



TRENDS IN PROBLEM MANAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

The social inclusion of young people as active participants in public processes represents a strategic priority for every modern society. Their ability to act as policy generators at supranational, national, and local levels is directly linked to their involvement in addressing issues that affect them (1). The aim of this study is to identify key problems faced by young people in Bulgaria and to highlight trends in addressing them. To achieve this, the following research methods were employed: analysis of specialized academic literature; survey-based inquiry; and mathematical- statistical methods (SPSS 19 for Windows).

The findings of the study reveal issues related to daily activity planning, financial difficulties, challenges in decision-making, lack of motivation, problems in education, and insufficient support. The research also outlines potential internal tools for addressing the identified problems.

The conclusions drawn confirm the thesis that young people require targeted support. This thesis highlights the need for strategic partnerships between institutions to foster the social inclusion of young people within contemporary socio-economic processes.

Keywords: problems, youth, management

INTRODUCTION

Local youth policies are essential for the inclusion and development of young people (2, 3). Key challenges include a lack of resources, coordination, and up-to-date data. Nevertheless, local authorities have the potential to implement adaptive and innovative solutions (4, 5). Effective policies require the active involvement of young people through youth councils, consultations, and support for initiatives. Sustainable partnerships between institutions, civil society, and youth are crucial for success (6, 7).

Youth is a critical demographic group whose problems directly impact the socio-economic development of any community (8, 9). According to data from the European Commission, nearly 34% of young people in Eastern European countries are at risk of social exclusion due to unemployment, lack of access to quality education, and limited opportunities

for civic participation. On a local level, these challenges take on unique dimensions that require detailed research and tailored approaches (10).

The lack of up-to-date, locally focused data leads to:

- Inadequate policies that do not address the real needs of young people.
- Costs associated with ineffective measures and programs – up to 40% of municipal youth measures and projects fail to meet their goals.
- Marginalization of vulnerable groups (e.g., youth in small or rural settlements).

In this context, we conducted a study among 215 young people from the cities of Sofia and Montana with the following objective: **To identify the key issues facing young people at the local level and to propose tools/mechanisms for addressing them in the process of implementing adequate local policies.** Additionally, the study aims to highlight the benefits of conducting such research on a systematic basis.

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METHODS

To conduct this study, a combination of research methods was employed, including:

- **Theoretical analysis of specialized academic sources** – To meet the research objectives, a review and analysis of academic sources was carried out.
- **Survey research – The survey method was chosen for conducting the study.** It was carried out using a pre-designed questionnaire (developed with the assistance of an expert), which included indicators/questions divided into three main sections: Profile of the respondent; Identification of current issues faced by young people at the local level; Factors influencing the resolution of these issues and the implementation of adequate local policies.
- **Mathematical and statistical methods** – Used to process the results in accordance with established statistical procedures, calculating the relative percentage distribution of responses using the statistical

software "SPSS for Windows". A descriptive and multivariate analysis was performed based on this data.

RESULTS

In the first area, the target group is segmented by gender, age, and education. These are key indicators that serve as reference points both for selecting the respondents and for interpreting the data from the conducted study.

The data in **Figure 1** shows that the majority of individuals managing sports clubs are aged between 36–55, indicating that experience and established professional status play a key role in leadership roles. Young people aged 18–25 are significantly underrepresented (only 3%), highlighting the need to attract and engage this age group. Despite the challenges, involving young professionals and interns in structured, long-term development processes could benefit sports clubs by ensuring continuity, innovation, and future growth.

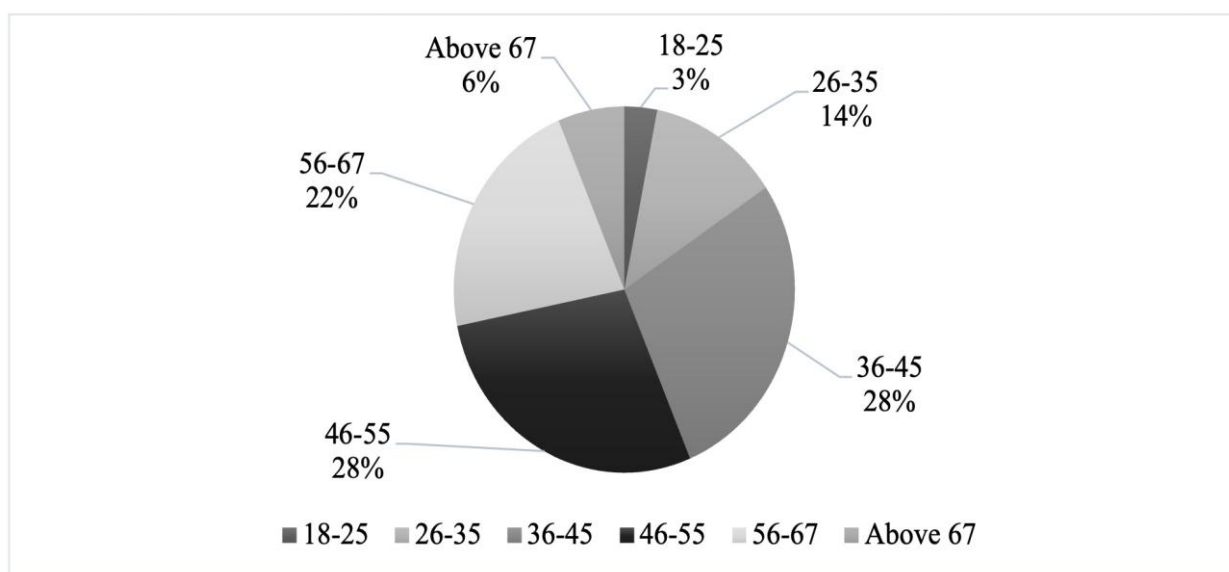


Figure 1. Age Distribution.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of respondents based on their highest level of education.

The data in Figure 2 reveal a strong dominance of respondents with a PhD (78.1%), indicating a highly educated group with a strong orientation toward academic and professional development. This suggests that sports clubs are often managed by individuals with advanced

knowledge, access to research, and integration into academic networks, which can enhance strategic planning and performance. However, the underrepresentation of those with only Bachelor's (12.5%) or Master's degrees (9.4%) raises concerns about potential barriers to entry for professionals without advanced academic qualifications. This high academic threshold may limit diversity and exclude capable practitioners from leadership roles in the field.

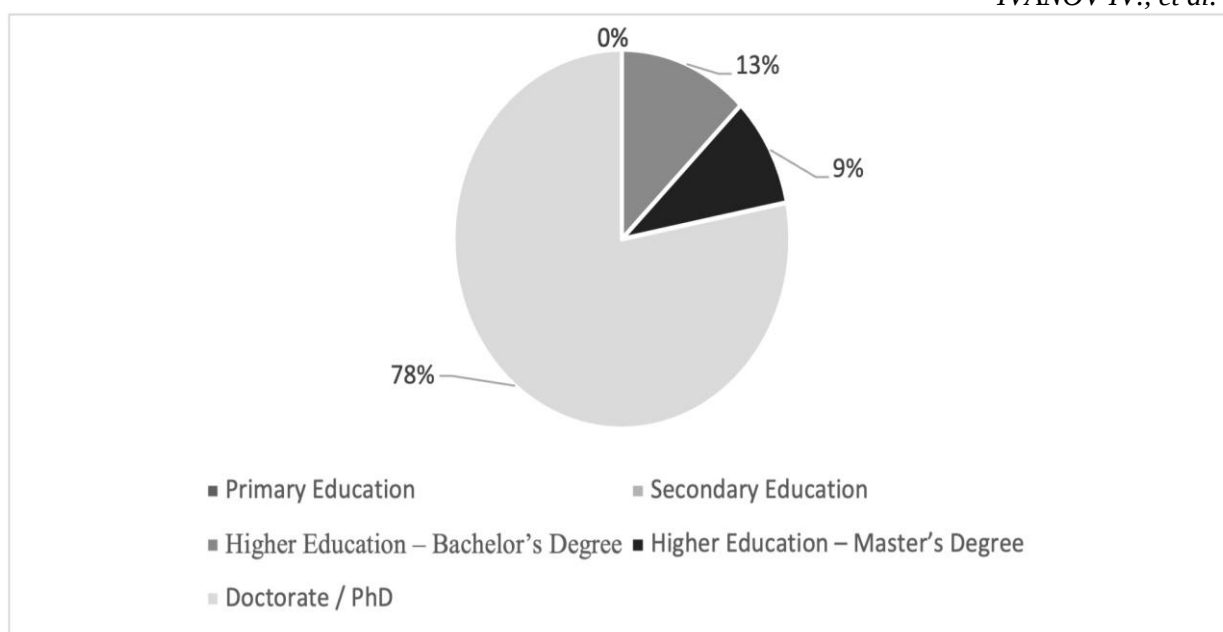


Figure 2. Highest Level of Education.

The data in Figure 3 show that 78.1% of respondents have over 10 years of experience in their sports organizations, indicating strong institutional knowledge and sector-specific expertise. This long-term engagement suggests structural stability but also reveals limited turnover and entry opportunities for new professionals. The alignment with the older age

groups in **Figure 1** further confirms that leadership roles are predominantly held by seasoned individuals. While this supports continuity and effective governance, it highlights the need for succession planning and greater inclusion of younger professionals to ensure long-term adaptability and innovation within sports organizations.

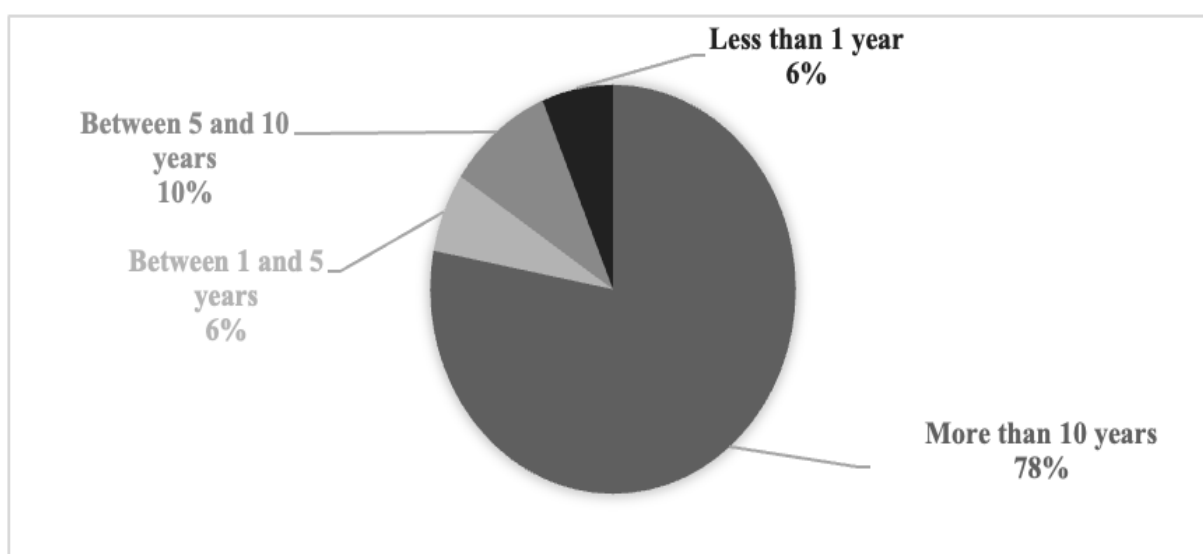


Figure 3. Work Experience in the Organization.

Figure 4 shows that 87.5% of surveyed sports organizations have existed for over 10 years, reflecting a mature and well-established presence in the sector. This aligns with the long professional experience of respondents and suggests institutional stability and sustained leadership. However, the low percentage of

newer organizations may point to barriers to entry, such as funding or administrative obstacles. Supporting emerging clubs—especially those promoting innovation or inclusion—could help balance stability with renewal in the sports ecosystem.

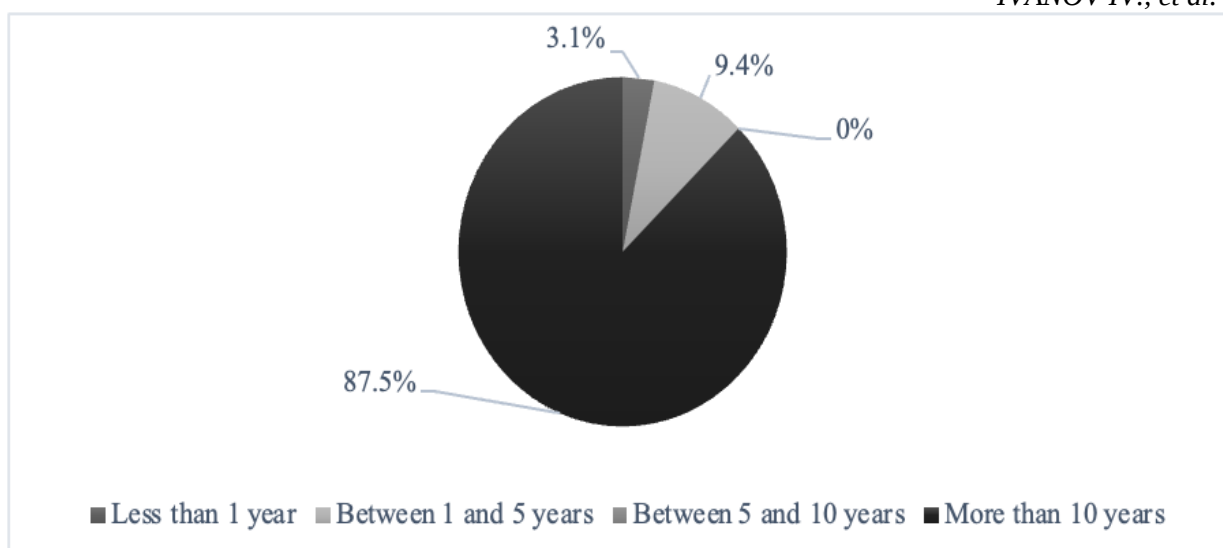


Figure 4. How long has the sports organization existed?

Figure 5 reveals that most surveyed sports organizations are small in scale, with 40.6% having up to 20 registered athletes and only 6.3% having between 100 and 200; none report more than 200. This suggests limited reach and resources, possibly due to niche sports, geographic constraints, or visibility issues. Despite their size, these clubs are vital to local sports ecosystems and are well-positioned to benefit from targeted support such as Erasmus+

funding. With strategic investment and capacity-building, even small organizations can deliver significant sporting and social impact. In conclusion, while the majority of clubs represented in this study fall into the "small" category in terms of athlete registration, this should be seen not as a limitation but as a **starting point for strategic growth**—especially when supported by the right tools, networks, and policy frameworks.

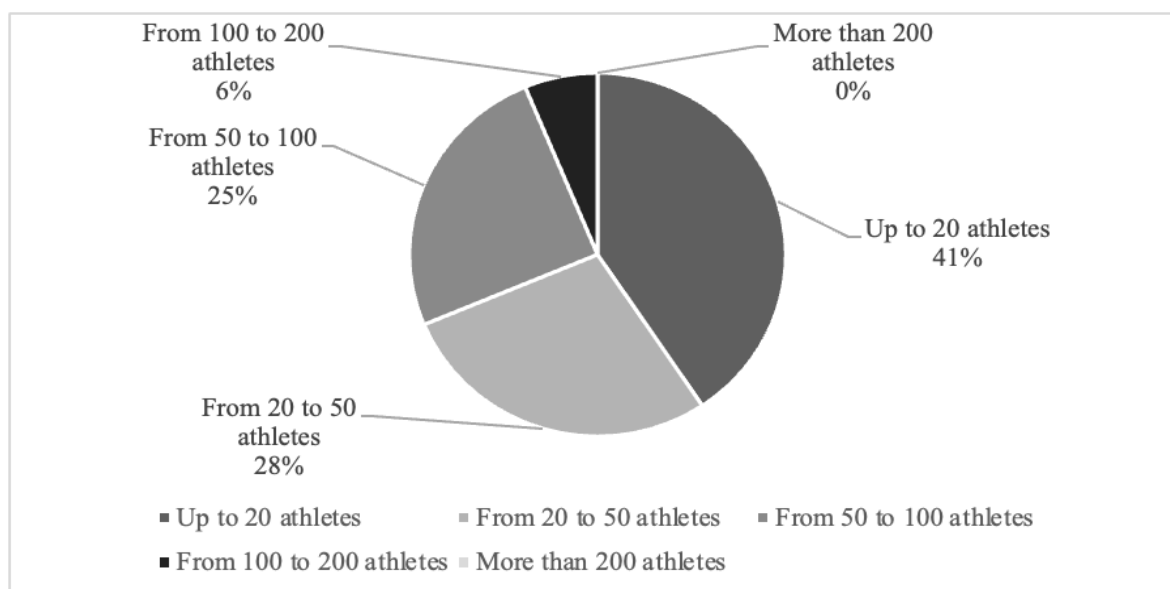


Figure 5. Number of Registered Athletes.

Figure 6 highlights a critical challenge: 87.5% of sports organizations report insufficient annual budgets to meet their goals, with only 6.3% finding their funding adequate. This points to a systemic issue in the Bulgarian sports sector, where financial instability often stems from limited planning capacity, low engagement in project-based funding, and a

lack of trained professionals in financial and project management. Addressing this gap requires strategic investment in capacity building to improve access to resources, enhance sustainability, and enable clubs to benefit from national and European support programs.

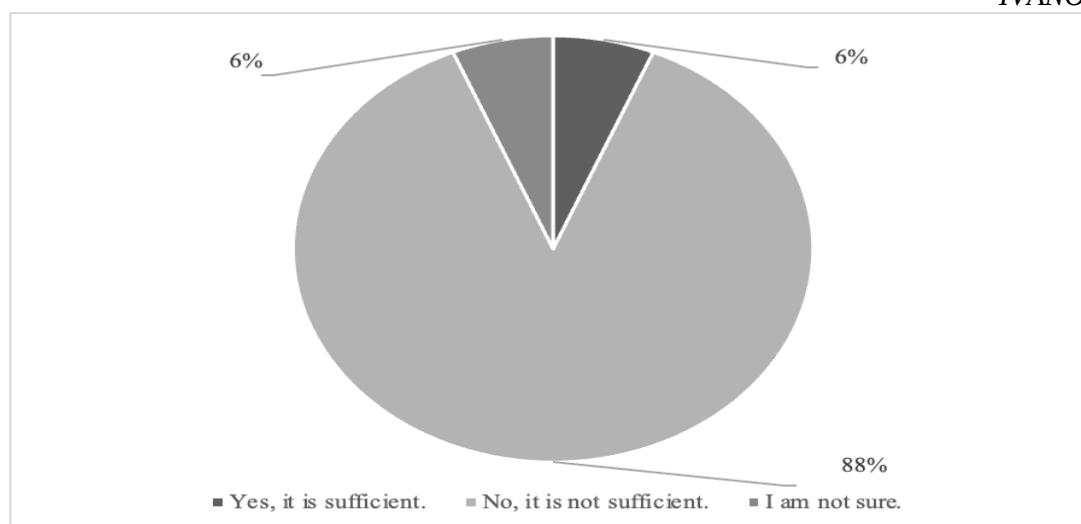


Figure 6. Is Your Annual Budget Sufficient to Achieve the Club's Goals?

Figure 7 reveals that 68% of sports organizations rely primarily on funding from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, underscoring strong dependence on national programs. In contrast, only 6% reported participation in municipal-level initiatives, while 26% had no experience with any funding schemes or were

unaware of them. This indicates limited awareness, geographic disparities, and institutional capacity gaps. Enhancing financial sustainability will require decentralizing access to resources, increasing program visibility, and equipping clubs with the skills needed to engage effectively in diverse funding opportunities.

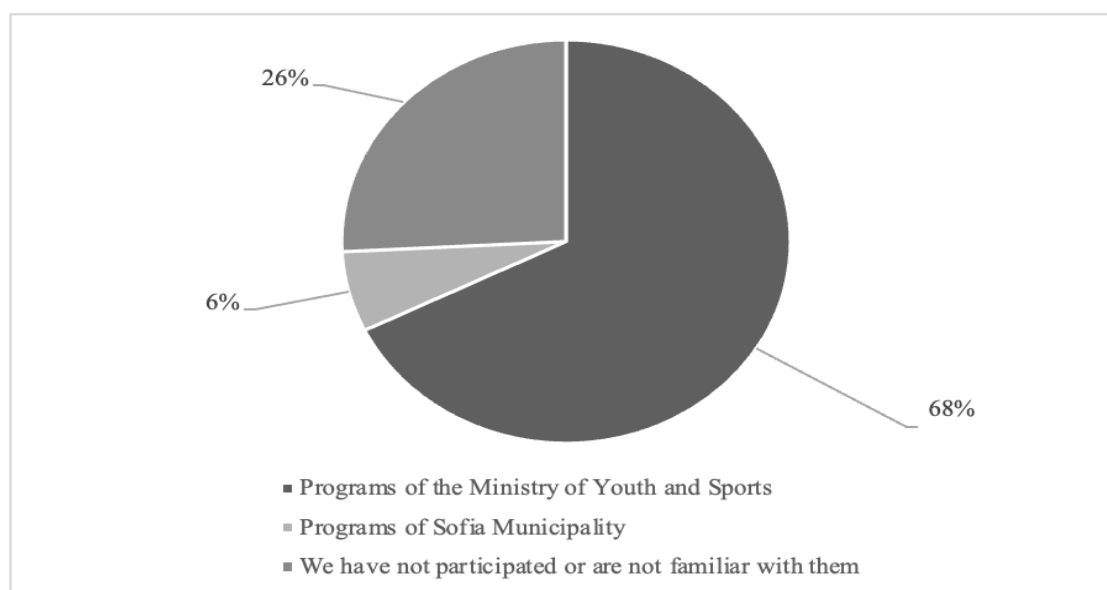


Figure 7. Which Funding Programs Does Your Club Participate In?

Figure 8 shows that 57% of sports organizations have successfully implemented projects funded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, confirming its central role in supporting the sector. Only 13% have accessed municipal-level funding, highlighting its limited reach and underutilization. Alarming, 30% of respondents have never applied for or are unaware of any funding programs, indicating a critical gap in information and capacity. Despite high academic qualifications among many respondents, the data underscore the need for

targeted training and institutional support to improve access to funding and foster sustainable development in sports organizations.

Moreover, the low presence of international or EU-level funding in the responses implies that **transnational opportunities such as Erasmus+ are either underused or unknown**, limiting the potential for international collaboration, innovation, and knowledge exchange.

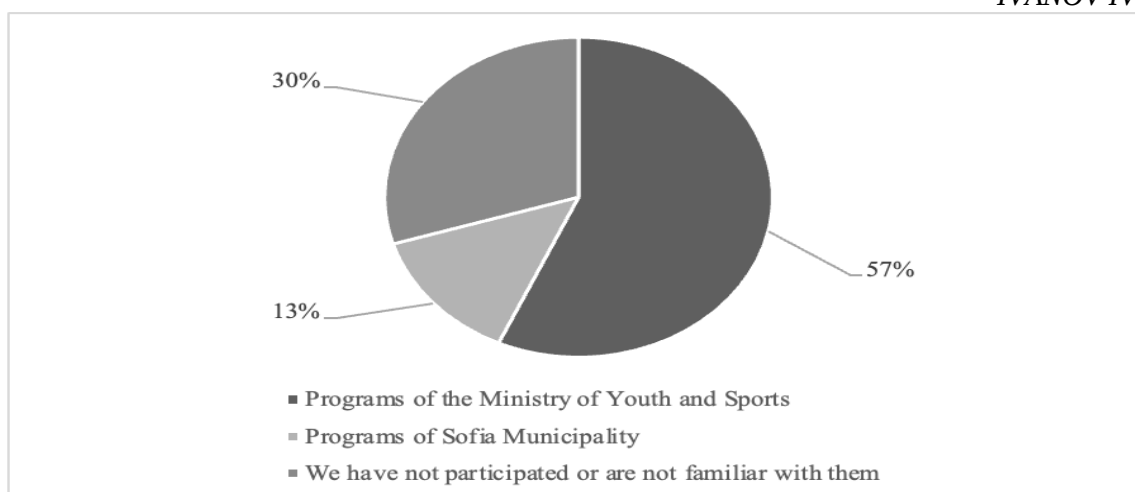


Figure 8. Through Which Programs Have You Won and Implemented a Project?

In conclusion, the results from Figure 8 highlight both **the reliance on national-level programs** and **the untapped potential** among sports organizations lacking knowledge of funding mechanisms. Expanding awareness, improving access to funding information, and building capacity in project management will be essential for enabling more clubs to engage meaningfully with both national and international support structures.

Figure 9 reveals that 72% of sports organizations lack a dedicated project development specialist, while only 28% have

such a professional in place. This significant gap in institutional capacity limits many clubs' ability to access funding, design initiatives, and engage in national or international programs. The absence of qualified personnel helps explain low participation in funding schemes (as seen in Figures 7 and 8), underscoring the essential role of project specialists in organizational growth. Addressing this weakness through targeted training and capacity-building is crucial for strengthening the sustainability and competitiveness of the Bulgarian sports sector.

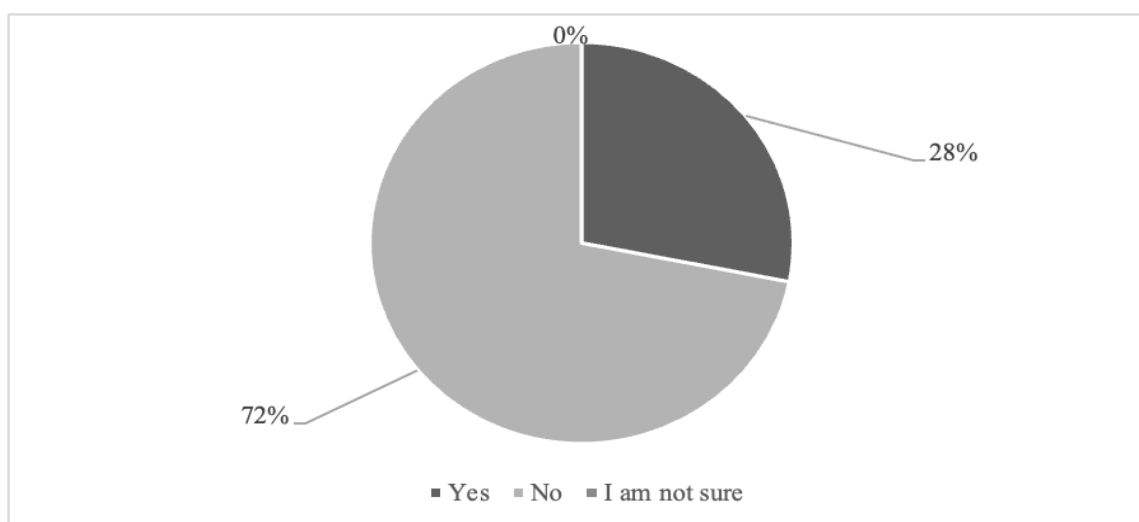


Figure 9. Does Your Organization Have a Specialist for Project Development?

Figure 10 shows that 68.8% of sports organizations rely primarily on state/public funding, confirming strong dependence on national institutional support. Other significant sources include project-based funding (42.4%), sponsorships and donations (40.6%), and membership fees (36.4%), indicating some effort toward diversification. However,

commercial income streams such as service provision (27.3%), facility rentals (3%), and ticketed events (2%) remain underutilized. No respondents reported passive income sources like investments or interest. These findings highlight the need to diversify funding strategies and build financial capacity to ensure long-term stability and independence.

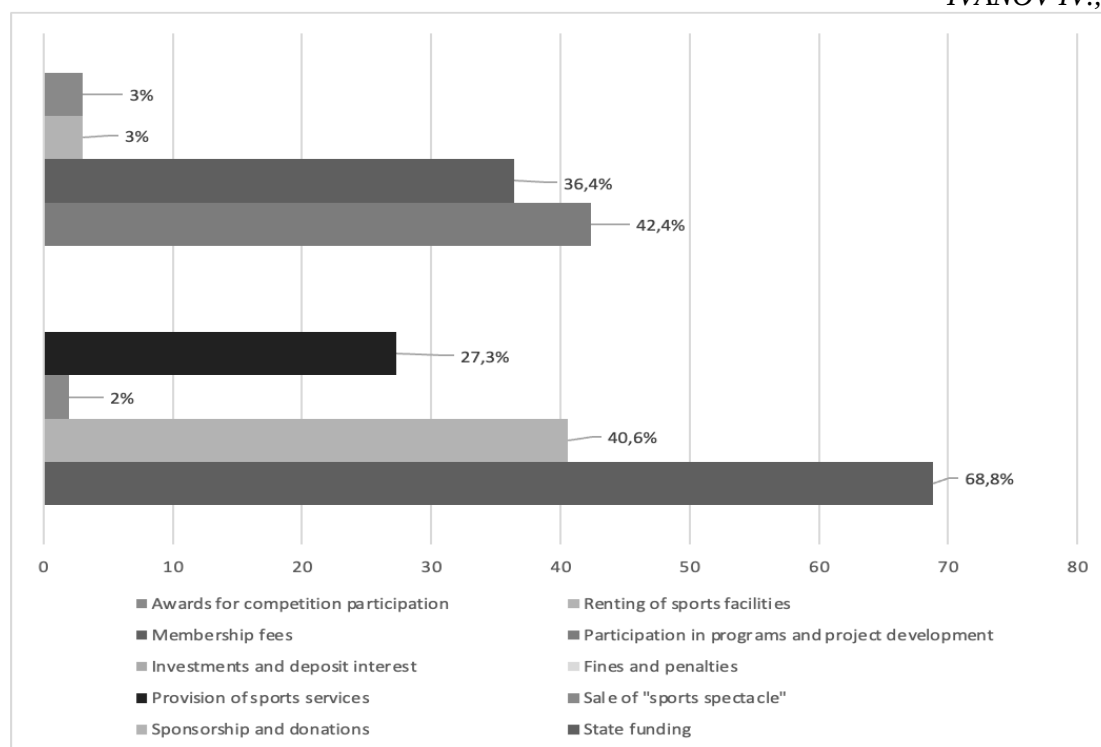


Figure 10. What Are the Sources of Funding for Your Organization?

Figure 11 demonstrates that sports projects are widely perceived as highly beneficial, with 78.8% of respondents identifying financial support as the primary advantage, followed closely by infrastructure and equipment improvements (75.8%). Other key benefits include the promotion of sport (69.7%), increased organizational visibility (63.6%), and enhanced human resource funding (54.5%).

Additional advantages such as partnership building, event organization, and skill development further highlight the multidimensional value of project participation. These findings underscore the need to expand access, raise awareness, and provide targeted support to help more clubs capitalize on the broad potential of sports projects.

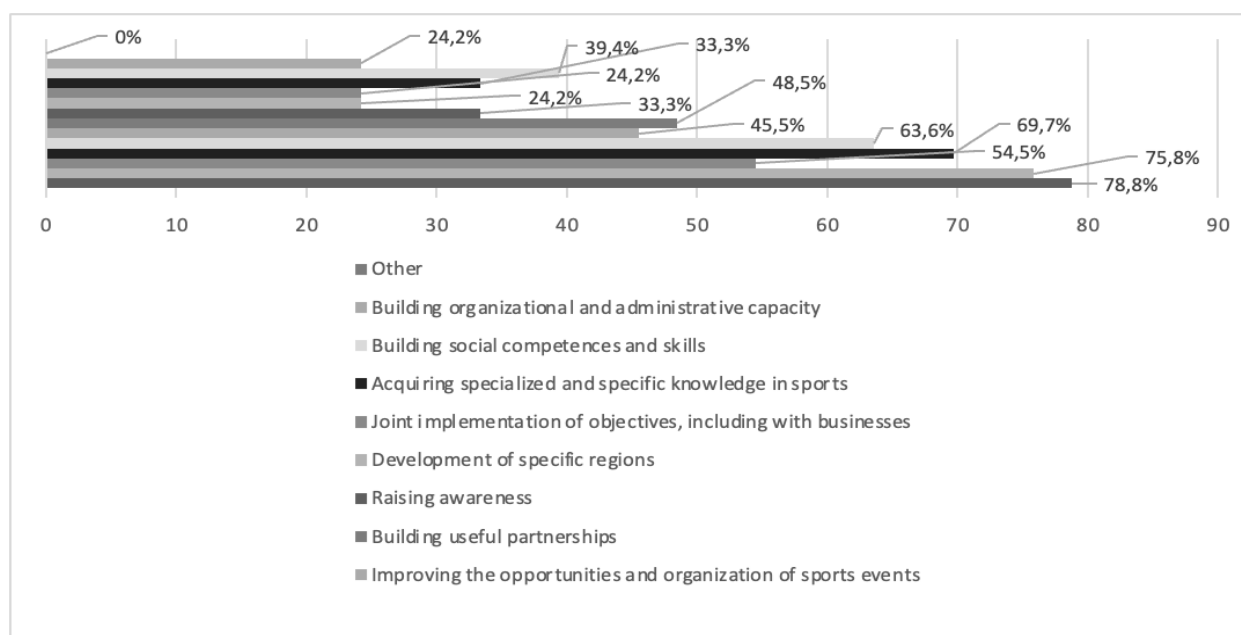


Figure 11. In your opinion, what are the benefits of implementing sports projects?

Figure 12 shows that 100% of respondents prioritize sports projects, reflecting their core mission and ongoing commitment to athletic

development and community engagement. Beyond this, 75% express strong interest in

educational projects, recognizing the value of learning for capacity building and athlete growth. Social projects (37.5%) and exchange initiatives (28.1%) highlight awareness of sport's role in inclusion and international collaboration. Only 12.5% show interest in business-related projects,

indicating untapped potential in sports entrepreneurship. These results suggest that while sport remains central, there is a growing openness to interdisciplinary and socially oriented initiatives that could benefit from targeted support and funding.

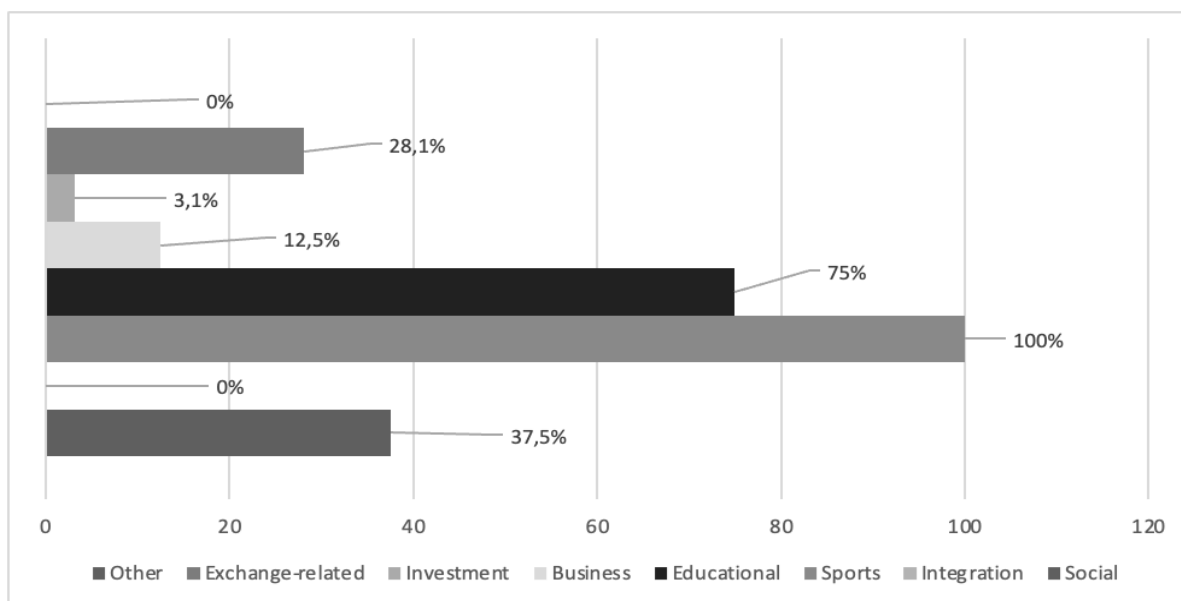


Figure 12. What type of projects would you like to implement?

Figure 13 reveals that 97% of sports organizations rely on the Ministry of Youth and Sports as their primary source of information about funding programs, underscoring its central role in the sector. Sports federations (54.4%) and peer organizations (39.4%) also serve as important communication channels, while academic institutions contribute to awareness through training and partnerships

(30.3%). Digital platforms, such as social media and online forums (24%), are emerging sources, whereas traditional media like radio (3%) and print (0%) play a minimal role. These findings emphasize the importance of strengthening both institutional and alternative information channels to improve access to funding opportunities.

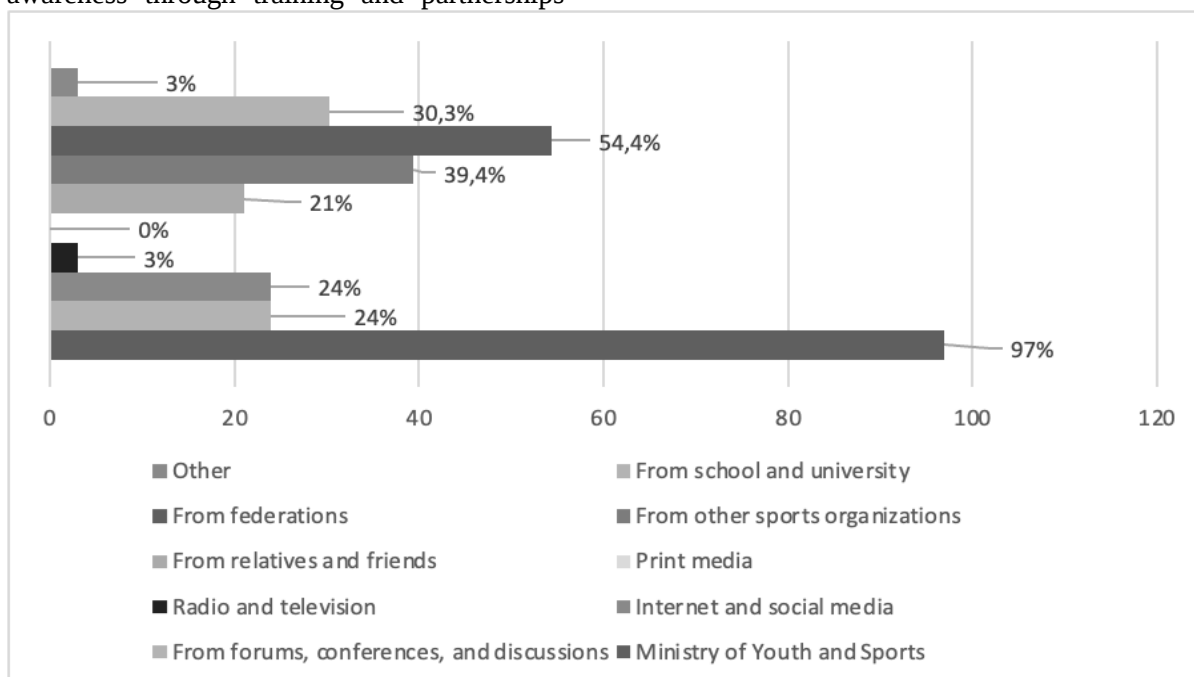


Figure 13. Where Do You Obtain Information About Programs That Fund Sports Projects?

Figure 14 reveals that sports organizations are primarily aware of national and municipal funding programs, with 40% recognizing those of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and 39% aware of Sofia Municipality's schemes. In contrast, awareness of international opportunities is extremely low—only 2% are familiar with Erasmus+, and just 1% with

programs by the Bulgarian or International Olympic Committees. Additionally, 13% are unfamiliar with any funding programs at all. These findings point to a significant information gap and highlight the urgent need for targeted outreach and training to improve access to international funding and support the strategic development of the sector.

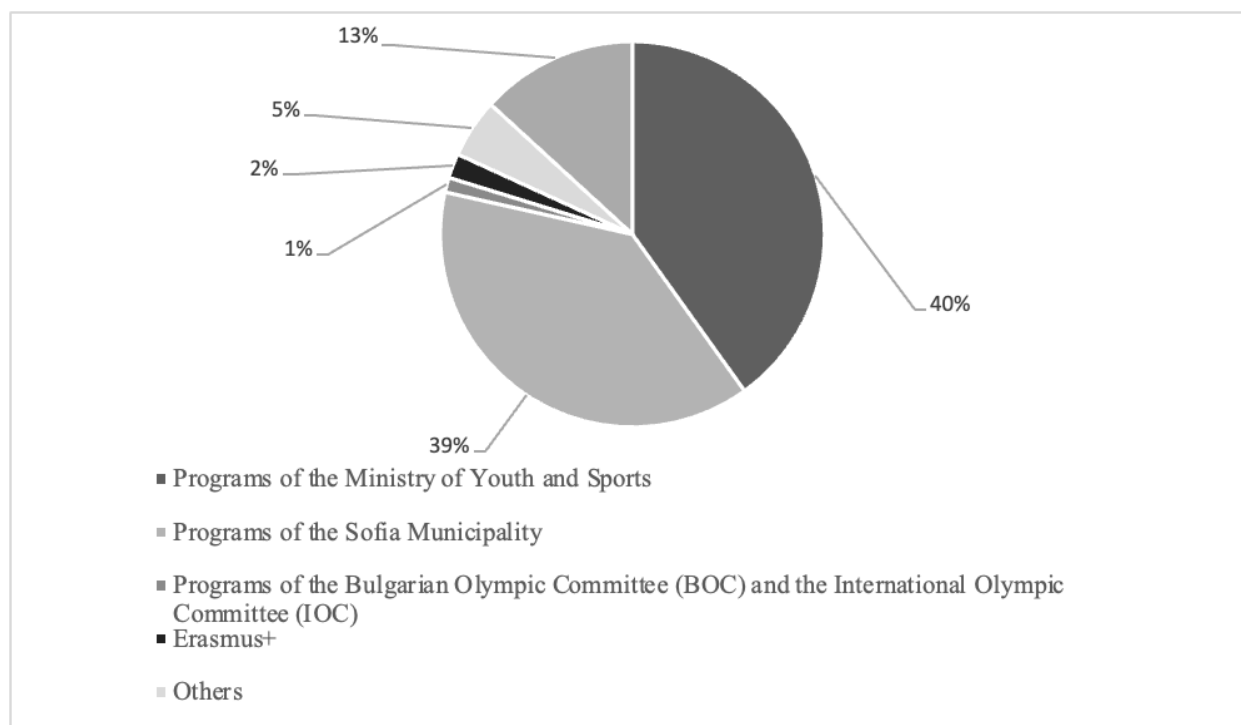


Figure 14. Which funding programs for sports projects are you familiar with?

DISCUSSION

This study presents a detailed and multifaceted picture of young people in Bulgaria, emphasizing the daily challenges they face, motivational barriers, the nature of their social connections, and their perception of both institutional and informal support in the decision-making process regarding important life issues. Conducted through a structured survey among 215 respondents from Sofia and Montana, the research offers a solid empirical basis for formulating effective youth policies at the local level.

Young people represent a demographic and social group situated at a critical stage of personal development—between the educational system, the labor market, and the process of building an independent life. The findings clearly indicate that the most significant difficulties experienced are not solely related to economic conditions or institutional access, but stem from deeply rooted psychological, social, and cognitive

barriers—such as poor time management, decision-making difficulties, low motivation, and a general sense of uncertainty.

The data reveal a state of cognitive overload, where young people struggle to filter, process, and prioritize the information available to them—most of which comes through digital channels. As a result, decision-making is hindered by fear of making mistakes, a lack of reliable reference points, and the overwhelming influence of social media. This highlights a strong need for the development of critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and reflective practices.

Nearly one-third of the respondents reported a lack of motivation, and a significant proportion experienced stress, insecurity, and emotional exhaustion. While some young people are able to activate internal resources to cope, there is a concerning number who avoid responsibility, experience guilt, or lack adaptive behavioral strategies. These findings underscore the urgent

need for targeted interventions focused on emotional intelligence, stress management, and the cultivation of psychologically resilient behavior patterns.

Family was identified as the strongest source of support, reaffirming its central role in socialization and personal resilience. However, institutional support—especially from teachers and academic staff—was perceived as partial and inconsistent. The educational system is seen as insufficiently engaged in addressing the emotional and social needs of young people, calling for a rethinking of its format and functions.

Social circles—peers, classmates, and colleagues—also emerged as key agents of social reflection and identity formation. Yet, support from these networks was also described as limited, revealing signs of social fragmentation and a weak institutional focus on fostering healthy group culture. The absence of sustainable and consistent support within educational and professional environments may lead to isolation, apathy, and declining psychosocial well-being.

Importantly, the study does not merely identify problems but also reveals their systemic interconnectedness, stressing the need for a holistic approach in youth policy. The challenges facing young people are both structural (economy, access, education) and deeply internal (identity, fear, motivation). Addressing them requires multi-layered interventions, including:

- Personalized support (mentorship, coaching, psychological counseling);
- A transformation of the educational environment into one that is more inclusive, empathetic, and adaptive;
- Social programs aimed at developing life skills and emotional competence;
- Active involvement of local authorities, NGOs, and youth organizations in building networks of belonging, trust, and development.

In conclusion, the findings emphasize the urgent need for a systemic, cross-sectoral approach that recognizes the complex reality of young people today and supports their personal and social growth through sustainable, coordinated efforts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the complex and interconnected challenges faced by young people in Bulgaria, encompassing both structural and psychological dimensions. While economic barriers and institutional gaps play a role, deeper issues such as low motivation, decision-making difficulties, and emotional exhaustion are equally critical. Despite these challenges, the strong role of family and the potential of peer networks and educational institutions offer a foundation for effective support.

To respond adequately, youth policies must adopt a holistic and multi-level approach—combining personalized guidance, educational reform, and community-based initiatives. Empowering young people with emotional, cognitive, and social skills is essential not only for their individual development but also for fostering a resilient and engaged generation capable of shaping a more inclusive and adaptive society.

LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted among young people from the cities of Sofia and Montana and does not claim to be representative. Rather, its aim is to identify certain trends in the challenges faced by young people at the local level, which can serve as a basis for developing targeted policies to address them.

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