

WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT (WDR) 2007

Development and the Next Generation

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS—EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA

This is a summary of references in *WDR 2007: Development and the Next Generation* to policy directions, actions, and programs particularly relevant to youth in Europe and Central Asia (ECA).

Demographic patterns highly variable across the region but main issues the same

- While other developing regions are experiencing or anticipating an increase in their numbers of young people, the number of youth in ECA has peaked and is set to decline. However, patterns vary across countries, with youth populations set to grow significantly in countries where fertility remains high (Turkey, Tajikistan).
- Although countries are also very differently positioned within the demographic ‘window of opportunity’—where rapid growth in the number of working-age people can be an opportunity for economic growth if accompanied by the right policies - investment in young people is still extremely important because of long term effects on economic and social development, but also because of heightened expectations and exposure of the young. In Armenia, young people accounted for 50 percent of internet users, while in Kyrgyzstan, they accounted for 61 percent.

Expand opportunities for young people by filling gaps in education, employment, and civic participation

- Easing the transition from school to work is important, owing to very high levels of unemployment among youth in most countries in the region.
 - A 2001 UNICEF survey of young people in ECA indicates that access to jobs, along with physical security, is their biggest concern. The answer is not less education—but more jobs.
 - The duration of unemployment as young people transition from school to work can be long in some countries. In 2000, more than about 60 percent of unemployed youth remained so for more than six months in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the Slovak Republic. (O’Higgins, 2003).
 - In Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the end of the civil conflict in the late 1990s, young people face high unemployment. In 2004, the unemployment rate was 62 percent for those 15-19 years old, and 37 percent for those 20-24. Among youth employed in 2001, a third were jobless in 2002 and a quarter in 2004. (Fares and Tiongson, 2006)
- Even as young people remain unemployed there are skills shortages.
 - The World Bank’s investment climate surveys show that more than a fifth of all firms in developing countries (including Latvia) rate inadequate skills and education of workers as a major or severe obstacle to their operations.
 - With the exception of the Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, Czech and Slovak Republics) 15-year olds fall behind in reading, mathematics and problem solving skills relative to rich countries.
- Young people—less embedded in older patronage and exchange networks than adults—have already been heavily involved in political reforms in the region. In

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Serbia, the Otpor youth movement played a key role in removing Milosevic from power by thwarting attempts to annul elections, and leading national protests that ended with the installation of a new legitimately elected president. However, the report says that much more can be done to prepare young people for citizenship.

Priorities

- Improve the quality of basic education.
 - Begin early. Early investment in nutrition, health, and psychosocial development has long-term benefits, the report says, citing several studies that show good results. In Turkey, enriched childcare and preschool programs led to higher achievement test scores and high school graduation rates, and lower crime rates for participants well into their twenties.
- Improve quality of post-primary education and its relevance to work.
 - In many countries, secondary curriculum is not relevant to the social and economic needs of students and tends to be fragmented, over-loaded and based on factual content (World Bank, 2005). Tertiary education curricula have many of the same problems (World Bank, 2002).
 - Educational institutions need to be more accountable to students. To avoid a decline in the quality of regular classroom instruction, Turkey now prohibits teachers from providing after-school tutoring for their own students (Bray, 2004)
 - Reform measures introduced in Georgia to fight corruption in higher education illustrate the effectiveness of combining a unified examination system, control mechanisms, and improved transparency.
- Address labor market regulations that restrict job access for newcomers/youth.
 - In economically depressed regions of Poland, the relatively high minimum wage discourages the employment of young people. A recent increase in the minimum wage in Hungary made it harder for the low-skilled (including the young) to find jobs.
- Make migration, especially temporary migration, easier. Migration by some young people can improve job prospects for those left behind, a safety valve in times of high unemployment. Over 10 percent of the workforce in Albania and Turkey is abroad; studies show that these large outflows increase wages and job prospects of those left behind.
- Create more opportunities for civic participation.
 - Slovenia brings local youth representatives together at the national level. In 2005, Moldova had youth councils in a quarter of the country's localities.
 - The report warns that compulsory military service has mixed effects on young people's civic engagement. In Russia, poor, low-educated, and rural households were much more likely to have sons drafted, losing about 15 percent of annual income in their lifetime.

Encourage capable decision making by recognizing the young as decision-makers and expanding information and support programs to improve their decisions

- Availability of information on health is sometimes limited.

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- A 2006 World Bank survey in Russia quotes a 20-year-old woman from the North Caucasus as saying: “I am interested in diseases and infections transferred sexually. The problem is I cannot ask my parents, because my breeding does not allow me to discuss such issues with [them].”
- An environment that encourages tobacco consumers in the region to quit is still lacking, including a tobacco control policy that also treats tobacco dependence.
 - More than a quarter of 15-24 year-old men in Armenia smoke regularly.

Priorities

- First, give young people legal identity. Basic identification documents are often crucial for access to services. They are also needed to enter the formal labor market.
- Provide young people with more information on health risks, on job opportunities and careers.
 - School-based career guidance services, a fairly new initiative, have shown promise in Poland, Russia, Romania, and Turkey in retaining young people in school and guiding their choice of further education options. Success depends on quality of information available to counselors – so train the trainers well.
 - While many countries offer students information on HIV prevention and reproductive health, only a few educate them on dangers of tobacco use, alcohol and substance abuse, and risk of obesity – all important for young people.
- Help young people command resources. Scholarships targeted at those with merit and need are more sustainable and equitable than notionally free tertiary education to which only the rich have access.
- Help young people become capable decision makers. Young people consulted by the World Bank in Georgia set the teaching of decision-making skills as a priority.

Offer ‘second chances’ to young people

- Illegal drug use is highest in developed countries but increasing in developing countries. In Central Asia, prevalence of illegal drug use approaches developed country levels (UNESCO2001).
 - Treatment can reduce social problems—including crime, violence and incarceration—and societal costs (UNDCP, 2003). Many former Soviet Union countries are introducing methadone maintenance therapy and needle and syringe exchange programs, which have been shown to also reduce the risk of HIV infection (WHO, 2005)
- Improve design of wage subsidies and targeting of employment support programs.
 - In the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, youth-specific wage subsidies can be of particular benefit if targeted to the most disadvantaged, with low-education females benefiting most. (Fretwell et al, 1999)
- For young offenders, avoid disproportionately harsh penalties and incarceration with hardened criminals.
 - Consider restorative justice rather than retributive justice.