

Comparative Analysis of Youth Policy in Azerbaijan and Turkey at the Contemporary Stage: Governance and Legislation

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15421/172579>**Yusifli Khalil**Ph.D., Doctoral Student, <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4195-4800>, yusiflixalil1@gmail.com*Ganja State University (Ganja, Azerbaijan)***Abstract.**

Out of the 198 countries in the world, 122 implement independent youth policies, taking into account the demographic characteristics of their populations as well as their political, economic, and social contexts. Considered one of the important directions of social policy, youth policy is aimed at facilitating the integration and social adaptation of young people into society, as well as developing their potential to ensure active participation in the country's socio-economic and cultural life.

Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey, allied states with long-standing close friendship and strategic cooperation, have developed and consistently implemented their own distinct youth policy strategies as countries where youth constitute a significant and active segment of the population. In both countries, youth policy is regulated within the framework of national legislation and international commitments and is carried out through collaboration with various state institutions, public organizations, and international partners.

This article analyzes the youth policies of Azerbaijan and Turkey from a political science perspective, comparatively examining their administrative structures, legal and regulatory frameworks, and institutional mechanisms. It also examines the activities of the main actors in youth policy, namely state institutions and non-governmental youth organizations. The analysis identifies the similarities and differences in the youth policies of the two countries; while some of these features can be regarded as positive experiences, others require improvement. Furthermore, the article highlights areas where both countries can benefit from each other's successful experiences and emphasizes the importance of further expanding bilateral cooperation in this field.

Keywords: State Policies, Social Policy, Youth Policy, Youth organizations, Legislation, Azerbaijan, Türkiye

Порівняльний аналіз молодіжної політики в Азербайджані та Туреччині на сучасному етапі: управління та законодавство

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Із 198 країн світу 122 реалізують незалежну молодіжну політику, враховуючи демографічні характеристики свого населення, а також політичний, економічний та соціальний контекст. Молодіжна політика, яка вважається одним із важливих напрямів соціальної політики, спрямована на інтеграцію та соціальну адаптацію молоді в суспільстві, а також на розвиток їхнього потенціалу з метою забезпечення активної участі в соціально-економічному та культурному житті країни.

Азербайджан та Турецька Республіка, союзні держави з багаторічними тісними дружніми та стратегічними відносинами, розробили й послідовно реалізують власні особливі стратегії молодіжної політики як країни, де молодь становить значну й активну частину населення. В обох країнах молодіжна політика регулюється в межах національного законодавства та міжнародних зобов'язань і здійснюється у співпраці з різними державними установами, громадськими організаціями та міжнародними партнерами.

У статті здійснено аналіз молодіжної політики Азербайджану та Туреччини з політичної точки зору, проведено порівняльний розгляд їхніх адміністративних структур, нормативно-правових баз і інституційних механізмів. Окрему увагу приділено діяльності основних акторів молодіжної політики, а саме державних установ і недержавних молодіжних організацій. Аналіз виявляє подібності та відмінності у молодіжній політиці двох країн; деякі з цих характеристик можуть розглядатися як позитивний досвід, інші ж потребують удосконалення. Крім того, у статті підкреслено напрями, де обидві країни можуть скористатися успішним досвідом одна одної, а також наголошено на важливості подальшого розширення двостороннього співробітництва у цій сфері.

Ключові слова: державна політика, соціальна політика, молодіжна політика, молодіжні організації, законодавство, Азербайджан, Туреччина

Introduction.

Young people have always emerged as the dynamic, innovative, and fundamental driving force of society. They represent the demographic group that plays the most important role in the social life of the country, its economic development, and the maintenance of order and security. On this basis, it can be stated that the evolution of society and its material and cultural progress are directly dependent on the young generation.

In the scientific literature and legislation, there is no common age range or definition regarding the youth period. The World Health Organization defines youth as the 15–24 age group (WHO, 2014), while the United Nations extends this range to 15 – 29 (United Nations, 2018). Countries determine the youth age range in accordance with their social, economic, and cultural structures, the policies they implement, and their population size. In some countries, however, there is no general law defining the youth age range. Youth represent the transition stage from childhood to adulthood, during which biological, psychological, and sociological development occurs simultaneously. This period is defined as a stage in which personality is shaped and social roles and responsibilities begin to become clear, or as the phase in life when young people are expected to move from education and vocational preparation to full-time employment and to establish their own families, thereby forming an independent lifestyle (Erikson, 1968; Barry, 2005, p. 81).

According to the United Nations, there are currently 1.2 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24, accounting for 16% of the world's population. By 2030, the number of young people is projected to increase by 7%, reaching approximately 1.3 billion (United Nations, n.d.). Despite the positive aspects of globalization, which today creates new opportunities, allows for the expansion of financial markets, the development of technologies, and the increase of scientific and technical knowledge, certain problems have also emerged that closely affect young people. Among these problems are adaptation to new realities, socialization, inequalities and discrimination in many fields, and particularly unemployment. The identification of solutions to these problems and the effective utilization of the potential of young people depend on the national youth policy implemented by the state.

Youth policy, as an important component of social policy, is one of the fundamental political orientations of the state. Therefore, the level at which youth policy is implemented depends on the state's attitude toward the social sphere. This policy aims to transform young people into active members of society, to ensure their integration and adaptation, while at the same time serving as an indispensable element for the realization of their skills (Algun Dogu & Yetim, 2016, p. 807). The state is the main actor of youth policy; this is due to the responsibilities it undertakes and its conception of

the social state. In modern countries, state youth policy essentially consists of strategies and implementation mechanisms that provide the environment and opportunities for young people to successfully participate in society and to use their potential effectively in line with state interests. When young people are considered a special category as one of the state's strategic resources, it becomes necessary to determine the implementation of a specific policy concerning youth as a priority area of the state (Cafarov, 2008, p. 48).

As of April 2014, according to available data, 122 out of 198 countries (62%) have a youth policy. In 37 countries (19%), existing state youth policies are being reviewed, or drafts of new youth policies are being prepared. Meanwhile, 31 states (approximately 16%) do not have their own youth policy (ILO, 2013, p. 14).

In developed countries, the elderly population is gradually increasing, while the number of young people is naturally declining. In developing countries, however, the youth population is rapidly growing (Cetinturk & Kucuk, 2019, p. 264). Azerbaijan and Turkey, as allied states, are among the developing countries, and in both cases, the proportion of young people within the population is significantly high. Therefore, the proper guidance of youth plays a fundamental role in ensuring the welfare of society and future generations; this can only be achieved through youth policy. In the contemporary period, Azerbaijan and Turkey implement their youth policies by taking into account their young populations and in accordance with their history, traditions, and socio-political and socio-economic conditions.

Methodology. The article, as a qualitative study, adopts an inquisitive and interpretative approach to the examined problem and aims to understand phenomena within their natural context. In the study, the youth policies of Azerbaijan and Turkey were analyzed from a political science perspective; the relevant legal regulations, normative-legal foundations, and institutional structures regarding youth policies of both countries were examined. The data were collected using the document analysis method and evaluated through comparative analysis. In the article, academic literature from Azerbaijan, such as the books of Hamza Cafarov on Azerbaijani Youth Policy, various articles from Turkey, as well as relevant legislative documents from both countries were applied.

The purpose of the research. The main aim of the article is to comprehensively identify the similarities and differences in the youth policies implemented by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the policies and programs applied by both countries in the field of youth. In addition, the article aims to demonstrate how both countries can benefit from each other's experiences and successful examples in youth policy. The purpose also includes evaluating the effectiveness of state strategies directed toward youth and presenting practical recommendations that can be applied to enhance the social integration and development

opportunities of young people. In this way, it will be possible to achieve scientifically grounded and practically oriented results for the development and optimization of youth policy in both Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The Main Material.

Azerbaijan and Turkey are among the countries with a young population. According to the statistics announced by the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2024, out of a total population of 10,180,800, 2,301,500 are young people, constituting 22.6% of the population. Based on the 2024 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), Turkey's total population is 85,664,944, of which 12,763,159 are young people, corresponding to approximately 14.9% of the total population. It should be noted that the proportion of youth in these countries is higher compared to the member states of the European Union, and this significant youth share further increases the importance of implementing effective youth policies (Statistical Committee, 2024; TUIK, 2024).

When analyzing the youth policies of Azerbaijan and Turkey, it is essential to first consider both the state administrative structures and the non-governmental organizations operating in this field.

Within the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Department of Youth Policy and Sports Affairs operates, ensuring the coordinated implementation of youth policy in the country (Talibli, 2023, p. 4). Additionally, within the National Assembly of the Republic of Azerbaijan, there is the Committee on Youth and Sports. This committee serves as a leading body in the drafting of laws and decisions related to the formulation and implementation of state policy in the fields of youth and sports (National Assembly of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025).

In Azerbaijan, the main state institution responsible for the implementation of youth policy was transferred to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, established on July 26, 1994, by the decree of National Leader Heydar Aliyev and the decision of the National Assembly. The establishment of this ministry, which aims to promote the development of young people and their integration into society, represents one of the first steps taken in the field of youth policy. Since 1994, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has been the main implementing body of numerous decrees and state programs related to youth policy. In addition, various state institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Communications and High Technologies, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as local government bodies, also play an important role in the implementation of youth policy.

One of the state institutions playing an important role in the implementation of youth policy in different regions of the country, especially in rural areas, is the Youth Houses. Under the Ministry of Youth and Sports,

approximately 30 Youth Houses have been opened in various cities and districts of the republic to promote the health of the young generation and organize their leisure time. These centers were established to inform and guide young people on various issues, as well as to provide social support. Youth centers operate in different regions of the country, such as Aghstafa, Astara, Balakan, Binaqadi, Goygol, Lankaran, Nakhchivan, Sabunchu, Shamkir, Ganja, Baku, and other cities of Azerbaijan (Cafarov & Imamaliyev, 2012, p. 110).

Youth organizations are one of the main priorities of state youth policy, and their existence emphasizes the importance of youth participation in the development of civil society. Currently, in Azerbaijan, more than 300 youth organizations are registered with the Ministry of Justice. The objectives and activities of these organizations include the integration of youth into the European area, addressing the problems of young people in various regions of the country, international cooperation with other youth organizations, participation in diaspora and lobbying activities, protection of human rights and freedoms among youth, encouraging young people in solving social issues, and initiating other projects (Cafarov & Imamaliyev, 2012, p. 100).

To coordinate the activities of youth organizations, provide an environment for their development, support the national, regional, and international interests of member organizations, and conduct joint work in solving youth problems and protecting their rights, the National Council of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, one of the leading youth organizations in Azerbaijan, was established on November 21, 1995, by 11 youth organizations. The National Council serves as the only confederative structure and the central coordination and cooperation body for the country's youth and youth organizations, organizing and ensuring their international integration. The National Council has made significant contributions to Azerbaijan's accession to the Council of Europe, and as a result of these efforts, several youth organizations gained the right to be represented in international organizations. For example, the Azerbaijan Scout Association was accepted into the World Organization of the Scout Movement, the Union of Young Lawyers into the International Association of Young Lawyers, the Azerbaijan Democratic Student Youth Movement into the European Democratic Students Union, and the World Union of Young Turkish Writers into the World Turkish Youth Union, among others (Cafarov, 2009, p. 391; National Council of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025).

When youth policy in Turkey is examined in the context of public services and the sociological characteristics of young people, it can be said that youth policy possesses a multidimensional and multi-actor set of policy implementation tools. The examination and discussion of laws and draft bills related to youth and youth policy in Turkey are carried out by the National

Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports Commission within the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Today, the primary implementing body of youth policy is the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkey. The ministry was first established in 1938; however, for many years it operated under different names and within various government structures. Since 2011, it has been restructured and has continued its activities independently (Yaman, 2021, pp. 58-59). In addition to the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkey, the implementation of youth policy also involves other state institutions, such as the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, as well as civil society organizations, including the Türkiye Education Volunteers Foundation and the Community Volunteers Foundation.

The Youth Centers and Youth Offices established in many cities and regions of the country aim to support the all-round development of young people and to ensure their integration and adaptation into society. As of September 2024, youth services are provided at 508 youth centers and 361 youth offices, with a total of 21,746,778 young people participating in the organized activities. Through these centers, young people can access a wide range of activities according to their needs (Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2024; Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkey, 2023).

At the regional level, the main implementing institution of youth policy is the municipalities. Municipalities are the primary local government bodies with the potential to more accurately identify the problems of young people in the areas where they operate. Article 14 of Municipality Law No. 5393 includes provisions related to youth, stating that "Municipalities shall carry out and commission youth and sports services." According to this article, municipalities are authorized, provided that these services meet local common needs, to offer services such as establishing student dormitories for youth, providing vocational and skill training, supplying sports equipment to encourage youth participation in sports, and offering educational support (Republic of Turkey, 2005, Art. 14).

It can be said that the management structures of youth policy in both countries are largely similar. In both Azerbaijan and Turkey, there are commissions within the legislative bodies that review and provide opinions on laws and draft bills related to youth policy. In addition, both countries have a Ministry of Youth and Sports specifically focused on youth policy, and several other ministries coordinate their activities in this field. Furthermore, the Youth Houses in Azerbaijan and the Youth Centers in Turkey are essentially equivalent institutions. All of these factors demonstrate the similarities in the state administrative structures.

However, some differences also exist, primarily regarding the activities of municipalities. In Azerbaijan, the municipal system is not yet sufficiently developed,

and the absence of youth-oriented services somewhat negatively affects the effectiveness of youth policy at the regional level. By taking the youth-oriented municipal services in Turkey as an example, similar practices could be implemented in Azerbaijan, positively contributing to the social and individual development of young people.

Regarding youth organizations, Azerbaijan's experience shows certain advantages. In particular, the National Council of Youth Organizations was established to coordinate youth organizations. In Turkey, this function is carried out by the Directorate of Youth Services under the Ministry of Youth and Sports (Yaman, 2021, s. 58-59).

From a political perspective, one of the main mechanisms for implementing youth policy is the adoption of legal acts aimed at young people. Between 1996 and 2003, significant efforts were undertaken in Azerbaijan to develop the normative and legal foundations of youth policy. During this period, a number of legislative acts and state programs were adopted with the aim of fostering the physical, spiritual, and moral development of young people, strengthening their patriotic education, as well as accelerating the resolution of their social and economic problems. These include the Presidential Decree "On State Support for Young Talents in Azerbaijan," the Presidential Order "On the Establishment of Special Scholarships for Young Talents," and the state programs "Young Families" and "On Enhancing Patriotism and Citizenship among Youth" (Cafarov, 2009, p. 370).

The most significant and comprehensive legal document adopted in the field of youth policy is the Law "On State Youth Policy," enacted on April 9, 2002. This law, consisting of 3 chapters and 14 articles, defines the fundamental objectives, principles, and organizational-legal foundations of youth policy in Azerbaijan, while also regulating the relations arising in this domain. According to the law, "Youth policy represents a system of measures implemented by the state aimed at creating socio-political, socio-economic, and organizational-legal conditions and guarantees to ensure the comprehensive development of young people and their active participation in social life" (Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2002).

Since 2005, the implementation of youth policy in Azerbaijan has been particularly characterized by the adoption of state programs specifically targeting young people, under the title "Azerbaijani Youth". To date, three such programs have been enacted. The first "Azerbaijani Youth" state program covered the years 2005–2009, followed by the second program for 2011–2015, and, most recently, the third program for 2017–2021. Each successive program was designed with more comprehensive and advanced content compared to its predecessor, thereby aiming to enhance the overall effectiveness of youth policy.

The primary objectives of these state programs are to ensure the more effective implementation of youth policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan; to enable the active participation of young people in all spheres

of society; to support the realization of their creative and innovative potential; to safeguard the health of the younger generation; to prioritize issues of education and employment for youth; to promote the effective use of modern information and communication technologies; and to foster the development of the volunteer movement throughout the country (Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2017).

One of the longest-term legal frameworks adopted in the field of youth policy is the “Azerbaijani Youth Development Strategy for 2015–2025”, which was approved by Presidential Decree on January 26, 2015. The primary objective of this strategy is to develop the potential of the young generation in accordance with modern requirements, to ensure the effective use of this potential for the country’s future development, and to foster a sense of active citizenship among youth over a ten-year period. The Development Strategy covers target groups defined as youth and young families. Moreover, in order to establish a comprehensive approach toward different social groups of youth, the strategy identifies a range of categories, including young scholars and researchers, youth studying and working abroad, those performing military service, young athletes, and unemployed youth (Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2015).

In Turkey, youth policy was first addressed in legal acts through Article 58 of the 1982 Constitution. The Constitution states:

"The State shall take measures to ensure the education and development of young people, entrusted with the independence and Republic of Turkey, in the light of positive science, in accordance with the principles and reforms of Atatürk, and against ideas aiming to undermine the indivisible integrity of the State with its country and nation. The State shall take the necessary measures to protect youth from alcohol addiction, narcotic substances, delinquency, gambling and similar harmful habits, and ignorance" (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, Art. 58).

In 2013, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkey prepared the National Youth and Sports Policy Document, which was published in the Official Gazette. The document was designed to define the concept of youth and to establish the fundamental goals, principles, values, and policy areas of youth policy. In the document, the concept of youth is addressed not in biological terms but within a sociological framework. Furthermore, considering the national context, individuals aged 14–29 were identified as the target group for youth policies. This document, which outlines the developmental directions of youth policy in the country, defines youth policy not only as a matter concerning young people but also as a social variable and determining factor connecting families, institutions, and all members of society. Youth policy is described in the document as follows:

"National youth policies are an indispensable

element for ensuring that young people participate as active individuals in all areas of social structure and for developing their skills and talents. Moreover, youth policies constitute a set of instruments that protect young people from exploitation and neglect" (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2012, p. 5).

In Turkey, issues related to youth policy have been addressed within the Five-Year Development Plans and the annual programs of the Presidency. The country’s development plans are documents that outline goals, policies, and strategies aimed at contributing to the economic, social, and cultural development of Turkey. These plans are implemented over a specific period (five years) with the objective of accelerating national development and formulating corresponding policies. The first development plan was implemented between 1963 and 1967. Over time, due to changes in Turkey’s economic, social, and cultural structure, the plans have focused on different areas (Akay, 2023, p. 1282). To date, twelve Five-Year Development Plans have been adopted. From the Fifth Development Plan onward, the topic of “youth” has been explicitly included in these documents, defining the state’s tasks, responsibilities, and the measures to be implemented in relation to national youth policy.

In the annual programs of the Presidency, under the headings “Children and Youth” or simply “Youth,” the current state of youth policy in the country, the defined goals and objectives, and the policies and measures planned for implementation are presented. These programs highlight key issues faced by young people, including access to education, poverty, involvement in crime, internet addiction, smoking, alcohol and substance abuse, as well as regional inequalities. The 2025 Presidential Annual Program emphasizes that the fundamental goal is to ensure that young people develop strong life skills, gain access to education and employment opportunities, cultivate humanitarian and national values, and actively participate in economic and social life and decision-making processes (Strategy and Budget Directorate, 2024). These programs, adopted annually, are prepared in alignment with the youth policy directions outlined in the Five-Year Development Plans. Consequently, it can be concluded that the Five-Year Development Plans and the Presidential programs serve as higher normative instruments that ensure the continuous implementation of youth policy.

When examining the youth policies of Azerbaijan and Turkey in terms of legislation, significant differences can be observed. In Azerbaijan, the legal framework for youth-oriented policy is relatively more developed. In particular, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On State Youth Policy” is considered the primary normative document in this field. Additionally, there are specific documents targeting youth, such as the “Azerbaijan Youth” state programs and the “Development Strategy of Azerbaijani Youth for 2015–2025.” In contrast, the

legal foundations of youth policy in Turkey are relatively weak. Although the “National Youth and Sports Policy Document” is conceptually aligned with the Azerbaijani law “On State Youth Policy,” it is not recognized as formal legislation. In Turkey, the main orientations regarding youth and youth policy are primarily found in the Five-Year Development Plans and the Presidential Annual Programs. However, these programs do not specifically focus on youth or youth policy.

The weak legal normative framework in Turkey creates certain negative effects. For example, although the “National Youth and Sports Policy” document defines youth as individuals aged 14–29, some state institutions, such as TÜİK, define this age range as 15–24. The absence of a common approach to the concept of youth in the country causes confusion in the implementation of youth policy and in research conducted in this field.

Conclusions.

In global practice, each country implements its own unique youth policy, resulting in the emergence of various approaches and models in this field. Among these models, two main approaches are particularly noteworthy. The first is the American liberal model, in which the state’s direct intervention in the social sphere is minimal and usually indirect, relying on the active role of civil society organizations, the private sector, and local communities. The second is the European model, in which the state plays an active role in addressing social problems, including youth policy, and guarantees the welfare state concept through the constitution. Based on the similarities of Azerbaijan and Turkey mentioned above, it can be stated that both countries implement a

youth policy aligned with the European model, drawing on the experiences of European countries. A key indicator of this approach is the emphasis on the primary role of the state in regulating and executing youth policy in both countries.

Considering the similarities and differences in the youth policies of Azerbaijan and Turkey, the primary objective in both countries is to enhance the participation of young people in social, political, and other spheres, and to transform them into active members of society by uniting them around common values. However, compared to leading European countries, the level of youth participation in these two countries remains relatively low. The main reasons for this can be attributed to political and economic crises experienced in certain periods in both countries.

From this perspective, the current priority for both countries is to increase youth participation in social and political life. Youth policy can only be fully shaped when young people actively engage in these processes and assume roles as decision-makers.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Azerbaijan and Turkey, as allied countries cooperating in many fields, can establish joint projects and platforms in the field of youth policy by drawing on each other’s positive experiences. The aim would be to enhance youth participation and to improve legislative and administrative frameworks. Such cooperation would provide opportunities for youth development in education, employment, and other areas, ultimately contributing to the advancement of youth policy and creating a foundation to elevate it to the level observed in leading European countries.

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