policy landscape in Turkmenistan has “changed dramatically since the fall of the USSR.” However, despite recent reforms and innovations, the government “has yet to address the private social sector of Turkmenistan with supportive policies.” The respondent noted that the political climate worsened in 2003 when the government instituted “a law on the work of NGOs” which prohibits any action (even meetings) of non-registered organizations or groups. Despite the existence of international NGOs striving for societal development in Turkmenistan, the respondent noted that “the government has withheld its support from the country’s civil society.”

“The government has withheld its support from the country’s civil society.”

The respondent identified obstacles to the NYSP movement as “the lack of an officially approved, legal basis to create a NYSP, the lack of government support, a general lack of expertise in the field of youth service, and the need for awareness of youth service and policy.”

Uzbekistan

The respondent indicated that there is no NYSP in Uzbekistan and that the field of service is in its infancy. The respondent noted that the government “needs to develop strategies that provide opportunities for young people.”

No further information was provided by the respondent.

Perspectives on NYSP

The following section summarizes the status of movements to establish government-sponsored NYSP in Eastern Europe, including factors that have advanced or hindered the movements. The section also provides the recommendations that respondents made to policy makers in their respective countries concerning the future development of NYSP.

Facilitators of movements to create NYSP:

Respondents listed several factors that facilitate movements to create NYSPs. Several respondents described historical context as a driving force for service movements in their respective countries. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina a respondent noted that the “ethic of service” remains from the days of the Communist Union of Yugoslavia. In Armenia, international service projects from the early 1990s have shifted the ethos of service from a state-mandated exercise to being a beneficial and enjoyable opportunity for youth. Participating in domestic and international service activities in greater numbers since the fall of Communism, the youth of Armenia have also become aware of community service as a positive and productive activity. According to several respondents, the inclusion of service in general youth policy of governments is another factor facilitating the NYSP movements in Eastern Europe. In Armenia, Belarus, and Russia, respondents indicated that the general youth policies of their countries make nominal reference to service as a strategy to engage youth. While these policies do not support formal service programs or more concrete opportunities for service, the respondents noted that at the very least the reference to service provides hope for a future expansion of these policies.

Several respondents described the role of non-governmental organizations and government-sponsored agencies in youth initiatives, including movements to develop NYSP. In Azerbaijan and Serbia, respondents noted that youth-focused NGOs implement youth programs and attempt to influence policy-making decisions in the government that concern youth. In Russia, a civil society workgroup strives to build partnerships that will facilitate the advance of youth initiatives. Respondents also noted that community service and volunteerism have received greater attention in recent years. The youth of Albania have become more receptive to opportunities for international service. In Russia, a website on voluntarism promotes large-scale projects designed to engage young members of civil society. Finally, respondents of several countries indicated that service is beginning to receive political attention as a strategy for youth development. In Serbia and Montenegro, the newly elected President has promised to devote greater attention to youth and the challenges they face in society. In Macedonia, government meetings have identified youth concerns and legitimized youth participation in society. In Azerbaijan, the government’s youth office has recently authored an internal paper on youth service.

Obstacles to NYSP movements:

Respondents described a variety of obstacles, often inter-related, that hinder movements to develop national youth service policies in the region. Many Eastern European countries have yet to develop awareness of youth service as a beneficial practice for youth as well as a potential strategy for addressing greater societal needs. Central government offices focused on youth issues are scarce, and a lack of coordination between public and private entities also create difficulties for the design and implementation of youth policy.

The majority of respondents described the lack of awareness among the general public and government officials as the main obstacle for NYSP movements. Under the Soviet system, community service had existed within a different ideological framework, operating as a mandatory activity often through Communist organizations. Even after the fall of USSR the term service remains adverse to many. In Turkmenistan, the respondent indicated that although there have been numerous changes since the Soviet collapse, policies have yet to address the private sector of their society as well as issues facing the country’s youth. In Macedonia, the term service remains associated with the socialist practice of providing government assistance for most private matters. As a result, the notion of volunteer service does

not resonate with many citizens. In Moldova, respondents noted that democracy and civil society are relatively new concepts. These respondents explained that there is less of a focus on youth issues and initiatives coming from youth organizations and the government. In Uzbekistan, respondents commented that people in his country lack an understanding that service can promote values of citizenship among young people and address social issues such as poverty, education, employment, as well as environmental protection. Another obstacle for NYSP movements in the Eastern European region is the lack of governments that institute youth-focused policy initiatives. In Serbia and Montenegro, for example, the absence of a government ministry for youth makes it difficult for youth agencies to gain access to official support, resources, and authority necessary to implement successful policies.

Recommendations:

Respondents were asked to provide recommendations on how to advance movements to create governmental policies that involve youth in service. Common responses included suggestions for awareness campaigns through the media aimed at policy makers and the public, organizational capacity building, increased cooperation between the government and youth organizations, increased institutional infrastructure to support and finance youth service programs, and increased support by the government for NGOs working in the youth field. The respondents emphasized that youth leaders must be involved in the preparation and development of any NYSP. Similarly, the respondents noted that the policy should incorporate youths' perspectives and understand what young people desire for themselves. In several countries, respondents noted that policy makers should examine national youth service policy models from other countries, and that international experts and other international youth service policies should be used to inform practice. In several countries, the respondents suggested that policy makers should initiate seminars, workshops, and round tables to bring together those interested in the youth and service. In several countries, the respondents noted that international bodies have to support the movement. Lastly, several respondents noted a need for research in order to determine the landscape for evaluating the effectiveness of any policy that would be created.

Conclusion

Youth born in the Eastern European and Balkan region in the 1990s are a unique generation, as their formative years have been marked by radical socio-political, cultural, and economic change. In many countries included in this study, totalitarian and state-controlled regimes had been replaced by Western-style democratic and representative governments. Furthermore, several of the countries in the present inquiry were born recently out of war-torn states of the past. In countries of the Eastern European and Balkan region, the act of performing community service and volunteering is not commonly understood as a strategy for youth and societal development. The research, performed in 2004, revealed that none of the 15 countries in the study have a governmental policy that involves youth in service. The finding indicates that youth service and policies supporting youth initiatives such as service have yet gain support among policy makers, despite the fact that movements supporting youth service do exist. Future research is needed to measure in greater depth the effects of youth service on individual development and on society in general, and to assess the impact of policy in addressing the needs of youth.

Due to the non-representative sample of respondents and the exploratory nature of this research, the authors recognize that this study may have omitted existing national youth service policies. Furthermore, this paper does not address the findings specifically in relation to the cultural, political, and social context of the particular countries in the Eastern European and Balkan region. Nevertheless, by uncovering some of the movements toward national youth service policy and addressing specific factors that hinder and facilitate these movements, this assessment provides a stepping-stone for further research and inquiry

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