



ევროკავშირი  
საქართველოსთვის  
Project funded by the European Union



**EaP** | Eastern  
Partnership



ადამიანის უფლებების კვლევის ცენტრი  
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# Interim Monitoring of the Three-Year Reform of the Youth Agency

## Research Report

2022



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## Key Findings

- Information about the programs was disseminated actively enough to make interested parties aware of them;
- The online forms required for expressing interest in participation were simple, presented in an understandable manner and did not create significant technical difficulties at the registration stage;
- The interviews with the candidates were quite organized and no additional questions arose;
- The published information on candidates recruitment procedures was not clear enough;
- The criteria for selecting candidates were evaluated positively by the majority;
- The results of the recruitment of participants caused general satisfaction;
- Youth workers participating in the Certification Program were not aware of the recruitment procedures for college representative candidates;
- The lack of qualifications of the representatives of the colleges participating in the Certification Program turned out to be a significant challenge for youth workers;
- None of the representatives of ethnic minorities, although one person with special needs, was involved in the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation;
- A successful group dynamics could not be created in the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation, because the members had different understandings of the statute of the council.
- Prior to the implementation of the programs, the necessary informational meetings were not organized at all or were held insufficiently;
- Mentorship, that is, the provision of informational support was not organized at all or was carried out insufficiently;
- Colleges and municipalities were insufficiently involved in the implementation of the Certification Program;
- The Youth Agency was insufficiently actively checking the involvement of colleges and municipalities in the Certification Program;
- Fruitful cooperation between the Agency, colleges and municipalities could not take place;
- Youth workers participating in the Certification Program used their own financial and other resources for the successful implementation of the program;
- The Certification Program budget was a problem in terms of flexibility and affordability;
- All participants considered the opportunity to create professional connections to be the biggest gain;
- Despite the many challenges that arose during the implementation stages of the programs, the majority of participants, thanks to their own work, were able to develop their competencies;
- The projects financed under the Million Fund Grant Competition turned out to be the most sustainable;
- Completion of the Certification Program did not affect the financial situation of any youth worker;
- Certified youth workers remain in the youth field thanks to their own resources and enthusiasm;
- Youth clubs created on the basis of colleges involved in the Certification Program, in most cases, ceased to operate after the completion of the program;
- The creation of the Youth Agency as an independent body was positively assessed by absolutely all participants;
- Participants of the Million Fund Grant Competition sharply negatively assessed the administrative part of the program;
- The structural changes implemented in the Agency, caused by the merger with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, had a negative impact on the youth field;
- The performance of the Agency has become completely nontransparent and hidden, which makes it difficult to determine the future of the youth field.

## Introduction

In September 2019, LEPL Youth Agency of Georgia was founded. Shortly after its establishment, a Three-Year Reform<sup>1</sup> with eight directions (Finances; Market; Public Policy; Human Capital; Organizations; Knowledge about Youth; Infrastructure; Culture and Attitudes) was announced, which would form a strong and sustainable youth field ecosystem. The organizational performance of the Agency has never been subject to external assessment, and this study was to change that. It is important to note that initially, the Agency was subordinated<sup>2</sup> to the office of the Prime Minister and had a certain degree of independence. On March 16, 2021, the Parliament of Georgia, in the third reading, supported the separate formation of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (79 in favour, none against). Thus, the Youth Agency came under the jurisdiction<sup>3</sup> of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia. Given that the decision by the government was taken without consultation<sup>4</sup> with local and international organizations dealing with youth issues, and most importantly, with the youth themselves, there were reasonable doubts that the said merger would harm the youth field.

The goal of this study was to conduct evidence-based research for the Interim Monitoring of the Three-Year Reform of the Youth Agency to assess how public services were being delivered at the national level.

Interim monitoring focused on studying the three major programs of the Three-Year Reform in terms of quality and sustainability: (a) the Youth Workers Training Certification Program; (b) the Youth Advisory Council (first and second convocations), and (c) the Million Fund Grant Competition.

To achieve the goal of the study, the following objectives were set:

- Assessment of the performance of the Agency based on its reports;
- Determination of the existing attitudes of discussants to the recruitment stages of programs;
- Determination of the existing attitudes of discussants to the implementation stages of programs;
- Determination of the benefits received by discussants as a result of participation in programs;
- Determining the sustainability of program outcomes by discussants;
- Determination of the existing attitudes of discussants to the performance of the Youth Agency.

## Methodology

By using the focus group discussion (FGD) method, which is a qualitative research method, it became possible to obtain in-depth information from program participants about the programs and the performance of the Agency in general. A total of six FGDs were held using the Zoom platform. Participants

<sup>1</sup> Three-Year Reform. Available in Georgian at: <https://bit.ly/3UxxSDV> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> On the Establishment and Approval of the Statute of the Legal Entity under Public Law (LEPL) Called the Youth Agency. Available in Georgian at: <https://bit.ly/3Tc3u16> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> On Amendments to the Decree #411 of the Government of Georgia, August 26, 2019, “On the Establishment and Approval of the Statute of the Legal Entity under Public Law (LEPL) Called the Youth Agency.” Available in Georgian at: <https://bit.ly/3DNHluZ> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Statement of the Youth Advisory Council. January 29, 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3WvXORE> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).

were selected among the beneficiaries of the abovementioned programs and thus represented different regions, age groups and sex. The distribution of participants was as follows:

*Table #1*

Code	Program	Number of FGDs	Number of Participants
YW	Youth Workers Training Certification Program	3	24
YC_1	Youth Advisory Council of the First Convocation	2	16
MFG	Million Fund Grant Competition	1	8
Total		6	48

FGDs were held on August 21-29 this year. The duration of each discussion was about 90 minutes. The process was led by one moderator. The participants spoke about the recruitment and implementation stages of programs, the benefits received, the sustainability of the outcomes and existing attitudes to the performance of the Youth Agency. Based on the informed consent of the participants, all discussions were videotaped. During the data analysis phase, a detailed transcript of each discussion was written, and the videos were deleted.

## Research Limitations

Given that the study is largely qualitative, it mostly has internal validity, meaning that the generalization of the results can be difficult. The study mainly analyzed and presented the subjective attitudes of FGD participants.

In addition, it was impossible to assess the performance of the Agency based on its reports. Nothing is known about the assessment and monitoring tool (if any) used by the Agency to assess its performance. Despite several months of active online communication and promised cooperation with the person responsible for issuing public information, no information was issued. Finally, on July 6, 2022, a request for public information in the form of a hard copy was submitted to the Youth Agency (letter #179) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia (letter #26288). However, these requests also remained unanswered. The same communication strategy was chosen by the Youth Advisory Council of the second convocation, the chairperson promised cooperation but then completely stopped communication. Because of this, it was impossible to conduct two FGDs with them (16 people in total, eight participants per FGD). As a result, their position was not included in the study.

## Research Results

### General Overview

#### Youth Workers Training Certification Program

One of the main directions of the Three-Year Reform of the Youth Agency was the professionalization and institutionalization of youth workers. For this, the following objectives were set: (a) Recognition of the youth worker profession in Georgia; b) Training of practitioner youth workers; (c)

Extension of quality-oriented youth work throughout the country. On July 30, 2020, applications for the Youth Workers Training Certification Program were announced.<sup>5</sup> 30 practitioner youth workers aged 21+ from all over the country were selected to participate in the program, the training lasted 6 months. The program also included the involvement of college representatives so that they could participate in the process of creating and strengthening youth clubs based on the colleges after the completion of the program.

For the study, 24 out of 30 certified youth workers, who completed the training, were selected.

### Youth Advisory Council of the First Convocation

The Youth Agency has identified youth participation policy as one of the key issues of the Three-Year Reform. Participatory youth policy was about the involvement of young people, both locally and nationally, in the decision-making process that could affect them. To develop this direction, the Youth Advisory Council was created. The Council was completely voluntary and aimed solely at taking into account the interests of young people in the performance of the Agency. For recruitment to the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation, the acceptance of applications began on May 13, 2020<sup>6</sup> (the second convocation - was on July 7, 2021<sup>7</sup>). 18-29-year-old representatives of youth organizations from all over Georgia, who were interested in youth policy and had experience in this regard, could take part in the competition (It is interesting that 14-29-year-olds could get into the Youth Advisory Council of the second convocation). 22 Council members were selected from youth organizations through an open competition, and one candidate was nominated by the umbrella organization of Georgian youth organizations. A one-year mandate was defined for the performance of the Council.

16 out of 23 members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation were selected for the study.

### Million Fund Grant Competition

On February 24, 2020, the Youth Agency announced<sup>8</sup> a grant competition to finance projects developed by youth organizations. The total amount of funding amounted to 1 150 000 GEL and included funding for projects in two thematic areas. 10 months was defined as the implementation period for the grant project. The conditions of the grant required that the created platform continue to function after the completion of the grant project and provide sustainable and reproducible outcomes in the long term. Representatives of regional youth organizations and initiative groups throughout Georgia could take part in the competition.

Eight out of 14 grantee organizations were selected for the study.

<sup>5</sup> Become a Youth Worker - It is a Profession! July 30, 2020. Available in Georgian at: <https://bit.ly/3howdCk> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Become a Member of the Youth Advisory Council. May 13, 2020. Available in Georgian at: <https://bit.ly/3Uwn6xV> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Become a member of the Youth Advisory Council. July 7, 2021. Available in Georgian at: <https://bit.ly/3hdmTBf> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Million Fund for Grant Competition. February 24, 2020. Available in Georgian at: <https://bit.ly/3UD8rkF> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).



## Program Recruitment Stage



**Access to Information** - All participants of the FGDs noted that information about the programs was disseminated actively enough to make interested parties aware of them:

*“The program [Youth Workers Training Certification Program] was quite promoted. If you are in the field and interested in the topic, it will not be difficult to get information” [YW]*

In the case of the Youth Workers Training Certification Program, the issue of the awareness of college representatives deserves a separate discussion. Most of the discussants noted that the recruitment of college representatives was purposive, that is, they, unlike practitioner youth workers, did not go through the recruitment procedures and their candidacies were nominated by the college administrations. This raised several questions from the FGD participants and called into question the inclusiveness of the recruitment process:

*“I have a few question marks in this [recruitment stage] regard. Even how informed everyone at the college was about it [the competition]” [YW]*



**Recruitment of Participants** - For all three programs, the recruitment process was assessed as fair by all discussants. According to them, the online forms required for expressing interest in participation were simple, presented in an understandable manner and did not create significant technical difficulties at the registration stage. The interviews with the candidates were quite organized and no additional questions arose.

The results of the recruitment of participants caused general satisfaction. According to discussants, all participants had significant experience in working with young people, regardless of their field of activity and region:

*“What I liked, now [in the case of the Youth Advisory Council of the second convocation] I don’t know how the selection took place, it was a rather motley group. In addition to the region, the direction of work was also taken into account. Moreover, we had to represent organizations, and special attention was paid to their areas of activity” [YC\_1]*

In terms of practical experience, the exceptions were college representatives participating in the Youth Workers Training Certification Program, which were nominated by the colleges and had very little or no experience in non-formal education:

*“Some [college representatives] have never even heard of non-formal education. So it was a bit difficult because they did not understand the process the way we [youth workers] did and often said we were doing something stupid” [YW]*

According to the participants of the Certification Program, the training program was intended for those who have been actively working in the youth field for many years and thus fulfilled one of the requirements for participation, and not for those who do not even have the appropriate minimum experience and have not gone through the recruitment procedure, that is were selected based on college nominations

*“Some people did not attend any training, so it was difficult for them; I would say several of them for whom it was difficult. Accordingly, I would say that their [college representatives] selection was a mistake. For them, there was supposed to be training, and for us retraining” [YW]*

It was revealed that youth workers did not have information about the recruitment procedures for selecting college representatives. This may be related to the perception that college representatives did not go through the appropriate recruitment procedures.

*“The way the college representatives were selected makes me question, not because I doubt the competence of anyone, I do not feel how objective the recruitment stage was” [YW]*

On the other hand, among the representatives of the colleges some went through the recruitment procedures, that is, they expressed interest by submitting an appropriate application, were interviewed, and some were appointed by the colleges without competition:

*“My selection as a college representative was purposive. I was among the participants due to the appointment of the college administration. Maybe because I have been doing youth work for many years” [YW]*

College representatives, who had experience in non-formal education, shared the opinion of practitioner youth workers on the difficulties caused by the inexperience of college representatives:

*“Many did not even know what non-formal education was. We were uncomfortable because when we worked together, it was as if we spoke different languages, that is, someone was very experienced, and someone was completely inexperienced, and because of this, there was a big problem in the workflow” [YW]*

One person with special needs was involved in the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation. There was no selection of representatives of ethnic minorities. Council members were very concerned about the issue of inclusiveness, so they became interested in studying this issue and turned to the Youth Agency with a question. The answer was that only one person with special needs expressed interest in membership, and there was no activity from regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, that is, no one applied. However, when the Council began to implement its mandate, representatives of ethnic minorities expressed their desire to join:

*“As we were told by the Agency, when the information about the recruitment was disseminated, there was no activity from areas densely populated by ethnic minorities, but when we started*

*working, several organizations wanted to participate, and then there were some uncertainties” [YC\_1]*

Former members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation also stated that publishing the Council statute alone was not enough. It would be better if the selection criteria and the system of evaluating candidates were clearer from the outset to avoid further ambiguities that had taken place:

*“Many people who were not selected asked for grades and compared them with others. If the process had been transparent from the start and the scoring system had been available to candidates, if they had known the weight of the various documents in determining the overall score, this problem might not have arisen later” [YC\_1]*

According to most of the former members of the Council of the first convocation, the requirement that the candidate must be a representative of the organization was welcomed, since, using the resources of the organization, it became possible to reach more young people. In addition, the representativeness of the organization, to a certain extent, contributed to the sustainability of the Council:

*“The representativeness of the organization was good because if a person decided to leave the Council, the replacement would be made by another member of the organization. This approach also provided some sort of sustainability” [YC\_1]*

At the same time, one of the members of the Advisory Council of the first convocation stated that the candidate must not be required to represent the organization. Thus, an additional bureaucracy appears, which, most likely, will not be a useful mechanism for the candidate, but an interfering barrier:

*“I think the representativeness of the organization should not have been a necessary requirement. I have practical examples of the fact that a person does not have to represent an organization to do something in the region. This is an additional bureaucracy, which I do not see the need for at the moment” [YC\_1]*

When recruiting the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation, it was essential that the candidate physically resides in the region and conduct activities there, that is, have contact with young people living in the region. Perhaps this criterion became an obstacle for a number of contestants, however, according to the former members of the Council of the first convocation, it was a fairly fair premise, because in this way the Council became more representative:

*“We have had several cases where people working in the youth field applied but were not selected. This caused great discontent. A story broke out that one could get into the Council through corruption and nepotism. I think that the representativeness of the region was a very fair demand. It was important that we were*

*people who really lived in the regions, saw what was happening on the field, and worked with young people on the field” [YC\_1]*

The recruitment criteria were also assessed differently by the participants of the Certification Program. When recruiting, attention was also paid to the direction of the activity of the youth worker, which created a kind of restraining barrier. Accordingly, the requirement turned out to be unacceptable for some candidates:

*“I think that program participants should not be evaluated in this direction. I wish there were enough places, and this [Certification Program] happened so many times that it did not cause the heartbreak that even my friends had” [YW]*

## Program Implementation Stage



**Group Dynamics** - According to discussants who participated in the Certification Program, it was a serious challenge for them to work with college representatives since the latter did not have the appropriate qualifications. Along with the youth under their care, the youth workers had to train college representatives, which further increased the workload. However, the motivation and enthusiasm of the college representatives gradually waned, and eventually, they stopped attending work meetings, which raised doubts that after the completion of the program they would not be able to continue working with youth on their own:

*“We were to train both our young beneficiaries and our colleague college representatives. Sometimes we had meetings, but they did not come to them. After all, they were supposed to stay in the colleges and continue this activity, but they could not because they did not really know what to do” [YW]*

According to the participants of the Certification Program, in completing the necessary tasks provided for by the program, the college representatives, that is, those who had no experience in non-formal education faced such significant difficulties that some of them even left the program their own free will because they believed that would fail to fulfil their assigned responsibilities:

*“Even though at first they got involved with great interest, they thought that they would not be able to handle something. This led to a loss of motivation, and out of 30 people, three dropped out of their own free will and did not pass the certification” [YW]*

The former members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation believed that it was not possible to create a successful group dynamics. In their opinion, the Council statute was vague and open to various interpretations. Even though the Advisory Council was built on the structure of the Council of Europe, it still did not work properly. One of the problems was the different understanding of the mandate of the Council by its members. Moreover, according to former members, the mandate of the Council was not fully understood even by representatives of the Agency. In addition, the necessary informational and team-building meetings were not

organized before the start of practical activities, therefore, according to former members, they became members of the Council completely unprepared. Furthermore, the scale of the workload was completely inconsistent with the voluntary nature of the activity. All this, together with an increase in workload, led to a decrease in the degree of involvement of members in the activities of the Council. As a result, only 10 out of 23 Council members remained active, which further weakened the group dynamics:

*“We were stuck between two wings. One wing believed that we should work as an NGO, that is, be informal, while the other wing was in favour of a formal structure. In the end, neither wing knew what to do” [YC\_1]*

*“In the end, it turned out that a few out of the 23 members were actively involved. It also seemed unfair to me. We all entered the Council together with the same desire to do something important for the [youth] field and for us, but in the end, just a few people had to do everything” [YC\_1]*

*“We did not have any training. For example, on issues such as the management of public institutions, LEPLs [Legal Entity under Public Law], budgeting, and preparation of strategic documents. With this information, we would be better able to fulfil our mandate, that is, to perform an advisory function. Since this information was not available, we all saw the processes differently, and this led to various problems” [YC\_1]*

According to the participants of the Certification Program, it would be better if, before the implementation of the program, representatives of the Youth Agency and colleges held orientation meetings with the young beneficiaries of the program to help them better understand the goals of the program:

*“It would be better for the colleges to have at least one orientation meeting with these young people before the start of the activity so that they at least have a general idea of what they are planning to do and what we are asking them to participate in” [YW]*

The failure to hold such meetings caused significant difficulties during the implementation phase of the program, as most young people did not even know who a youth worker is and what non-formal education and youth work in general are. Consequently, it was difficult for them to define their role. As a result, during the implementation of the project, this burden also fell on youth workers, without whom the gathering of beneficiary youth would not have been possible:

*“Many of them did not even know who the youth worker was. The whole situation fell upon us, and if we had not been active, we would not have been able to gather these young people” [YW]*

The amount of time allotted for theoretical preparation also had a significant impact on the implementation of the program. According to the youth workers who participated in the focus group

discussions, this number of days would be enough only for practitioner youth workers, and college representatives would not receive enough knowledge. According to them, this opinion was shared by the trainers:

*“There were several five-day meetings. For those who have worked with youth for years without certification and had experience, this was really enough. However, I think that this number of days and the course will not be enough for people who have not previously had such experience in non-formal education, and who have not worked with young people. We were also told about this, and the trainers also said this” [YW]*

After sending groups of 2-3 youth workers to their regions, they were tasked with conducting non-formal educational activities for local youth. The discussants noted that the requirement related to the number of beneficiary youth seemed excessive to most regions since it was impossible to mobilize 30 active young people against the backdrop of deserted villages:

*“The number of young people with whom we had to work to transfer the acquired competencies to us seemed somewhat excessive because working with a group of 30 people did not allow us to implement an individual approach targeting the particular young person. Some regions also had difficulty finding participants” [YW]*



**Mentorship** - Participants were to receive mentoring support through the Youth Workers Training Certification Program. According to the discussants, the mentors have been experienced youth workers selected by the program management team through purposive selection. Focus group discussion participants talked about the importance of mentorship. They believed that the effective implementation of the program largely depended on their involvement when they had to carry out activities on a tight schedule. They had no doubts about the qualifications of the mentors, but considered their participation, with rare exceptions, insufficient. Moreover, in some regions, the involvement of mentors did not happen at all due to the covid pandemic or a number of other reasons:

*“I had a double hard time because I had to be a youth worker, a teammate mentor and an intermediary between the Agency and the college. After all, we did not have a meeting with a mentor at all, except for a few minutes” [YW]*

*“Without the attention of the mentor, we were left with our competencies, because, apparently, they [program organizers] hoped that, thanks to our experience, we would cope with the work on our own” [YW]*

The former members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation also spoke about the importance of mentorship and its insufficiency. The program did not include actual mentorship, although Council members expected the program coordinators to oversee the content of the program and provide them with the information and support they needed. Unfortunately, for



the entire mandate of the Advisory Council of the first convocation, no one assumed this responsibility, so the members of the Council had to fill the information vacuum on their own:

*“For me, the program coordinator is the manager who will guide me through the content. We got the impression that these people were engaged only in solving technical issues. For example, they checked the condition of the microphone and the correct location of the inventory on the table. These were not the kind of people who would do quality work on the content part” [YC\_1]*

*“In this process [implementing the mandate of the Council], I did not see a person who would hold our hands and help us understand the mandate of the Council. Accordingly, there was a division of Council members into two wings” [YC\_1]*

The mentorship was also not included in the Million Fund Grant Competition, although representatives of grantee organizations counted on informational support from the Agency. In their opinion, the agency should have carried out professional consultations as actively as it monitored the activities of grantees. Grantees saw the need for consultation not only at the beginning but throughout the program. According to the grantees, the grant program was too rigid and demanding, and this was against the background of the fact that it was aimed at strengthening the newly established regional organizations:

*“I think a little flexibility and a gentle relationship are very important when dealing with less experienced organizations. This would play a big role in the successful implementation of the program. In the reports sent, if I made a minor typing mistake, for example, I wrote N instead of M, they sent it back, asked me to correct it and send it again” [MFG]*

Those youth workers participating in the Certification Program who received support from mentors, although they considered this support insufficient, used these meetings to increase the effectiveness of group dynamics:

*“The mentoring process was going a completely different way, but it was good that we listened to the opinions of each other, and then my teammates and I could come up with new ideas. Maybe there was no advice or support from a mentor, but there was support from each other because we listened to each other when we spoke on Zoom” [YW]*



**Involvement of Colleges** - According to participants of the Certification Program, the involvement of colleges was not as active as expected. From nominating candidates, and providing working spaces to post-program activities, colleges have failed to deliver on their commitments. All the discussants saw the problem in the vagueness of the terms of the contract, because of which the rights and obligations of the parties involved were not clearly defined:

*“The involvement of colleges should be spelt out in the contract in more detail so that their role is highlighted, and participants*

*are selected based on the results of the competition and not just on a handshake” [YW]*

*“Even though by memorandum committed itself [college] to finding support for us, there was no allocation of a workplace and no simple interest in our work” [YW]*

The lack of control over college involvement by the Youth Agency was also cited as a problem by youth workers. Most workers felt that the colleges themselves did not know why youth workers visited them. Consequently, they could not tell the young beneficiaries what they expected from them:

*“I think that the Agency should have been more involved in monitoring these processes and checking what kind of support we are getting. They [colleges] were not at all interested in what we were doing and why we were doing it” [YW]*

After the completion of the Certification Program, the continuation of work based on colleges was assessed positively, although this idea did not find practical implementation since, according to the discussants, fruitful cooperation between the Agency and colleges could not take place:

*“The approach that we, trained people, had to work on based on colleges, that is, to strengthen them through the introduction of new teaching methods, was very good for the sustainability of the program, but in our case, it did not work, because cooperation between the Agency and these colleges was not as close and fruitful as we expected” [YW]*

*“It would be good to have more involvement so that our work and the resources we have invested in working with these young people do not end so abruptly after the end of the program. After all, we all expected that this youth activity would continue based on the college. Unfortunately, this did not happen, so we were all heartbroken” [YW]*



**Access to Resources** - Participants of the Youth Workers Training Certification Program noted that information was initially disseminated on the provision of financial support necessary for the implementation of activities. However, during the program, they did not have direct access to finances, which caused significant difficulties in the work process, which the workers had to cope with on their resources:

*“From start to finish, everything was financially on us. We had to spend our own money along with our own time” [YW]*

*“Young people had activities that they wanted to do, but it became difficult financially. Very meagre funds were allocated*



*and only for a specific purpose, that is, we could not change their purpose” [YW]*

As part of the Certification Program, at the practical stage, work was required to be completed on a tight schedule, so there was a need for immediate access to financial resources. According to the youth workers, with finances, time was a problem not only in terms of getting money but also in terms of spending it. Most of the discussants noted that the period of use of the received funds became an important problem for them:

*“Yes, the money was allocated, but the processes were unorganized. We saved it until the end we wanted to spend it and could not spend it. Many failed to use it, and many returned. We also had to return the money” [YW]*

*“Due to the pandemic, when we left the implementation of activities to the end, we did not have the opportunity to spend money. It took time to get funding, so the only way out was to get the necessary material in advance, that is, without payment, from familiar companies. We did not even know when the time limit for spending money would expire” [YW]*

Restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic have proven to be a serious challenge. There was an opinion that the transition to the online space could not completely replace the physical space. At a time when it was possible to hold activities in the physical space, subject to certain rules, youth workers tried to make the most of this opportunity. When restrictions were placed on public transport, they started reimbursing taxi costs for beneficiary youth:

*“During the pandemic, I used my funds to bring these children from highland villages by taxi. When I shared this with the representatives of the Agency who came to the meeting, I received the answer that the main thing is that the project is carried out for the sake of the project. These words made me very angry. My motivation has dropped significantly. I thought I was working for nothing” [YW]*

The initial budget for the Certification Program did not include any contingencies, so participating youth workers covered the cost of moving the activities online. This cost included both the fee for the right to use the relevant online platforms and the financing of mobile internet for the beneficiary youth:

*“There were no contingencies in the budget, and when we decided to move online due to the pandemic, we were not allowed to help those young people who did not have the money to use mobile internet and attend our Zoom meetings” [YW]*

There were many significant difficulties with the transfer of activities online. In addition to paying for the Internet, an additional problem was the lack of appropriate devices that young people could use to connect to the Internet. Colleges did not have these devices that could be loaned to young people. The online space has also created a threat to inclusiveness. In particular, the situation

of persons with special needs could not be taken into account, since it was necessary to quickly adapt to the new reality, and the existing structure of the program was not ready for this:

*“The hearing-impaired youngster was physically unable to use the Zoom platform and was forced to leave because of this. We did not know how to attract young people with similar needs to digital platforms. We tried to mediate with the Agency but to no avail” [YW]*

According to youth workers, adjusting to the online space has been a long and painful process. Even if the technological means to access the Internet existed, having the appropriate digital skills remained a challenge. A number of online tools were used before the final choice settled on the Zoom platform. The problem of the lack of necessary digital skills was not only among the youth beneficiaries but also among the youth workers:

*“We used dozens of programs before we settled on Zoom. The organizers [the Agency] bought a Zoom package, and we all used it. The biggest challenge was raising awareness among young people about the correct use of their functions. Neither they nor we knew how to use it” [YW]*

## Benefits of Participation in the Program



**Professional Network** - All FGDs participants cited the opportunity to build professional connections as their biggest benefit. For example, youth workers say that by participating in the Certification Program they were able to gather qualified and reliable people from all over the country, and they continue to support each other to this day:

*“The network that was created through this program was important. We support each other to this day. We have groups on social networks, and we actively share relevant information” [YW]*

*“Although our organization has been working in the youth field for many years, we know many people, and many people know us. Thanks to this program [Million Fund Grant Competition], youth organizations got to know each other even better. We have created an effective network for the exchange of experience, contacts and information” [MFG]*



**Professional Development** - Despite the many challenges that arose during the implementation stages of the programs, the majority of participants, thanks to their own work, were able to develop their competencies:

*“We worked on strategic documents. This was our first experience of working on official policy documents, and no one helped us in this regard. For those who were interested in the issue, we began to search for information on our own. I found this to be a very useful issue. Consequently, this prompted me to go deeper into strategic and policy documents” [YC\_1]*

Some found their calling thanks to these programs and decided to stay in the youth field and build a professional career:

*“Today I am actively working in the youth field; I consider this a merit of this course [Certification Program]. I have worked with youth before, but this program has made my work more formalized and organized. Now I am getting much better results than before” [YW]*

Completion of the Certification Program, that is, obtaining professional recognition, did not affect the financial situation of any of the youth workers. Despite increased awareness of the profession in society, certified youth workers were not involved in economic activities. In their opinion, the best solution would be the employment of certified youth workers at the municipal level. Otherwise, there is a risk that the outcomes of the program will not be sustainable, that is, those people who are now working on their enthusiasm may leave the field:

*“Financially, nothing has changed. We are still working with our resources. Popularization [of the field] has its advantages, but nothing tangible. I think certified workers should be hired by government agencies to better serve the community. Working with youth requires certain skills, and this has always been a problem in government institutions” [YW]*

## Sustainability of Program Outcomes



**Sustainable Outcome** - In the case of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation, only one participant noted that the work on the Council had yielded sustainable outcomes. According to this person, membership in the Council was the reason that the organization became the main partner of the office of the mayor in the development of a strategic document in the municipality:

*“A strategy document has been written in my municipality. Through my participation in the Council, my organization has become a key partner in this process. I can say with confidence that we, the members of the Council, were the people who gave the office of the mayor the motivation and strength to somehow finalize this strategic document” [YC\_1]*

There will be nothing surprising if we say that, in terms of the sustainability of the program outcomes, the projects financed under the Million Fund Grant Competition turned out to be the most sustainable, since they had the most resources for this:

*“The organization created under the program has independently received several grants and is still operating. However, I cannot say that these young people have a workplace thanks to the Agency because we tried to force the municipality to fulfil its obligations” [MFG]*

*“This program [Million Fund Grant Competition] allowed us to work simultaneously in all municipalities of the region. We trained young people who then formed initiative groups in their municipalities and received small grants based on their needs. They are still actively involved in youth activities. Whether in cooperation with the municipality or other organizations” [MFG]*

*“Our space is operating actively. We have support from the municipality, which means providing a free workplace. We have about 500 unique visitors per month. We also have 40 people who are involved in the daily activities of the organization. We are working so that in 2 years it will become independent. I believe that the project is sustainable and complete” [MFG]*



**Unsustainable Outcome** - Former members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation considered it superfluous to talk about the sustainability of the program outcomes. Despite the selfless work of the active part of the Council, it was not possible to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes, nor to fully fulfil the mandate of the Council. Heartbroken former members of the Council noted that, despite the disproportionate amount of volunteer work, they did not feel at all that their work had any value, that is, their voices were heard.

*We wanted to create an institutional memory. As part of the second convocation, when new people came, we wanted to share with them the experience of solving the problems we encountered. However, it did not work out because we left [the Council]” [YC\_1]*

*“I never had the feeling that our work yields any significant results. We held meetings and gave recommendations and feedback, but in the end, I never felt that our work was visible. The last straw was the merger of the Agency with the ministry in such a way that we find out about it from the news. However, with such an attitude, the Council would still be dissolved ahead of schedule” [YC\_1]*

There have been mixed outcomes since the completion of the Certification Program. The youth club was created more or less based on all involved colleges, although in most cases, after the

end of the program, the clubs also ceased their activities. There were rare exceptions where beneficiary youth remained in the youth clubs established under the program. However, this was only due to another program or organisation and not to a systemic institutional approach that would ensure that youth clubs remain sustainable through their activities:

*“These processes [non-formal educational activities] continued with us. The club created under the program continued its work. The program ended, but the children remained. Now another organization has started a similar project and the activity has continued in the same way” YW]*

*“Where it has continued [activities of youth clubs], it is a different project than the desire of the college or the state to hold youth activities in colleges. This is not a systematic approach; It mainly depends on individual decisions on whether non-formal education activities will continue or not” [YW]*

According to the participants of the Certification Program, during the presentation of the program in colleges, the idea of creating full-time positions for youth workers in colleges was voiced, that is, a trained worker would continue to work in the college. However, after that, this issue was completely ignored. After completing the Certification Program, there were no certified youth workers employed by the colleges:

*“The idea that youth work would continue based on colleges, that is, it would be continuous and sustainable, could not or was not implemented. No effect, today this person [college representative] is no longer a youth worker” [YW]*

As part of the program, youth workers were involved voluntarily. They selflessly gave their financial and other resources for the successful implementation of the program and the implementation of beneficial social changes through the example of the youth beneficiaries. After the end of the program, their fate is still unclear. Until now, youth activities were carried out without official recognition and financial reward, now with recognition, but without the corresponding material benefits. This situation creates a significant risk that certified youth workers may leave the field and seek employment opportunities elsewhere:

*“If a full-time position came up, I would leave my current job and devote myself entirely to this area, but I can not volunteer all the time. The Agency must have a financial incentive to ensure sustainability so that the trained person actually stays in the field” [YW]*

All youth workers are heartbroken that after working so hard on their own, they have to see their work disappear. In terms of ensuring the sustainability of the program outcomes, in addition to the Agency, they also impose an important responsibility on the municipalities. According to the youth workers, not only after the end of the program but also during the program, their involvement was minimal or non-existent:

*“At the municipality, I worked in a tiny room next to the public health centre. It was at a time when the Covid pandemic was in full swing, so I had to look for different places. If the weather was favourable, outdoor activities were organized. My case was unusual, and I got the impression that even the representatives of the Agency did not know where I was sent” [YW]*

*“Even though strengthening the role of the youth worker is written in the strategy of the municipality, it is not implemented in any context. To this day, we are fighting for the municipalities to do something so that all the work does not pass only to us. However, two years have passed, and there is still no support from them” [YW]*

Not all the outcomes of the projects financed within the Million Fund Grant Competition turned out to be sustainable. According to one of the grantees, their needs were ignored by the municipality, and the Youth Agency, instead of finding support, limited itself to requests for interim reports:

*“I contact the municipality with a request to allocate a workplace. I will be called to a meeting, and then my request will be sent to another agency and I will go there for the meeting. They listen, but there is no result, I do not have even the slightest support. I have been completely turned away from the municipality, and the Agency only requires reports from me. I did not even get mediation from them” [MFG]*

## Attitudes towards the Performance of the Youth Agency



**Positive Attitude** - The establishment of the Youth Agency as an independent body is assessed positively by all discussants. It was said that with its creation there was a bright spot, the hope that more attention would be paid to the youth field. The Youth Workers Training Certification Program, the Youth Advisory Council, the Million Fund Grant Competition, the Mobile Youth Workers Training Program and the development of the municipal youth policies as initiatives were positively assessed and identified as very important for the area. The official recognition and awareness of youth work are considered to be the greatest achievement:

*“I feel there is a lot of change going on in terms of the recognition and implementation of youth work. The municipalities where I work at least know the term [youth worker] and do not look at me like I am a weirdo” [YW]*

According to former members of the Advisory Council of the first convocation, due to the merger of institutions, which led to the creation of a Youth Agency, it was possible to reduce bureaucracy and significantly save budget funds. The youth field became more visible, and the



development of youth policy, that is, the activities in the Agency, was carried out by people well-versed in this field.

Representatives of grantee organizations expressed their deep gratitude to the Youth Agency for the Million Fund Grant Competition. They said that such support is vital to building the capacity of the newly-established regional organizations, so everyone was grateful:

*“I was full of optimism. I saw that something is still happening without nepotism. It turns out that, based on my work, something can work out. So disinterestedly, just because I wrote a good project, I can be appreciated. It was very good which boosted my confidence even more” [MFG]*



**Negative Attitude** - Participants of the Million Fund Grant Competition gave a sharply negative assessment of the administrative part of the program. This caused negative attitudes towards the performance of the Youth Agency:

*“Our organization is inexperienced. All the donors with whom we have worked so far have not criticized us, but helped us, so such a rigid approach seems a bit strange to me. We were so worried that we swore we would never have a project like this again. Reports were returning to us even on small nuances. When we were called on the reports the Agency staff even spoke a little aggressively” [MFG]*

*“There were definitely moments of rudeness, criticism, and raising the voice. To me, it was not professional. I really lacked professionalism on their [Agency representatives] part” [MFG]*

*“It would be nice if, in addition to the request to provide reports within two years, we received support from the Agency. For example, how we receive from other organizations. They are following us to the end. They teach us everything from completing the application to submitting the final report. We did not receive such support from the Agency” [MFG]*

The Agency was criticized by the participants of the Million Fund Grant Competition for the duty of official representatives of grantee organizations to personally come to Tbilisi. While the grant program was aimed at strengthening regional organizations, the requirement that grantees come to the capital to sign official documents was considered irrelevant:

*“Organizations working in the regions are much oppressed. Absolutely everything is happening in Tbilisi, and because of each signature, we are required to run there. I have always objected to this because, to me, it is very inconvenient. I think that in the 21st century, it was possible to solve this problem differently” [MFG]*

Former members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation first learned about the merger of the Youth Agency with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth from the news. Regardless of their rank, they did not receive any information from representatives of the Agency. It was feared that the sudden merger of the Agency with the ministry would be detrimental to the youth field because no consultations were held with representatives of the youth sector, that is, those who have been asking for and participating in the establishment of the Youth Agency for years. Members of the Council tried to figure out the issue of the merger on their own, but these efforts were not enough. Most of the members were finally convinced of the futility of participating in the process and left<sup>9</sup> the council:

*“When the reorganization of the Agency and the merger with the ministry happened in such a way that we found out about it quite by accident from the news, it was an indication that we were not important at all” [YC\_1]*

*“I remember the article was written with the title “They did not ask the Advisory Council for advice.” This was the last straw. If not for this, many of the other members would have thought about it and would not have made this decision [leaving the Council], but the situation became so ridiculous that it was worthless” [YC\_1]*

According to the members of the Council of the first convocation, they made the right decision when they left the Council because, with its attitude, the Youth Agency has lost the legitimacy to speak and act on behalf of the youth sector, and everything negative that they expected after the merger has already happened:

*“Even employees [of the Agency] did not know about the merger decision. There was no one in the ministry who was familiar with the youth field. It is very difficult to imagine a lawyer who has never been in contact with young people as the head of the department. The reason for our leaving was that the Agency lost all legitimacy because of all this and only increased the bureaucracy” [YC\_1]*

*“What we were afraid of and said when leaving [the Council], in my opinion, has already happened and ended in the Agency” [YC\_1]*

Apart from the issue of the merger with the Ministry, the Agency received the most negative attitude due to the Youth Advisory Council of the second convocation. The whole process, from the recruitment of participants to further work, was highly questionable since all these issues were non-transparent and hidden:

*“The worst thing that could happen to the Agency was a competition to recruit members of the Youth Advisory Council of*

<sup>9</sup> 18 out of 23 Members Left the Youth Advisory Council of the Youth Agency. March 19, 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3GbgzV9> (last accessed: October 3, 2022).



*the second convocation. We [my friends and I] applied. When we asked for scoring, we saw what they were doing. I would like the identified harmful practices to be changed and make the activities more transparent and objective” [YW]*

According to all discussants, the structural changes carried out in the Agency, caused by the merger with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, had a negative impact on the youth sector. There were fears that the Agency was no longer as active as it was when it was an independent body. The biggest dissatisfaction was the sudden termination of the second call of the Million Fund Grant Competition without any feedback or justification. Those, who submitted applications, could not understand why the process, leading to the signing of contracts with the winners, was stopped:

*“We submitted applications, and suddenly it turned out that after the selection and everything else, the Ministry simply did not sign the order to pay money to the winners” [YW]*

After the merger of the Agency with the Ministry, the communication strategy with people interested in the youth field has also changed. The performance of the Agency became non-transparent and hidden. According to the discussants, they have no idea what is happening in the Agency now and what to expect from them in the future. Perhaps the negative expectations that all the discussants had were due to this feeling of uncertainty:

*“What kind of transparency are we talking about?! We do not know what is happening and what the plans of the Agency are. Communication with youth, youth workers and other people working in the field has been completely cut off” [YW]*

*“If there is still something good in it [Agency], it is because of inertia. The bureaucracy has become more rigid. Transparency and the involvement of persons interested in the youth field have decreased. An indication of this is that all attempts to conduct focus group discussions with the existing [the second convocation] Advisory Council have ended in vain. This would not have happened in our time. Moreover, Council members may have been critical of the Agency. It was open then [before the merger with the ministry], closed now” [YC\_1]*

*“I do not like the processes taking place now in the Agency. Because of this, I will not continue to cooperate with them at any cost. I said that at the beginning, everything started very well [by the Agency]; it was an unprecedented case of cooperation between public authorities and the non-governmental sector with the financial support of the European Union. Then everything collapsed on us. First, there was the forced dismissal of the director, and then other employees left. All the pillars on which the youth field rested have completely disappeared” [YW]*

## Conclusion

Interim Monitoring of the Three-Year Reform of the Youth Agency focused on studying the three major programs of the Three-Year Reform in terms of quality and sustainability: (a) the Youth Workers Training Certification Program; (b) the Youth Advisory Council (first and second convocations), and (c) the Million Fund Grant Competition. Even though it was impossible to assess the performance of the Agency based on its reports since it did not comply with the request for the provision of certain public information, the assessments made by FGDs participants at the stages of recruitment and implementation of targeted programs, the benefits received, the sustainability of the outcomes and the existing attitudes to the performance of the Youth Agency provides a deep understanding. All participants of the FGDs noted that information about the programs was disseminated actively enough to make interested parties aware of them. For all three programs, the recruitment process was rated as fair by all discussants. According to discussants participating in the Certification Program, the involvement of colleges was not as active as expected, and working with representatives of colleges was a big challenge since the latter did not have the appropriate qualifications. The former members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation believed that successful group dynamics could not be created because the members had different understandings of the statute of the Council. Participants of all three thematic FGDs noted their disappointment with mentorship, that is, the provision of informational support by the organizers, which was not organized at all or was carried out insufficiently. All participants considered the opportunity to create professional connections to be the biggest gain. Despite the many challenges that arose during the implementation stages of the programs, the majority of participants, thanks to their own work, were able to develop their competencies. The projects financed under the Million Fund Grant Competition turned out to be the most sustainable. On the other hand, former members of the Youth Advisory Council of the first convocation considered it superfluous to talk about the sustainability of the program outcomes, and certified youth workers remain in the youth field thanks to their resources and enthusiasm. The creation of the Youth Agency as an independent body was positively assessed by absolutely all participants. It was said that with its creation there was a bright spot, the hope that more attention would be paid to the youth field. The structural changes implemented in the Agency, caused by the merger with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth had a negative impact on the youth field. According to them, they felt like the youth sector has stopped, frozen in one place. Apart from the issue of the merger with the Ministry, the Agency received the most negative attitude due to the Youth Advisory Council of the second convocation because the whole process, from the recruitment of participants to further work, was highly questionable since all these issues were non-transparent and hidden. After the merger of the Agency with the Ministry, the communication strategy with people interested in the youth field has also changed. The performance of the Agency became non-transparent and hidden. All discussants express the hope that the Youth Agency will become as active as before and that the youth sector will revive again, but none of them can make an encouraging forecast.

## Recommendations

Based on the information analyzed within the study, the following recommendations can be developed to improve the quality of performance of the Youth Agency:

- Ensure proactive disclosure of public information related to its performance;
- Ensure the issuance of public information related to its performance within the time limits established by law;
- Ensure active, open and two-way communication with parties interested in the youth field, including its beneficiaries;
- Ensure the same pace of development of the youth field as before the merger with the Ministry;
- Ensure the intensification of cooperation with local municipalities on youth issues;
- Ensure the intensification of cooperation with international donor organizations on youth issues;
- Ensure the mobilization of financial and other resources needed for the development of the youth field;
- Ensure advanced training for its employees.





