

DIAGNOSIS OF THE INDEPENDENCE GENERATION: ISSUES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF ARMENIAN YOUTH

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The end of the 20th century was distinguished by exceptional changes in the reality of the Armenian society, by the degeneration of value basis and directors of continuous reproduction and existence of the society, by the mutilation of corresponding social relations, meanings and symbolisms that seemed to be stabilized over years, as well as by the mutilation of basis and processes of the institutional reproduction of the society [1]. The reasons of the above-mentioned were the collapse of Soviet Union, the profound transformation of political management system, still existing consequences of Karabakh conflict and the earthquake of 1988, the transition from one economic system to the qualitatively different neoliberal market relations, where the interest and targeted competition without preconditions have an undeniable and permanent priority [2]. The logical consequence of the mentioned could be the social exclusion of different groups of the society, particularly the youth who are considered highly important for the existence and regular functioning of the society [3]. The mentioned especially refers to such components of social exclusion as the multivariate poverty of some groups of the youth, the lack of social, political and cultural participation and inactivity, etc.

Nowadays, the discourses of social and political sciences, public administration and law concerning significant issues such as poverty, security, migration, crime, etc. are rich in definitions and formulations of social exclusion, its separate, logical components, functional manifestations [4]. Thus, it is hard to

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choose the one that will be comprehensive and final. We can just mention, that when talking about social exclusion, the majority of definitions highlight the lack or absence of material, social, cultural and other resources among the potential excluded, risky or really excluded groups [5]. They also mention the inactivity of different groups of society including youth in social relations, in social, political and cultural spheres, the lack of participation, as well as the inaccessibility of social goods, public and private services.

Although such general and multidimensional definition may cause to several methodological problems, it is the basis for the following analytical multivariate operationalization. Thus, in our opinion the emergence of the complex social phenomenon of social exclusion could be related to the following components as a result of obvious or potential problems [6, pp 10, 87-95]:

- material resources,
- social resources,
- cultural resources,
- social participation,
- political participation,
- quality of life.

Before switching to the analytical results of the research, it is necessary to refer to the methodology. The required data and information for the analysis were taken from the database of Independence Generation: Youth Study 2016- Armenia, conducted by the Faculty of Sociology, Yerevan State University and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Thus, combined cluster sampling was chosen as the correct approach for this large scale quantitative study; the permanent population of the Republic of Armenia—the base sample—was separated into internally heterogeneous, externally homogeneous subgroups of equal volumes called «clusters» (according to predefined numbers). Each of the clusters was composed of eight targeted «addresses», which were studied completely. Additional subsampling was not conducted within the selected clusters. Cluster sampling was conducted proportionate to the population size of all residential areas in Armenia, according to the country's ten administrative regions (Marzes) and

the eleven regions of Yerevan city. Sampling started with the first randomly selected residential area, where the first cluster to be studied was located, according to the step of sampling. The other residential areas containing the remaining clusters were also selected in the direction of accumulative distribution increase. Based on this approach, the selection of a given number of clusters in a certain residential area is directly proportional to the population of that same area. This ensures proportionate sampling, as well as proportionate representativeness of large residential areas, such as regional centers and the capital city in the selected sample. Moreover, systematic random sampling was conducted due to the absence of a complete and trustworthy list of addresses for each residential area. The starting point—first address—for each cluster was selected through simple random sampling of a concrete address from the residential area lists at the respective polling stations. Of the residents of the selected apartment/house aged 14 to 29, the one whose birth date was the closest to the interview date was questioned. 1,200 youth from various regions of Armenia—both rural and urban areas—participated in a survey (the margin of error for the sample being 3 per cent) conducted through standardized interviews. The youth were born from 1987 onwards. This cut-off is the year when the processes of independence had commenced, fuelled by the first anti-Soviet demonstrations in Armenia.

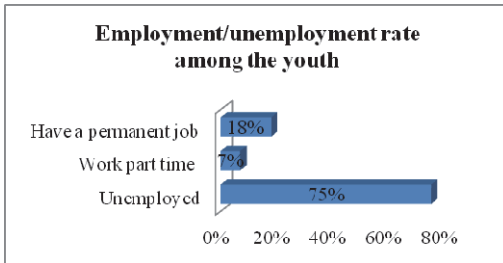
Thus, our respondents are people whose initial socialization took place during the periods leading to independence, the formation of independence, and its strengthening. And from this point of view, we are dealing with the generation of independence [7, pp 15-16].

Now let's look at the analytical results, the components of operationalization and their sequence.

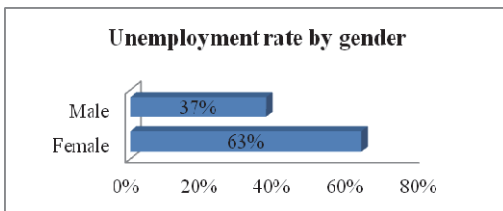
Material Resources

In the literature related to the issue one can find that problems related to material welfare and economic resources have primary role in the existence and deepening of social exclusion [8, 9, 10]. This indicator is proved in our research as well. The measurement of the latter was done through the indicators related

to work and material opportunities of the households. Thus, almost 75% of respondents are unemployed, 7% works part time or from time to time.



It should be mentioned that such high rates of unemployment firstly are related to the fact that a significant number of people under age of 18 who are not employed yet, were also included in the sample. Meanwhile, in case of people aged 18-29, the unemployment rate is also quite high (61.5%); nearly 31% of youth from 18 to 22 are unemployed. Such results can be interpreted by local characteristics. People in this age group are mainly undergraduate (bachelor) students. In the age range of 23 to 29, who are mostly graduates, every 3rd person is unemployed.



The problem has also gender bias. Among the female respondents regardless their age, 63% are unemployed, whereas only 37% of male respondents are unemployed.

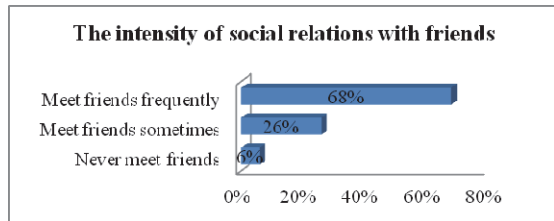
At the same time, 42% of the employed do not work in their field of study, by their narrow specialization. The mentioned situation indicates the loss of social and material direct or indirect investments on their education, the uncertainty of future plans of the youth, as well as the deep discrepancy between the social institute of higher education and labor market [11]. In such conditions, the economic pessimism of the youth is obvious as well. Each 4th person believes that the economic conditions of Armenia will worsen over the next 10 years. The mentioned pessimism is mostly specific to the age range of 26 to 29 and more than 53% of this subgroup thinks that the situation will worsen to some extent.

Referring to the material and economic well-being of the youth, it should be noted that every 3rd of the Armenian youth does not have a computer. More than 45% does not have a personal laptop. The households of nearly 45% of the youth do not own a car. Moreover, families of 45% of the youth can only afford to buy food, clothing, shoes, but extra expenses or any

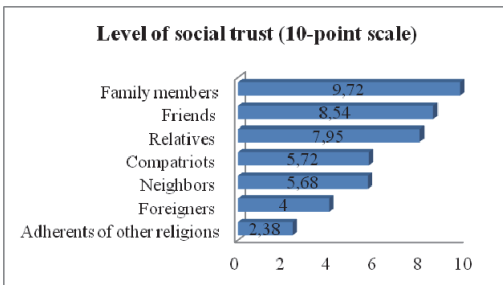
savings are not affordable. At the same time, nearly 3% of the youth lives in families, who do not have enough means for even food, 6% do not have means for clothing. Surprisingly, under such conditions only 15% of the youth has personal income and not surprisingly the absolute majority of the Armenian young people (66%) live off their parents.

Social Resources

In this research social resources are considered as some kind of manifestations of social capital [12]: the intensity of social relations particularly with friends [13], the level of trust towards several social groups and other subjects of relations, as well as towards social structures and institutes. Thus, nearly 68% of respondents meet their friends frequently,



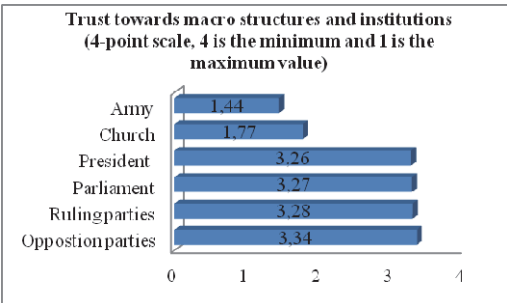
26.5% meet their friends sometimes. About 6% almost never meet their friends. There is also interesting data concerning the distribution of meetings according to the age groups of the respondents. The data shows that the number of meetings decreases as the age increases. About 15% of respondents from the age group of 26-29 do not meet their friends.



As to social trust, which was measured by a 10-point scale (1 is the minimum and 10 is the maximum level of trust), the youth mostly trust their family members (9.72 points in average). Then, they trust their friends (8.54 points) and relatives (7.95). The community based reproduction of society is becoming obvious in this context.

Related to the latter, it should be mentioned that the level of trust is comparatively low towards the compatriots (5.72) and neighbors (5.68). The Armenian youth has the least trust towards foreigners (4) and adherents of other religions (2.38). This pattern is the reflection of the extreme mono-ethnicity and high level of religious homogeneity of the Armenian society which were shaped historically.

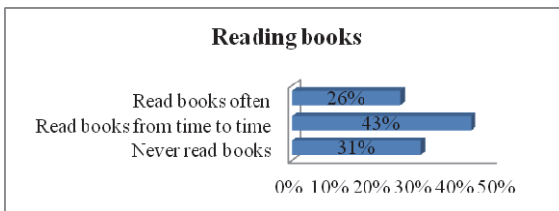
Switching to the trust towards macro structures and institutes, measured by a 4-point scale (4 is the minimum and 1 is the maximum value), the highest rate of trust is towards the army (1.44) and the church (1.77). The trust towards political institutes is relatively low. The trust towards the president is 3.26, and the parliament is 3.27. The youth has little trust towards both the ruling (3.28) and opposition parties (3.34).



Cultural Resources

In the context of this research, under cultural resources the participation in socially acceptable cultural events and activities such as reading, sports, TV and internet are considered.

More than 31% of the respondents never read books. About 43% of respondents read books from time to time.



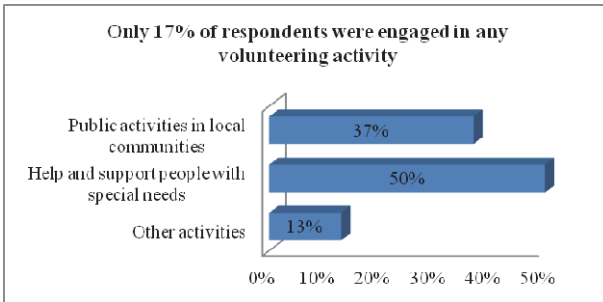
Almost 50% of the Armenian youth are not engaged in sports. Accordingly, more than 52% of women and 37% of men are not engaged in any sport activity.

Nearly 54% of youth watches TV often and 81% spend much time surfing the web. The youth regardless their age and gender use internet 4 hours a day in average. While men spend 30 minutes more on internet than women. The main purpose using the internet is to communicate with relatives and friends (40%). Every 5th person uses internet as a source for news.

Social Participation

When talking about social participation in the social life of the Armenian society, the indicators chosen for that are quite strange as they refer to volunteering and also emigration as a refusal from participation in the Armenian

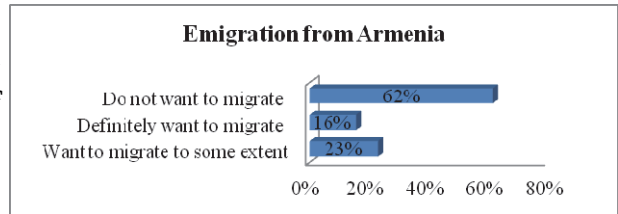
social life. It should be noted that the rates of volunteering are quite low among the Armenian youth.



Only 17% of respondents were engaged in any volunteering activity. 50% of the volunteers help and support people who have special needs. Nearly 37% is engaged in public activities in their

local communities. The commitment to help others (63%) was mentioned as the main reason for volunteering.

Referring to the emigration from Armenia, it should be noted that 61.5% of the youth does not want to migrate from the country yet. 15.5% definitely wants to

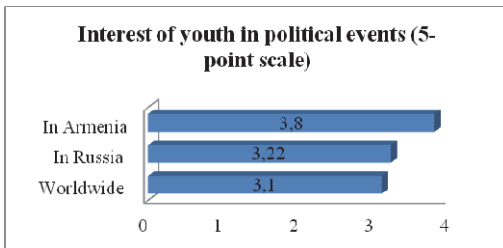


leave Armenia and that is why these people also refuse to directly be involved in the social life. The rest wants to leave Armenia to some extent. 19% of men and only 13% of women definitely want to emigrate from Armenia. In the age subgroups the age range of 23 to 25 has the strong desire to migrate (18%). The primary reasons for emigration are the improvement of their living conditions (35.6%) and job opportunities (30.8%).

Political Participation

For the analysis of the political participation some indicators were chosen concerning direct and indirect political participation and political position. Thus, to be politically active is trendy for 41% of the Armenian youth which, in fact, is a significant indicator. For the rest, to be politically active is more or less trendy. In addition to the mentioned, it should be noted that 54% of respondents do not follow any political debates programs on TV. At the same time, only for 36% of respondents participation in civic initiatives and similar social activities is

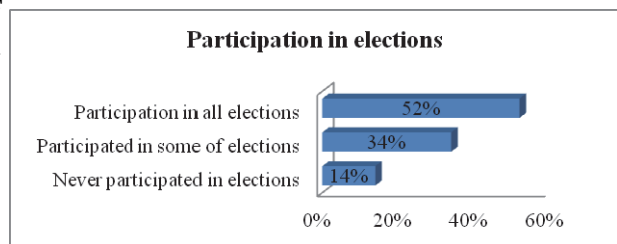
trendy. It is strange, but being politically active is trendy for 44% of female and for 37% of male respondents. 1/3 of youth does not discuss any political issue or event with their parents and every 10th person discusses that sometimes, which evidences that the Armenian youth is politically passive. However, the political stances of nearly 90% of the youth more or less coincide with ones of their parents, which evidence the high level of social homogeneity.



If we evaluate the interest of youth in political events with a 5-point scale (1 is the minimum and 5 is the maximum value), then we can state that the youth is firstly interested in issues and events in Armenia (3.8 in average),

secondly in Russia (3.22 in average), and then in worldwide (3.1 in average).

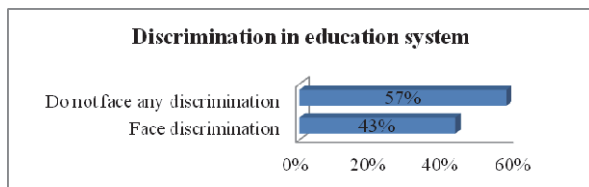
Referring to the participation in elections, it should be noted that more than half of the youth (52%) participated in all political elections since they got the right to vote. 14% of the respondents have never participated in the elections. Every 3rd respondent believes that their vote has no significance in the activities of Par-



liament and National Assembly. Moreover, about 44% is sure that their vote has no significance in political elections. Simultaneously, more that 34% of respondents are not satisfied with democracy in Armenia. It is remarkable that the main source of information for youth is the internet (45.6%) and then the TV.

The Quality of Life

To measure the quality of life indicators such as the existence of social and material goods, the availability of public and private services, and the absence of social discrimination in different spheres of social life were chosen. On the whole, we can state, that particularly in the education sphere 57% of respon-



dents do not face any discrimination. Unfortunately, the rest often faces discrimination. Despite the fact that overall gender

discrimination is quite low, 87% of men never faced gender discrimination, while the percentage of that for women is 78.

Referring to social goods and public services, particularly to education, the data shows that about 30% of respondents get education, 20% will continue their education, and more than 50% does not get any education at this moment. For financial reasons every 4th from the corresponding proportion cannot afford higher education. While every 3rd from those, who want to continue their education, just need the diploma, which is an opportunity for them to get a better job. The absolute majority of students from higher education institutes (58%) do not want to get postgraduate education. For the majority (62%) higher education is enough. At the same time, every 3rd respondent claims that additional education will not provide a better life.

Now let's switch to some material goods and opportunities. The majority of youth lives with their parents (73%). The absolute majority lives in a 3-room apartment (33%). 78% has private room in their apartment. The rest share the room with other family members.

Conclusion

When measuring social exclusion, such factors as material, social, cultural resources and social, political, cultural participation should be taken into account. In the context of the Armenian society which underwent social and political transformations after the collapse of Soviet Union and cannot overcome many of them and continues to face new challenges, the problem of social exclusion particularly of youth is becoming an urgent issue. One of the greatest problems that causes exclusion is unemployment. Moreover, the unemployment rate of women is much higher that of men. The latter deepens the exclusion of women from the labor market and the economic sphere. The other problem is that almost half of the ones, who are employed, do not work

in their field of specialization and which states the inefficiency of material investment in education. The abovementioned means that the youth lacks financial resources which assume that they cannot afford various services, goods and are dependent on their parents.

The next problematic factor which also is an indicator of social exclusion is the lack of trust towards various institutions. The Armenian youth trusts the army and church, but on the other hand there is a big distrust towards the president, parliament and political parties. The latter induces the youth not to be engaged in activities with the mentioned institutions.

The mere fact that the Armenian youth is not engaged in volunteering activities also indicates social exclusion from social life. Non-participation of youth is also apparent in civic initiatives and other social activities.

At last, the will to migrate to other countries for better future and employment indicates that the youth does not link their future with Armenia. The intention to migrate prevents them from participating in social, political and cultural spheres of society, thus being excluded from any activity.

To sum up, the abovementioned data evidences that in some spheres and with some indicators social exclusion as well as its existence and the high risk of its further development are obvious.

November, 2017

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