

**YOUTH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AT
THE LOCAL LEVEL:
IMERETI AND TBILISI**

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Youth is important. Many hopes are attached to the “next generation” – societies tend to look towards the young to bring about a value change, to get rid of old habits, and to lead any country into a better future. But are young people really the drivers of change, or are they rather driven by societal processes around them? And, as importantly, what does the young generation need to be able to fulfill its potential and be a positive transformational force? What can, what should the state do – both at the national and the local level?

The present study, commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in close collaboration with the Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs of the Parliament of Georgia, aims to help answer the latter questions. It hopes to inform the future policy process, that has recently passed a critical juncture in Georgia with the launching of the National Youth Agency. The FES acts in the tradition of its previous study on youth in Georgia, the 2016 research on a “Generation in Transition”. The present study, however, focusses on the policy level, and on Tbilisi and the municipalities of Imereti.

Two findings stand out, as evidenced from focus group discussions with young people and interviews with key stakeholders: Firstly, the drafting of strategic documents at the national level can only be a starting point for any kind of policy, no matter how good the document is. And secondly, connected to that, communication remains a challenge. Policymakers complain about merely “symbolic” interactions between the national and the local levels. Municipal officials claim to know the problems facing the local youth – and fail to name them in full. And finally, the target group does not feel well informed about the opportunities that already exist.

The authors of the research thus argue – convincingly – for municipal youth strategies and action plans that are evidence-based and take into account

the real, and not only the supposed needs of local youth. Creating physical meeting spaces for the young generation, and opportunities for informal education, seem important steps in order to enable Georgia's youth to pave the way for a better future. In any case, we hope that the present study will contribute to this process.

Felix Hett

Director

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
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GLOSSARY

ACT	Analysis and Consulting Team
Informal Education	Any planned program of individual and social education that is not a part of officially structured curriculum and aims improvement of knowledge, skills and competencies. Informal education is a lifelong lasting process and, along with the improvement of skills and knowledge, contributes to the attitudes and values formation process.
CENN	Caucasus Environmental NGO Network
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
Freelancer	Someone who does particular pieces of work for different organizations, rather than working all the time for a single organization
LEPL	Legal Entity of Public Law
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NEET	Person who is not in education, employment, or training
KI	Key Informant – a person selected for an in-depth interview purposively as a representative of a group most knowledgeable person about study specific issue
KII	Key Informant Interview
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

Youth are an important part of every country's democratic and socio-economic development. They are catalysts of change and main players in the process, and therefore require encouragement and support at local as well as international levels. To create the relevant environment for the development of youth and to provide them with support, it is important to know their needs, have an action plan tailored to these needs in place, and implement the activities envisaged by the plan at central and local levels.

In order to study how the above-mentioned issues and the youth policy are implemented by local self-governments, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) South Caucasus Office and the Parliamentary Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs commissioned this study. In the frame of the study, the implementation of youth policy by the Imereti region and Tbilisi self-government bodies were surveyed. The self-governments in Georgia have the overall authority to plan, manage and implement youth policy at the local level. Correspondingly, the survey aims to identify whether youth policy is inclusive and participatory, and how the youth policy is implemented in municipalities. In order to have analytical insights on management and the implementation of the youth policy by local self-governments in the Imereti Region and Tbilisi, the study focused on the process and challenges of policy planning and implementation in the aforementioned municipalities. The study also provides recommendations.

The study design implied using a desk review and two techniques – in-depth interviews and focus group discussions using qualitative study methods. In total, in Tbilisi and all municipalities of the Imereti region, 20 in-depth interviews and 17 focus group discussions were conducted.

Based on the study results, we may conclude that representatives of local self-government authorities are less aware of youth needs. Moreover, they do not study them or conduct surveys. When drafting action plans, they rely on previous experience and/or the personal taste of specific decision-makers. In addition to the fact that the action plans of municipalities do not respond to youth needs, they are not aimed at the achievement of a specific result. Activities are mainly planned just for conducting activities. With rare exceptions, most activities are not associated with any

competence identified by the EU in the frame of “the lifelong learning” or oriented to sustainable development. Therefore, the amount spent on youth projects or the number of beneficiaries is just actual data that does not say anything about specific, qualitative results.

In terms of financial resources and budgeting according to the key informant study results, both state and international financial resources are sufficiently mobilized in the youth sphere, but the qualification of staff is a serious problem, including in terms that hired personnel are not informed about the possible mechanisms for using funds. With few exceptions, representatives of local self-government authorities do not talk about the challenge of the professional qualifications of staff responsible for the implementation of youth policy. They instead emphasize the scarcity of funds. As the results of the desk review show, although some positive tendencies have been observed in some municipalities regarding increasing the financial resources allocated for youth activities, the amount of financial capital spent on youth activities both in the Imereti region and Tbilisi is approximately 1% of the total municipal budget.

According to the main arguments of the respondents who see a challenge in human capital, the problem is that youth offices are staffed with individuals who are not professionally suitable for this position. In frequent cases, the political environment influences employment possibilities at the local level in municipalities; while at the same time, older staff members, as well as those who do not understand youth problems and needs well, are mobilized in youth offices. This was also evaluated as a problem by the youth. However, a lack of knowledge about the essence of youth policy and opportunities for the sphere’s development by staff were identified as the main challenges in terms of social capital.

Perceiving the youth sphere as less serious was named as a challenge in terms of the implementation of youth policy. However, according to the key informants, the steps taken by the state, in particular the commencement of working on the state concept of youth policy, as well as the creation of Youth Agency, which is directly subordinate to the Prime Minister, creates positive expectations. There is a feeling that youth policy has moved to the list of the state priority issues in some extent, the political will exists, and that work in this direction will be oriented to the achievement of real results. In this regard, maintaining the existing course regardless of any change in the political situation was considered critically important to avoid interruption and ensure the gradual development of the youth sphere.

At the same time, in the context of continuity, the development of action

plans based on a study and oriented to the real needs for each municipality was considered significant. Moreover, the definition of results to which each activity should be aimed was identified as necessary for the action plan, while the results must be oriented to the long-term goals of sustainable development.

For Youth Policy Implementation at the local level, Imereti and Tbilisi study results show that activities carried out in municipalities of the Imereti region within the framework of the youth policy are similar. They do not imply providing informal education to youth or the development of their specific competencies. Activities are mostly planned in municipal centers, such as sporting events and excursions, and their beneficiaries are mostly young people of school age. Activities are relatively more diverse in Tbilisi, where in addition to the city center, activities are planned in the suburbs, and their beneficiaries include young people of older ages.

According to the qualitative study results of key informants, the activities mentioned among the implemented projects both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi reiterate the data identified by the desk review and the focus group discussions held with the youth. Projects and activities carried out by local self-government authorities in the Imereti region are mostly identical and imply activities such as the intellectual game What? Where? When?, school sports day, and competitions in various sports. As according to the information obtained from municipalities in the frame of the desk review, various festivals and meetings with famous persons are held in municipalities together with the above activities and rarely, movie shows and exhibitions of handmade items. Volunteer activities were named among the activities that mainly imply cleaning and charity actions. As for Tbilisi, activities are more diverse and include entertainment and sporting activities as well as projects aimed at education and employment.

According to representatives of local self-government authorities participating in the study, the fact that activities in the Imereti region are mostly designed for schoolchildren is preconditioned by migration. According to their argument, since a part of the young people migrate from municipalities after finishing school and do not come back, there is no audience for which activities should be planned. This is differently evaluated by representatives of the central government and the NGO sector participating in the study. Despite the fact that there is no accurate data about how many young people between the ages of 18 and 29 live in municipalities, it cannot be said that representatives of this age category have fully left. Therefore, it is not relevant to justify not planning events for this age segment by migration. According to the evaluation made by

respondents from the NGO sector, as young people in schools are already organized, representatives of local self-government authorities do not spend extra resources on working with other age groups of young people. It is worth mentioning that one of the side effects of correctly planned youth activities and relevant work with young people of older ages may be the reduction of migration.

The youth and key informant surveys revealed that the engagement of youth in different activities and in the decision-making process is low, and that there is only a narrow group of active youth in municipalities. One of the explanations for this may be sought in the cultural fact that society often considers the government as the entity that is mainly responsible for the management of processes. This is also proved by the results of focus group discussions with youngsters, where according to the main discourse, local government is considered mainly responsible for the activities of the youth sphere. According to the evaluation of key informants, the reasons for the low engagement of youth should be sought in serious challenges in terms of informal education. Due to the above, the youth have not understood their role and the importance of participation. This can be considered as the main reason for low engagement. The laziness of young people (according to the FGD), even in the case of the existence of initiatives, as well as the belief in a low likelihood of success or distrust of the government are also significant, yet secondary factors. To increase belief and ensure the young people that their ideas could be transformed into real projects, young people and key informants participating in the study revealed that it is necessary to support youngsters' ideas and inform the audience about successful cases.

In connection with informing young people about planned activities, the study of the youth and local self-government authorities showed a different tendency. Though according to representatives of municipalities of the Imereti region, they ensured the dissemination of information about planned activities to the maximum extent, according to the youth, a lack of relevant information is a serious problem. It seems that the dissemination of information about planned activities on webpages and Facebook pages of municipalities is not enough.

It turned out that volunteerism, as an important form of strategic direction of participation, is associated only with cleaning and charity actions both in Tbilisi and in the Imereti region. It is noteworthy that both the youth and the key informants mentioned that volunteerism is not popular, as it is often perceived as a non-prestigious activity. Therefore, according to study participants, changing this perception and raising awareness

about volunteerism is necessary. It is noteworthy that even the idea of volunteerism means volunteering without any material benefit or incentive. Focus group participants think that volunteerism requires some motivator, such as a volunteer hour accumulation system and conversion into various benefits (tuition fees, travel by public transport), so that more young people will be willing to engage in volunteer activities. Receiving a certificate from a political agent with high status, including the President of the country, may be another type of motivator.

The fact that the problem of employment is the most urgent for youth was confirmed by the study of the youngsters participating in focus group discussions, as well as by key informants. It turned out that one problem for young people is associated with the selection of a profession. It is noteworthy that despite the fact that representatives of local self-government bodies declared that they communicate with young people and are aware of their needs, they failed to mention issues related to the selection of a profession when they were surveyed.

Except for Tbilisi and Kutaisi, a lack of community spaces for entertainment as well as for networking and informal education was identified as a significant problem in all municipalities participating in the study. This is particularly problematic for young people living in the villages, for whom even transportation to municipal centers is connected with barriers. It is noteworthy that representatives of local self-government authorities focused mainly on the necessity of the arrangement of entertainment spaces and focused less on the importance of spaces that could be used by youngsters not only for entertainment but also for networking and informal education. The latter turned out to be important both for the youth and representatives of the central government and NGO sector participating in the study.

The study showed that the relationships of representatives of local self-government authorities with the central government, as well as the relationship between City Council and City Hall have a symbolic nature. In the case of City Council, this mainly implies participation in the review and approval of budgets, and the review of the City Hall report at the end of the year. In the case of the central government, this mainly implies “giving instructions” to municipalities about the implementation of specific activities, as well as providing information about activities carried out/to be carried out by municipalities.

It is noteworthy that in terms of relations with City Council, the study participants represented local self-government bodies do not consider it

necessary to make any change. In the context of relations with the central government, the study revealed the need to improve communication and coordination. In the opinion of local government representatives, relations with the central government must not be only symbolic, but contextual as well. In particular, relations should imply real, substantial evaluation of the work of municipalities; sharing important comments with representatives of the local government; and supporting them in the development of action plans. The study results also showed that though local self-government authorities independently make decisions about which activities they should carry out in the context of the youth policy, it is necessary to identify the policy implementation instruments and the strategy for each region. Moreover, it is desirable to identify the strategy and action plan independently for each municipality, considering their peculiarities.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Within the youth policy framework, the activities carried out in the Imereti region are mostly similar, predominantly limited to organizing sport events, and is less oriented on the programs of informal education leading development of specific skill. Activities tend to be more diverse in Tbilisi, but informal education-related activities are carried out in rare exception in the capital city, too.
- Local self-government bodies are less aware about the real needs of youngsters. Conducting surveys is almost never used as a mechanism for identifying needs, and action plans are not based on study results. Action plans are mainly developed based on the personal views/ideas of the entities/individuals responsible for the implementation of the youth policy.
- Entrusting self-government bodies to plan youth activities is not an effective policy according to Central government and NGO representatives. As they assess, creating strategies and action plans independently for each municipality considering their peculiarities is crucial for youth policy implementation.
- The relationships of local self-government bodies with the central government, as well as the relationship between City Council and City Hall are mainly symbolic in the framework of youth policy.
- Relevant qualification of the staff members of the entities responsible for youth policy development in the local self-government bodies is a significant challenge for both the Imereti region and Tbilisi.
- The implementation of the existing youth policy document, as well as coordination between municipal and central government is challenging. Establishing of the Youth Agency and the state concept of the youth policy that must be approved by the Parliament of Georgia, would lead to the improvement of the coordination between the parties and increasing of the policy efficiency.

- Pessimism is indicated as one of the main reasons for the low activity of youth both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi. Youngsters do not believe that their initiatives will be supported by the decision-makers (e.g. local self-government) or by the young people who represent the target group of these initiatives. Internal and external migration also was identified as an important reason for low activity among youth in the Imereti region.
- Activities planned by the local self-government bodies are mostly planned for school age youngsters, while youngster age between 18 and 29 years old are disregarded. This is mainly relevant for municipalities of the Imereti region. As for Tbilisi, some activities are also planned for the suburbs, and projects designed for the youth also cover young people of an older age.
- Youngsters are not informed about activities planned by the local self-government bodies and this is primarily relevant for municipalities of the Imereti region.
- The lack of community spaces for youth that can be used as an informal education, networking and entertainment space for youngsters is challenging in the Imereti region, especially for youngsters from urban areas for whom moving/transporting to the municipal centers is related to the barriers. For Tbilisi the issue is less problematic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth are an important factor for change. Their activities could lead to important transformations in the frame of democratic, socio-economic and cultural changes not only in the country but in the whole region. In this process, it is crucial to support youth at different levels. Local self-government bodies have the overall authority to implement youth policy on the local level in Georgia. In this context, it is important to know what activities are carried out at the local level, what the real needs of youngsters are, and how action plans of the municipalities are oriented to the real needs of youngsters. It is also important to determine if the process of policy implementation is inclusive and if young people are engaged in this process or not. Additionally, it should be certain that local self-government bodies are structured by relevant staff who could ensure the creation of relevant action plans and their implementation. It is also essential that relationships between local and central government, as well as civil society in the frame of youth policy implementation are collaborative.

In order to study the above-mentioned issues and other challenges related to youth policy implementation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) South Caucasus Office and the Parliamentary Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs commissioned this study. The goal is to analyze the implementation of youth policy by the self-government bodies in Tbilisi and the Imereti region.

The study methodology implied using a desk review and two techniques – in-depth interviews and focus group discussions of qualitative study methods. In September and October 2019 in Tbilisi and all municipalities of the Imereti region, 20 in-depth interviews and 17 focus group discussions were conducted in total. The main focus was oriented on the study of existing policy documents, implemented youth projects, needs of young people, and the compliance of activities carried out by target regions to the real needs of youth.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to study youth policy implementation by local self-government authorities in Tbilisi and the Imereti region, the *desk review* and *qualitative research methods* were used. The qualitative research was conducted using in-depth interviews and focus group discussion techniques. In total, in Tbilisi and all municipalities of the Imereti region, 20 in-depth interviews and 17 focus group discussions were conducted.

Specific **objectives** of the research were identified as follows:

- Study the existing policy documents;
- Study the implemented youth projects;
- Identify youth needs;
- Identify the compliance of existing projects with the actual needs of youth;
- Study the cooperation between central and local government, as well as self-government authorities and civil society.

Desk Review

The desk review aimed to study the youth policy documents, as well as the existing studies related to youth issues in Georgia. The desk review was carried out by focusing on the following main issues of the conducted research:

- the main aspects of the youth policy document in Georgia;
- the amount of the budget and the types of projects implemented by local self-government authorities (Municipalities of the Imereti region and Tbilisi) in the context of youth policy; and
- the social capital/staff that are engaged in the implementation of youth policy at the local level.

Qualitative Study

Two techniques were used within the framework of the qualitative study: **(1) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and (2) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).**

Within the framework of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, attitudes and the general mood of the main informants and the youth in connection with youth policy implementation, their opinions about existing and desirable practices, as well as their needs and mechanisms of responding to them were studied.

The qualitative study was divided into two parts:

- I. In-depth interviews with the key informants allowed us to study the opinions of stakeholders in respect to the research issues in detail.
- II. Focus discussions with the youth allowed us to study the attitudes of the youth to the research issues, and to compare their needs/ attitudes to the needs of youth identified as a result of the interviews with the key informants.

Study Instruments

In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were conducted at the locations convenient for respondents at a time preliminarily agreed upon with them. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held using a guide preliminarily prepared by the moderator. The study instruments were prepared in close cooperation with the client. The duration of the in-depth interview was 50-60 minutes on average, and the focus group discussion lasted for an average of two hours.

Target Group and Study Area

Twenty in-depth interviews and seventeen focus group discussions were conducted within the framework of the research project. Respondents of *In-depth Interviews* were: (1) representatives of the executive and legislative bodies; (2) representatives of local self-government authorities; and (3) experts/ representatives of the NGO sector. *Focus group discussions*

were held with the youth between the ages of 14 and 29 in Tbilisi and all Municipalities of the Imereti region.

Table 1. Research Design

Method	In-depth interview	Focus Group discussion
Target group	(1) Representatives of the executive and legislative bodies/ central government; (2) Representatives of local self-government authorities; (3) Experts/ representatives of the NGO sector.	Yong people between the ages of 14-29
Sample size	20 interviews	17 focus group discussions
Study area	Tbilisi and all municipalities of the Imereti region	Tbilisi and all municipalities of the Imereti region
Selection method	Target	Target
Duration of interview/ discussions	50-60 minutes	2-2,5 hours

You can see the number of focus groups and in-depth interviews by location in Table #2.

Table 2. Number of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews by location

Location	Age	# of FGDs	# of KIIs
Tbilisi	14-17	2	5
Tbilisi	18-29	2	
Kutaisi (city)	14-17	1	4
Kutaisi (city)	18-29	1	
Baghdati Municipality	14-29	1	1
Vani Municipality	14-29	1	1
Zestaponi Municipality	14-29	1	1
Terjola Municipality	14-29	1	1
Samtredia Municipality	14-29	1	1
Sachkhere Municipality	14-29	1	1
Tkibuli Municipality	14-29	1	1
Chiatura Municipality	14-29	1	1
Tskaltubo Municipality	14-29	1	1
Kharagauli Municipality	14-29	1	1
Khoni Municipality	14-29	1	1
	Total	17	20

3. YOUTH POLICY REVIEW

During the period from childhood to adulthood, an individual receives education, starts a job, begins to make political decisions using the right to vote, has access to healthcare, goes traveling, and takes their first steps to independent life. Youth, as a significant phenomenon of personality formation, may be characterized by a sequence of actions oriented at studies and development, as well as active citizenship and gaining independence. During this period, an individual becomes engaged in the multistep process of self-determination and undergoes stages of self-realization. By doing so, he/she has an opportunity to adjust to existing norms, underline his/her individualism and find his/her place in society. However, when carrying out comprehensive changes, the feeling of uncertainty and loss is frequent among young people. During the period of adolescence, behavioral archetypes are formed in young people, which may have a critical influence directly on their lives, as well as on the future of the entire society.

According to the UN study, young people between the ages of 15 and 29 make up 23% of the world's population in 2019.¹ In order to achieve the maximum result in the context of sustainable development, young people must be engaged in the process from planning to implementation.

As a result of the aforementioned UN study, the inactivity of young people in terms of self-assertion in the political and economic environment was identified. According to one of the findings of this report, as there is no complete database and sufficient studies have not been conducted, it can be said that the strategic plan created for the achievement of sustainable development is deprived of goals based on facts. Education and employment still remain the biggest problems. As a result, the development of a work plan based on real needs represents an initiative of fundamental importance and an example of a comprehensive approach to youth-related issues. Such a plan represents a guide for increasing the engagement of young people in social, economic, cultural and political activities. According to the data of the National Statistics Office of Georgia, as of

¹ United Nations, World Population Prospects 2019, available from <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>;

January 1, 2018, the population of Georgia equaled 3,729,600.² Among them, 31% of Georgia's population lives in Tbilisi, and 13.6% live in the Imereti region. Young people between the ages of 15 and 29 make up 18.9% of the population. A majority of young people residing in Georgia by January 1, 2018 are men (52%) between the ages of 25 and 29 (38.7%).

According to the data of January 1, 2018, young people equaled 19% of the economically active and 16.4% of the employed population. Furthermore, according to the Geostat Labour market survey, the share of Georgian youth not in employment, education and training (NEET) is unusually high, reaching 30% in 2017.³

² National Statistics Office of Georgia. (2017). *Demography in Georgia*. https://www.geostat.ge/media/13833/demografiuli-viTareba-saqarTveloSi_2018.pdf

³ <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/591061559766670862/pdf/Exploring-the-diversity-of-young-people-not-in-employment-education-or-training-NEET-the-gender-profile-of-NEETs-in-Georgia-and-Armenia.pdf>

MAIN FINDINGS

- Activities carried out in the frame of the youth policy, both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi almost are not oriented on the informal education that means development of specific skills; activities also are not oriented on the activities those could lead increasing engagement of the youngsters in different processes, including in the decision-making process. Activities are mainly oriented to the development of the health and healthy lifestyle strategic direction, while other strategic directions (participation, education, employment and mobility, special support and social protection of the youth) identified by the policy document are less covered in Tbilisi and almost never in the Imereti region.
- In municipalities of the Imereti region, youth activities are oriented to school-aged children and less oriented on older youngsters, as well as another specific group of direct beneficiaries: young people with special needs.
- In Tbilisi, as well as in most municipalities of the Imereti region, from 2015 to the present, about 1% of the total municipal budget is spent on youth activities.
- In local self-government bodies, at least one staff member is responsible for youth issues in the entities carrying out the youth policy.
- Entities responsible for youth policy implementation in the self-government bodies do not have survey-based information about the real needs of young people. The information they have is not documented or available for different stakeholders.

- The youth policy document does not have a guide on how to develop an action plan for achieving the goals of the youth policy document. The document also does not have a structured monitoring scheme for maintaining the successful implementation of the youth policy in practice.
- Local self-government bodies do not have a formal strategy or action plan that takes into account features of the municipal context to support youth policy implementation at the local level and effectively respond to the real needs of youngsters.

3.1. STATE YOUTH POLICY

To stimulate the youth, society, through state institutions, tries to support the purposeful development of the youth potential where everybody will have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and realize their potential. The role of active youth is significant in the strategic development of the country. The latter are engaged in various processes ongoing in the country and co-participate in the creation and development of social welfare. Such active engagement provides an opportunity for strategic development in the long-term perspective. Practical implementation is facilitated by the youth policy document.

Youth policy is defined as a supporting tool that should create additional opportunities for the youth. Policy is a process through which actors of the public sector allocate resources for the achievement of set goals. Youth policy also suggests the working methodology, the target groups, all the necessary stakeholders, budgeted funds, and so on.

Youth policy supports social unity, social and economic development, sustainability, and democracy. It also reflects the views of the state and decision-makers about the youth.

In the synthesis report of earlier international youth policy review (Williamson 2002, 2008), there are references to “the five Cs” that national youth strategy should meet:

- Coverage (geographical area and social groups that are covered, plus policy domains);
- Capacity (the role and relationship of government and youth NGOs);
- Competence (the question of training and qualifications);
- Co-operation, co-ordination and coherence (hierarchically and horizontally); and
- Cost (the financial and human resources required).

If the Youth policy meets the abovementioned qualifications, it can be considered a success when implementing the policy in practice.

Additionally, a well-structured Youth Policy document must provide answers to the following questions: Who is the responsible body when implementing the document? Who are the beneficiaries? What are the concrete actions,

and is there a transparent strategy accessible for everybody?

In the perception of the youth policy, young people should be considered as a “resource,” not as a “problem.”

State Youth Policy Document

The state youth policy of Georgia is mainly defined and is carried out according to the “Georgian Youth Policy Document”⁴ adopted by Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 553, dated March 28, 2014. The document was developed with the participation of the interagency coordination council consisting of representatives of all ministries, members of Parliament and representatives of UNFPA. By this document, the government emphasized the particular role and significance of the youth in the long-term, democratic and social-economic development of the country. Persons between the ages of 14 and 29 are the target group of the state youth policy of Georgia.

The goal of the youth policy is to facilitate the creation of a relevant environment for the healthy development of the youth, where they will be able to become actively engaged in all areas of social life. According to the youth policy document, the goal should be implemented in four strategic directions:

- participation;
- education, employment and mobility;
- health and healthy lifestyle; and
- special support and social protection of the youth.

The document provides structured links between the four goals. However, there are some key points missing:

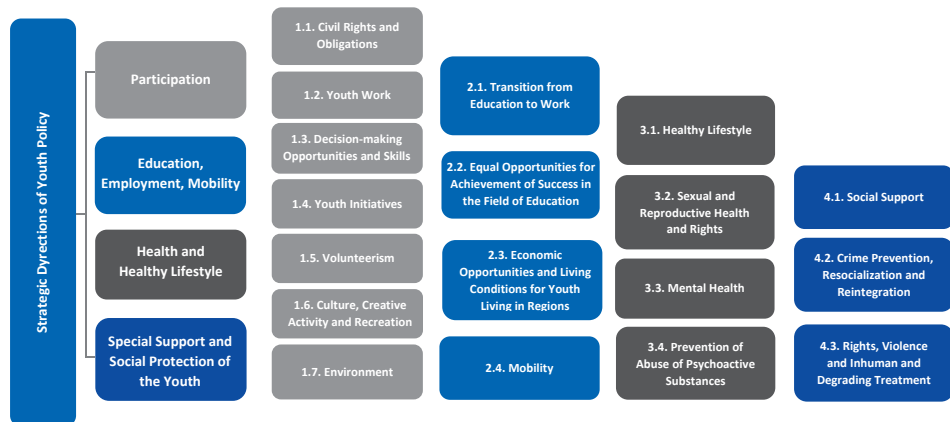
- Identifying Stakeholder groups. Stakeholders are both those who are influenced by and those who exert an influence on youth policy implementation directly or indirectly. Besides Governmental bodies and NGOs, this also includes business organizations and trade unions, organizations and authorities involved in areas such as housing and public health, youth workers, social workers, police authorities, counsellors, and community leaders.

⁴ Georgian Youth Policy Document. <http://msy.gov.ge/files/veko/2014%20weli/marti/.pdf>;

- A cross-sectoral, integrated approach. The youth policy document should perceive the relation and regulation between different stakeholders, such as regulating student loans and health insurance.
- “Freelancer” experience. Besides acknowledging the role of the youth worker in the community, it is also important to open the discussion to “Freelancer” experience.⁵ According to the Cambridge dictionary, a “Freelancer” is someone who does particular pieces of work for different organizations, rather than working all the time for a single organization. Youth freelancers should be defined, certified, and supported by the Youth Agency.
- Separate Budget.

An action plan designed for the period of 2015-2020 was developed to implement the goals defined by the youth policy. The plan included more than 200 programs, and various agencies were/are responsible for their implementation. Each direction is presented below in the form of sub-goals (see Diagram # 1).

Diagram 1. Strategic directions of the youth policy



According to the policy document, in addition to age distribution (14-29 years old), two specific groups were identified as direct beneficiaries: (1) school-aged children and (2) youth with special needs. Youth with special

⁵ Freelancer - someone who does particular pieces of work for different organizations, rather than working all the time for a single organization. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/freelance>

needs were divided into the following sub-groups:

- young people with disabilities;
- pregnant minors/parents;
- street children;
- young people deprived of parental care;
- young people illegally consuming psychotropic and narcotic substances;
- young people in conflict with the law;
- young people – victims of the law; and
- young people residing in high-mountain areas, etc.

The need of special and particular care was identified for the above groups from the part of the state.

The implementation of the policy document policy was divided into two directions: (1) integrated (sectoral) youth policy and (2) youth activities.

Integrated/sectoral youth policy implies all areas and policy directions that are important for the youth. This covers a wide range of areas, including social sphere, employment, healthcare, culture, tourism, agriculture, crime prevention, and other policies. The document envisages that the above sectoral direction should have youth direction and carry out respective activities based on the needs of the youth.

The second component is youth activities, which include educational activities for the youth and with participation of the youth. In particular, youth activities are based on the informal education process and volunteerism beyond the context of formal education, family and employment.

The goal of the youth work is to facilitate the development of many various competencies among young people to the maximum extent possible.

However, the policy document doesn't give clear instructions about where, when and how youth work and youth workers should be engaged. The country has not recognized the youth worker as a complementary profession and doesn't provide a specific qualification. A lack of adequate support in combination with the need in this sector can discourage those who are working with young people and can lead to bigger issues. This has the potential to damage the links between the young people and government, and to destroy established relationships. Recognizing youth work as complementary profession is a way to support youth workers to

appreciate the experience, professionalism and contribution they bring to their work with young people. In frequent cases, informal educational activities related to youth activities are much more successful than those related to formal education and associated institutions. From the study conducted by the European Commission in 2009, it was evident that youth work should be perceived as significant, and it should be implemented in the same highly professional manner as any other formal or informal learning activity. It requires qualified, responsible personnel, the conceptualization of business, and delivery to an addressee.⁶ Therefore, the development of youth activities is one of the main components of the implementation of the policy document. The recognition and introduction of the framework of key competences determining youth activities in the process of development will facilitate the goals of the policy document and introduce high standards for youth activities. It is required that youth workers will be retrained, and that modules and certification programs that will be based on the principles developed by the EU (“for lifelong learning”) will be created.⁷ The above principles identify eight competencies the youth worker should develop in order to facilitate working with the youth, their active role, and integration in society. The eight competencies adopted by the European Commission in the Georgian working document were complemented by the 9th – healthcare and healthy living competence.⁸ Youth activities and youth workers should directly or indirectly facilitate the development of the following key competencies in young people:

- civil competence;
- environmental competence;
- analytical, technological, informational and scientific competence;
- entrepreneurial and initiative competence;
- creativity and creative thinking competence;
- independent learning competence;
- communication competence;
- cultural expression and cultural relations competence; and
- healthcare and healthy living competence.

⁶ Hendrik, O., and Yael, O. (2009). The eight key competencies for lifelong learning: an appropriate framework within which to develop the competence of trainers in the field of European Youth Work or just plain politics? IKAB September. https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-1881/Trainer%20Competence_study_final.pdf

⁷ Hendrik, O., and Yael, O. (2009). https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-1881/Trainer%20Competence_study_final.pdf

⁸ Council of EU. *Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2018:189:TOC

The National youth policy of Georgia implies supporting youth initiatives and youth organizations, however it doesn't provide a clear vision on how the different institutions should co-function. The latter is important, as the youth policy implies inter-sectoral and interagency cooperation, which envisages equal engagement of all actors that are associated with youth-related issues. This includes both governmental institutions and NGOs, businesses, international organizations, etc. This implies readiness of all sectors for the creation of relevant conditions for the youth in order to support their realization. To a certain extent, this is confirmation of political will, according to which youth related issues are recognized as significant, while the policy document is oriented more on the support of youth organizations, enhancement of international exchange programs, stimulation of young entrepreneurs, and funding of research in the youth sector.

Overall weaknesses of the Policy document are more connected with the development of several aspects. The policy document is lacking in the concrete measures and obligations that cover and support all of Georgia's young people. The document needs to advocate for the actual needs of youth by creating supporting mechanisms, such as youth worker institutions and young freelancer support.

Additionally, the document fails to cover the below mentioned sections:

- Stakeholder groups – communication and cooperation;
- “Young Freelancer’s” support mechanisms;
- Separate Budget;
- Youth Worker policy acceptance and implementation mechanism; and
- A guide for different governmental and non-governmental bodies on how to develop an action plan for implementing the aims of the Youth Policy document.

The document doesn't imply a well-structured monitoring scheme that will guarantee the successful implementation of the Youth Policy in practice.

Youth Agency

In addition to the youth policy document, youth-related issues are also regulated by the “Law of Georgia on State Support of the Children and Youth Union”⁹ adopted in 1999. The law regulated relations arising during the implementation of state support measures for Children and Youth Unions by the state, however, it did not cover youth policy issues over the years. Changes were made to the Law eight times from 1999-2019. Initially, “youth policy” was included in the goals in 2017. Before 2017, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs was the entity responsible for youth issues. From 2018, the services of the Ministry were united with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. Two legal entities of public law (LEPL) were created as the entities responsible for youth issues: Children and Youth Development Fund and Children and Youth National Center.

After the abolition of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia, by decision of the Government of Georgia, a decree on the creation of a new LEPL Youth Agency was issued on August 26, 2019.¹⁰ Youth Agency is a Legal Entity of Public Law that was created for the purpose of the development, implementation and coordination of the state youth policy. From May 29, 2019, a change was introduced in the law, which is related to the Agency and youth activities. In particular, children and youth issues with the state government bodies are governed by Georgian legislation, and the state receives information about youth issues from the Youth Agency.

Goals of the Youth Agency include:

- creating a favorable environment for youth development, the realization of their potential, and their engagement in social, economic, cultural and political life;
- developing and supporting the youth sphere, youth activities and volunteerism;
- raising awareness about civil rights and obligations among the youth, and the facilitation of their institutional participation in the decision-making process;
- raising awareness in accordance with directions important for youth (gender equality, environmental protection, healthy lifestyle, etc.);
- developing informal and formal external education, enhancing the youth economy, creating a favorable startup-ecosystem for

⁹ <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/11836?publication=8>

¹⁰ <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4642829?publication=0>

youth, supporting their initiatives for the purpose of facilitating youth employment, and transitioning the youth from studies to employment; and

- ensuring an efficient, inclusive, participation-based and representative decision-making process.

As a result of the reform, the new Agency covers the functions of the Children and Youth Development Fund, Children and Youth National Center, and the structural unit of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport – Youth Policy Management Department.

In addition to participation in the development and implementation of the state youth policy, the function of the Agency is to develop the government's youth sphere and activities strategy and action plans, their enforcement and coordination of performance between various agencies, as well as monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the process. The Agency should also define youth worker qualification and certification rules and participate in the development of professional standards.

On the other hand, the Agency should facilitate the development of the youth policy and youth activities at the municipal level. One of its functions is planning programs in which it will be possible to engage various vulnerable youth groups. These groups imply persons with disabilities, internally displaced people, NEET groups, etc.

The creation of the new Agency may be evaluated positively. This confirms the readiness of the state to work more actively on the youth issues, , enhance youth institutions, assume responsibility for planning and implementing youth-oriented projects, and enhance the integration of youth in society. The performance of various functions and achievement of set goals by the Agency, within its own competence, improves the chances of eliminating challenges related to the youth. Despite the positive attitude towards the new agency, the change might result in to disorganized programs/projects. Without taking into consideration previous practices and experiences of previous agencies/governmental bodies, the new agency might lead to a dysfunctional system. It is important to evaluate previous work, define success mechanisms and continue working on improvement, as well as initiate new reforms and advocate for more creative approaches towards the youth sector.

3.2. MUNICIPAL POLICY AND PROGRAMS

Role of the Municipality

International experience shows that the active participation and engagement of local self-government authorities is one of the significant preconditions for the enhancement of youth. Tight connections between the various actors can play a major role in identifying the current needs and finding the most convenient ways to assist with youth-related issues. Local Self-Government should be responsible for decision making, adopting and implementing the Local Youth Strategies.

As for Georgia, according to the state youth policy document, local self-government authorities are significant actors. In connection with the role of self-government, the policy document notes: *“state institutions and governmental agencies are responsible for the implementation of youth policy within their competence and will pay attention that the strategies and programs implemented by them in connection with the youth should comply with the youth policy principles and spirit, even if they are not specified in the youth policy.”*

The competence of self-government authorities in the field of youth policy is established in the Organic Law of Georgia “Local Self-Governance Code” (Article 16, paragraph 4). The law states that the municipality is authorized to carry out measures for the purpose of facilitating the development of youth policy at the local level on its own initiative. According to the Code, taking measures to facilitate youth policy does not represent the obligation of self-government authorities. Self-government authorities make decisions whether to carry out any activities or not.

The municipalities have a central role in youth work. At the local level, municipalities can allocate resources as they see fit, but they should evaluate the service with young people on a regular basis. However, it is not clear how the Youth Policy reflects the needs of youngsters in the local municipalities. There is no clear strategy on how the evaluation is being done or how youngsters are involved in the strategic plan development process. Adopting the Youth Policy on the local level and creating an adequate action plan for the implementation of the strategy should be facilitated by decision-making bodies. Even though the Youth Policy Document has an action plan on the regional level, it is not adopted by

the local municipalities. Additionally, the implementation of Youth Policy depends on the good will of local decision-making bodies, and does not have obligatory nature. Another problem that occurred in the youth sector involved responsible employees. Not enough attention is paid to the development and professional growth of the staff members who are working with youth. Research indicated a major lack of understanding of the Youth Policy aspects, strategic goals, as well as the need and necessity of its implementation among the employees responsible for youth issues at the local level.

Within the framework of the study, we evaluated the performance of responsibilities envisaged by the “State Youth Policy” document by Tbilisi and all municipalities of the Imereti region. As of today, in all municipalities except Baghdati and Tbilisi, youth issues are governed by the Culture, Education, Sport, Tourism and Youth Affairs Entity of City Hall. In Baghdati municipality, youth issues are coordinated by the Education, Culture and Sport Entity. As for Tbilisi, youth issues are governed by the Culture, Education, Sport and Youth Issues Entity of City Hall. According to the information requested for the survey, it turned out that in Terjola Municipality, the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Terjola Student Social Protection, Civil and Esthetic Education Municipal Center functions together with City Hall. The source of funding for the agency/specific structural unit responsible for the implementation of youth policy is the local budget.

Results of this study show that the activities carried out by municipalities at the local level with regard to the youth policy are the same from year to year, and do not offer approaches suitable to the real needs of the youngsters.

Self-government authorities do not have a formal strategy or action plan that would facilitate the implementation of the *State Youth Policy of Georgia* at the local level or an effective response to challenges faced by the youth residing in the territory of self-government bodies.

It would be wise for each self-government body to have a youth policy document/plan based on evidence, which will be developed based on close consultation and surveys with the youth residing in the territory of the municipality. The youth policy document/plan of the self-government body should be oriented to youth needs. At the same time, the purpose and objectives of each action should be clearly stated in such documents.

Creation/implementation of the self-government youth action plan will also facilitate:

- identification of the needs of the local youth and the establishment of the scale of challenges facing them;
- identification of resources necessary for the implementation of respective activities;
- participation and engagement of the local youth in policy development;
- implementation of the Georgian state youth policy document; and
- identification of the specific needs of the youth and the planning of activities in this regard at the local level.

Human Capital

Human capital at the municipal level, in the frame of the youth issues, is one of the important challenges. Within the framework of the study, the units responsible for youth issues and number of staff employed there was identified (see table #3).

Table 3. Offices responsible for youth issues, number of employees in offices, number of employees responsible for youth issues

City/ Municipality	Entity responsible for the implementation of youth issues	Number of employees in the Department/ Office	Number of employees responsible for youth issues in the Department/ Office
Tbilisi	Civil Office of Culture, Education, Sport and Youth Affairs	49	8
Baghdati	Office of Education, Culture and Sport of the Municipality City Hall	6	1
Terjola	Office of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth Affairs of the Municipality City Hall and non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity – Terjola Municipal Center of Social Protection, Civic and Aesthetic Education of Students	27 (in the Municipality)	5 (Additionally 1 employee is in charge of relations with the center)

Vani	Office of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth Affairs of the Municipality City Hall	5	1
Zestaponi		5	1
Samtredia		10	2
Sachkhere		4	1
Tkibuli		7	1
Tskaltubo		9	5
Chiatura		8	3
Kharagauli		8	2
Khoni		7	1
Kutaisi		7	1

As it appeared, at least one and a maximum of five employees are in charge of youth issues in the offices of the Imereti Municipality. Considering the high index of domestic and external migration, there are no exact data about the number of youth living in the municipalities. Therefore, it is difficult to say whether the number of employees responsible for youth issues in municipalities is enough for the implementation of a needs-based action plan. At the same time, it should be highlighted that it is desirable to make the main focus on the contextual aspect of activities, and if this accurately responds to the demands of the youth and the strategic directions envisaged by the policy document, it is possible that the above number of employees will not be required to change. Moreover, it is possible to make the main focus on trainings and capacity-building of the existing and/or new staff, and not necessarily on their number.

The practice of Terjola Municipality, in which the local city hall office cooperates with the Terjola Municipal Center of Social Protection, Civic and Aesthetic Education of Students and implements various projects through this cooperation may be considered one of the interesting examples of the effective work of municipalities. Despite this, the number of beneficiaries of this center is limited and covers only youth between the ages of 6 and 21, cooperation with centers of a similar type, as well as planning and implementation of relevant activities for youth above the age of 21 would be a significant practice for Terjola Municipality and other municipalities.

Budgeting

Implementation of youth policy implies the existence of financial capital in addition to the respective political will, policy documents, human capital and other significant factors. The funds allocated for youth activities in the Imereti region since 2015 make up a very small portion of the municipal budget, and this tendency has not experienced much growth over the years. At the same time, it should be mentioned that considering the cross-sectoral nature of youth activities, financial resources intended for youth activities are also accumulated in the budgets of various programs of various municipalities or subordinate centers.

Municipalities of the Imereti Region

Functional classifications of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia were taken into consideration during the study of municipality budgets of the Imereti region and Tbilisi within the framework of the study.

In the Imereti region, the funds intended for youth activities imply the following:

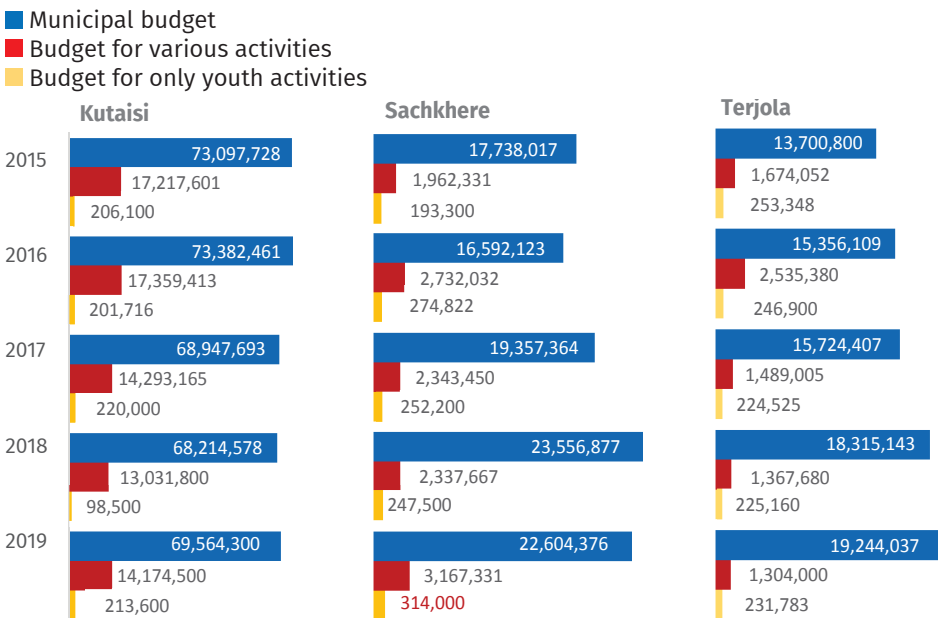
- *events of youth organizations;*
- *funding youth programs;*
- *facilitation of youth programs;*
- *youth centers;*
- *facilitation of extracurricular education;*
- *programs facilitating extracurricular work of students.*

Together with the annual budget of the municipality, funds are presented for *cultural, religious, youth and sports events in total and specifically, for youth events. Youth events are often combined with tourism and/or cultural events. However, a detailed breakdown of the budget of some municipalities is not provided; wherever a respective breakdown is not presented, the data in the charts below are shown in red to denote that it is difficult to define the exact share of funds allocated for youth activities.* For example, 314,000 GEL is allocated for youth and tourism activities in Sachkhere Municipality in 2019; for Tkibuli Municipality, funds are presented for cultural, religious, youth and sports events in total and a breakdown is not provided for youth activities at all.

As the state approved the youth policy document in 2014, data from the years 2015 to 2019 (January-March for 2019) have been studied for the

municipalities of the Imereti region and Tbilisi within the framework of the study. As it is seen from the data, funds allocated for youth activities in *Kutaisi, Sachkhere, Terjola, Kharagauli, Samtredia, and Chiatura* municipalities since 2015 do not experience any significant change in terms of growth or reduction. However, a change may be mentioned in Kutaisi and Sachkhere. In particular, in Kutaisi Municipality, the least amount - 98,500 GEL, was allocated for youth activities in 2018. The amount recorded in 2019 was 213,600 GEL and became almost equal to the funds allocated for respective activities in 2017 (220,000 GEL). As for Sachkhere Municipality, the amount recorded in 2019 exceeds the funds allocated for youth activities since 2015, but as it has already been mentioned, the funds for 2019 imply tourism activities together with youth activities, and a more detailed classification is not provided. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that there has been significant growth in terms of funding youth activities.

Figure 1. Annual budget of Municipalities, total budget of various activities, share of only youth activities in Kutaisi, Sachkhere and Terjola / 2015-2019

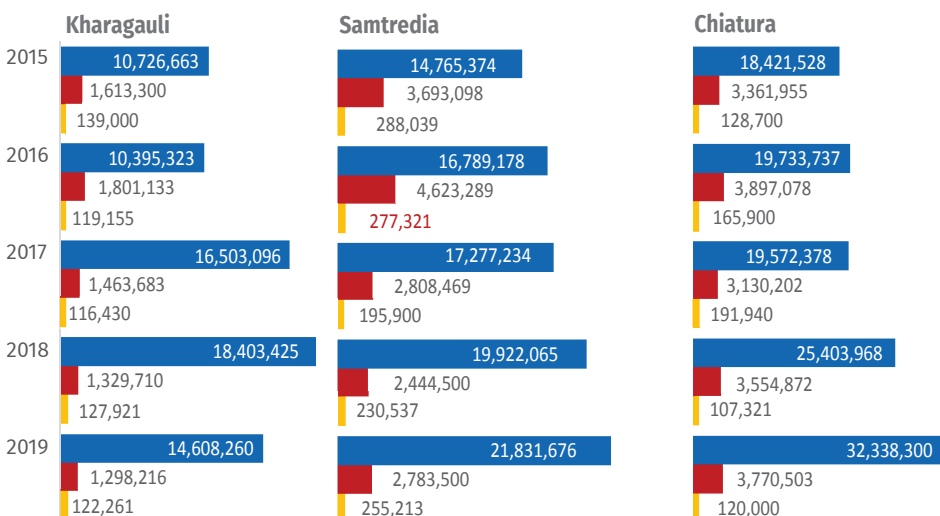


Note: The amount is shown in GEL. The data for Sachkhere municipality in the chart above are shown in red to denote that it is difficult to define the exact share of funds allocated for youth events.

The tendency is nearly the same in the Kharagauli, Samtredia and Chiatura municipalities.

Figure 2. Annual budget of Municipalities, total budget of various activities, share of only youth activities in Kutaisi, Sachkhere and Terjola / 2015-2019

- Municipal budget
- Budget for various activities
- Budget for only youth activities



Note: The amount is presented in GEL. The data for Samtredia municipality in the chart above are shown in red to denote that it is difficult to define the exact share of funds allocated for youth events.

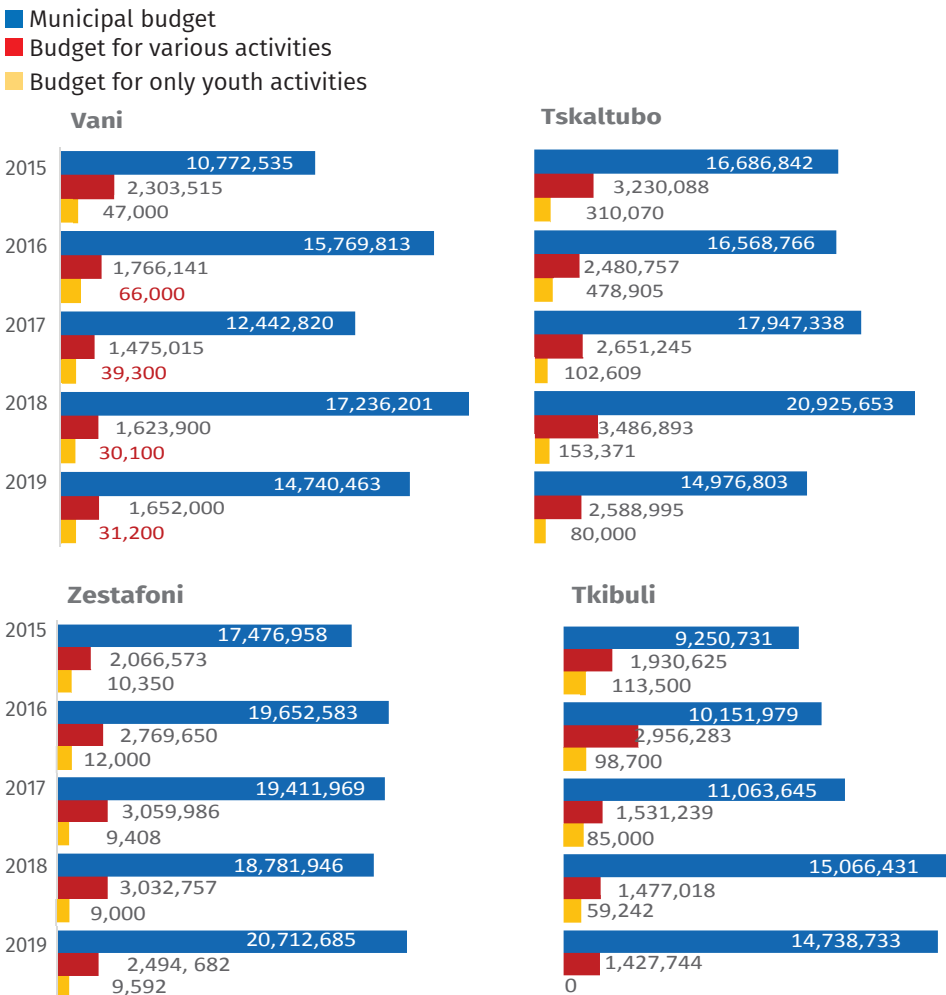
A negative tendency is observed in Vani, Tskaltubo, Zestaponi, and Tkibuli Municipalities. Despite the fact that the budget of the Municipalities had not experienced special changes since 2015, excepting Tskaltubo, in the remaining three Municipalities, the Municipal budget for 2019 exceeds the Municipal budget for 2015, however, funds allocated for youth events are reducing. Except for the funds that have been cut for youth activities in Vani since 2015, the information available to us does not allow us to review the funds spent on cultural and youth events separately.

Funding for youth activities has been significantly reduced in Tskaltubo Municipality, where the amount allocated for these events exceeded 310,000 GEL in 2015 and equaled only 80,000 GEL in 2019.

Though we do not observe a significant change in Zestaponi, in this Municipality of the Imereti region, the least amount is spent on youth activities and equals only 9,592 GEL in 2019.

As for Tkibuli Municipality, a negative dynamic is observed there too. While the Municipality allocated 113,500 GEL for youth activities in 2015, this amount equaled only 59,242 GEL in 2018. As for the year 2019, the amount is presented for cultural, religious, youth and sport events in total and it is difficult to say specifically what amount is intended for youth activities out of about 1.5 million GEL allocated for the above purposes.

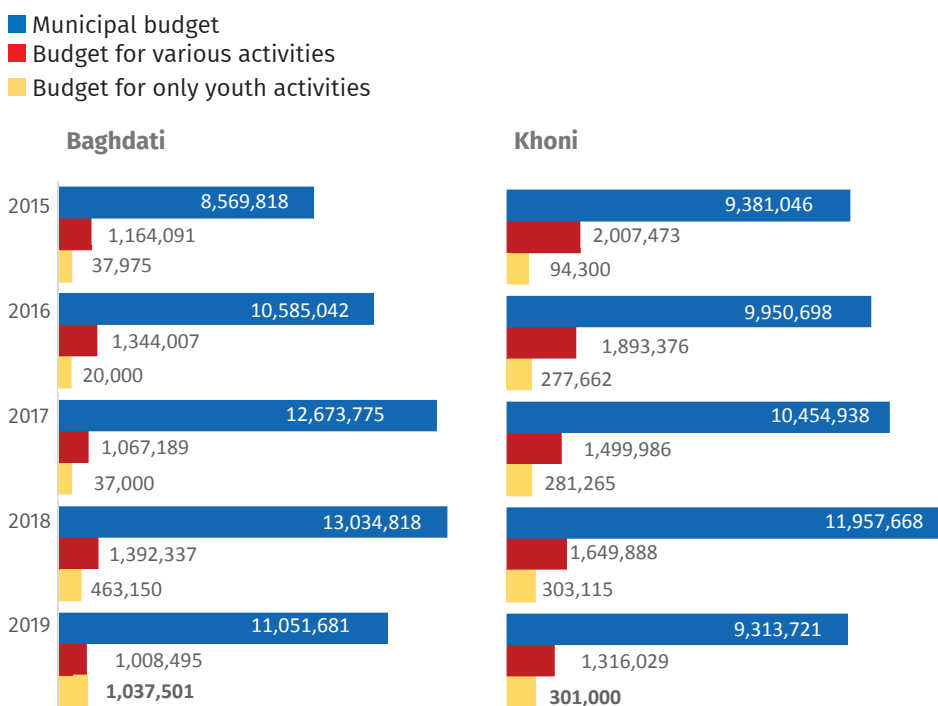
Figure 3. Annual budget of Municipalities, total budget of various activities, share of only youth activities in Vani, Tskaltubo, Zestaponi and Kharagauli / 2015-2019



Note: The amount is presented in GEL. The data for Vani municipality in the chart above are shown in red to denote that it is difficult to define the exact share of funds allocated for youth events.

A positive tendency is observed both in *Baghdati* and *Khoni* Municipalities, where the funds allocated for youth activities have increased several times since 2015. Regarding the funds allocated for the facilitation of activities of the respective services of Municipality City Halls and youth activities, funds were increased at the expense of specified non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities in both Municipalities. In *Baghdati*, the budget includes funds of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Association of preschool and extracurricular institutions of *Baghdati* Municipality since 2018. In *Khoni* Municipality, the budget includes funds of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity House of Young Technicians and the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Veta Chkhenkeli *Khoni* Student Youth Center since 2016.

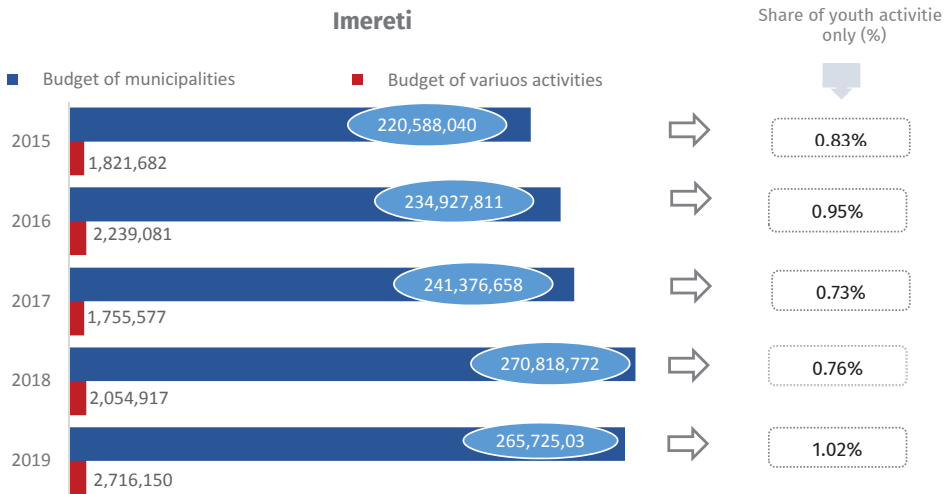
Figure 4. Annual budget of Municipalities, total budget of various activities, share of only youth activities in *Baghdati* and *Khobi* / 2015-2019



The amount is presented in GEL.

The study also considers what part of the total budget is spent on the youth activities.

Figure 5. Total budget of all municipalities of the Imereti region, total budget of various activities, share of youth events only in the total budget / 2015-2019



The amount is presented in GEL.

If we look at the budgets of all Municipalities of the Imereti Region and the funds cumulatively allocated for youth projects from 2015 through 2019, we will discover that the funds spent in the region on youth activities do not exceed 1% of the total funds, and the tendency does not significantly change by years in this regard.

Tbilisi

In Tbilisi, funds are calculated based on the following classifiers: *municipal budget; budget of Civil Service of Culture, Education, Sport and Youth Affairs; cultural, sport and youth activities in Tbilisi districts; and youth events*. The latter imply:

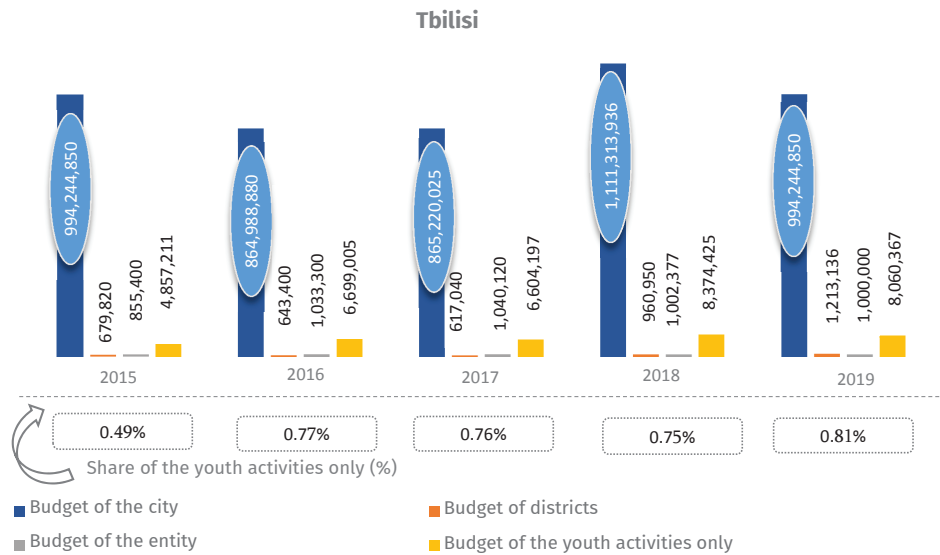
- *free tuition at youth houses and the palace;*
- *facilitation of continuous education and student projects;*
- *national palace of students;¹¹*
- *youth events.*

In addition to increasing the funding of City Hall services governing youth affairs, the budget of cultural, sport and youth activities has also increased

¹¹ *The facilitation of the national palace of students is included.*

in districts since 2015. The funds allocated for youth activities have significantly increased. If the funds allocated for youth activities in Tbilisi in 2015 equaled about 4.9 million GEL, the funds allocated in the budget for this purpose equaled about 8.1 million GEL in 2019. Despite such a tendency and the fact that funds allocated for youth activities from 2015 to 2019 almost doubled, which can definitely be evaluated positively, it is noteworthy that funds accumulated in the municipality for the above activities do not equal even 1% of the total budget.

Figure 6. Budget of Tbilisi and its entity/districts/youth activities only in 2015-2019¹²



The amount is presented in GEL.

Despite the above tendency and the positive practice observed in municipalities, which is related to the growth of funds allocated to youth activities since 2015, the funds spent within the framework of the implementation of youth policy both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi is minimal and seldom exceeds 1% of the municipality budget. At the same time, if we consider other results of our survey, according to which the

¹² *Entity* – structural unit of the municipality coordinating the youth issues, mainly the Entity of Culture, Sports, Religion and Youth Issues; *District* – budget for cultural, sports and youth activities allocated in the governmental districts of Tbilisi; *Youth activities only* – financial capital only for youth issues allocated in Tbilisi budget

activities carried out by municipalities are not diverse, mainly imply sports and entertainment events, are orientated mainly at the school-aged youth, and seldom imply the enhancement of an informal education component or activities for youth of older ages, particularly in the Imereti region, we may conclude that there are questions around the feasibility of achieving the goal of the enhancement and sustainable development of youth.

Programs/Projects

According to study results, the list of activities that are planned and implemented within the context of implementation of the youth policy by Municipalities hardly changes. If we look at the list of events planned/implemented in 2018-2019, we will discover that there is a list of standard activities (intellectual games, concerts, meetings with people of various professions, community holidays, awarding successful students/sportsmen), which responds to the requirements of the action plan developed in accordance with the policy document to a minimum extent.

It can be said that in terms of youth enhancement in the Imereti region, the main focus is on engaging youth in cultural, creative activities and leisure. The carried-out activities serve goal 1.6 of the policy document. On the basis of information requested from the municipalities, it becomes clear that part of the measures carried out in 2018-2019 include: the arrangement of national and popular festivals; camps of various content and thematic, organizing exhibitions and literary evenings; meetings with famous people; and the implementation of measures planned within the framework of various festivals, including the arrangement of film showings and performances, municipal theater tours, as well as concerts and festivals.

In addition, some events held in municipalities actively supported the formation and development of environmental skills among the youth in the form of various events. For example, schools of Terjola, Zestaponi and Vani municipalities, in addition to the events planned in connection with Environmental Protection Day (June 5), which mainly implies conducting cleaning actions for the purpose of raising environmental awareness, participated in the CENN (Caucasus Environmental NGO Network) competition – Niko Ketskhoveli school prize. The purpose of the competition is to support environmental education and civil engagement among

the youth and local community; raise awareness about the sustainable development of goals; and develop and encourage community initiatives, project management, record management, writing, visualization, and communication skills.

It should be mentioned that some of the municipalities carried out activities that correspond with goals 1.1 and 1.3 of the policy document. The above goals are aimed at raising awareness among young people about civil rights and commitments, as well as youth capacity-building so that they are engaged in the decision-making process. In order to achieve this, the projects – *UN Modeling* and *The Youth Assembly* were implemented in Kutaisi Municipality in 2018-2019; and the debate club and the children's rights protection club function in the Terjola Youth Municipal Center.

For the purpose of supporting youth initiatives, the implementation of measures offered by the youth were funded/facilitated in Chiatura and Zestaponi municipalities. In particular, projects initiated by the youth in Chiatura in 2018 were funded by 1000 (one thousand) GEL, and the project *Showing Georgian cartoons in kindergartens* initiated by the youth was implemented in Zestaponi.

Within the framework of raising social awareness, various actions were held in municipalities. For example, the action *This is not my choice* was conducted in Kutaisi and was dedicated to the street children. Additionally, the campaign *My Girl* was conducted against selective abortion. Conferences against drug addiction and violence were held in Vani. World *No Tobacco Day* was celebrated, and during charity actions week, *The Youth for Your Sake* was held in Zestaponi.

The component of volunteerism is also a part of the strategic direction of participation. However, volunteerism is at the initial stage of development in Georgia and its low level of popularity is proven by studies. According to Georgian legislation, relations between the volunteer and the host organization and their relations with a third party are governed by the international agreement of Georgia. Out of the activities carried out by municipalities, active volunteer activities of the youth are limited to participation in one-time actions, such as cleaning actions. Despite the existence of certain activities related to volunteerism and participation that are planned in municipalities, it may be said that the projects implemented for this strategic direction are less oriented at a long-term goal, and their one-time nature will facilitate sustainable development to a much lower degree. At the same time, as this study has revealed, raising awareness in

connection with volunteerism and a change in attitudes to it among the youth are important.

The same is true for the strategic directions of education, employment and mobility, despite separate interesting cases. For the purpose of encouraging education, youth services of Imereti municipalities actively support awarding successful students. Within the framework of this direction, non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity - Municipal Center of Social Protection, Civic and Aesthetic Education of Students functions in Terjola Municipality is implementing 4 sub-programs which unite 26 clubs. The goal of the center is to implement the youth policy and support permanent improvement. The center is an informal out-of-school educational institution that offers the youth to develop transverse skills through the study of various crafts.

The practice of Kutaisi in terms of the facilitation of the youth employment is also worth paying attention to and can be copied by other municipalities. The project *Respond to the time requirements and become an entrepreneur through the digital marketing* was implemented in the Municipality. It is also noteworthy that in 2018, Vani Municipality hosted the *International Youth Summit* organized by the Institute of Informal Education of Georgia. Unfortunately, similar practices are not often implemented and need to be adopted by other municipalities. In terms of engagement in educational projects, cognitive project *Etaloni* and intellectual game *What? Where? When?* were held in almost all municipalities of the Imereti region. Despite the above, according to the study results, this is not a relevant response to youth needs. To meet these needs, activities should focus on the importance of receiving informal education and gaining specific skills for employment.

Within the framework of the third strategic goal of the youth policy – health – municipalities mainly organize sporting events and have activities for the facilitation of successful sportsmen, which is mostly expressed in providing financial support to them and allocating funds required for their participation in various sporting events. Municipalities also arrange various sporting events, school sport Olympiads, municipal championships in various sports, or tours. Despite the above, the study showed that youth needs in terms of organizing sporting events are oriented at other aspects. In the opinion of the youth, it is important to arrange Olympiads/ championships not one time or several times a year, but rather provide spaces with relevant infrastructure to support regular sports activities for youth.

For the implementation of the strategic goal of social support and protection, the youth activities in the municipalities included celebration of the International Day of Protection of Rights of People with Disabilities and the organization of one-time events for children with disabilities.

The list of the activities mentioned above are the part of the youth work done by municipalities. During the study, we faced an issue around the understanding of policy document strategic goals – what are they and how the local government can insure implementing the goals into practice. By this perception, related challenges could be explained by the fact that some of municipalities did not mention the full list of activities done within the youth sphere. In general, municipalities concentrate on “onetime events,” such as concerts, competitions, excursions, etc.

As for the implementation of projects that are more relevant in the context of the youth policy and are led by other stakeholders rather than municipalities themselves, the list of activities by municipality, as well as the results of the focus group discussions with youngsters in the frame of this study were provided. Results show that despite the relative diversity of activities carried out in Tbilisi, mainly activities conducted in the frame of the youth policy are similar, almost do not include an informal education component, and are less oriented to the sustainable development of youth.

3.3. TARGET AUDIENCE OF THE YOUTH POLICY

Despite the fact that the youth policy document is oriented to youth between the ages of 14 and 29, the desk review and the qualitative study confirm that youth projects are mostly intended for school-aged youth, particularly in the Imereti Region, where adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 represented the main target group of the implemented projects. For example, the projects carried out in Baghdati Municipality had up to 500 beneficiaries in total, including 400 beneficiaries between the ages of 14 and 17, and 100 beneficiaries between the ages of 18 and 29. The number of beneficiaries of events held in Vani Municipality equals 300, out of which only two beneficiaries were between the ages of 18-29. Even though the total number of beneficiaries participating in events in Kharagauli Municipality in 2018 is higher compared to the above two municipalities and equals 1877 young persons, a majority is between the ages of 14 and 17 (1377 beneficiaries – 14-17 years old, 500 beneficiaries – 18-29 years old).

It should be mentioned that Tskaltubo Municipality is the only Municipality where the number of beneficiaries between the ages of 18 and 29 (1910) exceeded the number of beneficiaries between the ages of 14 and 17 (1500), which can be explained by the content of the activities carried out in the Municipality. The region hosts the folklore festival *Art Geni* annually. In 2018, about 60,000.00 GEL was spent on the events held throughout Tskaltubo Municipality. More than 70% of the amount was spent on organizing *Art Geni* and student days.

The qualitative study of the youth and the main informants identified migration as one of the most serious problems, including in terms of designing youth projects for school-aged children. The work of municipalities should mainly focus on the reduction of the outflow of youth from the region, which is possible to achieve by the implementation of the policy document action plan. This should contribute to a reduction in migration and the realization of youth potential in the municipalities. For the successful implementation of the policy document, it will be important to have factual data, such as number of young people residing in regions, as well as the number of self-employed, entrepreneur youth in the capital city or in the region and their needs.

3.4. DISCUSSION

Despite the fact that the youth policy document has identified the needs of the youth, efficient implementation of the policy depends on the good will of the state. Though the youth policy document includes a near-complete list of goals tailored to the youth, the action plan does not address all questions. In order to ensure that the action plan is oriented at results, can influence the life of the youth, cause sustainable and systemic changes and more importantly, resolve the above challenges, the state must ensure not only its implementation but also its further monitoring.

The action plan has no indicators according to which it will become possible to evaluate success and efficiency during its implementation. Also, funds from the budget are not allocated to the plan and it is unclear what amount should be used for the implementation of the plan.

In order to monitor the implementation of the policy document introduction

process, it was determined to evaluate the action plan once in two years, which was not done. Presumably, the engagement of each interested party responsible for the successful implementation of the action plan in the process was not sufficient.

Also, the *Framework document of key competences of youth activities* failed to be adopted and introduced into practice. Activities of youth workers are still not recognized and youth workers have not been retrained. No information about the requalification of youth workers employed in the municipalities is available, and their status is unknown.

In terms of the implementation of the policy document by municipalities, there is no guided framework which would help to plan activities in collaboration with relevant actors, resulting in the successful implementation of youth policy. Also, the entities responsible for youth policy implementation in the self-government bodies do not have information about the real needs of youngsters based on surveys. The information they do have is not documented or available.

Activities carried out by municipalities are identical. Over the years, these activities are not more diverse and/or old activities are not replaced with the new ones. The main target group of the activities are school-aged youngsters. In the municipalities, there are almost no activities targeting young people aged 18 to 29.

Study results also showed that there are challenges regarding the knowledge of youth policy implementation and understanding the importance of youth enhancement in the long-term perspective by staff members responsible for youth policy implementation.

Despite some risks that the foundation of the Youth Agency in 2019 might hinder functioning of already existent programs, expectations could be assessed as rather optimistic. The responsibility of the Agency is to develop standards, quality control mechanisms, rules of recognition and certification of results, guidelines and learning-methodological training-modules on issues falling under the youth sphere. Achievement will increase the level of document effectiveness. Also, the Agency will be the main actor in defining the rule of qualification and certification of youth workers and the development of professional standards. However, there is still a risk that the agency will not consider the practices and experiences of previous youth-focused governmental agencies.

4. YOUTH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Results of Focus Group Discussions

MAIN FINDINGS

- Within the youth policy framework, activities are predominantly focused on sports and give less consideration to informal education. Activities carried out in the Imereti region are mostly similar and imply the same types of sports, entertainment and intellectual games. Activities tend to be more diverse in Tbilisi, but informal education-related activities are also rarely carried out in the capital city.
- Youth policy implementation by local self-government bodies in the municipalities of the Imereti region is assessed negatively by focus group participants. As for Tbilisi, the respondents have more neutral attitudes. Lack of qualification of staff was named as the main reason for the poor performance of local self-government bodies.
- Young people rarely take initiative to solve problems by themselves. Instead, they lay the main responsibility for solving problems on the local government.
- Initiatives and activities implemented in the self-governing units are mainly planned by local municipalities rather than by the youth, although some young people are active in the municipality/city.
- Pessimism is one of the main reasons provided for the low activity of youth both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi. Youngsters do not believe that their initiatives will be supported by the decision-makers (e.g. local self-government) or by the young people who represent the target group of these initiatives. Internal and external migration also was identified as an important reason for the low youth activity in the Imereti region.

- The forms of civil activity in which young people are rarely but still engaged are mainly related to participation in protest actions and volunteering. Passive and/or non-participation is explained by the belief that nothing will change. Those who participate in protest actions frequently consider that it is an opportunity to express their position loudly, to network, and use the space for building relationships with peers and entertainment.
- Volunteering as a form of social activism is not very prestigious and respectively, not very popular. Youngsters rarely but still are engaged in volunteer activities, and these activities mainly include cleaning the environment, planting trees and participating in charity actions.
- Young people are not informed about the rare but existing youth initiatives that are supported by the local-self-government.
- In the Imereti region, activities are mostly planned in the municipal centers. As for Tbilisi, the main focus is on central districts, but there are activities planned for the suburbs, too.
- In the Imereti region, projects are designed mostly for schoolchildren and are less oriented on the youth of older ages, if at all. As for Tbilisi, projects designed for the youth also cover youth of older ages.
- The lack of community space for young people that can be used as an informal education, networking and entertainment space for youngsters is a challenge in the Imereti region.

4.1. IMPLEMENTED YOUTH ACTIVITIES

The main goal of the youth policy is to create the relevant environment for the development of youth and to provide them with the support. For the youth to realize their potential and to actively get involved in all spheres of public life, it is crucial to offer opportunities for developing different competencies. Respectively, to ensure the maximum engagement of youth, it is extremely important to first plan relevant activities.

As the results of focus group discussions with youngsters showed, there are certain differences between Tbilisi and the municipalities of the Imereti region in terms of the activities planned and carried out in the frame of the implementation of youth policy. In particular, activities implemented in Tbilisi for the youth are diverse and differ from activities carried out in the region, where projects are mostly similar. Considering the last two years, intellectual games (*Etaloni, What? Where? When?*) and sports championships were named most often among the projects implemented for youth in the Imereti region municipalities. It turned out that the above activities are carried out mostly for school-age children, and young people under the age of 18 are engaged in these activities. At the same time, various festivals and concerts related to specific holidays were named among projects planned and implemented for youth. It is noteworthy that in the frame of the implementation of youth policy, most activities carried out for youngsters are sporting events and ecological activities, but the component of informal education is often missed. Activities for youngsters are, with rare exceptions, almost never oriented on increasing youth engagement in various social processes. Despite the relatively diverse activities carried out in Tbilisi, the abovementioned issues are relevant for the capital city as well, however, this is a particular challenge for the Imereti region.

As for Tbilisi, sporting events and cleaning campaigns were most often mentioned by the discussion participants among projects intended for the youth. In the context of **sporting events**, it is noteworthy that the above activities are carried out in the Imereti region mostly with the involvement of schools, and mostly schoolchildren participate. In Tbilisi, activities are designed not only for school-aged youth. Even though the organization of various charity campaigns, concerts, festivals, etc. were named among events planned for the youth in Tbilisi, a large number of sporting activities was also highlighted. According to the focus group participants, the intensity of holding sporting events is explained by the fact that youth engagement in them is higher than in intellectual activities. It was mentioned that

intellectual activities are also planned and carried out in the city, however, information about them is disseminated to a narrower audience.

"I think that more people participate in sporting activities, and that's why they are held more often." [Tbilisi, male, representative of 18-29 age group]

"Debates are organized for the youth throughout Tbilisi, but they are seen less than sporting events." [Tbilisi, female, representative of 18-29 age group]

In addition to sporting activities, **ecological projects** were also frequently named as a category of activity. In this regard, cleaning campaigns were identified as one of the most frequently mentioned and therefore, planned and implemented events. The study showed that carrying out such activities was important both in Tbilisi and in all municipalities of the Imereti region. It can be said that the problem of ecology is undoubtedly an urgent issue, however, its popularity, comparatively high awareness and frequency of activities related to it are connected with the activated campaigns regarding this topic. According to one of the respondents participating in the study, Georgia reflects the global tendency to a certain extent and as this issue is given particular attention in the world, it also became urgent in Georgia.

"This topic came to us from other countries, many famous actors talk about saving the Earth, how many years are left if we continue doing so, and people must choose this ideology, because filling the Earth with garbage damages of all us." [Tbilisi, male, representative of 14-17 age group]

According to the study results, even though projects for youth should not be limited to sports topics only, it is necessary to recognize their importance. According to one argument, under the conditions of an increase in soft drug consumption among youth, sporting activities and championships in which a comparatively large part of the youth can participate is particularly important. One more reason why it is considered necessary to pay particular attention to sporting activities is their positive effect on escaping being chained to virtual reality, as well as in terms of increasing social capital. As it was mentioned during the discussions, impairment of the ability to establish real and not virtual social connections is a challenge for youth,

especially among those aged 14-17.

"Master League in Football was held. Many young people who used to smoke "weed" in the street, started playing football – those who wanted to play. Such a project is good." [Samtredia Municipality, male, representative of 25-29 age group]

"Before I started engaging in sporting activities, I was a very frequent user of the computer or phone, and after I started to do sporting activities, I did not use the computer. I use the phone only to make calls, and in my opinion, sports largely contributes to this habit." [Tbilisi, male, representative of 14-17 age group]

"You can run and engage in sport activities without infrastructure. Many people exercise at home and have very good results." [Khoni Municipality, female, representative of 14-17 age group]

"The City Hall installed training facilities and equipment in many districts. There are children who do not want to exercise, but just be entertained." [Tbilisi, male, representative of 14-17 age group]

Even though a lack of respective infrastructure was named as the factor preventing a large group of young people from engaging in sporting activities, it was mentioned that infrastructure is not the main obstacle. Moreover, even if infrastructure exists, it is often not used properly. One of the reasons is that sports do not represent a necessary element of everyday life for society, and a healthy lifestyle is not widely popular. According to the study respondents, it is necessary to popularize a healthy lifestyle and make sporting activities part of everyday life. From this point of view, together with planning various activities, respondents consider it significant for those with symbolic capital (popular and/or eminent personalities) to popularize a healthy lifestyle and transform it into a trendy activity.

The study also showed that activities planned for the youth are mainly accumulated in the municipal centers of the Imereti region. One of the main supporting arguments was the better condition of roads in regional centers and the simplicity of "gathering people" from villages in the center. However, it turned out that this tendency is observed not only in the Imereti region, where the issue of mobilizing youth from villages to municipal centers is urgent, but also in Tbilisi. As it was mentioned in the

focus group discussions, activities for the youth are mainly carried out in the center of the city and seldom in suburbs. However, while relocation/ transportation were outlined as the main factors for the region, in the capital city this was explained by the large number of people in central districts and accordingly, the perspective of engaging more people in the planned activities.

"[Activities are planned] mostly for the regional center children. Terjola is large and there are villages there..." [Terjola Municipality, female, representative of 25-29 age group]

"I live in the village and it was located at a distance of 4 km from the center. We used to walk, but villages are less engaged in projects. Events are mostly held in the municipal center..." [Kharagauli Municipality, female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"I am active and I like to engage in projects, but these projects are implemented elsewhere. I go to Tbilisi to participate in the European Parliament modeling project, because it is not held in villages ..." [Sachkhere Municipality, female, representative of 14-17 age group]

"Most activities are carried out in central places because more attention is paid there and there are more people. For example, when my initiative group plans some campaign, we try to do this in the center, because there are more people; at least the center is the most favorable place to distribute leaflets." [Tbilisi, female, representative of 14-17 age group]

It is noteworthy that participants of the focus group discussion in the municipalities of the Imereti region considered it very important to hold discussions on various topics. According to the respondents, unfortunately, there is neither space for this, nor a group that will organize discussions where the youth will be given an opportunity to “speak loudly” on various issues. In Tbilisi, discussion participants emphasized the establishment of cooperation with school theaters and museums among the desirable activities for young people. In the opinion of one of the respondents, this will ensure frequent visits of schoolchildren to theaters and museums, as well as allow for the use of these spaces for public lectures and discussions. Even though less attention was paid to it in Tbilisi than in municipalities,

the existence of spaces for discussions and the engagement of youth were identified as desirable activities for the youth.

"This discussion was very interesting [focus discussion within the framework of the study]. There are problems, but they are not discussed much. People do not talk about them publicly." [Terjola Municipality, female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"I would like to organize excursions to the theater for schoolchildren, so that children can see and love it, and hold discussions." [Tbilisi, male, representative of 14-17 age group]

According to the study results, activities for the youth in municipalities are mainly planned/carried out on the initiative of local self-governing units and very seldom on the initiative of the youth. Study respondents assess the activities as less satisfactory and this is caused by several reasons. One reason is the frequency of events planned for the youth, and it was noted that it is desirable to carry out activities more often. Another reason is the similarity of activities. In connection with this issue, it was mentioned that the projects implemented for the youth over the last several years are the same, and it is necessary to introduce novelties. The third reason for assessing the youth projects implemented in municipalities as less satisfactory is the segment for which the majority of activities are intended. The study showed that projects are designed mostly for schoolchildren and are less oriented to the youth of an older age or are not oriented to them at all. According to the respondents in municipalities of the Imereti region, even though young people migrate from municipalities and after finishing school many young people leave them, this does not mean that no representatives of this age group are left there. Therefore, it is necessary to plan activities for the youth aged 18-29.

When assessing the local government, some respondents in the Imereti region were particularly critical and declared that the local government is not active in terms of the implementation of youth policy, and they are not active in general either. Moreover, according to one respondent, the local self-governing units do nothing and cannot even use the budgeted funds. It should be mentioned that these issues were identified as urgent for municipalities of the Imereti region and not for Tbilisi, where the activities of local self-governing bodies were assessed by the study participants as neutral in terms of projects/activities carried out for the youth. Within the

assessment of activities carried out in the framework of the youth policy, it is noteworthy that focus group participants place less emphasis on the lack of activities focused on informal education both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi.

"The municipality plans events to make schoolchildren active, but events are not planned for people above the age of 25." [Terjola Municipality, female, representative of 25-29 age group]

"The municipality is the main organizer of events. Children rarely ask for anything." [Baghdati Municipality, female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"[The local self-governing units] are not doing anything. I think they do not even try." [Terjola Municipality, female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"At the end of the year, unused money is left and they return it." [Terjola Municipality, male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"There is no activity from the municipality. The only activity of the municipality is elections, visiting families, old people and the youth." [Sachkhere Municipality, female, representative of 25-29 age group]

Severe social problems were named as one of the arguments for the assessment of the work of local self-governing units as less effective in terms of the implementation of youth policy. According to the arguments of authors of this opinion, there are so many social problems to be resolved in municipalities that there are no sufficient funds for youth projects, so less attention is paid to them. It is also noteworthy that in one of the narratives it was highlighted that the central government also does not have a high interest in the implementation of youth projects and therefore, the local government tries spending less time and resources on them.

According to one more opinion, the inefficient implementation of youth policy is preconditioned by irrelevant staff. According to this opinion, young people are less represented in the local government work groups responsible for the implementation of youth projects, at least in cases related to a specially created council of advisors.

"Local self-governing units and the local budget cannot allocate these funds for many things. There are many socially vulnerable people. Some of them need medications, infrastructure needs to be improved, the local budget does not have enough funds, [for the implementation of youth projects] and there is less interest from senior officials in this regard." [Terjola Municipality, male, representative of 25-29 age group]

"Another problem is that the mayor established the council of advisors and there is no young person in that group of 7-8 persons to offer some idea." [Terjola Municipality, male, representative of 18-24 age group]

According to the study results, it can be concluded that the activities carried out within the frame of youth policy are not oriented on the development of different competencies in youth, especially in the Imereti region. The main focus is made on the participation of youth in sports and entertainment events, and not on the delivery of informal education. Besides, the activities are mostly planned in the municipal centers and they are mostly targeted to school age children. Even though some activities taking place in the suburbs of Tbilisi focus not only on school children but also on youth, it is a general trend that quite an important part of youth are not include in the youth policy program. One of the reasons for this trend, like the study participants say, is the inefficient work of local self-government bodies, as the corresponding units are structured with non-relevant staff.

4.2. CHALLENGES OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

For the successful implementation of youth policy, it is important that people who are responsible for decision-making and policy implementation have good knowledge of the real needs of youth, and also of the goals on which the policy should be oriented. Action plans should be compliant with the actual needs and goals of youngsters. Correspondingly, to focus on the sustainable use of social and financial capital rather than carrying out activities for those do not support the achievement of the long-term goal, which is the enhancement of youth. Therefore, it is crucial to know what challenges young people face.

According to the study results, the main challenges identified among youth were the following:

- *Lack of information about planned activities is a problem for youth in the Imereti regional municipalities, especially in villages;*
- *Lack of informational points at schools that would inform youth about the specifics of different professions, employment and demands on the market;*
- *Limited capacity for employment;*
- *Non-recognition of an internship as work experience and the lack of hourly work;*
- *Lack of places where youth could entertain, accumulate social capital, network, and receive informal education across all municipalities of the Imereti region;*
- *Lack of or poor condition of sporting infrastructure, which is extremely acute for the youth in the Imereti region;*
- *Lack of knowledge about the negative effects of soft drugs and gambling in youth, as well as bullying at school. It is noteworthy that this problem was emphasized by school-age respondents.*

As the results of focus group discussions show, the main problem facing youth is limited **employment** opportunities. Naturally, this was particularly urgent for respondents aged 18 and older. Several pressing issues were identified in this context, which affect employment and often explain the high unemployment index. In connection with employment, focus was made on the *selection of a profession, internship, hourly compensation rate, and nepotism.*

Problems related to the *selection of a profession* were identified as one of the difficulties related to employment, which, in the opinion of the study participants, were mainly connected with issues related to employment in one's own profession. In the opinion of the respondents, one thing is the problem of employment in general and another thing is the low chance of employment in one's own profession, which is not necessarily related to a lack of jobs. Moreover, this is often related to the selection of a profession. Two arguments were outlined in this context: one argument is that under social pressure, young people choose a profession which is not their vocation at all. They are not interested in the specific profession and accordingly, they are not employed in this profession. Another argument is that the selection of popular professions, also associated with social pressure, is not adequate to the actual demand in the workforce. Under the conditions of high competition and widespread nepotism, a young person has to work not in their own profession, but where the jobs actually are.

"I have finished accounting courses and I would not work in this profession, no matter how much I am paid. I am not interested in it. While I was studying, I wondered about finishing the courses quickly." [Kharagauli Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

"Compulsion from the part of parents is also a big problem. It is a problem when you choose the same profession as your parent and you do not want to tell your parent that you do not like it. You think that your parent will be offended." [Tbilisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]

"In Georgia everybody wants to become a lawyer, economist or doctor ... there are more lawyers in the country than citizens that need the assistance of a lawyer..." [Samtredia Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

Both the schoolchildren respondents and older respondents noted that it is important to have special areas in schools where various professions, their peculiarities, and employment opportunities will be discussed with young people, so that the focus is not only on popular professions and the young people do not make an uninformed decision under social influence.

"It would be good to have a separate office where you can be registered, where you will be given advice considering your grades, motivation, shown universities, jobs..." **[Tbilisi, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]**

"From my personal example I would like to tell you: I was enrolled in the Faculty of International Relations 5 years ago and studied there. Then, 4 years later, I discovered that I do not need this profession and now I have chosen another area in which I am interested and for which I have skills... If I had known earlier [what a profession implies], I would not lose those years." **[Khoni Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]**

"I find it very difficult to choose a profession. I have taken various courses and trainings and try to study anything to think about whether I want to do this in the future. I would like to have such a thing so that I can become more familiar with professions and this would help me make a choice." **[Kutaisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]**

In addition to the selection of professions, study results showed that ignoring the potential of vocational schools was identified as a problem. According to the study participants, vocational schools are not prestigious, and despite the desire to continue studies there, young people give up this idea. As it was mentioned during the discussions, continuing studies at the university after finishing school is a kind of tradition that should not be broken. Moreover, children are pushed to make a choice in favor of a university during the entire socialization process. This is complemented by the fact that vocational schools are not prestigious and thus, very few people consider the possibility of studying elsewhere outside of a university after finishing school.

"Society created the stereotype that vocational education is inferior to a university education ... Parents pay more attention to education. Maybe somebody has the goal to become a sportsman but cannot say that because he knows that his parents will refuse, and it is senseless."

[Kutaisi, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

"Enrollment at the university is not what you say only in the 12th grade. You were told years ago that you have to enroll at the university." **[Kutaisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]**

In the context of employment, the study also showed that non-recognition of an *internship* as work experience and the lack of *hourly* work are problematic for the youth. These issues were particularly urgent for Tbilisi focus discussion participants, which may be explained by the fact that unlike municipalities, young people in Tbilisi have more opportunities for internships, as well as low-income employment outside their profession. According to their arguments, the fact that an internship is not recognized as work experience causes a less serious attitude to the process of internships from the part of the intern as well as the employer. The lack of hourly work does not allow the youth to adequately combine work with study. Therefore, by the time they finish their studies, they either have no work experience or have experience working in positions that are not related to their profession directly. This makes the situation related to employment in general more severe, resulting in frustration among the youth and the staffing of almost all areas with unprofessional staff.

"I would say that there is no employment problem in Georgia, especially in Tbilisi, but very seldom by profession."

[Kharagauli Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"Lack of professionalism in your own field, this is the result. Many negative results are caused by the fact that an internship is not recognized as work experience and that there is no hourly work. Young people either do not study at all, or they go because they have no hope." **[Tbilisi, Female, representative of 18-29 age group]**

Nepotism was identified as another problematic issue related to

employment. This was identified as a problem both in Tbilisi and in the municipalities of the Imereti region. According to the study participants, the existence of nepotism in the country causes a lack of professionalism on one hand, and the creation of nihilistic feelings in young people on the other hand.

*"When a vacancy is announced in connection with some job, an interview is always conducted formally. There are very many cases when interviews are arranged formally and they know in advance who should be accepted." **Chiatura Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]***

*"You cannot find a job because of nepotism. I am an aviation engineer and do not have any hope of employment. You cannot become a pilot or an engineer if your father or uncle is not a pilot or head of a company or something like that. The same is true for controllers."
[Tbilisi, Male, representative of 18-29 age group]*

Due to a lack of employment opportunities in the country, the dominant opinion of the discussion participants was that young people go abroad to improve their living conditions and not to receive education, which is evaluated as a problem. Young people consider receiving education as the best reason to go abroad. However, an interesting opinion was expressed in this context, according to which, the level of development of all countries cannot be equally high and it is not a misfortune that young people leave Georgia at least to improve their living conditions. Another factor that was accentuated in the context of departure abroad is related to a cultural factor. In particular, according to one opinion, young people who went abroad work in places where they would not have agreed to work in Georgia. Even though salaries are much higher in European countries than in Georgia, often going there to work is associated with the fact that doing a certain job is "shameful" here. The desire of young people to occupy managerial positions immediately after graduation was assessed as a cultural peculiarity, and if they agree to work in less prestigious positions, they will do so only abroad, because "nobody can see them there."

"Young people consider it shameful if somebody sees that they are working as a waiter. When they go abroad, they feel free there and the factor that somebody will see them does not affect them."

[Tskaltubo Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"[The departure of young people abroad to improve their living conditions] does not represent a big problem due to the fact that all countries cannot be at the same level. Of course, there are countries that are more developed than Georgia, they are big and we cannot catch up with them in 1 or 2 years..."

[Samtredia Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"When they graduate from the university, they want to occupy highly paid positions immediately and they do not consider starting work in their profession in a low-paid position, and that after they become popular, there will be a higher demand for them..."

[Vani Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

In addition to employment and related problems, the study also identified the dependence of minors on **soft drugs** and **gambling**, as well as **bullying** among the problems facing youth. It is noteworthy that the schoolchildren participating in the study focused on the increased consumption of *soft drugs* among minors as a result of decriminalization. According to the main narrative of the youth of older ages, decriminalization did not increase the number of consumers, but made the issue more visible.

"I have a friend who was dragged into gambling. Some friends won a lot of money and continue playing and others lost \$3,000 USD ..."

[Tbilisi, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

"The problem lies in lack of awareness of the youth about the harm of marijuana. They do not know what harm marijuana can cause them." [Tskaltubo Municipality, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

"There is no problem. Those who used to smoke, smoke again." [Baghdati Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"Those who used to smoke in the corner, smoke in the center too..." [Baghdati Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

Bullying was mainly accentuated by school-aged respondents. An increase in acts of bullying on various grounds was identified as one of the problems. Low awareness of schoolchildren and teachers about bullying was identified as another problem. The significance of raising awareness about cyber security among schoolchildren was also mentioned in the context of bullying. Due to frequent cases of cybercrime, we can conclude that activities carried out in the social space often become an instrument used for bullying. Therefore, according to the arguments of one of the respondents, it is necessary for young people, primarily schoolchildren, to know how to protect themselves from bullying.

"... Now children at school are more interested in who has a better phone, who is dressed better ..." **[Terjola Municipality, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]**

"One girl used to dress differently. She was a bit overweight and my classmates used to bully her. If you are not a representative of the elites, you are low level or an outsider. For example, if you do not have 100 "likes" under your photo, people do not know about you..." **[Kutaisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]**

"Children and teachers are not informed about bullying in Georgia – in Kutaisi or any city. It means that often one can bully a child without even knowing about it." **[Kutaisi, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]**

"The issue of cyber safety in schools is a problem; what a child should know and how he should protect his personal information." **[Tbilisi, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]**

It is also noteworthy that in the context of bullying, respondents in Kutaisi focused on homophobia. According to their arguments, different clothes, pitch of voice or manners are sufficient reasons to bully a person and demonstrate homophobic attitudes. It should be accentuated that according to respondents, homophobic attitudes are particularly demonstrated in the case of boys, because "masculinity" is associated with the Georgian identity.

“Physical appearance is more or less covered. More attention is paid to manners, conversation, voice. Even if one is not gay, if he has such pitch of voice ...” [Kutaisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]

“I have seen cases in which a boy has closer relations with girls rather than boys in this class and therefore, he experiences pressure from boys. Boys are aggressive to this boy ... This is serious bullying, because they do not perceive him as a person. They tell him that he is not a brave man, that he is not a Georgian... it is associated with being Georgian.” [Kutaisi, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

“There is strong pressure from the parents. For example, if their son is gay, it is a shame and they have even kicked boys out of the house because of that. I think that if you are a mother, you should accept your son no matter who he is...” [Kutaisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]

Also, a lack of **community spaces** for youth that can be used as an informal education, networking and entertainment space for youngsters was named as a problem in almost all municipalities of Imereti. It is noteworthy that the study respondents implied not only the places related directly to entertainment, but also space where it will be possible to plan educational activities. This is a space that will allow young people to communicate with each other, share knowledge and opinions, as well as become familiar with novelties. Due to the fact that there is no place for gathering youth in municipalities, representatives of municipalities located near Kutaisi visit Kutaisi for entertainment. This is also associated with a problem. In particular, as movement of public transport is limited, daytime and not evening should be selected for entertainment. It is noteworthy that this was also named as a problem in Tbilisi. As noted by participants of the focus group discussion, public transport does not move during night hours and entertainment activities are planned late. Accordingly, this is a problem for the youth who want entertainment and at the same time, do not have an opportunity to move by taxi or personal car.

"There is one park, in July-September, other times it is cold and there are no people. We mostly go to Kutaisi, there is billiards and a bowling center there ... But sometimes, I cannot go to Kutaisi, because there is a problem returning." [Tskaltubo Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"There is no place to watch movies, there are no catering facilities, an equipped library with all the books that may be interesting for us..." [Khoni Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"I would like to have something like a club, not a club [entertainment] but a club where children can discuss free topics and express our opinions or listen to others. One day per week will be enough." [Kutaisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]

Lack of awareness of young people, at least regarding the small number of events held at the municipality, was named among the youth problems. This issue is particularly urgent for the youth residing in villages. The study participants consider two main mechanisms to resolve this: *active use of social networks and informing the youth of planned events and ensuring that youth are directly informed by representatives of local government.*

Study participants also discussed various **infrastructural problems**. Focus was made on the lack and/or poor quality of sporting infrastructure, lack of public gardens, inadequate condition of existing public gardens related to the poor quality of benches, inadequate number or condition of trash bins, and inadequate lighting. Environmental contamination was also accentuated. The latter was particularly urgent in the case of Tkibuli, Chiatura and Zestaponi, where it was mentioned that contaminated rivers and streets add to the ecological environment contaminated as a result of the operation of mines/factories, which creates a more deplorable state.

Due to the peculiarities of specific municipalities, young people named problems that are related to the municipality/the city in general and their settlement is not directly related to the implementation of youth policy. For example, an unsafe environment in mines was mentioned as one of the serious problems in Tkibuli. It was mentioned that most employed residents of the city/municipality are employed in mines. Almost everybody's family member and/or close relative is employed in this field and therefore, high

risks related to working in mines are the most serious problem which often does not allow people to think about or understand other issues.

"The worst thing for Tkibuli residents is that there is no safety in the mine. This is what bothers us most and destroys us because our family members go down there; many of our relatives died there." [Tkibuli Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

Despite mentioning the significance of the responsibility of both citizens and youth, study participants consider the local government as the **main responsible** entity for resolving problems. According to the discussion participants, the local government should identify problems, try to obtain support from the central government when developing mechanisms for their resolution, and use these mechanisms for the elimination of problems. Certainly, according to the discussion participants, there may be frequent cases when the central government will not allocate funds to the local government for resolving problems, but respondents consider the above chain of actions to be efficient. It is noteworthy that the issue of the responsibility of citizens was mentioned in the context of the resolution of infrastructural projects. It was noted that first of all, the government should take care of the improvement and renewal of infrastructure, but the citizens are also responsible for its maintenance. As awareness is low and the cases of damaging infrastructure are rather frequent, one of the offers was related to the installation of surveillance cameras and the respective punishment of offenders.

"I think that the government – the city hall should be responsible for the resolution of problems." [Tkibuli Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]
"[Responsible for the resolution of problems:] local government. It should write what problems there are in the municipality and there should be interest from the central government. The local government may write and the central government may not finance but ..." [Terjola Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

According to the group of the study participants who impose some responsibility for the resolution of problems on the youth, it is important

that young people take initiative and even despite several unsuccessful attempts, still try to deliver their own ideas to the respective agencies. According to one opinion, the circumstance that youth are not active and only “complain” is used by the municipality for carrying out their own interests, and the municipality will not try to be more active. ***It is noteworthy that imposing responsibility for problem resolution on the young people themselves did not emerge as a main discourse of the study. This view is rarely shared by the respondents of focus group discussions.*** Therefore, it is difficult to talk about the tendency that this viewpoint is more or less shared by the respondents from a particular age group.

“This is a mutual problem. We do not have a need to make our lives more active, and this lack of need is used by the municipality, which does not pay attention to us.” [Sachkhere Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

“The municipality cannot do anything if you do not give it an idea. You should go there and say, I have an idea... When you go to school in the morning, complain, stand up and go home again... nothing can be done this way... I wanted to hold a literary evening, so I came to the relevant place ... [The idea] may be not always meaningful but they will anyway pay attention to you, explain and tell you that it is not adequate. If you do not do anything to carry out this idea and sit at home and complain, this will not be done. Go and tell somebody.” [Samtredia Municipality, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

We can assume that the most urgent problem for youth is employment and to it associated issues, like the selection of a profession, internship, the absence of hourly pay, and nepotism. The study also revealed the addiction of youth to soft drugs and gambling. Regarding infrastructural problems, respondents mostly mentioned a lack of sporting infrastructure or its poor condition.

However, the trend shows that along with employment, in almost all target municipalities (excluding Tbilisi and Kutaisi), the most serious problem is a lack, or often an absence of spaces that could be used for networking, entertainment and informal education. This problem is even more acute for the youth in villages.

4.3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Young People and Engagement

In modern democratic societies, the participation of youth in different processes is extremely important. When young people are active, it means that the decision-making process is inclusive and reflects the interests of different groups. Besides, consideration of the interests and the needs of youth in the decision-making process is a critical precondition for sustainable development. In this context, the results of the youth study have the utmost importance.

As already mentioned, the activities that are carried out in municipalities are mainly planned on the initiative of local self-governing units and not the youth. The low indicator of youth engagement at the project initiation and implementation stages was mentioned by the study respondents both in Tbilisi and in the Imereti region. According to the main discourse, there may be a very small group of active young people that has initiative and tries to implement projects in the municipality/city, but a majority of young people are passive.

"If we evaluate impartially, a certain part of young people tries to become actively engaged in all activities organized in our city, even though the number of these activities is low. But another part of the youth is inert and passive ..." **[Tkibuli Municipality, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]**

"For example, I was engaged in eco-club, but the same people were engaged, that's the problem ..." **[Tskaltubo Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]**

"When we, the schoolchildren had a question about why they did not do something, we always expected more from the government. We had never had a desire to go to the city hall or relevant authorities and talk about our desires." **[Baghdati Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]**

One of the reasons for the low activity of a majority of young people is

related to **pessimism**, and another reason – to **laziness**. The latter explains the circumstance that often, young people are waiting for initiative from others. Their attitude is – “why me?!” and they not only do not participate in planning, but also hardly ever participate in the planned activities. Study respondents note that pessimism is explained by a lack of support for youth initiatives. In one case, support is related to the official authorities, who may appear as sponsors of projects/initiatives, and mostly respective municipality services are implied. In another case, support is related to the youth, who should be more engaged in various activities, but the indicator of engagement is low. In both cases, representatives of the focus group discussion consider that taking initiative is prevented by the preliminary attitude that there will not be any support and/or activity from the local self-governing units or the youth.

"There is a very pessimistic attitude from the part of the youth in general. There may be one or two initiators in the region who want to do something. All of us are looking at each other. We want somebody to start and then we will be engaged. I think that there are very few people to take initiative, create a project, submit it to a representative, etc." [Kharagauli Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"Maybe they have a pessimistic belief that nobody will sponsor and help them..." [Kharagauli Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"There is both laziness and stubbornness – if he does not do it, why should I do it?" [Vani Municipality, Male, representative of 25-29 age group]

Internal or external **migration** was named as another reason for the low indicator of youth activity in the Imereti region. According to the focus group discussion participants, young people leave regions due to the fact that there are fewer development opportunities in regions on one hand, and because young people have the attitude – “nothing can be done anyway” on the other hand. Therefore, several young people who have initiative and who want to plan activities do not have people who will be engaged in activities, or the audience for which the activities may be intended. Thus, focus is made on young people of school age and if any event is planned, it is mostly designed for schoolchildren. In this regard, the study participants impose a certain level of responsibility on the youth.

Even though respondents recognize the significance of the migration factor, they consider that it is necessary for the young people themselves to plan respective activities for the young people of older ages who have remained in the region.

"Today I decided to hold a good concert, but I do not have good dancers or good singers anymore. I want to be active but how? Nobody helps me and I cannot sing alone, can I?! People leave the region because everybody thinks that nothing can be done here." [Kharagauli Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

"I think that there are fewer active young people. Young people have to go away. The government cannot create living conditions." [Tkibuli Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"This activity is mainly intended for schoolchildren – football, judo, everything is done for school and the category under 17 years of age – not for the older category of 20-21 years. Maybe this is the fault of young people, because there is interest from their part. Some group may be created and address the local self-governing unit with some issues and be active." [Terjola Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

The dependence of youth on **social networks** and virtual reality in general was named as another reason for low activity. As mentioned at the discussions, a large part of young people is so engaged in the virtual space that engagement in real social life is not interesting for them. On one hand, this is predetermined by the fact that there are no activities and young people replace the lack of activity with Internet space. However, the significance of virtual reality and the dedication of a large portion of time by the youth to it precondition the scarcity of real social activities. Moreover, this is a problem because it increases the threat of dependence on virtual reality.

"We spend time being engaged in the Internet and not in social life." [Kharagauli Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"The game "Blue Whale" is a very big problem because many young people with a poor mental state will obey it." [Tbilisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]

The study participants fully agree that lack of initiative, low activity, low civil activism, and lack of engagement in processes can only be evaluated negatively. Together with laziness and pessimism, **indisposition for development** was mentioned as a reason for low activity, and low development of society was named as its main outcome.

"Some people are satisfied with what they have and do not want to develop." [Kharagauli Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

"All of us are talking about our problems, but maybe we also are not educated enough to take action and do something." [Terjola Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

As the study results show, the participation of youth in different activities or in the decision-making process is very low. Moreover, the number of youth who are active is rather limited in municipalities. The reasons for the low activity of youth revealed by the survey were laziness, migration, addiction to social networking, lack of a desire to develop, and pessimism. With regard to the latter, it turned out that young people do not believe that their initiatives will be supported by the decision-makers (e.g. local self-government) or by the youth who are the target group of these initiatives. However, in the context of engagement, it must be noted that young people lay the responsibility of managing the processes on the local government, and rarely on themselves, as they do not perceive youth as active players in these processes.

Practices of Civil Activism

As for the use of different forms of civil engagement, the study showed that young people more or less use a form of civil activism, such as participation in a protest campaign and more seldom, volunteerism. In connection with **participation in a protest action**, the study results showed two extremely different discourses. In accordance with one discourse, young people participate in actions often, however, different motivations for participation in the campaigns mentioned by the study participants are noteworthy. According to one group of respondents, this was proven by the participation of youth in the action "It is a shame."¹³ The main motivator of young people is expressing a protest loudly, which is done through action. But according to authors of the second opinion, young people participate in protest actions, but a very small part of them really know what they are protesting or the real purpose of the action. The main motivation for participating in actions for this group of young people is related to the establishment of social connections, or for using a specific space to build relationships with peers and entertainment.

"Young people do engage in actions. They always attend mass meetings. They are not interested in the purpose of the mass meetings or actions. They want just to stand there hugging their girlfriends ..." [Samtredia Municipality, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

"Some young people attend the actions, but do not know what's happening there, they just know it's cool to go there..." [Vani Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"They go there to mix with other people, to see Rustaveli avenue at least once?!" [Samtredia Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"Often young people go to such actions to be entertained and to boast that they have attended." [Tbilisi, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

¹³ "It is a shame" - protest in front of the Parliament building in Tbilisi against former Minister of Internal Affairs Giorgi Gakharia and his appointment as Prime Minister, claiming that police used excessive force against protestors on the June 20th rally (also known as Gavrillov Night) according to his order.

As for the second discourse in connection with the participation of young people in protest actions, young people do not participate in actions because they do not have hope for change. However, one more factor needs to be accentuated here. As mentioned by one part of the respondents, sometimes young people avoid participating in protest actions due to their political accents. According to the study participants having such an opinion, due to the fact that protest actions in Georgia are mostly political from the beginning or acquire a political nature later, young people avoid participating in them. Accordingly, young people try to avoid discomfort and moreover, protect their family members from discomfort.

"Some participants of actions were visited at home and asked why they attended the action..." [Tkibuli Municipality, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"[They wanted to engage in the action "It's a shame"] but they were not allowed – the roads were blocked. I was going but I did not have an opportunity; we were called and informed that going there had no sense because the roads were blocked, and therefore I did not go." [Khoni Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"My neighbor works in the city hall, so she will go and tell my mother that she saw me participating in the action." [Kutaisi, Male, representative of 18-24 age group]

"Patrol police stop me at least three times a day and search me at least twice a night. Why? Because they just did not like my face. Maybe they saw me at the action. Security Service does not do other things: they just write down names and surnames and want to always have these persons in terror." [Tbilisi, Male, representative of 25-29 age group]

Despite the fact that civil engagement of the youth is low, study participants still point to rare cases of using various forms of civil activism. It turned out that young people seldomly also use a form of civil activism, such as **volunteerism**. According to the study results, volunteerism is mainly related to environmental cleaning, landscaping and participation in charity actions.

Despite individual cases of volunteer activities, it was outlined that they

are not popular. Young people become more actively engaged in them during tragedies. Also, the planning of volunteer activities is not regular. Although related to specific dates (for example, Easter, Christmas, Children's Protection Day, etc.), activities are not necessarily organized regularly (e.g. every Christmas). It is noteworthy that one of the obstacles to volunteerism is that volunteer activities are not considered to be socially prestigious. Moreover, the engagement of youngsters in volunteerism is considered a shameful activity, as it means engagement in a non-prestigious activity. It should be mentioned that young people between the ages of 14-17 were more focused on the significance of shame for volunteerism.

"I am not in any group, but I have a group of friends and we often go to parks or reserved areas and clean garbage." [Tbilisi, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

"A project was implemented at school: we collected food, clothes that we could afford and helped those in need." [Kutaisi, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]

"Each Easter we grow Easter grass at Public School No. 2, sell it and buy food for socially vulnerable children ... we also collect clothes and toys. After that, we visit families and hold events." [Tskaltubo Municipality, Female, representative of 14-17 age group]

"You remember that everybody went out in the streets and cleaned up Tbilisi on June 13th. A tragedy happened. Was not it a shame then? It's a shame that we cannot stand up for each other until a tragedy happens." [Samtredia Municipality, Female, representative of 25-29 age group]

"I have been taken to the house of mercy to visit elderly people as a volunteer many times, but many people did not enter the building because they felt uncomfortable when photos of them were taken. When we visit families to help them, there is the same situation. They feel ashamed ..." [Samtredia Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

Demonstration of personal examples by so-called celebrities or subjects with high social status is considered to be one of the means of promoting volunteer activities. Also, the development of mechanisms that would allow the youth to gather scores through volunteerism and later use these

hours was named as a stimulator for volunteer activities. Transforming the time accumulated at university into part of a state grant and obtaining a certificate are reviewed as one of the opportunities of the conversion of volunteer hours.

"If I were a member of parliament, I would also be a volunteer and would clean up, not for photos but just ... The crowd which says – why should we do this? officials do not do this; this will give them motivation." [Samtredia Municipality, Male, representative of 14-17 age group]

"If we compare volunteer activities with other countries, for example, in the USA if you accumulate more than 100 hours of voluntary activities at school, you will be enrolled in the university and the state will give you a 10% grant, or the president may send you some certificate ... I think that everything is about motivation. When you are motivated, you become more active." [Khoni Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"I have been a volunteer since I was 16, as soon as I learned about this possibility... but hours are not counted here ... The main thing is that our volunteerism should be appreciated. I am not saying that we should have a salary, etc. but at least it should be on the same level as in the West, because they count hours there; you have motivation." [Tbilisi, Female, representative of 18-29 age group]

Not only in the context of volunteerism, but also in general, the demonstration of positive examples is one of the conditions necessary to increase activity and youth engagement; to motivate them to start expressing their own interests and then transform these interests into projects. Due to the fact that in rare cases when young people are active but are not supported by the local government, they remain disappointed and lose enthusiasm. Therefore, in the opinion of the study participants, it is necessary to inform the respective audience of the specific supported and implemented youth initiatives and plan the right communication strategy. In the opinion of respondents, the above actions will lead to the function of a “domino principle” and will become a motivator for transformation of initiatives into projects for young people.

"Willingness of the youth is low; nobody helps them. Many requests were submitted to the city hall and many of them were not considered. For example, as I know, letters have been sent in connection with a stadium in the village for 4 or 5 years. The response is positive, but the project is not implemented. When I want to do something, I go 2, 3 times and receive a negative response all three times and will not be able to do it. Accordingly, I will have no desire...Maybe there are other people like me, but they did not receive a respective response as many times as they addressed the city hall, and then they gave up." [Chiatura Municipality, Female, representative of 18-24 age group]

"The right direction should be given from the part of the state. When the trend of cleaning is introduced, the children will not be unwilling to do it; a group of children comes, cleans the territory, helps animals, provides medical assistance. They will not be lazy and will do it ..."
[Tbilisi, Male, representative of 18-29 age group]

Like the study results show, the engagement level of youth in different processes is low. The rarely used forms of civil activism are participation in protest actions and volunteering. However, it must be noted that participation in a protest action does not always mean civil activism, because it is mainly used for establishing relationships or having fun. As for volunteering, the study participants believe that volunteering is not very popular because people perceive it as a non-prestigious activity. For this very reason, the respondents both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi think that it is important to have different encouraging mechanisms for youth to increase their motivation for volunteering.

5. ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDERS

Results of Key Informant Interviews

MAIN FINDINGS

- Local self-government bodies do not use survey-based tools to identify the real needs of youth. Action plans are typically made by considering past experience or the subjective opinion of the staff responsible for youth policy implementation.
- The staff responsible for youth policy implementation have low qualifications according to central government and NGO representatives; though increasing qualifications and a lack of knowledge was rarely mentioned by the representatives of local self-government.
- The self-government bodies simply planning youth activities is not an effective policy according to central government and NGO representatives. As they assess, creating strategies and action plans independently for each municipality considering their peculiarities is crucial for youth policy implementation.
- According to representatives of the central government and NGO sector, there are sufficient local and international financial resources for the implementation of youth policy. The problem is related to unqualified staff who do not have the relevant knowledge and skills to either acquire or use these financial resources.
- Representatives of the local self-government identify a lack of financial resources as the main challenge, but in case sufficient financial resources are available, they have a less clear vision about their use.
- The relationships of local self-government bodies with the central government, as well as the relationship between City Council and City Hall are mainly symbolic in the frame of youth policy. It is mainly limited to sharing information and/or hearing reports.

- The lack or even absence of a community space (informal education, networking and entertainment space for youngsters) was identified as a significant problem in all municipalities of the Imereti region, while in Tbilisi it was not identified as a problem.
- The target group of activities of local-self-government is mainly school children, and as they are already organized at school, local self-government bodies do nearly nothing to work with other age groups, according to the assessments of Central government and NGO representatives.
- Youth activities are carried out in the municipal centers of the Imereti region, which excludes a majority of youngsters from the villages from participating in the youth events planned by the local self-government.
- The youth sphere is perceived as less serious by the state, which is an obstacle for the implementation of youth policy according to key informants. In this context, establishing the Youth Agency and beginning work on the state concept of youth policy is evaluated as a positive change by key informants.
- The existence of political will is critically important for the effective implementation of youth policy. The continuity of the policy should be ensured, despite any changes in government in order for the sustainable development of goals, according to the representatives of the central government and NGO sector.

5.1. CROSS-SECTOR EVALUATION OF YOUTH POLICY

Supporting youth development, along with other factors, also implies creating an environment in which youth can realize their full potential. It is impossible to achieve this goal without the relevant activities. Respectively, knowing what activities are planned by the municipalities for strengthening the youth at the local level is important.

According to the qualitative study results of key informants, the activities mentioned among the implemented projects both in the Imereti region and in Tbilisi reiterate the data identified by the desk review and the focus discussions held with the youth. For example, projects and activities carried out by local self-government authorities in the Imereti region are mostly identical and imply activities such as the intellectual game *What? Where? When?*, school sports day, and competitions in various sports. This was also confirmed by the desk review, in which according to the information obtained from municipalities, various festivals and meetings with famous persons are held in municipalities together with the above activities. Seldom, movie showings and exhibitions of handmade items are planned. Organizing summer camps, excursions and volunteer activities were named among activities that mainly imply cleaning and charity actions. As for Tbilisi, activities are much more diverse and include entertainment and sporting activities, as well as projects aimed at education and employment.

Similar to the youth study, according to key informants, the above activities are mostly carried out in municipal centers. However, it should be emphasized that respondents mentioned this in the Imereti region, while in Tbilisi, activities are not concentrated only in the city center. According to representatives of local self-government authorities of the Imereti region participating in the study, young people residing in villages located far from the center do not have as many opportunities to participate in events, save for rare exceptions, and this is evaluated by them as problematic. It is noteworthy that similar to the youth who thought that the above was mainly caused by issues related to transportation, according to the representatives of local self-government authorities participating in the study, the main reason for organizing a majority of events planned in municipal centers of Imereti is due to a lack of financial resources. Limited financial resources do not enable local self-government bodies to organize small events in various locations (e.g. villages), and therefore events are held in one location, mainly in the municipal center. Moreover, municipalities do not have enough financial resources to transport young people to municipal

centers from villages.

“Street Art direction is highly demanded among the youth. We have already painted 5,000 square meters in the central districts of the city and suburbs within the framework of festivals held at the international and local levels. Two festivals are being held now, too...”

[Representative of local self-government authority, Tbilisi]

“There is a problem with transportation, mainly. It is difficult to bring a child to the meeting from so far away. The parent will bring the child once; the next time the child will come alone, but all the time...”

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

The significance of planning youth activities for young people residing not only in the municipal centers but also in villages was particularly highlighted by representatives of the NGO sector participating in the study. According to them, it is necessary to think about mechanisms that will ensure the engagement of youth residing in villages in projects both in their villages and in the municipal centers.

“Funds must be invested in the youth direction to ensure that all activities are distributed by territorial units or by municipal center-village. For example, for the Baghdati Municipality, this should not be done only in Baghdati. Villages from where the youth cannot arrive should be united in clusters or by some territorial principle so that everybody can be engaged, because young people say that they have not seen a municipal center until they finish school. For example, young people from mountainous areas of Tskaltubo Municipality said that they do not know what Tskaltubo looks like. Do you understand what it means?”

[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]

This study in the Imereti region identified challenges in terms of insufficient **information** provided to the respective audience about planned events, and youngsters participating in the focus group discussions complained about a lack of information about various activities. However, the study of key informants provides different results, as respondents say that they always inform target groups about planned activities. According to

representatives of local self-government authorities, the main source of informing the respective audience about the events planned for the youth include social networks, such as official webpages and Facebook pages of municipalities that are regularly updated. In addition, representatives of self-government authorities named the distribution of booklets or posters in places where youth are concentrated, including at schools and municipal government offices, as the source of dissemination of information about activities. In rare cases, representatives of local self-government authorities mention the engagement of TV and village governors as the mechanism for dissemination of information about activities. It is noteworthy that the latter (village governor) was mentioned by the youth as a significant mechanism of dissemination of information together with social networks.

The study results showed that the number and the diversity of activities carried out for youth are different in specific municipalities. However, ultimately, we can conclude that the implementation of youth policy at the regional level is not oriented to a long-term perspective and sustainable development, while in the capital city, the situation may be evaluated as more positive from this point of view. For example, the local self-government authority is implementing two projects in Tbilisi, which are aimed at the resolution of two of the most urgent problems facing youth – unemployment and the availability of education. In terms of the availability of education, more than 1 million GEL is allocated in the budget of Tbilisi City Hall for funding students' tuition fees, and particular focus is made on socially vulnerable students registered in Tbilisi. As for employment, in this context, City Hall offers short-term professional retraining courses to youth with a main focus on construction, tourism, the service sphere and technology. It is noteworthy that one study respondent emphasized the fact that the program promotes the training of qualified individuals and did not draw attention to the fact that state budget resources are spent on training individuals whose knowledge and skills are not used in Georgia. In such situations, human capital trained in the frame of the municipal program in turn becomes a working force not for the Georgian labor market, but abroad. The narrative that underlines the importance of trainings to develop and enhance individuals for the international labor market, and does not emphasize the fact that time and state financial resources are wasted. This could be evidence of the fact that the understanding of youth issues among the staff members responsible for the implementation of the youth policy is a serious challenge.

"The top priority is supporting the educational process and the facilitation of employment for the youth ... The budget for funding student studies is more than 1 million, and the amount of funding depends on the academic performance of students ... The length of specific professional retraining courses is 2-3 months ... By the way, after these programs [professional retraining programs in Tbilisi], people are employed not only in Georgia, but also abroad. For example, we have students who leave courses that started working as welders in a factory in the Czech Republic." [Representative of local self-government authority, Tbilisi]

The key informant study confirmed one more result of the focus group discussions with youngsters. In particular, youth activities in all municipalities of the Imereti region are mostly designed for **schoolchildren**. According to representatives of local self-government authorities, the main reason for the above is the high index of **migration**. As the respondents argued, this is complemented by nihilistic attitudes towards engagement in activities by post-school youth remaining in the places of their residence. Considering this, the main efforts of municipalities are also directed at schoolchildren.

"Projects are intended for children between the ages of 14 and 17. Somehow, we are focused on this category, as this is the category of school-aged children. Migration, outflow occurs among the youth between the ages of 18 and 29. Young people go and do not come back because of the social conditions and unemployment." [Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"There is a lack of young people not only in the regions but also the whole of Georgia. Ninety out of a hundred persons do not return to the country. There are no people for whom something should be done. For example, I want to do something well, for whom should I do this? There are no young people ..." [Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

The vision of the study participants representing the NGO sector and youth issues experts is different in the frame of activities oriented to schoolchildren. Though the study respondents recognize migration as a serious challenge,

they consider that this does not explain the lack of activities for young people of post-school age. Rather, according to one opinion, explaining the problem by migration is “standard text” that is used by representatives of local self-government authorities to justify their own ineffective work. As cooperation with schools simplifies the process in terms of gathering the youth, providing information and organizing various activities, according to respondents, representatives of local self-government authorities do not bother to work with young people of a higher age. Therefore, the problem is not that there are no young people between the ages of 18 and 29 in municipalities, but that working with them requires many more resources and responsible persons dedicate less time to this. Moreover, nothing is planned by youth offices, not only for the youth between the ages of 18 and 29, but also for youth with special needs. There are also no projects for those who terminated studies at school early.

“Today, schoolchildren are the beneficiaries in almost all municipalities, because this is easy. Children are at school already, they are organized... Certainly, the migration level is high from regions, but this does not mean that there are no young people of non-school age in regions ...” [**Representative of NGO sector/expert, Tbilisi**]

In the context of migration, it should be mentioned that key informants from the central government or NGO sector participating in the study highlighted the significance of the correct implementation of youth policy, including the achievement of side effects, such as reducing the outflow of youth and their activation in regions.

"One of the most significant challenges for Kutaisi is migration. The level of migration and particularly, the outflow of youth is very high compared to other cities. Much more has to be done to stop them than we are doing now. More opportunities should be given to the youth ..." **[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]**

"Focus is made only on one part of the youth. Of course, this is not correct... In reality, reduction and regulation of migration is the objective of the youth policy to a certain extent, because when more opportunities are created for the youth in the region, this facilitates their occupation there ..." **[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]**

One more activity that was considered significant in the context of youth policy implementation by key informants is **volunteerism**. The results of focus group discussions with the youth revealed that volunteerism is mostly limited to participation in cleaning and charity actions. It appeared that Tbilisi is the only city where various projects are carried out by the municipality in terms of volunteerism. In addition to the current practice of organizing volunteer camps, it is planned to create a volunteer club in Tbilisi where all young people residing in all districts of the city should be engaged. Despite the fact that engagement of the youth in volunteer activities is higher in Tbilisi than in regions, it turned out that projects there are mostly initiated by organizations that are engaged in volunteer activities and not directly by the youth.

It is noteworthy that the key informant study identified the low prestige of volunteerism as a problem, and this was especially highlighted by the youth, too. Both the youth and the key informants participating in the study mentioned that volunteerism is often perceived as a "shameful" activity, and this perception necessarily requires transformation. Similar to the youth, key informants consider that one of the means of creating positive attitudes towards volunteerism is to give a certain status to such activities, and to transform that status into financial capital. One of its forms envisages providing certain benefits to volunteers. This may be related to a reduction in tuition fees at the university as well as public transport benefits.

"Volunteerism is significant, which may be considered absolutely shameful ... People are ashamed to do it; they say that they are not somebody's slaves to do something free of charge ... But every person generally begins their career with volunteerism, right? The fact is that they need a motivator, and then the young person should receive some benefit to continue being a volunteer. At this stage, things should be done this way."

[Representative of regional government authority, Imereti Region]

"For example, paying a certain portion of tuition at the university or reducing public transport travel costs by half, or granting some financial benefit [for volunteerism], which will encourage young people."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

According to the focus group discussion results with the youngsters, it would be significant to engage celebrities, including political figures, for the popularization of volunteer activities. However, the key informant study identified a different discourse. In the opinion of the study respondents, there is a risk that the volunteerism of politicians may be perceived only as part of a communication strategy. Moreover, it was noted that it is necessary to carry out volunteer activities independently from public institutions, with the active support of the civil sector, so that the asset of volunteer youth is not inadequately used by the political community.

"There is a high risk that this [volunteer activities of politicians] will be perceived only as a PR strategy. Somebody may really do this wholeheartedly, and for somebody this may be just a publicity move. Is this correct? Is this an example to follow?"

[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

"A correct strategy should be developed to ensure that this volunteerism does not grow into political action and be independent." **[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]**

A lack of financial resources was mentioned as the main reason for planning activities in the municipal centers, especially in the Imereti region. The representatives of local self-government bodies say that a lack of finances restricts them from planning activities in many different locations, and

therefore they give preference to the centers. Moreover, a lack of relevant finances is also a problem in terms of transporting the youth living in villages to the municipal centers.

As the study results show, the activities planned for youth are mainly similar. They are mostly organized in the municipal centers and their target group is mainly school children, as confirmed by the representatives of local municipalities. This is explained by scarce financial resources as well as a high indicator of migration. On one hand, due to migration, there is a scarcity of young people in municipalities to serve as the focus group for these activities. On the other hand, a lack of financial resources does not allow the municipalities to do more than they do now. However, according to the assessment of the central government and non-governmental sector representatives participating in the study, it is much easier to work with a group that is already organized at school, so the local municipalities simply do not waste resources to work with other age groups.

5.2. CHALLENGES

For sustainable development purposes, it is important to plan activities from a long-term perspective. Empowering youth is a long process requiring gradual and consistent work. In this process, it is important to have action plans tailored to the needs of young people and to focus on realistic goals. To achieve these goals, it is important to first have a good understanding of the real needs of youth. Herewith, this also requires the mobilization of staff who will work on the implementation of action plans and the active engagement of youth in the processes.

As the results of this study show, we can say that the key informants identified **unemployment** and a **lack of community space** for youth that can be used as an **informal education, networking and entertainment space for youngsters** as the two most significant problems. The same issues were identified as problems by the youth, too. Unemployment was identified as a problem for all age categories (except school-aged children), which is also the main reason for the high index of migration from regions, according to the study respondents. Community spaces are not a problem in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, but are a problem for all other municipalities. Moreover, in some

municipalities, there is not only a lack of such spaces, but they do not exist there at all. This is particularly urgent for villages, which is intensified by the problem related to transportation to municipal centers.

"The most significant is the problem of employment and also, those who work, have a very low salary compared to the performed work."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"We have very poor social conditions. This is the same for children and people of any age. I consider that employment is the biggest problem here. Those who graduate from the university do not come back."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"There is a lack of places of entertainment. They do not know how to spend their free time..."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

It should be highlighted that representatives of local self-government authorities barely focused on the lack of opportunities for receiving **informal education**. Representatives of the central government and NGO sector focused on this issue. As already mentioned, it is necessary to implement programs oriented at alternative education and the development of youth skills, which should be a significant component of youth activities. On one hand, informal education may facilitate the creation of groups of active youth who will be significant actors of youth policy implementation and will be engaged in various civil activities. On the other hand, informal education will facilitate the development of skills that will assist the youth in employment and career advancement.

"We know the basic needs of the youth and they are variable at this stage. The primary need for the youth is entertainment, i.e. spaces for entertainment; another is employment; the third is a means of receiving education and career perspectives."

[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]

"If more resources are spent on informal education and the civil education of young people, they will naturally create associations, which will be engaged in the decision-making process through communication and advocacy, and will influence the decision-making process."

[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

*"The main instrument of youth policy implementation is informal education. We do not directly facilitate employment, but we facilitate the development of these skills."***[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]**

The representatives of local self-government authorities participating in the study did not mention *bullying*, *soft drugs* and *gambling* among problems, while they were identified as problems by the youth. The issues related to the *selection of a profession* for the youth were not mentioned among the needs, despite the fact that representatives of local self-government authorities participating in the study and responsible for the implementation of youth policy declared that they permanently communicate with the youth and are aware of their needs. The study results showed that local self-government authorities do not have a specific mechanism, for example, in the form of a study, to identify the needs of the youth. Moreover, according to experts, the problem is that the persons responsible for the implementation of youth policy often are not aware of the necessity of conducting a study and the importance of drafting an action plan based on real needs.

Based on the key informant study results, we can say that less focus was made on the importance of this mechanism of identifying youth needs by representatives of local self-government authorities. As it turned out, they were identifying the needs of the youth during meetings with the local youngsters, which is not sufficient according to the young people, as well as representatives of the central government and NGO sector participating in the study. In addition to the meeting with the youth, local self-government authorities also consider the experience of past years and relatively high

activity of the youth in specific activities/projects, which will result in the planning of similar types of activities. Representatives of local government in Tbilisi and Kutaisi could point to the existence of a practice of conducting studies and considering their results in an action plan.

"[The persons responsible for the implementation of youth policy] do not understand the needs of the youth and do not understand the evidence-based approach to planning everything based on study results. For example, if a person responsible for youth issues is a wrestling specialist, championships in wrestling are held all year round; if he/she is a music teacher, musical concerts are held, and there is such an attitude in general."

[Representative of NGO sector/expert, Tbilisi]

"In reality, we do not have the culture of conducting studies – of high or poor quality – to know which issues we should be oriented at."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"Everybody knows that there is a problem of unemployment in the country. The youth need employment, and it is not required to conduct an additional study, but it is necessary to conduct a study to see which directions are most highly demanded in the market and what the youth are interested in."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Tbilisi]

"Basically, we consider the most interesting thing at planned and held events in previous years; in which events they were more active."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

Considering the study results, we may conclude that making decisions in connection with the implementation of youth projects has the superficial nature of the continuation of a certain tradition. This is caused not only by the fact that respective studies for the identification of real needs of the youth are not conducted, but also by the fact that the index of **youth engagement** is very low. The fact that the activities planned for the youth are initiated mostly by self-government authorities was proved by the results of focus group discussions, which outlined that there is a very small group of active youth in municipalities who are engaged in various

projects, may be authors of ideas, or initiators of project implementation, however, this is still rare. The same was confirmed by the key informant study. According to the respondents, the reason for low activity of the youth should be sought in a *lack of informal education*. Another reason is location and limited transportation opportunities, which is an urgent issue in the case of municipality villages. According to key informants, in addition to the fact that the youth do not know how to *send a message* to the respective agencies/subjects, the problem is that activities are mostly concentrated in municipal centers, while young people residing in villages often have *transportation* problems. It should be highlighted that problems related to transportation were also identified by the youngsters participating in the focus group discussions.

Though not identified as the dominant discourse, an opinion was expressed within the framework of the key informant study that the reason for low engagement of youth is a *lack of confidence*. In particular, the youth study revealed that according to one representative of the local self-government authority, young people do not believe that the announced programs really work and that their ideas may be supported. Therefore, in the opinion of the study respondents, it is important to inform the youth about successful cases.

"A young person between the ages of 20-22 shows up and for some reason thinks that he could not realize his potential. He comes, but does not communicate with you, does not tell you what he wants. I think that a relatively low level of informal education is the reason for that."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"The same children try to be active and receive informal education together with their studies." [Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"There is a certain group of about 20 people who are very active ..." [Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"The fact is that interest is low. They do not believe [that the projects are designed for actual results] ... Successful examples must be shown to the youth." [Representative of local self-government authority, Tbilisi]

The key informant study also identified *bureaucracy*, which is the factor hindering youth engagement when submitting initiatives to public agencies. In the opinion of representatives of both the NGO sector and the local self-government authorities participating in the study, one of the means for the activation of the youth was to remove bureaucratic barriers and create simple communication platforms, which will facilitate fast receipt of desirable information by the youth, on one hand, and accelerate the response of the youth to requests from public agencies, on the other hand. Another factor accentuated by representatives of the NGO sector was a *lack of knowledge and skills among youth that are necessary for transforming ideas into projects*. This is associated with challenges existing in terms of informal education, which ultimately leads to low engagement of the youth.

"Young people are unwilling to undergo some procedures. This procedure, this bureaucracy is painful for them..."
[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]

"If priority is given to the youth in the state, a norm should exist to make this bureaucracy simplified... The old system is in place in our city hall. This bureaucracy hinders the youth."
[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"It is important to make communication more simplified; to create many communication platforms where it will be much easier [to exchange information] and to reduce bureaucracy. Let's say openly that bureaucracy is a problem today, because we are a public office and we are restricted in terms of procedures ... "
[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"It is a standard, simple format of projects - the main thing is that the idea should sound good. It is important that this idea is clear and the requested budget is adequate ... At the meeting, the young people tell you what they want, but when you tell them that this project is being implemented now and they should write, introduce, and implement this, they are stuck ..." **[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]**

The study respondents mention the ineffective implementation of youth policy. According to their arguments, due to a lack of action plans based

on studies and oriented at sustainable development, it is possible to implement many projects in the context of youth policy by municipalities, but they may not fully respond to the respective goals. Moreover, in the opinion of one of the respondents, it is possible that all stakeholders may remain dissatisfied because the results of the activities are unclear.

“When activities are planned not for the achievement of a specific goal, but for other reasons, just in order to carry out an activity or just because it was initiated by somebody or liked by somebody, this is not well-coordinated and goal-oriented planning... Nobody knows what result was achieved by this activity and ultimately, all parties are dissatisfied - participant, organizer and observer.”
[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

Some respondents associate the lack of action plans oriented at sustainable development to problems existing in the context of **staff**. It is noteworthy that an insufficient number of staff members has not been mentioned as a problem. Lack of knowledge about the idea of youth policy by staff/public officials responsible for youth issues is a challenge. In the opinion of respondents, this explains the large number of identical, simple and short-term results-oriented activities in municipalities. It should be highlighted that representatives of self-government authorities seldom talk about this.

"A team is allocated in municipalities, which should be working on youth issues and everything is limited to the arrangement of a football tournament, the New Year fireworks or some concert. This is limited to very simple things because there is no knowledge or competence. This is limited to what is youthful in their understanding. For example, let's arrange a football tournament or let's hold a concert..."

[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

"We more or less know how to develop sports: investment should be carried out, good sportsmen should be brought into the team, but in the direction of the youth, we do not know. We public officials are not trained for that. A mayor or deputy mayor of course cannot be competent, especially that we, who work in this direction are not ready, and we have no specific information about how to develop this sector."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"The main problem is staff and the qualification of persons who work in municipalities in this sphere. Save for several exceptions, the qualification of these persons is very low and maybe they will not be able to meet the minimum requirements, because these people do not understand what youth policy is and what the idea of youth policy is."

[Representative of NGO sector/expert, Tbilisi]

As it was mentioned, respondents from the central government and NGO sector focus on the necessity of providing relevant knowledge and skills for staff. When talking about the uniformity of activities and their almost unchanged nature over the years, representatives of local self-government authorities mentioned the **scarcity of funds** as the main reason, while the main part of respondents find it difficult to say what activities/projects they would implement in the case of having sufficient funds. The opinion of representatives of several municipalities who had specific views in terms of planning activities in the context of informal education and engagement of municipality villages in the above projects may be considered to be a rare example.

The opinion of representatives of the governmental or NGO sector in connection with financial resources is different. According to them, there are sufficient financial resources for the implementation of youth policy, and the problem lies in incorrect perceptions related to this. In one case,

this is related to the fact that the financial resources that were distributed among youth projects in sport schools, art schools or various programs are not considered to be the funds spent on the implementation of youth policy. Another issue is related to a lack of knowledge that financial resources for the youth sphere are accumulated not only in the state budget, but also in projects of various international organizations, and representatives of local municipalities are not aware of their existence or opportunities for their use.

"The best initiative is to provoke education in the youth. Investments should be carried out in it. I know that others would mention a cinema that we do not have, but I think that there must be a very good public space for the youth, kind of a training center (for informal education), a youth family with its audience and technical support." **[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]**

"Any municipality will say that for example, the youth division has 1,000 GEL and this amount is small for the youth policy. In reality, the youth policy budget and finances are not calculated this way because, for example, sports schools, art schools, student palaces - this money is spent within the framework of the youth policy. When something is done for the youth in the field of healthcare, for example, in the healthcare program, this money is also spent on the youth policy..." **[Representative of NGO sector/expert, Tbilisi]**

"There is money in this sphere, there is state money and even more international money. The EU, Council of Europe and UN with their agencies invest a lot of money in youth activities on an annual basis ... There is money, but there is no knowledge. There was no political will and now it seems to appear... In general, we are not a rich country and there will be a problem with money, but this is not correct to say that we do not have money and that's why we are not doing this." **[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]**

The study results allow us to conclude that local self-governments do not use research as a mechanism to identify the needs of youth. They are guided by old experience and/or the personal taste/judgement of specific decision-makers when developing action plans. The plans are simply focused on conducting activities, and the majority are not oriented to any

competence considered in the frame of the principle of lifelong learning

Even though there is almost no practice of conducting surveys, local authorities believe that the main problem is unemployment and a lack of entertainment centers. They almost never mention the lack of alternative places for informal education, which was emphasized by the central government and non-governmental sector representatives participating in the study. The latter stressed the importance of having an efficient mechanism to identify the needs of youth and to prepare action plans based on survey results.

The representatives of local self-government authorities emphasized a lack of financial resources when talking about different issues. However, representatives of the central government and the non-governmental sector said that the financial resources attracted from state and international organizations are sufficient, and that the major problem is social capital and the competence of staff responsible for the implementation of youth policy.

5.3 DISCUSSION

The study results showed that representatives of the governmental or NGO sector do not have many questions in connection with the contents of the policy document. The main questions are related to policy implementation. In this context, the study identified challenges in directions of *staff, civil society and decentralization*.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapters, there are flaws in the context of **staff**. A majority of the staff responsible for youth policy implementation often does not possess the respective knowledge and skills. Also, older staff members are mobilized in youth offices and this effects on the limited understanding of the real needs of youngsters too. This is one of the reasons for that the fact that municipalities repeat specific activities that are not oriented at sustainable development from year to year. Accordingly, the enhancement of staff is named as the necessary priority. It is noteworthy here that this is true both for persons responsible for issues regarding the youth employed in local self-government authorities and the civil society in general. The study respondents mentioned that though the civil society is associated only with the NGO sector in Georgia, *if we look at the civil society from a wider perspective, it is significant to enhance school and university as a part of civil society, as well as active citizens and increased awareness about the essence of youth policy.*

The above is connected with another significant challenge in the context of **civil society**, which hinders the effective implementation of youth policy. The enhancement of civil society envisages the activation of the youth and increasing their participation level. The study respondents consider the enhancement of an informal education component as the main mechanism for the achievement of the abovementioned goal. According to the idea of one respondent, it is possible to think about the creation of so-called 'youth houses' not only in municipal centers but also in villages, where youth workers having the relevant competence will be employed. They should ensure interest, activation of youth, their engagement in various activities, and enhancement. Accordingly, the top issue on the agenda is the enhancement of staff. *The following is noteworthy here: first, the enhancement of human capital in local self-government authorities, i.e. public officials responsible for the implementation of youth policy. Second, the creation and enhancement of youth workers, i.e. bringing people to the youth sphere who will be able to provide informal education and accordingly, carry out youth activities.*

As it turned out, the Youth Agency has commenced working on issues around the certification of youth workers. Despite the fact that there are individuals who have competence in youth activities, can deliver them, and mostly represent the NGO sector, they are not formally recognized. Therefore, the institutionalization of youth workers, the creation of their certification program, and thereafter their recognition as a profession is included in the agenda of the Agency. Recognition of youth worker as a profession implies the existence of workers of various types; in particular, a basic worker who can work with any group; a worker having competence in working with problematic youth; a school youth worker; and a so-called mobile youth worker who seeks young people on his/her own. The agenda of the Agency also includes working on the hobby-education strategy and its recognition, which implies giving education to children in various art groups using an informal education methodology.

"Perhaps, at the first stage, a youth worker will be recognized by the Agency. This certificate will be issued by the Agency and this person will hold a document confirming that he/she is a certified youth worker, the most competent in informal education. The next stage is the recognition of youth worker as a profession ... also, the recognition of hobby-education. The certified professional should work with the youth here, too. The math teacher or the class supervising teacher must have graduated from somewhere, mustn't he/she? You cannot bring somebody to school without education, can you? Exactly the same as here, but in informal education. That math teacher is simultaneously a certified youth worker. Otherwise, he/she will not have a right to teach music."

[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

The perspective of possible cooperation with the *NGO sector* is positively reviewed in the context of the enhancement of civil society. Representatives of both the governmental and NGO sectors participating in the study consider that in the context of youth policy implementation, cooperation between these two sectors may be particularly successful. The factor to be considered here is the knowledge and competencies accumulated in the NGO sector, which they can convey to the youth as service providers. Another factor is the flexibility of the NGO sector. Due to the fact that the Law on State Procurement restricts state organizations to some extent, the NGO sector has more opportunities to become a service provider and actively

cooperate with the public sector. As for cooperation with the *private sector*, it turned out that stakeholders have not actively started thinking about it, however, they think that cooperation with the private sector might have an interesting perspective.

"Where can municipalities help and what can we do in the development of services? NGOs can become service providers, some organizations are Think Tanks, some are research organizations, etc. that are oriented at providing services (i.e. there is no conflict of interest). Therefore, there may be very good collaboration between the government and NGOs, through which the community becomes more developed and the effect is bigger, and it costs the government less to provide these services."

[Representative of NGO sector, Tbilisi]

"The youth should receive informal education if they want, and this may be somehow ensured by state programs, but mostly, I think and I believe that this must be done from external sources. It means that the state should not do this directly; the civil society should do this." [Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

"By the way, it [cooperation with the private sector] is interesting. We have not discussed this separately. Such practice has not been applied before, right?"

As a rule, the private sector is not engaged in this type of activity within the framework of social responsibility. They are more interested in other types of events and if we increase their interest and recognition, we will somehow facilitate their engagement. I think it will be good." [Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

In connection with **decentralization**, the study showed that though local self-government authorities independently make decisions about which activities they should carry out in the context of the youth policy, it is necessary **to identify the policy implementation instruments and the strategy for each region**. Moreover, it is desirable to identify the strategies and action plans independently for each municipality, considering their peculiarities. By decentralization, the study respondents imply the existence of documents tailored to a specific region/municipality.

"One policy document should exist at the national level, and representatives of municipal and regional authorities must participate in its creation. Afterwards, separate municipalities must prepare the strategy development plan tailored to the municipality."

[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]

"You cannot draft a document tailored to everybody at the national level. If you include healthy lifestyle propaganda, if Baghdati has other resources, it will start activities according to that resource. If Baghdati includes healthy lifestyle propaganda such as swimming, it will not be possible to carry out, because they do not have a swimming pool."

[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]

To achieve real results from work in the strategic directions defined by the youth policy, the study respondents consider that it is critically important to have action plans in place that were developed considering youth needs at the municipal level, which will be oriented to the achievement of specific goals. The work in the above direction must start, first of all, by the identification of youth **needs**. The study respondents identify several challenges in this direction: one challenge is related to the low level of awareness of youth problems by young people themselves. According to the evaluation of the key informant study participants, youth are not only unaware of how and to whom they should inform about their own needs or how they should engage in the decision-making process and be active citizens, but also, they find it difficult to identify the youth needs specifically. Often, they mention infrastructural problems as the main problems of the youth, and this was confirmed by the focus group discussions with youngsters.

“Young people are asked what they want, what they need and they have no answer... One young person says – I want a cinema, free cinema. There is a cinema in Kutaisi, of course, it is not free. But it is not the competence of the city hall to open a cinema which will be free... But if the correct work is carried out with the youth, if they are given explanations, they will give very adequate, very good initiatives.” **[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]**

“We brought young people from various municipalities, met them and asked them about their problems. The children basically mentioned infrastructural problems, problems with roads, traffic lights out of service ...” **[Representative of regional government authority, Imereti Region]**

Another challenge identified in connection with needs is that local self-government authorities are preparing their programs without knowing the real needs. As mentioned in previous chapters, municipalities draft the action plan and annual budget, and implement projects based on their subjective opinions. There is no mechanism to identify the real needs of young people residing in each municipality upon which the action plan will be based. Respondents consider studies to be such a mechanism. In addition to the fact that this will help local self-government authorities to identify real needs, this will be significant material for NGOs as well. According to one argument, based on the already existing information, the NGO sector will also be able to plan and implement projects that will be orientated to the resolution of real problems.

"It will be good if the central government instructs local self-government authorities to conduct a youth study in municipalities to know their needs. Young people have different needs in Kutaisi and Samtredia ... These studies will be significant not only for municipalities... It will be a real study on real needs, and both NGOs and self-government authorities will know what to do."

[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"It's money down the drain to make camps that will not have any competence, which young people need for enhancement."

[Representative of NGO sector, Imereti Region]

"Unfortunately, the problem is low interest of young people in the above type of projects and at the same time, a lack of experience in organizing youth events, because to organize a concert, bring singers from somewhere ... We understand that this is one specific event, but it is not discussed in the long-run."

[Representative of regional government authority, Imereti Region]

In connection with the effective implementation of youth policy, the key informant study showed positive attitudes. As it turned out, one of the preconditions of such an attitude is the creation of a Youth Agency, which is responsible for the development of this direction. According to the evaluation of respondents, after the abolition of the Sport and Youth Ministry and bringing the youth issues within the competence of the Ministry of Education, there was a certain recession in terms of the implementation of youth policy. Despite the fact that these issues were governed by the department staffed with almost the same individuals, according to respondents, there was insufficient coordination and the recognition of youth issues as a priority. That's why it became necessary to create a new agency, which will be subordinate to the Prime Minister and will be able to better coordinate respective issues. According to the main argument, youth policy is multi-sectoral and it is not relevant to limit it only to the educational sector. Therefore, the creation of an independent agency for better coordination with various sectors / spheres is assessed as definitely positive.

"It became necessary for the youth policy to be better coordinated than before, and we, the stakeholders, found a solution in creating a separate agency that would be directly subordinate to the Prime Minister. This would give it more legitimacy and power to better coordinate the processes of development and implementation of youth policy."

[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

At this stage, the State is working on the state concept of youth policy, which must be adopted by the Parliament. Based on this concept, the Youth Agency will develop strategies and action plans. Working on the concept and existence of the agency may be evaluated as more significant, considering the fact that youth policy and youth issues seem to be perceived as less serious, according to the study respondents. Moreover, according to one opinion, people are often employed in respective offices not based on their competence, but due to political factors. By saying this, respondents imply the continuation of the vicious tradition of employing old and new political assets in self-government authorities.

"Local self-government authorities are looking at youth issues a bit superficially. The youth offices have become a shelter for people who worked there during the period of the previous city hall but were not dismissed." **[Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]**

"There is such a problem [unserious attitude to youth issues] ... Youth policy should have more power and recognition. First of all, public servants should understand how youth policy works. Senior political figures should understand its meaning and it should be a priority in the country. If this is not identified as a priority and respective resources are not allocated, of course, there will be no improvement and we will remain at the same level."

[Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

Though respondents consider it unrealistic to fully free the youth sphere from political influence, *the enhancement of youth through informal education is considered as the best mechanism for avoiding such influence. According to the evaluation of the study respondents, results-oriented youth activities should ensure self-organizing and unity of youth in municipalities*

around different interests. Active young people thematically united in various groups that will be engaged in advocating for topics interesting for them from decision-making through its enforcement, is considered to be one of the best ways of avoiding viewing them as a political asset.

According to the study results, the existence of political will was also identified as critically important for the effective implementation of youth policy. As already mentioned, the existence of political will is confirmed by the creation of a Youth Agency, also, beginning work on the state concept of youth policy. However, this is not enough and respondents consider it most significant to adhere to the principle of **continuity**. As the resources invested in the youth sphere show, the effect in the long run and the results may be not visible today. According to respondents, it is necessary that the youth policy and the attitude towards the youth sphere is not changed according to a change in political reality. *Moreover, it is considered critically important to separate the youth sphere from political interests and give up the malpractice according to which priorities are identified based on the personal or political views of specific subjects.* According to the evaluation of the study respondents, the first steps have already been taken for the creation of a real youth ecosystem at this stage, and it is necessary to continue the existing line of development regardless of changes in the political reality of the country. The strategy developed based on this concept should be implemented gradually, and stakeholders should understand that any interruption in this process will affect the youth sphere only negatively.

"We have not created a strategic document that will define the youth policy. For example, if I go on maternity leave, there is no document that will bind the person substituting me to continue the same path that I considered a priority... Therefore, it is necessary to continue the line of development, which will be tailored to the needs identified based on the study and will not depend on political choices." [Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"I consider that it will be good if the public sector separates a party and youth activities from each other, because the budget of city hall belongs to everybody regardless of political views, religion, etc." [Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"The main thing is that political will should be maintained in the end, because if everything is interrupted before or after elections, it will be very difficult to start it from the beginning again... NGOs, experts working in the youth sphere had lost all hope during the last several years... It will be very expensive to bring them back again in all senses, both in terms of time and money." [Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

Coordination of the local and central government is important for the effective implementation of policy. The study results showed that **cooperation** between **local self-government authorities** and the **central government**, as well as between the **City Hall** and **City Council** has a symbolic nature. It turned out that in case of the central government, it is instructed to plan certain activities and requested to provide information about activities to be carried out/already carried out. This is done by local self-government authorities, however, according to some of them, it is desirable to have more communication with the central government, evaluate the current reality, as well as work on future plants jointly. As for the cooperation of City Hall with City Council, this is mostly limited to the approval of budget and a review of the report of activities of the City Hall at the end of the year. However, in the opinion of the respondents, an increase in City Council's power and its higher engagement in youth issues is not necessary. According to one of the arguments, the approval or non-approval of the budget is a "political issue" and therefore, the necessity of granting more powers to City Council must not be included in the agenda.

"Absolutely all events forwarded from the central power have been held." [**Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region**]

"We always send events [to the Ministry] – what we are planning, what results we have achieved, etc. But there is never any feedback from them: we do not know whether they liked it or not, whether they had expected it to be better or not ... I may think that I have done everything good, but maybe they can advise us of something better, or at least help us to develop a strategic plan, and thereafter we will work in this direction..."
[**Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region**]

"To tell you the truth, members of the City Council do not have much power to interfere in our activities. The only thing is that City Council and City Hall cooperate when preparing the budget and when making a change to the budget. Also, at the end of the year, they are reviewing the report and may make an assessment. Whether this assessment is good or bad, this will not and cannot largely affect our activities."
[**Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region**]

Despite recognition of the significance of decentralization and activation of the role of municipalities, as already mentioned, the study respondents consider it necessary to receive certain messages from the central government. Though municipalities should play the main role in identifying local needs or developing the action plan, in their opinion, specific decisions of the central government should be considered as necessary for implementation by the local government. One such decision implies making certain changes to the selection of staff responsible for youth issues in local self-government authorities.

According to respondents, *decentralization and the independent implementation of the policy by local self-government authorities is significant, but "horizontal communication" with the central government in this process is also important.* This implies not only receiving instructions from the central government and arranging for their enforcement, but also coordinating cooperation that will be oriented to the achievement of specific, measurable goals. According to one argument, the central government should be supportive, should monitor the quality of performed work and compliance with goals. In this direction, a framework document should be

in place for the guidance of everybody, but the municipality should be the main entity responsible for the implementation of the specific action plan.

"To tell you the truth, it's uncomfortable for me to say this, because I am a supporter of decentralization, but if the central government interferes and young people who are aware of youth issues will really work in youth departments in local self-government authorities, this will be the best interference from the central power." [Representative of local self-government authority, Imereti Region]

"Communication between the central and local powers, coordination between various regions and between municipalities is necessary." [Representative of central government, Tbilisi]

As the study results show, the youth policy documents are less problematic. The main problems are related to implementation, mainly due to a lack of professional qualification of social capital/staff. The study also identified that in the process of youth policy implementation, the non-governmental sector is perceived as one of the main players, and as respondents say, it is important to make the non-governmental sector more active at the municipal level. Their role is mainly seen in the provision of services and in the strengthening of the informal education component. Regarding relations with the central government, according to the representatives of the local self-government bodies, the relationship with the central government should be more content-based and not symbolic. Particularly, this relationship should imply evaluating the performance of municipalities in a realistic and contextual manner, sharing comments and views with the local self-government, and providing support for the development of action plans.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the focus group and key informant study results revealed, youth policy implementation by self-government bodies faces many challenges. Establishing the Youth Agency rises positive expectations in terms of sustainable development of the youth sphere, as of today, the implementation of youth policy is not effective. The problem is that people responsible for policy implementation do not have relevant knowledge and skills; there are no mechanisms to identify actual needs of youth; activities are not oriented to the development of different competencies; and action plans are created based on personal opinion and are less oriented to the enhancement of youth in a long-term perspective.

Creating strategies for each municipality for youth policy would make the policy implementation process more effective. Moreover, it is important to identify the strategy and action plan independently for each municipality, considering their peculiarities.

While planning youth activities at the local level, surveys should be used to identify youth needs, rather than the subjective opinion of staff responsible for youth policy implementation or past experience.

It is important to formulate goals and objectives of each activity in the action plan, as well as allocate funds from the budget for each activity. Stakeholders should be responsible for implementation and respective outcomes.

As structuring the youth sphere with qualified staff is identified as a challenge, it is crucial to pay attention to training public servants who are responsible for youth policy implementation.

Representatives of the central government and non-governmental sector participating in the study emphasized the importance of strengthening the informal education component. *In this direction, it would be important to start working with representatives of the NGO sector on planning specific activities, developing educational modules, and informing representatives of municipalities about the possible use of their services.*

According to the study results, in all municipalities of the Imereti region, the problem is the lack or absence of community spaces that could be used for entertaining, as well as for networking and informal education. As for Tbilisi, a lack of such spaces was not identified. Therefore, it is desirable to create youth spaces in regions where discussions will be held with the high participation of the youth. *For this purpose, it will be good to mobilize initiative groups, which, on their part, will encourage other young people to become engaged in discussions and use the informal space.*

As the activities carried out in the frame of the youth policy are mainly oriented to school-aged children, it is crucial to carry out activities for older youngsters. *Thus, it is important to work on other age groups and not only schoolchildren, and to consider the migration challenge in order to invest more time and recourses towards the age category of 18-29.*

As the activities in the Imereti region are mostly carried out in the municipal centers and do not cover youngsters from rural areas, decentralization of activities at the municipal level is essential. *Thus, it is important to give more opportunities to the youngsters from the villages with less access to municipal centers. Also, it is crucial to support local youth communities at the village/town level.*

As the engagement of youngsters in different processes is low both in Tbilisi and especially in the Imereti region, it is essential to *strengthen the informal education component and plan specific activities by increasing awareness about forms of civil engagement, the possible effects of activism, and the role of youngsters.* Also, it is important to *give special support to the small group of active youngsters existing in the municipalities who could become young opinion leaders and knowledge/idea providers for peers in advocating for youth-related issues.*

The budget allocated for youth activities should be used efficiently and purposefully for the activities *oriented on the development of specific competencies identified as crucial by the youth policy.* It is worth mentioning that the budget allocated for youth activities is less than 1% of the total municipal budget, both in Tbilisi and in municipalities of the Imereti region. This makes it challenging to conduct activities in all municipalities.

The relationships of local self-government bodies with the central government, as well as the relationship between City Council and City Hall should not be symbolic, but should be goal-oriented. *Thus, it is important to develop a system of close cooperation that maintains the support of local*

government bodies in creating action plans oriented on specific municipal needs.

Since a lack of awareness about youth policy is identified as a challenge during the study, *it is crucial to increase awareness about specific issues of the staff members responsible for youth policy implementation by developing special modules and training the relevant staff members. Also, it is crucial to create youth workers, i.e. bring people to the youth sphere who will be able to provide informal education and accordingly, carry out youth activities.*

As it turned out, besides other factors, the low rate of youth engagement in the process is also associated with fact that young people do not believe in the support of local self-government bodies. This issue is relevant for Tbilisi, and especially for all municipalities of the Imereti region. *Therefore, it is desirable to focus on the popularization of successful cases of youth initiatives in communication strategies and persuade the youth that their relevant initiatives may be supported by municipalities.*

Selection of a profession is identified as a problem for school aged youth, both in the Imereti region and Tbilisi. *Therefore, it is important that self-government authorities ensure the planning of activities that will introduce various professions to schoolchildren, as well as provide them with information about demand on the employment market. The private sector may also be engaged in this process. At the same time, it is desirable to develop a format of cooperation with vocational schools in which the latter will make offers to young people.*

The study also identified the need of raising awareness among youth, especially among school children, about the negative effects of soft drugs, gambling and bullying, both in the Imereti region and Tbilisi. *It is desirable that schoolchildren be the main target group for these activities, and that programs/projects designed for them should not be of a one-time nature and should be implemented with their engagement to a high extent.* In this context, it is possible to create a concept similar to the so-called “big brother/big sister,” program, which will ensure that guidance is provided to youth and that various knowledge/information is shared with peers or representatives of younger ages. At the same time, the concept of “big brother/big sister” may also be a significant mechanism of engaging youth in volunteer activities.

As there are problems in the frame of informing young people about planned activities in the Imereti region, *it is desirable to improve the methods of informing youth in the process of local self-governance and take the respective measures for their engagement. For example, the creation of a youth social network page or municipality group; the creation of a database of active youth; the providing of relevant information to youth living in the villages through an NGO or other active young people; and the use of various advertising communication mechanisms (for example, footage in local media, banners, posters, etc.).*

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The following documents are included in the report: (1) The data provided by the entities responsible for youth issues from Tbilisi and all municipalities of the Imereti region those include number of employees of the entity, number of staff responsible specifically for the youth issues, activities carried out, number and age of beneficiaries, amount of money spent for the activities. (2) Budgets of all targeted municipalities considering functional classifications of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia since 2015 till January-March, 2019 provided by the Parliamentary Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs of Georgia.



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