YOUNG PEOPLE IN TRANSITION IN SLOVAKIA

COUNTRY PAPER

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The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF.
1. Introduction

In the period of transition the most pressing problem for young people is how to assert themselves at the labour market. In spite of the fact that the educational system of Slovakia prepares a wide range of good and professional graduates from secondary, university or tertiary education, their position at the labour market is frequently problematic. This problem will be more closely dealt with in the following part of the report.

Another pressing problem for the young people in Slovakia arises when they want to start a family. It is extremely difficult for them to get a flat because housing development subsidised by the government has been stopped, prices of flats or houses are very high in Slovakia and so is the rate of unemployment among young people. Therefore, contrary to the usage in the past, they start families much later. Something positive and at the same time something negative has come out of the situation. Positive is that the young people start families at a more mature age, they are aware of their responsibility and are psychologically and financially better prepared for their marital life. The negative effect is that the fertility period in young women is lower which results in the decrease of the numbers of live-births and the increase of the ageing population in Slovakia. Many young couples, not having sufficient support for the start of a family, live in extramarital relationships. Due to this there is an increase of non-marital live-births. These children later often have to cope with difficulties and complications. Recently the situation is improving as the new government tries to create better conditions for young people looking for flats or houses by introducing mortgaged credits and state bonuses for saving in building saving banks. This approach will obviously help to start the stagnant building of flats and one-family houses in Slovakia which may positively influence the current demographic situation.

The third serious problem of the growing up generation in the time of transformation is the increase of the number of drug addicts among the young. Institutions, health and charity organisations are involved in this problem. It deteriorates inter-human relationships, breeds poverty and criminality and negatively influences the health of newly born babies whose parents are drug addicts. This results in increased cost and countless losses in the field of health and social care.

The Ministry of Education deals with the problems of young people within the frame of its competence. Theme are also centres of diagnostics that take care of problem juveniles and those with mental or physical handicaps. Help is provided by the sector of NGOs as well. Results of the work of these institutions are published in the mass media. The Slovak Radio and Slovak TV regularly present various educational programs and discussions about the problems of the young people. The same exchanges of opinions are presented in regional and local cultural establishments and in the local press.

2. Entry and exit from the school system: school transitions and dropouts.

The regular statistical files of the Ministry of Education record the number of pupils who leave primary schools earlier than usual. The number of pupils who repeat classes are recorded at primary schools, grammar schools and secondary professional schools, not at vocational schools and secondary vocational apprentice training centres.

The relation between the number of pupils who continue their education and those who don't do so is not recorded in the education statistics.

Secondary schools are divided into state, church and private schools according to their organiser, according to their orientation there are bilingual grammar schools at which some
the subjects are taught in foreign languages. Graduates from state, church and private schools have equal access to university studies, graduates from bilingual schools have, thanks to their language skills, theoretically better possibilities to study at universities abroad.

Secondary vocational apprentice training centres and vocational schools prepare their pupils for their future jobs in training centres in which they get special training adequate to their future field of work.

After primary education pupils attend either grammar schools, or secondary vocational schools, secondary vocational apprentice training centres and vocational schools. Grammar schools orientated on general education are meant for students who want to continue studies at universities. Secondary vocational schools prepare pupils for their entering the labour market in a particular sphere of work. Secondary vocational schools organise higher vocational education for graduates from grammar schools and for their own school leavers in the form of post-graduate or non-university education.

School statistics do not show the students' social environments: their family background, permanent address etc. The only indices are numbers of students who get scholarships and the amount of the paid scholarships to students of secondary schools and universities. The intention of universities and other university level schools is to safeguard dormitory accommodation above all for the first and second year students. The other students have to look for accommodation in private homes or institutions. The government contributes to student meals in the form of boarding-out allowances especially in school and university canteens. Fares in the means of transport are also subsidised by the government. Young student families can get cheaper accommodation within the frame of the university's possibilities.

The international declaration of the rights of the child has been gradually implemented in the legal system and a number of institutions and bodies deal with their applying in practice: from health and educational, and social institutions, up to the parliament, government, ministries, prosecution, law-courts etc. Pupils and students get acquainted with the basic rights ensuing from the document within the frame of classes or in special subjects i. e. civics or within the frame of extra curricula activities in circles of interest, local history or geography etc. According to the empirical knowledge of pedagogues and educators, young people appreciate more and more their attained education. But they are often disillusioned if they can't make use of it because of lack of vacant posts. The majority of them don't resign, they attend retraining programmes and refresher courses to improve their chances of getting a quality job. Unfortunately, some young people turn apathetic or start taking drugs or start criminal activities.

To give young people the opportunity to voice their opinions about pressing problems of their lives, self-governing students' parliaments have been established at secondary schools and universities. They handle questions about the orientation of studies, of social, cultural and other problems connected with their schools and out-of-school lives. The school management consider them to be equal partners in discussions about all basic questions.

3. Life skills and health program delivered in schools.

The teaching of foreign languages is compulsory on the secondary school level. Extended teaching of foreign languages and optional studies of other foreign languages is provided at grammar schools. Schools of languages also provide this service. Statistics evaluate the process of education at schools of languages according to the kind of courses (preparatory, conversation, preparatory for state examinations, general or special). Graduates from schools of languages can make use of their skills in various spheres of life, especially at the labour market in jobs where the knowledge of at least one foreign language is required. Recently this is a frequent demand and the graduate's success depends on the level of his knowledge.
Every second or third grade of education has access to work with personal computers. This doesn't mean that every student has one of his own. But every student gets the necessary time for his work with a computer within the frame of the educational process. The internet is also available at schools. Many students have personal computers at home. To satisfy the students' interest computer centres are open at the majority of schools till late evening. Possibilities of extramural education are incorporated in the system of lifelong education. Courses are organised by several state schools and by many private educational centres. The expanding spheres of further education provide courses of accounting, customs declaration, secretaries, managers, language courses, driving license tests for cars and other transportation mechanisms etc.

Even if the situation in the Slovak health service is not rosy, the students' interest in studies at universities preparing physicians, dentists and pharmacists isn't decreasing.

Interest in studies at secondary schools for health-workers is prevailing in girls. Many of them, not finding jobs at the home labour market and having good language skills, successfully work abroad, above all in the Czech republic, Austria or Germany. Questions of family planning, prevention of venereal diseases and sexual education are part of educational programs at primary and secondary schools.

4. From schools to the labour market

Employment

Changes in the economy of the SR after 1989 have been reflected in the development of employment. Since 1990 till 1993 employment in the economy of the SR was permanently declining: by 331,4 thousand people (13.4%) within the mentioned period. The greatest decline of employment occurred in 1991; the number of employed people decreased by 8% in comparison with the year 1990. The main causes of the decline were at the beginning of the economic reform: conversion of the armament industry, the rise in the price indices of imported materials in exacting productions and the disintegration of Eastern markets. Changes in the structure of employment appeared hand in hand with the decline of the general level of employment. As for sectors, changes were in favour of the tertiary sector, the share of which rose from 41.5% in 1990 to 50.9% in 1993, while the decline in the secondary sector was 6.5% and in the primary sector 2.9%.

The branch structure of employment has also changed. Decline of employment occurred especially in agriculture, construction industry, industry - above all in the machine industry and in the branches of the processing industry. The rise of employment occurred in several branches of service industries, in administration and in banking and insurance businesses. At present the highest rate of employment in the SR is still in industry with almost 584 thousand people in 1998. But in overall employment the share of this branch decreased from 33.7% in 1990 to 29.9% in 1993 and in 1998 to 28.7% (enterpremural sheet data).

In the years 1994 - 1998 employment in Slovakia increased by 88.4 thousand persons i.e. 4.2% (there has been a slight decrease since 1997) exclusively in the private sector. In the public sector employment has gradually decreased within the observed period. This was reflected in the general change of the structure of employment according to the forms of ownership relations: while the private sector's share in overall employment in the SR was 5% in 1990, it was 3.5% in 1993 and 65.2% in 1998.

The development and structure of employment is influenced by illegal work. By official estimations the number of illegally working people is cca 200 - 250 thousand people. The reported unemployed and other groups of people working for instance in the construction industry, in business or service industries are included in this number (but not the number of young people at the age of 15 to 24 years).

By the Law of the National Council SR No. 387/96 Z. on employment, the citizen reaches work and legal competence on the day of completing 15 years of age, at the
earliest by finishing compulsory school attendance. Young people in the SR are well prepared for their starting work.

Out of the total number of 2,198.6 thousand employed people in the SR (by results of the selected findings about labour forces) in 1998 there were 315.6 thousand young people at the age of 15 - 24 years i.e. 14.4% out of overall employment. Compared with 1994 the young people's share in employment rose by 0.2%.

In the sphere of recompenses for work, selected statistical findings about wages of the employed according to age are carried out every year (up to 20 years, from 20 to 30 years etc.). The results of these findings provide data about the average monthly earnings of young people according to sex. Classifications - main groups of employment (ISCO-88), according to education, regions-districts in the SR and in the structure of the number of young employed people according to earnings (for instance up to 4000 Sk, from 4001 to 5000 Sk etc. and 10001 Sk and more). Some of the selected data on the results in the structure of the employees' earnings according to their ages are included in the supplement (We sent to Mr. Fajth by mail publication: „Structure of Wage of Employees in the SR by Occupation, Age and Education“ where you will see detailed structure).

Unemployment

In 1991 a steep increase of recorded unemployment occurred due to the process of transformation of the Slovak economy after 1989. At the end of 1991 there were 301,951 unemployed people recorded at the labour offices (rate of unemployment 11.8%). In 1992 there was a decrease and later stabilization of the total unemployment (rate of unemployment 10.4%). In 1993 and 1994 the number of unemployed people increased due to the decrease of employment and the expressive rise of the number of people recorded at labour offices. The rate of recorded unemployment rose to 14.4% till 31st Dec. 1993 and to 14.6% till 31st Dec. 1994. In the years 1995 and 1996 there was a decrease of unemployment by 0.9% on the average, and in 1997 and 1998 a rise of 0.5%. At the end of 1998 the number of recorded unemployed persons was 428,209, the rate of unemployment 15.6%, and till 30 June, 1999 it was 496,038 persons-rate of unemployment 17.7%.

The development of unemployment in the SR is influenced by the insufficient linking-up of the school system and the labour market, the poor mobility of the labour force, unsuitable relation between social and work incomes, lack of creating new work places and unclear ownership relations especially in enterprises going bankrupt.

Differences in the rate of unemployment in regions increased gradually with the rise of unemployment. At the end of 1998 the highest rate of unemployment was in Rimavsk Sobota (33.26%), Ve–kė Krtč (30.26%) and Vranov nad Top–ou (30.12%). The difference between the district of the lowest and highest rate of unemployment in 1998 was 29.7%. One of the causes of expressive regional differences in unemployment is the low mobility of labour forces characterised as follows:

- the unemployed are not willing to work away from their permanent place of living
- lack of flats (accommodation is not sufficiently secured by the employers)
- generous social allowances (not being interested in jobs as they get this kind of financial support)
- information on vacant work places published by district labour offices is often outdated and rigid.

Unemployed young people, women taking care of their children, persons of low qualifications and handicapped citizens are risky groups at the labour market. They are gradually excluded from the labour market and become longterm unemployed people. People of low income who, compared with the social allowances, can't expect higher incomes, form the group of socially unemployed people.

An extremely serious problem in the SR is longterm unemployment (more than one year). According to the ILO methodology the results of the selected findings about labour forces in the SR, showed that in 1998 there were 50.7% of longterm
unemployed people out of the total number. More females (53.1%) than males (48.5%) were longterm unemployed. The main problem at the labour market of the SR is the unemployment of young people. Out of the total number of 317.1 thousand unemployed people in 1998 more than 33% were young people at the age of 15-24 years. According to sex, there was a higher percentage of the unemployed in males (36.7%); in women it was 29.8%. Compared with 1994 the share of unemployed young people decreased by 0.5% (a rise of 0.1% in males, a decrease of 0.8% in females).

The rate of unemployment, according to the results of the labour force findings in the SR, was in 1998 12.5% on the average, but in the category of young people (from 15 to 24 years) higher - 23.3% females. As for the structure of education, the majority of unemployed young people came from Secondary vocational apprentice training centres without a leaving examination (34% out of the total number of unemployed school leavers) and those from Secondary vocational schools (33.5%). From the regional aspect the data about labour forces (employed and unemployed) are sorted into the regions of the SR only. Data on recorded unemployment obtained from district labour offices are sorted according to the district but not according to towns and country. Data on employed and unemployed people according to conditions in families, or young people's family backgrounds are not available.

Within the frame of the "Concept of the employment policy up to the year 2002 (these days discussed in the government of the SR) general proposals have been made in order to secure the permanent balance between the structure of the school leavers' education and the demands of the labour market. Some of them are:

- to secure close cooperation between the educational system and the employees when preparing teaching plans, curricula and plans of practical education at secondary schools so that the contents and extent of education would respond to the educational demands at the labour market.
- to introduce the subject of "choice of profession" (to make the change from school to practice easier for the school leavers) and provide information on current and prospective possibilities at the labour market after finishing the preparatory work for the future profession,
- to introduce and expand the system of post graduate education in order to strengthen the flexibility of the labour force at the ever changing labour market.
- to organise programs of requalification to secure continuity between the demands of the labour market and the qualification structure of unemployed people etc.

5. Transition from parental environment to own family

The new socio-economic situation in Slovakia after 1989 has brought many changes in the reproduction behaviour of the inhabitants, as well as in the position and stability of families. On the one hand, the economic transformation, development of entrepreneurial activities, reconstruction of economics and other facts have led to the creation of an increased economic independence of families; on the other hand, the risk of economic instability has increased in the majority of young families due to the decline of their living standard and rise of social dependence.

Characteristics of young families from the point of view of demographic and socio-economic aspects

Demographic findings show that institutions of marriage and family in Slovakia enjoy a high status. The majority of adult inhabitants gets married at least once, the majority of women become mothers and the majority of children are born to married couples (in 1998 57,6 thousand, i.e. 85%). Compared with West European countries, young couples get married at a very early age (difference 4-5 years). Typical for Slovakia is the low age in the
case of the first marriage (in females 22.7 years) and the low age of mothers giving birth to their first child (23.3 years). The time difference between the wedding and the first confinement is very short. More than 50% of the first born children had been conceived before the wedding. The number of 2 children is prevailing in families, they are usually born within a rather short time and therefore the reproduction period in females is short and ends rather early as the majority of children are born to women up till 24 years and childbirth after the age of 35 is minimal.

There are some specifics in the socio-economic sphere in young families. The Mikrocensus in 1996 showed that by the end of 1996 there were 1,841,7 thousand households in Slovakia, out of which 108,3 thousand i.e. 5.9% were young households up to the age of 30 years. Specific features are: the starting of the family is connected with the furnishing of the flat and the beginning of work activity under the demanding conditions of the labour market. Due to the lack of a flat market and the bad financial situation, a great number of young families is greatly dependent on their parents as for housing, baby care and financial matters. Part of the young newlyweds are psychically and socially unprepared for the life in a family because of their young age.

Reasons for postponing marriage

The main reason why marriages are postponed to a later age is the inconvenient economic and social situation for starting a family. There are difficulties with finding accommodation for the young couple to be independent, the feeling of insecurity because of unemployment, low income and many other facts.

In recent years the number of single males and females has been increasing in the population of Slovakia while the intensity of weddings decreased after 1993. These young people don't live in households of their own, but continue living with their parents because renting a flat, in case they married, is for the majority of them financially inaccessible. It is possible to assume that these young people only postpone their getting married, but some of them will live in so called "actual" marriages without a legal wedlock and some won't marry at all.

Demographic results show that at present there are in Slovakia about 414 thousand single males and 342 thousand single females at the age of 15-24 years, this is about one third out of the total number of single persons of both sexes.

What is the housing situation of young couples like?

The housing problem of young people is very unfavourable in Slovakia and its solving is problematic.

The rise of rents and services connected with living in a flat and the stopping of the complex housing development subsidised by the state are insurmountable obstacles for the resolution of this problem in young families. The almost not existing market with flats makes mobility of the labour force impossible which is another basic obstacle for the resolution of the problem. Economic and accommodation problems, dependence on the parent's help strengthens the young couple's dependence on their grandparents' families. More than 80% of young married couples don't have flats of their own. This dependence connected with further negative indices (getting married at a too young age because of the bride's pregnancy, starting work, marriage and parenthood) leads to the instability of young marriages. Divorces occur extremely often in them.

Marriages of very young males and females (16, 17 years) and childbirth at a very young age (under 15)

Marriage at a very young age (16, 17 years) and childbirth up to 15 years are not widespread in Slovakia and therefore not significant from the aspect of numbers. Getting married is conditioned by the family law No. 94/1993Zb. chapter 2, § 13 says that a minor person cannot marry except if there is a social reason can the law court allow the marriage of a minor older than 16.
In 1989 256 females and 4 males at the age of 16, 852 females and 91 males at the age of 17 got married. In the years 1994-1997 the number of marriages of 16 and 17 years old juveniles was the same as in 1989 with only a slight decrease in numbers. The largest number of marriages of both sexes is in the group of 20-24 years.

From the universal point of view it is necessary to denounce childbirth in girls of 12-14 years. Since 1989 till the end of 1998 there were 384 live births, on the average 38-39 children a year, in this category. It meant one live-birth child in 1,000 girls of the mentioned age. Simultaneously with the rise of the girls' ages, rises the number of live-birth children. In the group of 15 year old girls there were 4 children, in the category of 16 year old girls there were, on the average, 145 children in 1,000 females i.e. 36 children a year.

It is necessary to mention that in the development of fertility in girls up to 15 years it is a case of incidental pregnancy (above all in young Roma girls). The causes of this are: insufficient psychic maturity in contrast with physical maturity and an early active sexual life, lack of experience in the field of sexual behaviour, parents' reluctance to inform children on the problem, fear and shyness of children to ask parents for advice. Last but not least, low quality sexual education in schools, insufficient use of anticonception method the as. But the most convenient anticonception at their age seems to be sexual self-restraint.

From the legal point of view pregnancy in a child up to 15 is qualified as a criminal act. Sexual abuse, rise of violence and sexual criminality after 1990, as well as socially inconvenient conditions not only in Roma families, have their share in the number of pregnancies in underage girls.

**Young people's opinions on marriage**

Similarly as in many West European countries also in Slovakia the age of newly weds is rising. According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic the age of the young people who marry for the first time was in 1994 21.3 in females, 23.8 years in males; till 1998 the number rose to 22.7 in females and to 25.2 in males, within four years the shift in both sexes was by 1.4 on the average. Research in this field shows that the majority of young people don't marry immediately after leaving school, only after they have been employed for some time. This fact is connected with the prolonged preparing for employment, the rise of the educational level and economic activity in females and, last but not least, by the inconvenient economic and housing conditions.

Research oriented towards the prospective reproduction behaviour of young people in the Slovak Republic carried out directly or as part of other research findings in a group of undergraduates at universities has given rather advantageous information so far. The last findings of the research "Number of children, marriage and parenthood in the birth-rate intentions of university students" among 1,000 respondents at the age from 20 to 23 years, all single except of 3%, can be summarised as follows:

- There is an obvious shift to higher age categories in opinions about the optimal age for getting married in contrast to the above mentioned data of the couple's average age at their first marriage-similar as in western countries-mostly to the category of 24 to 25 years, or 26 to 27 years, conditioned by a certain period of employment (almost 70% of respondents mentioned this condition).
- About 3% don't intend to get married at all.
- Basic conditions for getting married are: to have a loved and loving partner and the prospect of financial security.
- The main reasons for fewer marriages are first-little prospect of getting a flat, second-uncertainty of getting an adequate job, third-instability of partnership relations and the risk of divorce.
- The strongest motive for getting married is the desire of a permanent marital cohabitation, followed by the desire to have children.
The family with two children is considered to be ideal, with the interval of 3 years between the first and the second child. The second model is the family with three children preferred mostly by students coming from the rural environment.

About the same results have been obtained within the same period by research on the opinions of households with students-undergraduates about their socio-economic situation. Out of the total number of respondents for nearly half of them the condition for getting married is to have a flat and a job, as for children the two-child family is preferred. 5% don't want to have children at all, 20% would like to have 3 or even more children. The most frequent cause of insecurity is the fear of not having a flat, health problems and unemployment.

Some corrections of the voiced opinions in the respondents' real lives must be taken into consideration as it is in researches on other questions of life.

The number of NGOs who deal, besides other matters, with the problem of families, has increased in the period of transformation.

One of the most significant NGOs dealing with the development of the family in Slovakia is the BICFS-The Bratislava International Centre for Family Studies. Even if they needed more financial means for their studies of the family environment and its development in the Slovak society, they have brought many new findings and views about the situation in the Slovak family. This international centre co-operates with the daily "Práca" and the widely read magazine "Slovenka". In both of them inquiries referring to the situation in the family, partnership cohabitation, relationships between parents and children and among siblings, are regularly published. The BICFS publishes the results of their researches in "Mozaika rodiny" 3-4 times a year. In Volume III, No 2 the results of the inquiry "Rodina 95" (Family 95) are published. The research focused on the situation in Slovak families within the period of 5 years from the following view points:

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<tr>
<th>I and II group of questions</th>
<th>change for the worse</th>
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<td>Family relationships and Their changes</td>
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<td>tolerance in family</td>
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<td>children's dependence on parents</td>
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<td>30,1</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>quality of sexual life</td>
<td>6,2</td>
<td>29,2</td>
<td>36,8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Bratislava International Centre of Family Studies

III. Range of questions
Marital and family life in Slovak families.

Questions have been put to family households only. The questionnaire asked about the most often occurring situations and problems in families as: family events, the family
members' mutual help, disharmony in relationships, so called objective difficulties, parents' absence at common events and negative features of family life (i.e. corporeal punishment of children, indecent language used in conversation, excessive drinking of alcohol, violence between parents). Respondents were to state if such situations occur in their families: very often, often enough, rather seldom or never, of no concern to respondents. 41,5% of them confirmed frequent family meetings, out of which 85,2% take part in the common Sunday dinner. The most frequent situations in Slovak families are: time stress 60,2%, health problems 44,4% and financial problems 72,3%. Unknown negative features in the majority of families is violence among adults 86,9%. Alcoholism occurred in 12,7% of families. An interesting sphere is the family members' engagement in household jobs: children help 66,0%, grandparents do 57,9%, fathers 53,9%. Misunderstandings in families: 35,7% between married couples, 27,8% between parents and children and 13,3% with grandparents. Misunderstandings between the married couples, parents and children, doubled in comparison with the findings in the past - a rise of almost 100%. Causes are objective difficulties - the family is endangered from outside.

Respondents were asked to specify the order of the importance of recommendations and advice on starting a family to other young people. They were to make use of their own experience. 21 spheres have been offered to them. The first ten, determined by the respondents, were:

1. Finance, economic security 30,6%
2. Flat, housing 25,3%
3. Tolerance, consideration 20,5%
4. Knowing the partner's character (good and bad points, relationship with others) 15,4%
5. Work, employment 9,1%
6. Mature age (not too early marriages) 8,2%
7. Knowing about addictions (alcohol, drugs, gambling etc.) 7,7%
8. Love, emotional relationship 7,6%
9. Careful thinking before getting married (not only emotions) 6,6%
10. Respect, esteem of each other 6,4%

Source: The Bratislava International Centre of Family Studies

It is obvious that recommendations of experienced Slovak parents for young couples are directed, above all, to a satisfactory financial background and also to love, consideration and the necessity of knowing each other before getting married.

Similarities and differences in marriage, divorce and bringing up children between the young and the middle age generations.

Changes in the economic, political and social transformation quite necessarily influenced changes of the population's behavior compared with the past. It can be seen in the differences of the young and the middle age generations' opinions on the particular components of the demographic development.

In the '50s till '80s the number of marriages remained at a high level (on the average over 8 per mile). It was usual that more than 90% of males and females got married at least once in their lives and the dominant model of partnership cohabitation was the family with several children. This traditional form of a family was supported by then existing social conditions. Lack of personal, social and professional self-realization was compensated with advantageous preferences (from preferential loans up to providing a flat). We may add the actually not existing anticonception and a rather strong influence of the Christian morale that resulted in a high number of marriages and child-births, a very low age of newlyweds and a low number of divorces.
After the change of the political situation in Slovakia, the demographic behavior, mainly of the young generation, changed as well. Differences of the young generation's opinions on marriages can be seen:

a) in postponing the time of getting married due to the already mentioned unfavorable economic and social reasons (bad financial situation, lack of flats, unemployment and the intensified pressure on the qualification of the young, etc.) All this leads to fewer marriages and to the postponing of marriages to a later time.

b) there is a change of the young people's attitude towards the legal institution of marital cohabitation. Legal marriages are sometimes substituted by so called actual marriages (not authorized) which had, at the beginning, the form of "a marriage on trial" and has become an alternative form of a family. The future development of marriages will depend on the couple's individual decision and on the availability of affordable housing for them. It will also depend on the legislature that can, to a certain extent, indirectly support or impair the development of marital cohabitation.

The attitude to the problem of divorce is also different in the young generation - they are adapting to the lifestyle of the West where misunderstandings in marriages are more often solved by divorce. The problem is also influenced by the change of life preferences. Marriage and family are in competition with greater possibilities of social self-assertion.

Another factor is the rise of economic independence in women, the proof of which can be seen in the higher rate of divorces. In two thirds of them women hand in the applications for them. Legislation is also more benevolent in handling divorces than it was in the past.

The transformation of the society from planned to market economy leads to a greater differentiation between the life style of the young and the elder generations. The elder ones stick to their ideals and habits, the young generation adapts very quickly to the new style of living. They are aware of the fact that instead to be taken care of by the state, there are now conditions created for the citizens. They know they must stand on their own feet as soon as possible even if they realize that their effort will be difficult without their parents' help.

Young people in Slovakia adopt also the healthier way of life: they like to practice sports, especially the new kinds as sky-diving, riding mountain bikes, roller skating, paragliding, bodybuilding, they visit fitness centers, sauna baths, solariums. The elder generation is more worried, absorbed in problems the solving of which would create most favorable conditions for the development of their children and families.

6. Inter-generation and social differences in lifestyles

Alimentary habits of young people have been changing very slowly in Slovakia as they are opposed to those of their parents. Dishes with high levels of fats are still favored in Slovakia, due to which almost 50% of inhabitants up to the age of 30 have an increased level of cholesterol in blood. Elderly people who suffer from various digestion and heart disorders try to eat lighter foods. The families' gradual change from using animal fats to the usage of vegetable oil or butter is still insufficient. The average calorie level of meals in Slovakia is above the recommended values. In one year the average daily consumption of 1 inhabitant/Kg cal/day went beyond the recommended value by 418 kg calories. The consumption of milk and milk products is very low, it is less than 74% of recommended quantity. The consumption of beef went down, that of poultry, especially chicken, slightly rose. Low is also the consumption of fish and leguminous plants. Favorable development has been recorded in the consumption of fruits, vegetables, non/alcoholic drinks and mineral waters.

The total consumption of alcoholic drinks in Slovakia decreased in 1998 in comparison with 1997 by 6.9l/inhabitant/year and is 110 l per person. The credit of the decrease of alcoholic drinks goes to beer - its consumption decreased by 7.7%. consumption of wine slightly rose by 1.4%. Spirits remained at the same level - 10.3 l/
inhabitant / year. Information on the structure of the consumption of alcoholic beverages is as follows: spirits 9.4%, wine 13.2%, beer 77.4%.

We can say that in the consumption of alcoholic drinks a gradual decrease has been recorded after some stagnation. In regard of the unfavorable impact of the exaggerated consumption of alcohol on families, this is a positive tendency.

Situation of drug addiction: In 1997 38 patients (26 males, 12 females) in the age group of children up to 14 years, were treated (Source: Health Statistics Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 1997, UZIS Slovakia), which was 1.8% out of the total number of drug addicted patients. The most numerous group of drug addicts was that at the age of 20 to 24 years out of which were 646 males and 166 females. The second most numerous group was that of 15 to 19 year (484 males, 180 females). The third group are patients at 25 - 44 years (365 males, 96 females). In 1997 the dominant drug used in Slovakia was heroin (1 657 cases - 79.9% out of the total number of patients). Other used drugs were volatile substances, hypnotic and sedatives. The most often way of taking drugs are injections - 1 307 cases - 57.2% out of the total number of patients. The majority of drug addicts are unemployed people - 1 187 cases, 57.2% out of the total number. According to the level of education, primary education have 873 people, 42.1% secondary education without the leaving examination 640 persons 30.8%, secondary education with the leaving examination 337 persons - 16.2%, university education only 31 cases - 1.5% out of the total number of drug addicts.

In schools and in media great attention is given to questions of information about the harmful effects of drugs on the organism. Counseling psychological services, telephone lines of confidence functioning 24 hours have been established in some towns and communities to help young people who became drug users. Here they can confide to experts their problems and difficulties and get advice and inevitable first aid.

The transformation of the society from planned to market economy leads to a greater differentiation between the life style of the young and the elder generations. The elder ones stick to their ideals and habits, the young generation adapts very quickly to the new style of living. They are aware of the fact that instead to be taken care of by the state, there are now conditions created for the citizens. They know they must stand on their own feet as soon as possible even if they realize that their effort will be difficult without their parents' help.

Young people in Slovakia adopt also the healthier way of life: they like to practice sports, especially the new kinds as sky-diving, riding mountain bikes, roller skating, paragliding, bodybuilding, they visit fitness centers, sauna baths, solariums. The elder generation is more worried, absorbed in problems the solving of which would create most favorable conditions for the development of their children and families.

7. Young people in conflict with the law

Young people get into conflict with the law for various reasons. They sometimes don’t even realize that they break the law. On the other hand, they often do so quite consciously and naively believe they won't be convicted. The approach of Courts and other institutions to juvenile delinquents is differentiated. The age of the offender, his former behavior and previous conflicts with the law are taken into consideration. The extent of punishment for young offenders (15 - 17 years) is a minimum sentence or half of the usual penal rate at maximum. Offenders under the age of 15 cannot be by law brought before a court. This regulation has become rather outdated with regard to some serious criminal acts, i.e. homicide and violent assault, committed by youngsters under 15 years. A group of lawyers in Slovakia, but also in other European countries, try to put through the lowering of the age limit at which a juvenile delinquent can be subjected to punitive measures. At present these young offenders are sent to detention centers for not adaptable and problem children. The system of prisons in Slovakia is such that young people serve their sentences separated from adult prisoners. The young offenders get theoretical and practical training in various
vocations within the frame of remedial education. Local possibilities and the character of the crime the juvenile had committed are taken into consideration. After the successful passing of the theoretical and vocational training, he can take the required examination and get the certificate of apprenticeship in vocations as lathe - worker, blacksmith, shoemaker, joiner etc.

In the Slovak legal system doesn't so far exist an institution of an alternative way of serving a sentence except some of its supplementary forms as a simultaneous fine or banned profession. There exists only an internal division of penal rates dependent on the grade of danger for the society and the social impact of the committed crime. The most severe is the 3rd reformatory prison for people who committed homicide, violent assault, battery and repeated crimes by recidivists, irremediable offenders. In the 2nd group are convicts who committed serious crimes for the first time with only minor consequences. In the 1st group are people who committed minor offences: causing traffic accidents out of negligence, avoiding alimony payments etc. Some convicts of this group are allowed to work outside the penitentiary institutions without any supervision. This way of serving a sentence is preferred as we assume that the convicted person, having served his/her sentence will be able to join quickly the regular civic life.

In 1997 there were 128 juvenile convicts at the age of 15 to 17 years i.e. 2.23% in prisons out of the total number of convicted persons. As already mentioned, persons younger than 15 years cannot be legally sentenced and imprisoned. Convicts can be usually visited once a month which is conditioned by their good conduct. In the 1st and 2nd group the convict can be allowed to visit his relatives outside the prison for 1 - 3 days once a month or once a year.

The educational level of juvenile prisoners within the average of 5 years for 1993-1997 was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterates</td>
<td>6.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfinished primary education</td>
<td>31.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary education</td>
<td>61.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth offenders come from various family environment and socio-economic status. They generally come from one-parent families or from families with the parents' impaired cohabitation. But even cases of young offenders from financially secured families are not rare. Causes are: parents are too busy all the day long and have no time for their children. These suffer emotionally and compensate their frustration by engaging themselves in minor or sometimes even more severe criminality. Findings have shown that almost 2/3 of juvenile delinquents come from urban environment and only 1/3 from the rural one. Official statistics in Slovakia don't discriminate juvenile delinquents according to race, ethnic minority or ethnic group. Such data are not at disposal.

The young people's opinions about criminality are varied. The majority of them think that the police aren't energetic enough to take actions against offenders of the law, too many cases remain unsolved, illustration of some kinds of criminal activities is below 50%. Courts take too long a time to try and sentence the offenders. The unnecessary delay of trials and final verdicts causes their loss of relevance.

8. Political participation of young people

Young people in Slovakia reach adulthood at the age of 18. From this time on they can vote and be elected to representative bodies of communities and the state. Proof of the young people's interest in the public and political life is that at the end of 1998 there were 5 deputies (3.3%) younger than 30 and 16 deputies (10.7%) at the age of 30 to 40 in the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Similarly, many young people have been elected to communal councils and have significant posts there.

Work in various NGOs is a new activity in young people's engagement in politics in Slovakia. There are environmental, educational and voluntary NGOs. In the pre-election period of 1998 the NGO OKO and many others successfully helped to spread information
and knowledge how necessary it was to take part in the election. They also explained citizens the principles of free democratic elections, the citizens' rights, duties of the electoral committees, of communities and towns. Thanks to their initiatives a record number of voters took part in the 1998 elections who voted for freedom, democracy, cooperation, tolerance towards other nations, minorities and other ethnical groups. This has helped Slovakia to return to the road leading to the family of free and democratic countries, to the European and Transatlantic structures.

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