

MONITORING OF NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES

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Abstract

Comprehensive and systematic monitoring of the situation of youth and its quality of life should be one of the most important parts of general national and EU policy-making. Slovenia is currently in the position where there is no well developed and continuous monitoring system in place. Therefore there is a strong need to establish it if we want to provide a strong measurement tool which could serve as a sound basis for policy action by different stakeholders such as policy-makers, researchers, media, advocacy groups and public ultimately leading to evidence based policy-making, better analysis of the situation of youth and potential improvement of its situation. Within the paper we focus on the first phase of the establishment of such a monitoring system. This phase include the identification and analysis of problem areas in several social fields important to youth (education, employment, participation, housing, virtualisation of everyday life etc.) and evaluation of existing national policies designed to tackle them. The successful completion of the first phase enables us to develop a so called ideal set of indicators to be used in measuring trends within these social fields as well as a set of process indicators enabling us to monitor implementation of national youth policies and programmes.

Key words: *youth, national youth policies, designing a monitoring system, youth indicators*

Introduction

The paper focuses on the need to establish a monitoring and evaluation system for youth policies. We define youth policy as »a declaration of the commitment a country gives to its young people. It should be based upon national dialogue and a fruitful partnership of relevant stakeholders (i.e. partners). A youth policy shall, in concrete terms, define objectives, strategies, concrete steps, target groups, timeframe, monitoring and evaluation« (Youth Policy - Here and Now, 2005).

Following the definition, monitoring and evaluation system should be an indispensable part of the youth policy. It provides information to the policy designers and other relevant stakeholders on the success or failure of particular policy, programme or youth project. The paper therefore deals with the issue of how monitoring and evaluation system should be ideally designed to maximise its purpose. We emphasise the need for so called evidence-based policymaking in the design of youth policies, as well as in the establishment of the monitoring system, and highlight its importance on the example of changing labour market and the influence it has on the situation of youth.

Furthermore, the paper assesses the use of evidence-based youth policymaking in Slovenia in the context of recent efforts to design new national programme for youth and its accompanying monitoring and evaluation system.

The need for evidence-based policymaking

Comprehensive and systematic monitoring of the situation of youth and its quality of life should be one of the most important parts of national and EU policy-making. The importance of monitoring and evaluation, viewed here as an integral part of national policymaking in the field of youth, has already been recognised by the EU institutions (Denstad, 2009). Mechanisms set to establish monitoring and evaluation systems of youth policies has to be therefore taken as a serious goal within the broader efforts of the state as well as other stakeholders to improve the situation of youth in a particular national context.

There are however other, perhaps more important reasons rather than EU's recommendations for paying close attention to the design as well as monitoring of the youth policies. These reasons derive from the broader socio-economic context and trends that are drastically changing the nature of risks contemporary youth has to deal with. The analysis of the social context in which youth policies are designed, evaluated and monitored, and which is predominantly the focus of youth policies itself, has to be therefore taken into serious consideration while designing national evaluation and monitoring system(s). The policy process has to start with a rigorous analysis of the current social context to provide a better understanding of the social reality, which is affecting the ability of youth to complete the transitions to the adulthood.

An example of such a changing social realities that has to be taken into account and analysed before designing youth policies and establishing monitoring and evaluation system is the labour market. It is one of the dominant social fields that public policies are trying to address. The youth labour market has been receiving an unrivalled attention from the academia, policy designers, policy makers and public as it constitutes one of the most prominent barriers to the successful transitions to adulthood. The labour market as we once knew no longer exists; the prevalence of the standardised permanent employment, accompanied by high levels of social and material security and society's unquestioned commitment to the goal of full employment has made room for the emergence of a labour market that is characterised by increasing unemployment and/or flexibilisation of employment consequently leading to the generalisation of unseen employment uncertainties and social polarization. An ever increasing part of the population is therefore being excluded from receiving material benefits that are linked to paid work itself, as well as social benefits that are connected with employment status. Transitions to adulthood seem to be ever more affected by these trends and are becoming much more complex in comparison to just couple of decades ago. The shortcomings of the labour market in fact lead to reduced ability to achieve full economic and social independence of youth.

To be able to successfully complete the transition to adulthood young person has to be much better equipped with different forms of capital than previous young generations. He/she has to be able to design a set of appropriate strategies and successfully use them to deal with the transitions risks. One of the most dominant transition strategies is the attainment of as much educational capital as one can, to be able to better compete in the current labour market marked by the employment uncertainties. The use of this strategy spurred by expected uncertainty in the youth labour market results in high levels of educational enrolment. This in fact leads to the devaluation of the strategy of the educational capital attainment as everyone is pursuing the same strategy and competing for limited employment opportunities. The pursuing of this all-important and ubiquitous strategy has unintended social consequences resulting in the necessary introduction of new criteria for the entrance into the labour market. These new criteria, that are no longer limited only to the educational attainment, allow the employer to distinguish among the youth with similar educational attainment. Most of the times such criteria include cultural, social and other characteristics that are beyond the influence of the young person therefore limiting his/her influence over its life course.

The example of devaluation of once leading strategy of youth to assure themselves material and social security in the new socio-economic context shows, how important it is to understand the social context in which the transition to the adulthood accrue. Without such new understanding policymakers and policy designers could still be relying and trusting into old policy designs 'curing' new social problems. Only through better understanding of the social context can we make sure that the design of national policies will be effective and in line with the social reality of youth, which it is in fact trying to address. Such an approach to policy making is called evidence-based policymaking. It represents

a discourse or set of methods which informs the policy process, rather than aiming to directly affect the eventual goals of the policy. It advocates a more rational, rigorous and systematic approach. The pursuit of evidence based policy making is based on the premise that policy decisions should be better informed by available evidence and should include rational analysis. This is because policy which is based on systematic evidence is seen to produce better outcomes. The approach has also come to incorporate evidence-based practices (Sutcliffe and Court, 2005).

Implications of evidence-based policy making for monitoring and evaluation of youth policies

Such a discourse has to be used also in the development of a comprehensive and systematic evaluation and monitoring mechanism for youth policy. It should be its essential part. Without accurate data, gathered through research it is impossible to measure real impact of the youth policies. The development process of such monitoring and evaluation system has to therefore begin with the analysis of the social context and barriers, which are limiting the choices of youth, identification of problems in certain areas of social life important to youth, and critical analysis of already existing national youth policies and their impacts. Evidence-based policymaking should be used as a starting point not only when designing youth policies but also in the design of monitoring and evaluation systems. It namely provides a precious insight into certain social problems, ill designs of existing youth policies, and enables policymakers and policy designers to identify priorities areas as well as to design a relevant set of indicators. Indicators are important because they help track results and provide essential information for successful management of a particular policy. They should flow from the objectives and activities planned, focusing on what is intended to be measured. The identification of such a set of indicators

provides a strong instrument for measuring change, trends, outputs, impacts and outcomes of youth policies. We can formulate such a set of indicators in accordance with international recognised matrix¹ which consists of:

- structural indicators that reflect the existence of legal instruments, as well as basic institutional and budgetary mechanisms necessary for facilitating the realisation of the particular youth policy,
- process indicators that reflect the efforts made at national and local or regional level to implement the structural provisions. This includes national strategies, policy measures, action programmes, training initiatives, campaigns and other activities aimed at implementation of particular youth policy,
- outcome indicators that reflect individual and collective attainments in reference to the status of implementation of particular youth policy, as well as the extent to which youth has benefited from interventions and action programmes. These tend to be statistically quantifiable, but can also be measured through qualitative means, if such comparable data is or could be made available (Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009).

Using the combination of these types of indicators, which should be based on the before mentioned evidence-based policymaking and be the core of the evaluation and monitoring system, enable us to assess the (un)desired outcomes of a particular youth policy or of an action plan designed for implementation of a national youth strategy or certain national youth programme.

The state of affairs in Slovenia

Slovenia currently does not have a well developed and continuous monitoring and evaluation system, which would cover solely the youth policies. However, with the aim of *Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth* (which is a body within the Ministry of education, science and sport) to develop a new national programme for youth in 2011, there is an ever stronger need to set up such a system.

As part of these efforts the Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia has so far contributed two recent research projects on the topic of youth. First one called *Between the childhood and adulthood: The analysis of the situation of youth in Slovenia 2009* is focused on, as indicated by the title, the holistic analysis of the situation of youth and its quality of life. It provided a broad analysis and a new insight into several social fields important to youth (demographic changes, education and educational attainment, employment and unemployment of youth, social and economic situation of youth, housing, health and free time and participation of youth). The second research project called *The matrix of governmental youth policies in Slovenia* covers more social fields (demographic changes and intergenerational cooperation, education and training, creativity, culture and free time, employment and entrepreneurship, sustainable social action, housing, health, participation and social inclusion, volunteering, mobility of youth and globalisation). The second research project is qualitatively different from the first one as it does not confine itself to the analysis of the social situation of youth, but broadens its analysis to the policy level. It therefore deals with the identification of problems and priority areas of each above mentioned social field and correspondingly provides an analysis of strategies, resolutions, programs and measures of youth policies and other public policies that affect the situation of young people indirectly. Furthermore, it provides suggestions on how to improve the implementation of existing youth policies in terms of their better compliance with previously identified problem areas and proposes a relevant set of indicators to measure the impacts and outcomes of existing and the potential of new policies.

Conclusion

With all that in mind we assess that these efforts have been part of the above discussed evidence-based policymaking, which should be viewed as a basis for designing a national programme for youth as well as the establishment of a comprehensive and systematic monitoring and evaluation system which will have to accompany it. We therefore conclude that Slovenia has recently been pursuing, at least seen from the point of view of the policy analysis theory, an ideal path when designing its new national youth strategy – what will happen in the following phases of the process remains to be seen, but so far policy designers have avoided designing new national youth strategy on the basis of the perceived needs of young people and have instead opted for the evidence-based assessment of needs and problems of youth.

References

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¹ See for instance UN-OHCHR's Report On Indicators For Promoting And Monitoring The Implementation Of Human Rights, HRI/MC/2008/3, 6 June 2008.

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