

Key Areas and Action Plans of the State Policy in Relation to Children and Youth in the Slovak Republic for 2008 – 2013

1. Introduction

1.1. The key areas and action plans of the state policy in relation to children and youth in the Slovak Republic for 2008 – 2013 (thereinafter referred only as “key areas”) define aims, principles, prioritised areas within the scope of the state, the self-administration and other subjects within selected children’s and youth’s life areas. The key areas specify basic tasks of the structures taking part in their execution and describe steps, which will ensure their effective fulfilment.

1.2. The basis for processing of these key areas is represented by the experience gained from the State Policy Conception in Relation to Children and Youth till 2007, the content of which brought the analysis of the situation within the children and youth area and determined specific tasks to various subjects. Other tasks were specified in annual action plans; their fulfilment was evaluated by means of annual reports submitted to the Cabinet Council of the Slovak Republic. The basic negative of such an approach to problems solving is the fact, that the extensive demarcation of the situation and the long-term tasks (7 years) disabled the aims fulfilment evaluation, mentioned in the conception itself. Based upon this experience the content of the proposed key areas aims at the determination of the problems in the specific area of the children and youth life and it leaves the specific tasks demarcation to following measures of its implementation – biennial action plans. Another basis for these keys areas processing is the National Report on the State Policy in Relation to Children and Youth in the Slovak Republic, which was elaborated following the methodology of the Council of Europe (www.spravaomladezi.sk). Aiming to ensure the continuity in state policy goals setting within the children and youth area the proposed key areas reckon with the elaboration of a complex youth report in mid-period of their activity – in 2010.

1.3. The state policy in relation to children and youth integrally supports and improves young people’s lives, their education, and their access to information, their lodging, employment, health or an active use of their leisure time.

1.4. The measures contained in the action plans, which fulfil the key areas of the state policy in relation to children and youth concern the routine of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Environment.

1.5. The state policy in relation to children and youth is also realised through the self-administration measures at the level of counties, towns and communities, which execute this policy at the nearest stage to children and youth.

1.6. The state within its policy in relation to children and youth forms partnerships with non-governmental organisations working with children and youth.

1.7. To execute the measures in the framework of this state policy the state uses also school organisations, mainly leisure time centres, school interest activity centres, school children clubs etc. Regional centres, being established at the level of some self-administration counties¹, operate significantly in this area.

¹ At the time of the material creation, the regional youth centres work in the County of Banská Bystrica, the County of Trenčín and the County of Košice.

1.8. The state accepts also children and youth, that are not members of the non-governmental organisations, as contributors to the forming of the state policy in relation to children and youth in the Slovak Republic and accepts specific measures for them.

1.9. For the needs of these key areas, under the notion “children and youth” we comprehend all people since they were born until they are 30 years old (including the age of 30).

1.10. In these key areas we use terms, whose aim is to confirm the state’s liabilities within the area of children and youth resulting from international agreements, which the Slovak Republic has signed. For the sake of the document transparency, the confirmations of these liabilities are not mentioned in their full version, but only informatively.

1.11. These key areas provide basis for following specific measures in a transparent and concise form with the demarcation of reasons for their fulfilment as well as ways and dates of their fulfilment. In doing so the aim is to make the key areas become a “living” document, to fulfilment of which contribute not only state bodies defined by legal regulations and international contracts, but also non-governmental organisations and representatives of children and youth.

2. Aims of the state policy in relation to children and youth

The aim of the state policy in relation to children and youth is to strengthen such a society that will secure to children and youth following items:

- forming of conditions to increase the quality of life,
- provision of social justice, plenitude of opportunities and equal opportunities,
- acknowledgement of rights to their own identity, distinctness and autonomy,
- provision of opportunities to employment, active citizenship and youth representatives’ participation in both, the societal and the political life.

3. Principles of the state policy in relation to children and youth

The state

3.1. perceives youth as an important participant of the society development,

3.2. forms conditions, so that children and youth in the Slovak Republic can satisfy their legitimate needs and requirements and the environment for a quality and ethic self-realisation,

3.3. considers youth to be able to overtake responsibility for their lives routing,

3.4. forms material and legislative conditions for children and youth protection and support for the sake of their general development; forms both, economic and societal structures, forms and develops the culture of co-operation and partnership with children and youth representatives, secures equal access to education and to true and up-to-date information,

3.5. perceives that the complex securing of the policy in relation to children and youth is not only a duty of the state or a community, but it also is a duty of both, non-governmental and private sectors, media, educational institutions, family, communities as well as children and youth themselves,

3.6. confirms that youth has the right to active participation in societal life, whereas it realises that a natural youth participation in both, the societal and the political life is a basic assumption of their positive contribution to decisions concerning their present and future life,

3.7. pays particular attention to protection and support of children and youth from socially disadvantaged environs (single mothers bringing up children, divorced parents with children, unemployed parents with children and adolescent youth etc.), whereas it forms conditions for the development of both, a preventive and a supportive system focused not only on vulnerable, problematic groups of children and youth and the groups standing at the edge of the society's interest, but also on the majority group of children and youth,

3.8. forms adequate conditions for work with children and youth at schools, school organisations and other organisations, supports families with children, children, youth, civic, humanitarian, religious and charity associations, movements, foundations, as well as various non-state, private, non-profit organisations and agencies and also individual citizens in their exceptional work with children and youth,

3.9. supports the development of work with children and youth and the policy in relation to children and youth at the level of self-administration counties and towns and communities and, for this purpose, it effectively uses the state budgetary funds (mainly the Ministry's of Education financial support programmes).

4. Key areas of the state policy in relation to children and youth

4.1. Education

In this area the state:

4.1.1. emphasises that education is not only young man's right, but also their investment and a tool for their talent and abilities development and their complex personality forming,

4.1.2. supports the educational system's development and improvement by securing of human resources, by support of infrastructure, by development of technologies and by provision of other forms of support,

4.1.3 builds a modern vocational education system that flexibly reacts to labour market's needs as well as to other changes within the Slovak society,

4.1.4. supports the educational system's democratisation mainly by strengthening of school self-administrations and school councils,

4.1.5. forms conditions to improve the education for children and youth with specific educational needs,

4.1.6. confirms reciprocal completion of both, formal and non-formal education as well as informal learning; in the scope of non-formal education and informal learning the acknowledgement of competencies of youth leaders, young leaders, volunteers from among youth as well as youth representatives, who have gained specific competencies through a systematic and purposeful work with children and youth, is underscored,

4.1.7. enables the access to life-long learning for all youth groups,

4.1.8. supports searching and identification of talented and gifted children and youth, supports their further development and work not only within the Slovak Republic.

4.2. Employment

In this area the state:

- 4.2.1. perceives the right of youth to work and the obligation of the state to secure them an offer of various opportunities and relevant basic skills for their realisation on the labour market,
- 4.2.2. motivates employers creating jobs and opportunities for gaining new work skills, or rather work practice and provides advantages to the employers, that accept graduates during so-called adaptation period,
- 4.2.3. supports fulfilment of duties resulting from the European Youth Pact, mostly those ones concerning harmonisation of professional and family life, reception of measures aimed at a better social and professional integration, a greater visualisation in youth field in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy,
- 4.2.4. considering the fact, that the employment is also a tool to youth self-realisation, it motivates employers to creation of jobs and support of autonomy development, leadership and creativity of youth,
- 4.2.5. underscores the equality of opportunities at reception to work and at execution of duties resulting from various job-positions as well as at career progresses of youth,
- 4.2.6. realises the significance and the role of professional work agencies, career advisors, labour unions, corporations, professional associations and other organisations, which help youth gain a certain work-culture, form their work-habits, educate them and support their further development and creativity, therefore it supports their activity in this area,
- 4.2.7. supports development of the youth entrepreneurship,
- 4.2.8. supports a continuous transition process of the youth from education towards employment through a better contact and co-operation between schools and employers,
- 4.2.9. develops the system of acknowledgement of competencies gained through youth participation in international mobility programmes in the scope of work, study and leisure time, whereas it pays attention mostly to acknowledgement of competencies gained through participation in voluntary activities within the Slovak Republic and abroad as well as to promotion of these issues among employers,
- 4.2.10. ensures an integral access to those youth representatives, who interrupt or do not finish the formal education process for impartial reasons, so that they could gain the knowledge capital also through a formal acknowledgement of non-formal education and informal learning results,
- 4.2.11. supports organisations creating jobs and opportunities for gaining work skills and practice,
- 4.2.12. promotes vocational education acknowledgement and accepts measures for securing its equality to academic education,
- 4.2.13. underscores the significance of organising events such as “job exchange” at least at the level of counties’ capitals, as well as the importance of advertising of such events.

4.3. Family

In this area the state:

- 4.3.1. respects every citizen’s family as a basic unit of the society,
- 4.3.2. forms conditions for fulfilment of family’s basic functions,

- 4.3.3. supports communication and interaction between parents and educational authorities at all levels and creation of partnerships,
- 4.3.4. supports flexibility of parents' working hours and working duties, so that they can secure a quality upbringing for their children and youth,
- 4.3.5. forms conditions for field social work and community work with families, which do not fulfil their basic functions,
- 4.3.6. forms conditions for independence of youth that grew up in substitute care,
- 4.3.7. supports further education of teachers, children and youth workers and youth leaders in intercultural relationships to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers mainly in relation to Romany families and migrants' families.

4.4. Habitation

In this area the state:

- 4.4.1. perceives the youth requirement for independent habitation as one of the basic human needs,
- 4.4.2. forms such conditions and measures that improve the access of youth to independent habitation, especially in case of young families (complete or incomplete ones), for instance by providing a subsidy or a loan for acquisition of rental flats on advantageous conditions, i.e. a low interest rate and a long maturity,
- 4.4.3. perceives the specific need for assistance and support of youth at securing of independent habitation, whereas the question of assistance is relevant mainly in case of groups of young people facing difficult life situations or stemming from unfavourable environs (see 4.12.).

4.5. Youth attendance at societal and political life – participation

In this area the state:

- 4.5.1. forms conditions so that the participation of youth in all fields of the society is at adequate level and is not only symbolic, but it really influences matters and the decision-making,
- 4.5.2. forms conditions for securing of up-to-date, available and relevant information for youth, what it considers as a basic condition of the youth participation in societal life at local, regional and state levels,
- 4.5.3. acknowledges schools, school organisations, non-governmental organisations, youth councils and other subjects to be a space, where youth has natural and appropriate conditions for gaining and realising of their adequate competencies and therefore it accepts such measures, which enable their continuous action in this area,
- 4.5.4. supports youth participation through their representatives at the level of local and regional self-administration,
- 4.5.5. secures an open co-ordination method in the field of youth participation and youth information as well as development of structured dialogue at the state level and it supports creation of platforms, consulting and other mechanisms for youth participation at the local and regional level,
- 4.5.6. pays adequate attention to development of measures leading up to creation of opportunities for participation of young people facing difficult life situations or stemming from unfavourable environs (see 4.12.),
- 4.5.7. forms legislative conditions for development of youth volunteering, supports education within the scope of voluntary service and building of relevant infrastructure.

4.6. Information and communication technologies

In this area the state:

4.6.1. acknowledges the right to information to be one of the basic human rights and therefore it guarantees availability and complexity of the information for youth by means of various subjects and structures and it supports exchange of good examples,

4.6.2. systematically supports provision of information services for youth and broadens youth access possibilities to information in all areas of their impartial needs and requirements, for instance in areas such as: education, employment, training courses and seminars, non-profit sector activities, national and international activities within the scope of youth work and youth policy,

4.6.3. supports systematic preparation of youth for work with information and, at the same time, it supports also development of advisory and consulting services,

4.6.4. supports such research and survey activities that enable to define measures of the policy in relation to children and youth at the local, regional and state level upon relevant and exact information, whereas action plans of realisation of these measures will indicate further development of the **problems**, will contain children's and youth expectations and will reflect their needs,

4.6.5. realises that the Internet is an inevitable condition of children's and youth further education and is a part of the life-long learning, therefore it continuously improves access to the Internet and increases its availability to children and youth,

4.6.6. supports modernisation and effectiveness of existing internet portals and nets,

4.6.7. using information technologies it supports assistance activities' development to those children and youth that have not been in contact with them yet, it supports various campaigns and other measures within this area and warns children and youth against the Internet abuse and draws attention to various dangers linked to that,

4.6.8. supports safe use of the Internet (mainly by children) against illicit and harmful content and increases general awareness within this area among parents, teachers and children as final users.

4.7. Mobility

In this area the state:

4.7.1. considers youth as a carrier of change, peace and progress, therefore it forms conditions for youth mobility and international contacts development and it motivates youth to gaining an intercultural experience,

4.7.2. acknowledges that a qualitatively prepared and realised activity within the scope of youth mobility strengthens such values in them as human rights knowledge, suppression of intolerance, racism and xenophobia manifestation, solidarity development, acknowledgement and understanding of various cultures' values,

4.7.3. supports development of the programmes focused on study, representative and work mobility of youth as well as on youth leisure time mobility and it supports a specialised education of activities' organisers within the youth mobility,

4.7.4. supports development of keeping the youth updated on opportunities offered by national and international programmes² in the framework of youth mobility, so that the youth can use the information and profit from it mainly in the field of personal development,

² For example the programmes of financial support of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, the European Union's programmes, the Council's of Europe programmes, the European Youth Forum's programmes, etc.

4.7.5. forms conditions for freeing participants of conferences, seminars, symposiums and other activities concerning youth work and youth policy from their workplace or school and it creates legislative conditions for acknowledgement of such obstacles at work on the side of employees,

4.7.6. upon the proposal of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic it supports provision of various kinds of fare advantages for youth as regards work, education, representation and mobility.

4.8. Environment

In this area the state:

4.8.1. supports measures leading to strengthening the process of building of environmental awareness of children and youth within purviews of sustainable development,

4.8.2. supports promotion of preservation of environment, what it perceives as a basic condition for a better quality of life and a higher level of public health,

4.8.3. supports the environmental programmes and projects within the scope of both, formal and non-formal education,

4.8.4. motivates children and youth to measures and activities for the environment improvement, as, for instance, recycling and savings in energies.

4.9. Leisure time of children and youth

In this area the state:

4.9.1. supports children and youth in their active involvement into sport, artistic, tourist and recreational activities,

4.9.2. supports development of the environment, in which children and youth facing difficult life situations or stemming from unfavourable environs (see 4.12.), especially disabled people can join leisure-time activities in the same extent as their other peers,

4.9.3. motivates children and youth to altruistic (a disinterested way of thinking and acting for the others' benefit) and philanthropist activities,

4.9.4. carries out measures to support work with children's and youth's subcultures,

4.9.5. supports establishment and work of open clubs and nízkoprahových zariadení.

4.10. Culture

In this area the state:

4.10.1 confirms the significance and the role of culture and cultural heritage for development and education of children and youth perceiving them as one of the carriers of the Slovak culture,

4.10.2. supports youth participation in society's cultural life by forming the conditions for youth's creative contribution to development of culture,

4.10.3. forms particular conditions for development children's and youth's gift and talent within the most various fields of human activity,

4.10.4. secures a quality media education as part of the society's educational system and considers it as an important assumption for cultural development of the young generation,

4.10.5. promotes multi-culture and tolerance as a basic key to a peaceful coexistence of various cultures not only in the Slovak Republic, but also in the European Union and worldwide,

4.10.6. supports initiatives leading to creation of effective influence aimed at the protection of children and youth from negative impacts.

4.11. Health and a healthy lifestyle

In this area the state:

4.11.1. perceives the question of health of children and youth as a complex area not involving only treatment and therapy but also primary health protection, prevention from negative impacts on health and a healthy lifestyle promotion,

4.11.2. supports availability and quality of health information and education towards a healthy lifestyle and health protection at the earliest age possible. Mainly it concentrates on preventive measures and measures focused on minimising the use of stupefying substances, psychotropic substances and alcohol.

4.11.3. supports so-called harm reduction measures (minimising of harms linked to drug usage),

4.11.4. supports a system solution of children injuries' prevention and prevention of violence committed on children including the CAN syndrome, children trafficking and commercial sexual abuse of children,

4.11.5. secures development of institutions, facilities and services aimed at supporting of psychical health of children and youth as a field requiring a special approach,

4.11.6. supports measures decreasing risky behaviour of youth involving mainly a risky driving of motor-powered vehicles, promiscuity and unsafe sex, addictions linked to the use of stupefying substances, psychotropic substances, alcohol, tobacco and an unhealthy nutrition,

4.11.7. pays special attention to the care, education, protection and support of disabled youth.

4.12. Children and youth facing difficult life situations and stemming from unfavourable environs.

In this area the state:

4.12.1. perceives that some groups of children and youth can be facing various risk factors regarding their life situation linked to their social, economic, educational or health environment and conditions, which they stem from,

4.12.2. accepts and carries out measures for prevention of social exclusion of children and youth having found themselves in life crises, of disabled youth, youth without shelter, children and youth from marginalised groups and youth having terminated their imprisonment,

4.12.3. supports measures to prevent increasing and prevalence of social-pathological phenomena and antisocial phenomena among children and youth,

4.12.4. secures development of institutions and facilities providing services to these children and youth, securing them a complex approach in the form of identification of the therapy, and the support of formal, non-formal education and informal learning.

4.13. Children and youth, social-pathological phenomena and their prevention.

In this area the state:

- 4.13.1. secures children and youth education to a healthy lifestyle and to a positive social behaviour acquirement,
- 4.13.2. affects the young generation in a way leading to creation and strengthening of moral values, to increasing of children and youth social competences, to further knowledge and experience development leading to refusal of all forms of self-destruction, aggression manifestation and law breaching,
- 4.13.3. persistently and systematically supports all activities leading to strengthening of preventive measures,
- 4.13.4. supports new activities leading to meaningful involvement of youth in leisure time activities and thus drawing their attention away from “get-away” behavioural forms.

5. Structures at the implementation of the key areas and their roles

5.1. The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic

- 5.1.1. communicates, coordinates and promotes the state policy in relation to children and youth and it cooperates with the subjects mentioned in paragraphs 1.4. up to 1.8. of these key areas, whereas it authorises institutions within its operation to execute the selected tasks,
- 5.1.2. secures execution of the state policy in relation to children and youth in relevant areas of its **business/competence**, such as, for instance, education, participation, work with children and youth facing difficult life situations and stemming from unfavourable environs,
- 5.1.3. forms conditions to support systematic work with children and youth out of the process of formal education and active use of leisure time,
- 5.1.4. coordinates activities of the state administration bodies, regional and local self-administration mentioned in these key areas and supports synergy of their measures in particular areas,
- 5.1.5. manages and guides the interdepartmental work group activity (see point 5.6.),
- 5.1.6. in 2010 it will secure coordination of preparation of materials for execution of measures resulting from these key areas at both, the regional and the state level,
- 5.1.7. in 2010 it will secure coordination of preparation of materials for purposes of working out the youth report,
- 5.1.8. supports execution of research activities related to working out the youth report,
- 5.1.9. secures a regular monitoring of the fulfilment of tasks resulting from the action plans of execution of these key areas.

5.2. Other ministries mentioned in the point 1.4. of these key areas

- 5.2.1. accept measures securing fulfilment of aims and key areas,
- 5.2.2. nominate their representatives in the interdepartmental work group (see the point 5.6.),
- 5.2.3. actively cooperate in preparation of consulting meetings in 2010 (see the point 6.4.),

5.2.4. at planning of research and survey activities they consider also the need of materials for purposes of working out the youth report (see the point 6.5.).

5.3. Self-government (or self-administration?) county

5.3.1. coordinates, communicates, prepares and executes measures tending to fulfilment of these key areas at the level of the self-government county, whereas it authorises institutions in its operation such as, for instance, the regional youth centre to execute specific tasks,

5.3.2. at preparation of its own conception of policy in relation to children and youth respecting the specifics of the county it cooperates with schools, school organisations, non-governmental organisations and other subjects functioning in the field of children and youth work and within youth policy on the county's territory,

5.3.3. at execution of the regional self-governmental policy in relation to children and youth it cooperates with other bodies of the state administration on the county's territory, communities, towns and non-governmental organisations on the county's territory,

5.3.4. considers establishment of an advisory body **in matters (or affairs?)** of children and youth, youth work and youth policy.

5.4. Community

5.4.1. in accordance with these key areas, having considered its own specifics and possibilities, it creates and executes the conception of work with children and youth on the community's territory, whereas it cooperates with schools, school organisations, non-governmental organisations and other subjects functioning in the field of work with children and youth and youth policy on the community's territory,

5.4.2. forms a platform for the local policy creation and implementation in relation to children and youth pursuant to up-to-date needs,

5.4.3. considers establishment of an advisory body **in matters (or affairs?)** of children and youth, youth work and youth policy.

5.5. Educational and leisure-time school organisations

5.5.1. leisure time centres, interest activities school centres, school children's clubs and youth homes form conditions for a systematic and a regular work with children and youth,

5.5.2. organise activities for children and youth and involve youth in preparation, execution and evaluation of these activities,

5.5.3. cooperate with the settler at the development of youth work within their functioning and at the implementation of the state policy in relation to children and youth at the level of their functioning.

5.6. Interdepartmental work group

5.6.1. is established for the purpose of an effective and complex preparation of measures leading to the fulfilment of these key areas as well as with the aim at the evaluation of their fulfilment,

5.6.2. it is created by the representatives of the subjects mentioned in the points 1.4. up to 1.8. of these key areas,

5.6.3. assesses and comments the measures for execution of the state policy in relation to children and youth, which demand a coordination of partial activities of several subjects,

5.6.4. assesses accepted suggestions and submits its own proposals of measures for execution of the state policy in relation to children and youth,

5.6.5. suggests priorities in individual areas of the state policy in relation to children and youth,

5.6.6. provides a space for an exchange of information on measures fulfilment within the framework of the execution of the state policy in relation to children and youth within particular areas.

6. Strategy of implementation and evaluation of the key areas

6.1. The fulfilment of these key areas is secured by the biennial action plans that will specify particular measures, activities and tasks of all subjects involved in the key areas of the state policy in relation to children and youth. The action plans of execution of the key areas of the state policy in relation to children and youth (hereinafter referred only as “action plan”) will develop from the work results of the interdepartmental work group (see the point 5.6.).

6.2. The preparation of the action plans is coordinated and secured by the Ministry of Education; the action plans are approved by the government of the Slovak republic.

6.3. The proposal of the action plan for 2008 – 2009 will be prepared after the approval of the key areas in the first half of 2008. The proposal of the action plan for 2010 – 2011 will be prepared till February 2010 and the proposal of the action plan for 2012 – 2013 will be prepared till February 2012.

6.4. The evaluation of fulfilment of these key areas will be executed at their mid-realisation in 2010. The evaluation is coordinated by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and will be executed in form of consulting meetings at both, the regional and the state levels, at which the fulfilment of these key areas will be evaluated by means of measures mentioned in the action plans.

6.5. Aiming at the preparation of relevant documents to other conceptions within this area, the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic will secure the coordination of the preparation of a complex youth report in 2010, which will cover all key areas of the state policy in relation to children and youth mentioned in this material.

7. Conclusion

These key areas are not only a summary of ways-out and intentions concerning various participants, but they emphasise the Slovak Republic's intention to strengthen the position of children and youth in all spheres of life and to guarantee their coequal position in the society on the base of partnership.

By means of named aims, principles and key areas of their functioning it strives to eliminate apathy, helplessness and disinterest of youth. As basic values of its policy in relation to children and youth the state considers equality, cooperation and joint responsibility.