

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP YOUTH POLICY: TENDENCIES OF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The desire of post-Soviet countries to integrate into the global financial and economic system and successfully integrate into the European Union makes it necessary to meet certain international requirements and bring national legislation into conformity with the norms and standards of international law, one of which is to ensure the implementation of effective youth policy. Youth policy is implemented by state authorities and local governments to ensure equal rights and opportunities for young people to successfully integrate into society and politics, as well as to actively participate in the economic processes of the country. This article aims to substantiate the theoretical and applied principles of youth policy formation and implementation in the Eastern Partnership countries and assess its effectiveness. The study uses the method of analysis and synthesis to study the essence of youth policy, comparison methods, and analogy to analyze the specifics of youth policy of Eastern Partnership countries; generalization and systematization in the formation of research results and conclusions. Concerning research results of youth policy tendencies development of the Eastern Partnership countries, it is necessary to ascertain that it is realized taking into account strengthening influence of globalization and European integration factors and according to norms of the current national legislation. It was defined that the population from 14 to 35 years old in the EaP countries is considered to be young people. The main problem of implementation of youth policy in the analyzed group of countries was revealed - the growth of youth unemployment.

Keywords: youth, youth policy, Eastern Partnership, European integration, European Union.

1 Introduction

The intensification of globalization processes and aspiration to integrate into the European Union causes the necessity of constant modernization of all public spheres and sectors of the country's economy, taking into account not only national socio-economic and political system development but also international and European one. In this context, an integral part of the European Neighborhood Policy is considered to be the Eastern Partnership, which is a common framework policy of the European Union and such countries like Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The efficiency of the changes, which are supposed to be carried out, to a great extent, depends on the country's development level and its ability to provide formation and realization of the state policy, where youth policy is an integral component. Relevance of the study of the role of youth as the bearer of social functions in the state-building and approaching processes of the European Union is justified by its significant innovative potential, lack of past stereotypes, and the need to ensure social protection and security. Studies of the main trends in the young people's participation of the Eastern Partnership countries in public life suggest significant limitations of young people in access to public administration, obtaining highly paid and promising jobs, ensuring a decent personal financial situation, and political life. Therefore, under such conditions, it becomes especially important to ensure the effective development of youth policy.

2 Literature Review

Ensuring an adequate standard of living for the population, in particular young people, is one of the priorities of state youth policy, the essence of which, according to Denstad (2009), lies in the implementation by public authorities of a strategy to provide young people with opportunities and experiences of successful integration into society, to position themselves as active members of social organizations and the right to education and participation, on an equal basis with other social groups, in political, social and cultural life.

Deepening research at the international level, Fras et al. (2021) state that in recent years there has been significant progress in the development of youth policy both in the European Union and in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, thanks to increased international support through the Erasmus+ program and youth support from many national institutions and international organizations. Scientists tend to believe that youth policy is a strategy of support for young people by public authorities. Its main purpose is to guarantee education and participation in all areas of society, politics, and culture.

The Operational Strategy on Youth 2014-2021 (2021), which was developed and implemented by UNESCO throughout the period, defines youth policy as the implementation of youth programs in various areas, in particular, in education, research, innovation, sports, democratic representation, and cyberspace following national needs and taking into account the characteristics of youth development, their interests, and beliefs. Mannheim (2021) argues that young people are hidden society resources whose mobility determines the degree of public policy development, including youth policy.

Alekseev (2017), analyzing the European practice of youth policy implementation, identifies two main strategies: (1) a strategy in which the leading role belongs to the state; (2) a strategy in which there is an interaction between the state and public society with the dominant influence of the latter.

Klarijs (2015) characterizes youth policy as a method of open cooperation based on voluntary partnership and the mechanism of "soft" management – recommendations – indicators – exchange of achievements, and interaction occurs not only between youth organizations and institutions of public society but also with the involvement of foreign institutions.

Researching youth policy in the context of ensuring the development of Eastern Partnership countries, Bendarzhvsky et al. (2019) focus their attention on the trends of youth policy development common to all countries and the influence on it of the dynamics of political processes, changes in the demographic situation, economic exchange with the EU market, the dynamics in the sphere of information technology and energy. At the same time, scientists recognize the long-term outflow of young people from the region as a significant factor in the formation of youth policy, which threatens to accelerate the process of population aging, unemployment, and poverty, which is most noticeable in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia.

At the same time, the Joint Staff Working Document Recovery, resilience and reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities (2021) notes that the youth policy implementation by member countries within the Eastern Partnership policy framework is important through flexible differentiation, individual approaches, and reinforcement. It contributes to the successful reform of each country and the possibility of youth to participate in this process both in each country and within the Commonwealth.

Hart (1992); Hart (1997) identifies youth participation forms in youth policy implementation, including:

- 1) participation in voting and offering their candidacies for elections;
- 2) participation in Referendums;
- 3) participation in protests;
- 4) participation in civic organizations, associations, and political parties;
- 5) participation in social and political life.

Yarema et al. (2019) consider it appropriate to distinguish three levels of youth policy management: (1) state – the state develops strategic priorities and main directions of youth policy, determines resources and mechanisms of institutional support; (2) regional – state structural units implement youth policy within allocated budgetary resources; (3) local – youth policy is implemented through participation in individual programs, projects and relevant activities.

The influence of globalization and European integration processes on the formation and realization of youth policy is unconditional and proved in the works by Scholte (2000), who directs the youth policy realization in several directions: internationalization, liberalization, universalization, modernization, de-territorialization.

Ukraine, on the way of European integration, directs considerable efforts on securing the appropriate level of formation of youth policy that is proved by acceptance of Law of Ukraine "About the basic principles of youth policy" (2021), the newest among all countries of the Eastern Partnership and precisely defines the purpose, the basic tasks, directions and mechanisms of securing the realization of youth policy, guarantees of participation of youth in the process of formation and realization, as well as the features of the organizational-legal basis of young societies activity.

In addition, Banar (2021) divides the main concepts of youth policy into two strategies, which differ from each other by the participation level of state institutions in the regulation of problematic issues of youth in social progress, and Chirun (2019) notes the understanding of youth policy as a phenomenon of state and non-state youth policy combination. And the feature of non-state youth policy is the consideration of anti-social aspects, namely crime and extremism, which have a significantly destructive impact on social relations and the formation of young people as a socially active population group.

Considering youth policy as one of the social state functions, Pischulina (2019) focuses on the youth policy transformation from passive to active, which is manifested in the provision of social guarantees, services, and assistance to young people, as well as employment and comfortable environment for life.

The research aims to define the theoretical and applied principles of youth policy formation and implementation in the Eastern Partnership countries and assess its effectiveness.

3 Materials and Methods

The research uses the method of analysis and synthesis for research of youth policy essence; methods of comparison and analogy for analysis of youth policy features in the Eastern Partnership countries; generalization and systematization at the formation of research results and conclusions.

The research is based on the use of data characterizing the youth policy in the countries – EaP member-states.

The information base of research is based on statistical data and reports of the program EU4Business; statistical data of the Ukrainian State Statistics Service and Eurostat database for 2019-2020.

4 Results

Global transformations and the transnational nature of socio-economic countries' development determine the peculiarities and specifics of the youth policy formation and implementation in the countries-members of the Eastern Partnership as a strategic vector of these states' development. The incompleteness of transformation processes in such countries has a significant impact on ensuring the youth development standards and their role in society, economy, and politics.

It was found that youth policy in each of the countries under consideration is implemented with the need to ensure appropriate conditions for the viability of young people, the realization of their rights and opportunities on a level with other social groups and differs significantly among themselves. In this context, it is important to define specific age limits for the population age group related to youth. If we analyze the national youth policies of the Eastern Partnership countries, there is a tendency to state that people aged on average 14 to 35 are recognized as young people. In particular, in the Republic of Armenia, young people are considered to be from 16 to 30 years old, in Azerbaijan and Georgia – from 14 to 29 years old, in Belarus – from 14 to 31 years old, and in Moldova and Ukraine – from 14 to 35 years old. The study of the dynamics of the number of young people in the Eastern Partnership countries in 2019. (Figure 1) makes it possible to identify the main trends in the analyzed indicator, namely: the share of young people in Armenia is 21.16% of the population, in Azerbaijan – 23.69%, in Belarus – 19.66%, in Georgia – 18.9%, in Moldova – 26.92% and in Ukraine – 24.65%.

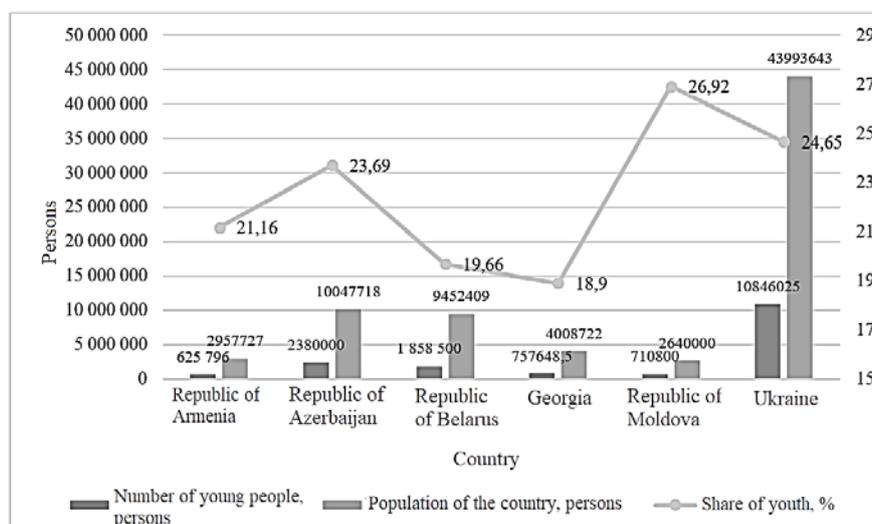


Figure 1. Population and Youth Dynamics in the Eastern Partnership countries in 2019. Calculated based on: Fras et al. (2021).

The conducted research allows us to state that among the Eastern Partnership countries, the largest number of young people is observed in Moldova and Ukraine.

At the same time, an analysis of the formation and implementation features of youth policy in the countries studied

(Table 1) shows that the state regulation level of this issue is adequate. Each country has adopted a corresponding law regulating the basic principles of youth policy. Its financing is mainly carried out from state budgets, and the coordinating functions are performed by state authorities.

Table 1. The features of youth policy formation and implementation in the EaP countries

№	Country	Youth police features
1.	Republic of Armenia	Systematic measures for the introduction and implementation of youth policy were introduced in the 1990s, but there is still no consolidated law on the regulation of the organizational and legal framework of youth policy; the main normative legal act is the Concept of State Youth Policy 2015-2025, which defines the subjects (government and social partners), objectives, directions, and principles of youth policy of Armenia; the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports coordinates implementation of youth policy; the financing of youth policy is carried out from the state budget
2.	Republic of Azerbaijan	Youth policy is implemented as a principal component of state policy; the subjects of youth policy are the Government and the President; youth policy aims to support the development of competencies and skills, to counteract social problems, and to guarantee the protection of rights; the Ministry of Youth and Sport is responsible for the implementation of youth policy; the law "On Youth Policy" is adopted; youth policy is financed from the state budget
3.	Republic of Belarus	There was adopted the law "On general principles of youth policy"; there was provided economic and social support to youth; the principles of youth organizations public recognition were defined; the main purpose of youth policy is to support active social position and patriotic feelings among young people and involvement of youth in the country; the responsible body for implementation of youth policy is the Ministry of Education; youth policy is financed from the state and local budgets
4.	Georgia	There is no clear definition of youth in the national legislation, and it is limited only by the age limits; the main normative legal act in the sphere of youth policy implementation is the National Youth Policy Concept 2020-2030, which defines specific directions of youth policy in Georgia, in particular: active youth participation in public life and democratic processes, promoting the development and realization of youth potential, expanding economic opportunities for youth; ensuring youth health and well-being
5.	Republic of Moldova	Law "On Youth" has been adopted; the main directions of youth policy are: increasing the level of youth involvement in social-democratic processes, promoting the development of knowledge and skills; improving the process of integration of youth with disabilities into society, creating jobs and entrepreneurial initiatives; developing youth sector infrastructure; financing of youth policy comes from the state budget
6.	Ukraine	Youth policy is regulated by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine; the main legislative act is the Law of Ukraine "On the Basic Principles of Youth Policy", which defines the goals, objectives, directions, and mechanisms of youth policy; the youth policy subjects are the government and social partners

Created according to: Fras et al. (2021); On the basic principles of youth policy (2021).

A significant problem in all the countries of the Eastern Partnership, at the present stage, is youth unemployment. The experience analysis of forming and implementing youth policy in the group of countries under study proves the complexity of youth policy state management and clear trends of such policy decreasing efficiency with excessive state interference in its implementation mechanism. As the results of the study of unemployment rates in the EaP countries (Figure 2) prove, the highest rate of unemployed was recorded in Armenia (16.4%), Georgia (11.6%), and Ukraine (8.2%). Such trends confirm the hypothesis of Bendarzhevsky et al. (2019) about the intensification of poverty processes in these countries associated with rising unemployment rates, low wages, and forced migration of young people in search of work. At the same time,

the lowest unemployment rate is observed in Belarus – 4.2% of the able-bodied population, which is explained by the post-Soviet type of management and organization of summer student squads, which are involved in the construction and reconstruction of roads, participate in the activities of kindergartens, schools, and sports complexes.

As for Azerbaijan, where the unemployment rate is 5.0% of the working population, it is necessary to note the youth employment seasonality in tourism services, agricultural and construction sectors, as well as employment inconstancy. At the same time, peculiar mental peculiarities cause an increase in the unemployment rate among young girls who start a family or remain unemployed while waiting for marriage.

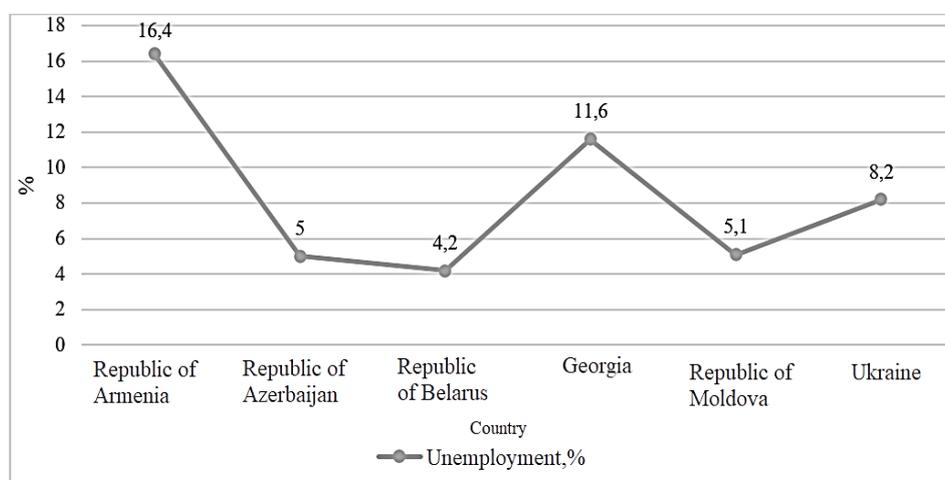


Figure 2. Unemployment Dynamics in the EaP Countries, 2019, % Calculated based on: Statistical Yearbook of Ukraine for 2020.

The peculiarities of unemployment in Moldova are explained by the low level of the population's education. As a rule, the majority of the unemployed population lives in rural areas and has only primary/secondary education.

Analyzing unemployment in Armenia, there are facts of the spread of illegal shadow employment and hidden unemployment.

The issue of youth employment is not a new one; it has been in the center of attention for a long time and concerns both the EU and the EaP countries, which was proved by the video conference of EU and EaP leaders in June 2020, where the main priorities of cooperation and collaboration for the next ten years were economic cooperation and creation of jobs for young people from the EaP countries. In addition, the emphasis is placed on multi-level cooperation and taking into account the national characteristics of the development of each country and the implementation of the European integration course to increase the effectiveness of further development of youth policy and increase participation in the public organizations' implementation.

The carried out researches allow noticing that the youth policy of EaP countries corresponds to its dynamic development model as it allows to provide a high level of youth policy transformation and to consider their changing needs. Another peculiarity is the significant influence of political changes on the youth policy principles formation. The political conjuncture in society most noticeably affects youth policy in Belarus and Georgia.

At the same time, the role of the city in the socio-cultural life of the young population is growing, and the migration of young people from rural to urban areas contributes to the rapid growth of urban settlements, where there are more opportunities for employment, modernization of life and the availability of expanded social infrastructure. When studying the EaP countries' urbanization index (Figure 3), the highest index value is noted in Belarus (79%), which corresponds to the developed countries, where it averages 71%, and in developing countries – 33%. As we can see, the index value of other EaP countries is much higher than the average value of countries in transition, but it does not reach the value of the countries which are considered developed. It means that there is a certain ambiguity. Besides, we should note that the closest to 71% mark is the value of the urbanization index, which is fixed in Ukraine – 69,47%, which testifies to the strengthening of the dominating influence of cities and the concentration of young people in them. Because of this situation, the European Union initiates programs to support rural development strategies and intensify the involvement of young people in economic activities in rural areas.

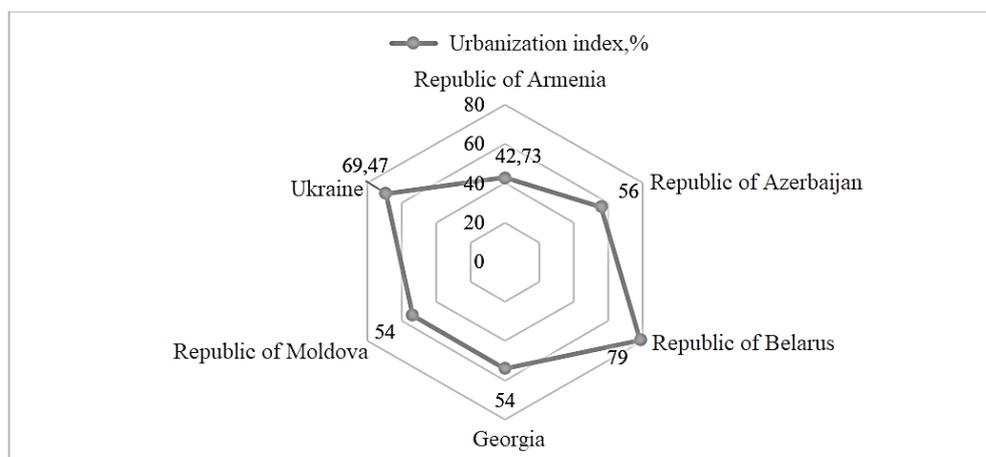


Figure 3. Urbanization index in EaP countries in 2019. Created according to: Fras et al. (2021).

At the same time, the effectiveness of youth policy formation and implementation in the considered group of countries largely depends on the development level of these countries and their ability to ensure an adequate living standard of the population

and high values of macroeconomic indicators. We consider it expedient to systematize the basic indicators characterizing the features of the youth policy of EaP countries in Table 2.

Table 2. Key indicators describing the features of EaP youth policy in 2019

№	Country	GDP, US\$ billion	GDP per capita, US\$	Population, mln. people	Birth rate	Active/passive voting age
1.	Republic of Armenia	11,9	3395	2,98	1,755	18/25
2.	Republic of Azerbaijan	48,1	4793	10,05	1,730	18/25
3.	Republic of Belarus	63,1	6713	9,45	1,448	18/21
4.	Georgia	15,7	4764	4,01	2,100	18/25
5.	Republic of Moldova	15,7	4503	2,64	1,262	18/25
6.	Ukraine	153,2	3649	43,99	1,300	18/21

Created according to: Fras et al. (2021)

According to the data presented in Table 2, among the EaP countries, the highest volume of GDP (\$153.2 billion) and the largest population (43.99 million people) is observed in Ukraine. However, GDP per capita analysis shows that the highest rates of this indicator are in Belarus (6713 USD), Azerbaijan (4793 USD), and Georgia (4764 USD), which indicates macroeconomic instability in Ukraine and the presence of social tensions in society, and thus the problems of ensuring effective youth policy.

Attention should be paid to the birth rate coefficient, which should be higher than 2.15 in conditions of generations simple replacement. However, the results of studies show its rather low value in the EaP countries, except for Georgia, which indicates a

decrease in the birth rate and, consequently, a decrease of the population in the countries, including young people.

As for the analysis of opportunities for young people to realize themselves in the state process, it should be noted that the active voting age in all countries is 18 years old. As for the passive voting age, it is 25 years in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, and 21 years in Belarus and Ukraine.

Taking into account the proven influence of economic, political, and social development destabilizing factors on the formation of youth policy, considerable attention is given internationally to increasing the youth policy effectiveness and supporting youth.

In this context, the funding of youth initiatives of the Eastern Partnership countries by the European Union and other special funds within the framework of support for the development of small youth entrepreneurship and youth employment acquires

great importance. The levels of macro-financial assistance to the EaP countries for these purposes are reflected in Figure 4.

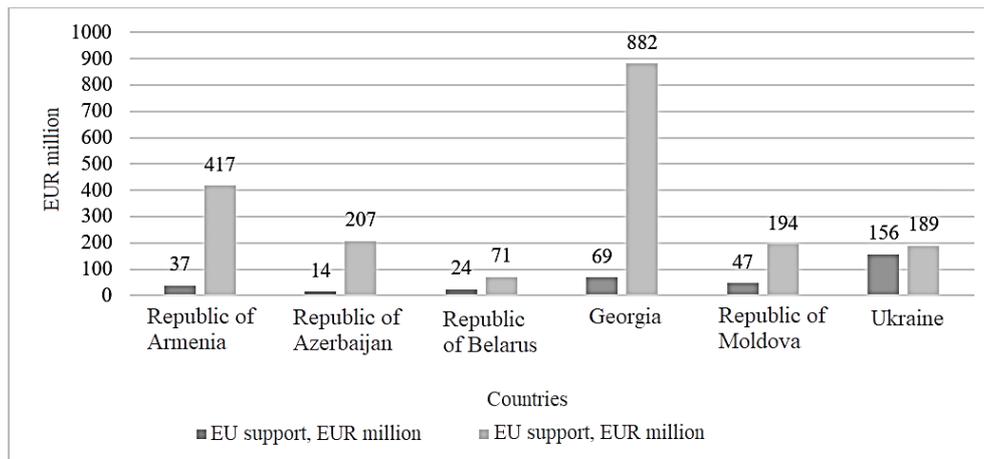


Figure 4. EU support volume to the Eastern Partnership countries, 2019.
Calculated based on: Official EU4Business page; Rabinovych (2020); Official website of Eurostat.

The analysis of youth initiatives' funding indicators by the European Union allows them to assert their significant support. Ukraine received 156 million EUR, which allowed the creation of an additional 5900 workplaces; Georgia – 69 million EUR – 10300 workplaces. Moreover, thanks to additional funds attracted, such countries as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have received more opportunities to improve their youth policies to reduce unemployment and the creation of youth businesses.

Consequently, the formation and implementation of youth policies in the Eastern Partnership countries are aimed at ensuring quality education received by young people and their gender equality, reducing poverty, obtaining decent and well-paid jobs.

5 Discussion

The conducted researches allow to affirm that the youth policy in the countries of the Eastern Partnership is formed and realized with the support of the state, directed on providing equal, with other social groups of the population, rights, and interests of youth is legally regulated and properly coordinated by its subjects. The trends in the development of youth policy in each of the participating countries have their characteristics, depending on national legislation, the level of socio-economic development of the country, mental values and traditions, and socio-political system.

Undoubtedly, there are several problems in the youth policy implementation in the Eastern Partnership countries, the main of which is youth unemployment and the inability to provide an adequate level of their material well-being, which most tangible impact is observed in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. The problem of youth unemployment has not yet been solved in any of these countries due to the significant financial support amount provided by the European Union and other foundations.

Therefore, the established trends of development of youth policy in the countries of the Eastern Partnership allow us to state that youth policy should be directed in such directions as:

- support of youth in the sphere of education and upbringing;
- support for the economic development of young families and promotion of youth employment;
- implementation of the youth housing policy;
- support of the youth in difficult life circumstances;

- prevention of asocial behavior, prevention of dangerous diseases, and promotion of healthy lifestyles;
- support to youth public associations and youth organizations;
- support for family policy;
- improving the reproductive health of young people.

Comprehensive implementation of the proposed measures will increase the effectiveness of youth policy in the Eastern Partnership countries and ensure the realization of the rights and opportunities of young people as equal society members.

6 Conclusions

Thus, the conducted research on the trends of youth policy development in EaP countries gives us reasons to conclude that the youth policy implementation is aimed at helping young people to secure their livelihood, employment, and participation in socio-political processes. The reduction in the youth share increases the risks of contradictions between expectations from young people and their actual capabilities. Since the financing of youth policy in the EaP countries is mainly from the state budget, the issue of involving private businesses in youth problems and the formation of social responsibility among business structures requires attention. At the same time, the strengthening requires international cooperation and academic exchange in this direction, in particular, the implementation and adaptation of European norms and standards of youth policy in the EaP countries' national models. Equally important is the need to strengthen the quality, role, and transnational mobility of non-formal education of young people and the relationship with other educational systems, society, and the labor market, not only at the national level but also between the partner countries.

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