HEALTH

“Good health lets you physically do what you want – being able to go to a three-day drinking party, to run 10 kilometres, to dance in the rain.”

Dorinel, 22

Preparations for this year’s Regional Monitoring Report, Young People in Changing Societies, included Focus Group discussions on health issues in Romania, Russia and Uzbekistan. Young people were asked their views on health risks and the notion of participation to promote good health. Individual interviews were also carried out in Romania and Russia. The views of many of these young people are featured in Chapter Two of the Regional Monitoring Report, which focuses on the health of the ‘transition generation’.

Young people are often seen as the healthiest of all age groups, but Young People in Changing Societies reveals a generation whose health is under threat. While there have been positive developments over the last decade, including declines in youth deaths due to suicide and injuries in some countries such as Hungary, fewer teens births in Romania and Bulgaria and abortions among young women in Russia, the Report says that young people feel less healthy and are taking more risks with their health than they did in 1989.

Around half a million of those aged 5-14 in 1989 are not alive today. In 1998, 85,000 people aged 15-24 died in the region, about 30 per cent more than in 1989. Youth mortality rates rose in 11 countries, largely in the CIS, and fell in 16 countries, including the Baltic States and all the countries of Central Europe. The disparities have widened, with young people three times more likely to die in Russia and Kazakhstan in 1998 than those in Slovakia, the Czech Republic or Hungary.

Addressing the various health risks faced by young people in the region, the Report calls for the strengthening of a whole range of intermediate health services in the region: information, health education, support networks, counselling, shelters and other services. Health services should be more ‘youth friendly’, adopting the more open approaches that are particularly crucial for the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

The Report says that young people are more likely to use services that respect confidentiality and involve them in their design, implementation and administration. Allowing young people to participate in youth health services would, says the Report, contribute to their immediate and future health and to more effective costs and benefits in the health care system.

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