



**2023**

# **YOUTH STUDY**

## **PERSONAL OPTIMISM, NATIONAL PESSIMISM, TRUST IN EUROPE.**

A COMPARISON OF VALUES, ATTITUDES AND  
PLANS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC,  
ESTONIA, HUNGARY, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, POLAND,  
AND SLOVAKIA

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**1**

# **INTRODUCTION**



This report is part of broad-based and internationally oriented youth studies initiated and coordinated by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The focus of the research is on today's young generations growing up of in Europe, Asia and North Africa.

This study focuses on young people in the Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as in the Central Eastern European countries known as the Visegrád Group<sup>1</sup> made up of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. It is based on a representative survey of almost 10,000 young people between 14<sup>2</sup> and 29 years of age from the seven countries named, which was carried out using quantitative and qualitative methods in 2021.

The aim is to present the current life situations and attitudes of young adults in five central thematic areas of focus: education, work and migration, family, general values, attitudes and desires as well as political attitudes and participation. For this purpose, regional comparative analyses are primarily carried out, which are supplemented at significant points by representing national specifics and make it possible to work out development processes and trends.

All participating countries have a common post-Soviet communist past that continues to affect the everyday lives of young people today even though this generation of young people is the first to have grown up exclusively in the respective nation states. Moreover, the young people experience the development of different national aspirations both political and economic. Furthermore, all seven countries are parliamentary democracies and member states of the European Union. In addition to the phenomena of globalisation, climate change, and an ageing population, COVID 19 is currently affecting the lives of young people. The study was planned before the COVID 19 outbreak and, despite all the challenges, was carried out with relevant adaptations to logistics and content during the pandemic. Although all generations have been affected by this global pandemic, it is children and young people who have been particularly affected in these sensitive phases of life.

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# MAIN FINDINGS



## EDUCATION

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- The pursuit of higher education qualifications is particularly strong among young people in the Baltic States. Adolescents in Central Eastern Europe, on the other hand, tend to orient themselves towards a middle level of education.
- Both young people from the Baltic States and from Central Eastern Europe align their educational aspirations with the economic requirements of their home countries.
- Young people from the Baltic States show a higher level of satisfaction with the education system than the young generation in Central Eastern Europe.
- Scepticism about the corruptibility of educational qualifications is more pronounced among young people in Central Eastern Europe than among their peers in the Baltic States.

## WORK AND MIGRATION

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- Opportunities on the labour market and the individual economic situation are largely determined by the level of education and training young people have.
- Young people in economically weaker countries are more likely to be affected by unemployment.
- Girls and young women are significantly more likely to be exposed to unemployment compared to their male peers. In the Baltic States in particular, the percentage is over 70%.
- Young people from Poland and Hungary disproportionately regularly express the wish to leave their home country.
- Compared to all other countries included in the study, young people in Lithuania report having already had a migration experience of their own.
- Male adolescents are more likely to have spent time abroad.

## FAMILY

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- The majority of young people in Central Eastern Europe and the Baltic States grow up in traditional family structures. The nuclear family is still the most common form of family life. This is most common in Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic and least common in Latvia.
- The majority of young people express a high level of satisfaction with their own family.
- Adolescents in Estonia are most satisfied with their own family life. In Hungary, the corresponding satisfaction rates are significantly lower. There is also a disproportionately high percentage in Poland and Latvia who have an ambivalent attitude towards their own family.

- The socio-economic situation is a decisive factor in determining how people judge their own family: the more precarious the financial situation within the family, the more stressful the relationship with parents is assessed yet with clear differences between the countries in terms of the level.
- Young people move out of the parent's home earlier in the Baltic States.
- The reasons for staying longer in the parents' home among young people in Central Eastern Europe are not so much based on convenience and securing comfort, but rather, it is their own financial situation that prevents them from moving out.
- Starting a family of one's own is a central goal in life for the vast majority of all young people interviewed across all countries surveyed. Most of them are oriented towards traditional ideas of family, e.g. marriage and the desire to have children.
- However, having children is considered more important than getting married. Young people in the Baltic States, in particular, do not see marriage as a prerequisite for partnership and having children.
- In Poland, the opposite picture tends to be true: marriage takes precedence over the desire to have children. Among the members of the Visegrád Group, child planning is most often postponed among the following youth generation in Poland.
- When it comes to starting a family, an urban-rural divide is apparent. The desire to get married and have children is significantly less pronounced among young people in urban structures than in rural regions.
- Young people in the Baltic States tend to plan to have children earlier and more than is the case among their counterparts in the other Visegrád countries.

## GENERAL VALUES, ATTITUDES AND WISHES

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- The young people surveyed are a satisfied generation across all countries.
- The view of the future among young people in all the countries surveyed is optimistic, at least with regard to personal development. In contrast, the development of their own country over the next ten years is assessed much more pessimistically.
- Independence, taking responsibility and a successful career represent the three most important life goals of young people.
- Religion plays a rather subordinate role for the majority of young people, although a religious orientation is even more pronounced among young people in Central Eastern Europe. The feeling of belonging to a denomination is widespread among them.
- Religious young people's life goals are somewhat more closely aligned with traditional values such as starting a family and getting married and tend to be more involved in society.



## POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND INVOLVEMENT

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- Political interest tends to be stronger among young people in Central Eastern Europe and lower in the Baltic States.
- Young males show a higher interest in politics compared to young females. Moreover, interest increases with growing age.
- On political issues, young people in Central Eastern Europe tend to be more conformist than those in the Baltic States.
- At the national level, the highest rate of conformity between the parents' and young people's generations can be found in Hungary. 40.5% of Hungarian young people agree with their parents on political issues. In Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, this applies to only one-fifth of all young people.
- Compared to young people in Central Eastern Europe, young people in the Baltic States are significantly less likely to express the intention to vote in the future.
- The vast majority of young people in the Baltic States and Central Eastern Europe show a clear tendency towards the political centre.
- A great deal of trust is placed in state organisations of the judiciary and the executive branches. Especially among young people in the Baltic States, the judiciary branch and the police receive high approval ratings. In contrast, governments and parliaments at the national level, the media in the respective countries, as well as the Church and other religious institutions are viewed much more critically. Political parties receive the lowest scores when it comes to trust.
- A great deal of trust is placed in international alliances such as the EU and NATO.
- Democracy is a viable and favoured form of government for three quarters of all respondents. Indeed: Every tenth person categorically rejects democracy. Every fifth person even considers dictatorship to be the better form of government under certain circumstances.
- Economic and socio-economic aspects are seen as the central challenges of the future.
- With regard to nation-state attitudes, clear differences can be observed between the young people in the seven countries studied. The majority of young people in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are against more immigration. Young people in Poland and the Baltic States show a much greater welcoming culture and less xenophobia.
- A clear majority of all young people both in the Baltic States and in Central Eastern Europe reject an exit from the EU.

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# **METHODOLOGY**



The empirical basis of the present study is a quantitative survey in an ex-post facto arrangement and a cross-sectional research design with one time of data collection. This was then supplemented by qualitative surveys with young people in order to delve deeper into individual topics covered. The aim of the study is to capture the living conditions of young people in the Baltic States and in Central Eastern Europe, specifically in the Visegrád States, from their perspective and through their eyes, and to make corresponding comparisons. The following seven countries were included in this study: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The study was based on representative samples taken in all seven countries (see the chapter “Demographic characteristics and trends”).

The final survey took place simultaneously in all seven participating countries between April and July 2021 and was conducted by the IPSOS Institute. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not used and the study was conducted by means of an online survey instead.

A quantitative survey instrument was developed in the first step to realise the study objectives. This is a standardised questionnaire with mostly closed indicators. The questionnaire is based on a previously validated instrument used in the FES Youth Studies in Eastern and South-eastern Europe and Central Asia. This was adapted and modified to reflect the living conditions in the countries of the Baltic States and the other four countries of Central Eastern Europe and supplemented by country-specific questions. The 120 or so questions on which the overall questionnaire is based comprise a total of about 500 items, which are broken down into eight thematic topics. These are: “Values, Religion and Trust”; “Family”; “Migration/Mobility”; “Education”; “Employment” and “Politics”. These thematic blocks were completed by socio-demographic questions and a country-specific module. Implementing country-specific issues served to take into account the respective national interests and needs. The structure of the closed response requirements was in most cases realised by using either a three- or five-point Likert scale. The standardised questionnaire was used in all seven participating countries to enable a regional and, from a perspective, longitudinal comparison. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was subjected to a pre- and back-translation in a double-blind procedure before the

field phase. This means that the questionnaire was translated from English into the respective national languages and checked for accuracy and clarity by back-translation into English.

The statistical programme SPSS was used to evaluate available quantitative data. Uni- and bivariate analysis procedures were carried out and significance tests were performed to test statistically relevant correlations. Chi<sup>2</sup>-based test methods were the *modus operandi*. Within this framework, it is examined the extent to which the empirically observed value distribution deviates from a theoretically assumed value distribution that would be expected in the case of statistical independence of the characteristics considered. The distribution of values to be assumed for the case of statistical independence of the characteristic variables is determined with reference to the distribution conditions of the entire study sample (cf. e.g. Backhaus et al. 2008).

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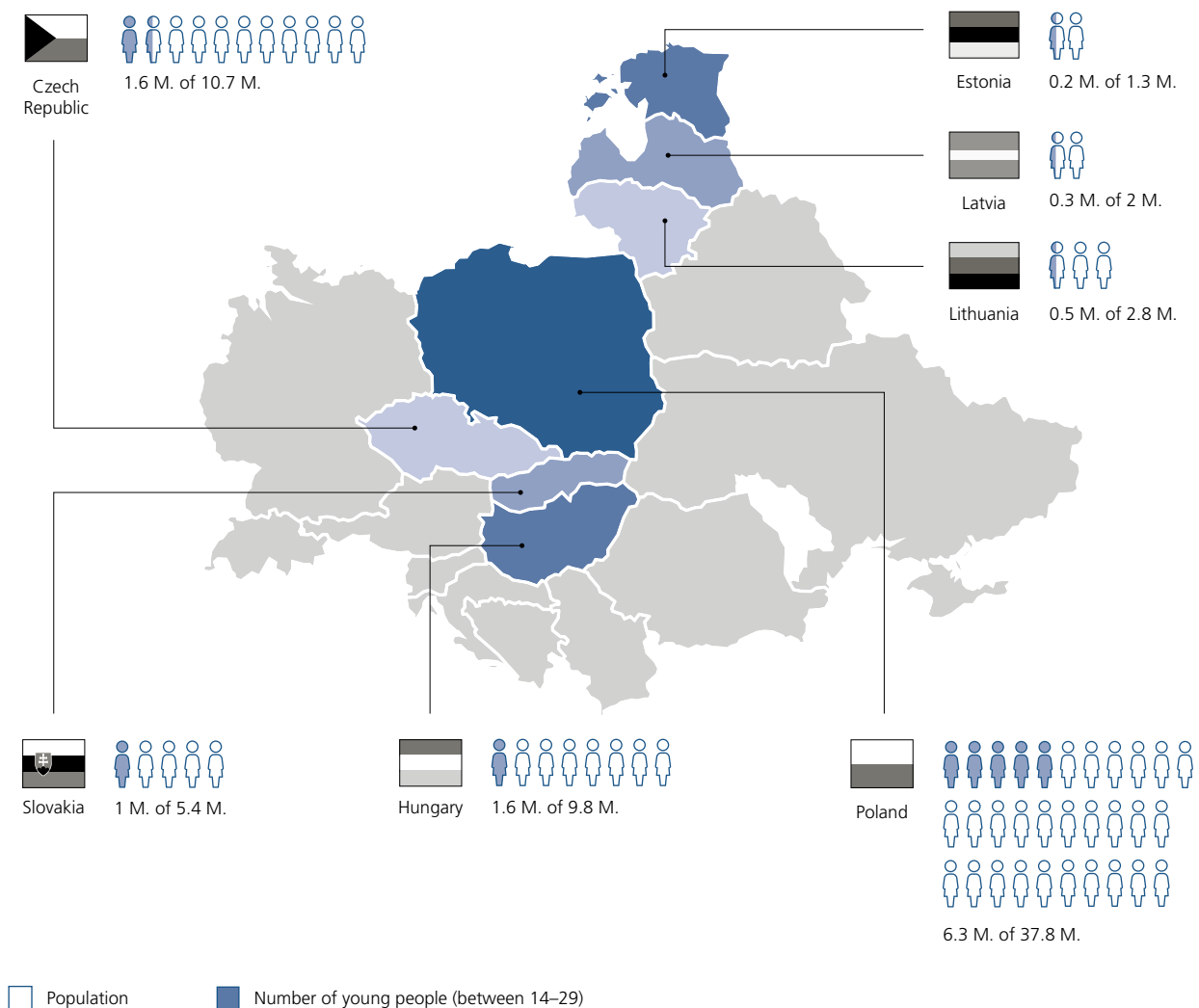
# DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTER- ISTICS AND TRENDS

At the time of the study in 2021, a total of 11.32 million young people<sup>3</sup> between the ages of 14 and 29 form the basic population. Poland is the most populous country with 37.86 million inhabitants. Estonia is the least populated country with 1.33 million inhabitants (cf. Fig. 1 Total population and proportion of young people in country comparison).

The proportion of young people in the total population is 16 per cent (+/- 1 per cent) in all participating countries. During the quantitative study, a representative sample of n = 9,900 young people was drawn. This allows conclusions to be deduced about the population. A sample

of 1,500 young people was drawn in all seven countries. Exceptions are Estonia and Latvia with 1,200 young people each. Socio-demographic aspects such as age, gender, region of residence or level of education played a central role in the composition of the sample. In the following, Table 1 (“Breakdown of the sample according to socio-demographic characteristics and reference to national affiliation”), essential characteristics within the sample are addressed. In addition, in some places reference is made to related phenomena and trends in the population as a whole. Many of these socio-demographic factors influence the well being and room for manoeuvre of young people.

**FIG. 1: TOTAL POPULATION AND SHARE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in millions.**



**TABLE 1: BREAKDOWN OF THE SAMPLE ACCORDING TO SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND REFERENCE TO NATIONAL AFFILIATION**

**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in absolute numbers and in (%)**

Socio-demographic characteristics	Countries (Absolute frequencies. Percentages in brackets refer to the respective country)							Total
	Poland	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Estonia	Slovakia	Czech Republic	
<b>Total</b>	1,500	1,500	1,200	1,500	1,200	1,500	1,500	9,900
<b>Age<sup>4</sup></b>								
14/15–18 years	336 (22.4%)	283 (18.9%)	152 (12.7%)	279 (18.6%)	171 (14.3%)	240 (16.0%)	399 (26.6%)	1,860 (18.8%)
19–24 years	568 (37.9%)	647 (43.1%)	536 (44.7%)	616 (41.1%)	552 (46.0%)	613 (40.9%)	617 (41.1%)	4,149 (41.9%)
25–29 years	596 (39.7%)	570 (38.0%)	512 (42.7%)	605 (40.3%)	477 (39.8%)	647 (39.3%)	484 (32.3%)	3,891 (39.3%)
<b>Highest education level...</b>								
Low Education <sup>5</sup>	316 (21.1%)	274 (18.3%)	222 (18.5%)	371 (24.7%)	268 (22.3%)	214 (14.3%)	411 (27.4%)	2,076 (21.0%)
Medium Education <sup>6</sup>	845 (56.3%)	834 (55.6%)	558 (46.5%)	526 (35.1%)	556 (46.3%)	800 (53.3%)	764 (50.9%)	4,883 (49.3%)
High Education <sup>7</sup>	339 (22.6%)	392 (26.1%)	420 (35.0%)	603 (40.2%)	376 (31.3%)	486 (32.4%)	325 (21.7%)	2,941 (29.7%)
<b>Gender of the respondents ...</b>								
Female	728 (48.5%)	792 (52.8%)	738 (61.5%)	909 (60.6%)	758 (63.2%)	805 (53.7%)	807 (53.7%)	5,537 (55.9%)
Male	772 (51.5%)	708 (47.2%)	462 (38.5%)	591 (39.4%)	442 (36.8%)	695 (46.3%)	693 (46.2%)	4,363 (44.1%)
<b>Type of settlement...</b>								
urban <sup>8</sup>	863 (57.5%)	853 (56.9%)	757 (63.1%)	982 (65.5%)	709 (59.1%)	636 (42.4%)	861 (57.4%)	5,661 (57.2%)
in-between	225 (15.0%)	195 (13.0%)	182 (15.2%)	249 (16.6%)	182 (15.2%)	226 (15.1%)	182 (12.1%)	1,441 (14.6%)
rural <sup>9</sup>	412 (27.5%)	452 (30.1%)	261 (21.8%)	269 (17.9%)	309 (25.8%)	638 (42.5%)	457 (30.5%)	2,798 (28.3%)
<b>Economic Situation</b>								
We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating...) and food.	42 (2.8%)	77 (5.1%)	45 (3.8%)	63 (4.2%)	34 (2.8%)	55 (3.7%)	15 (1.0%)	331 (3.3%)
We have enough money for basic bills but not for clothes and shoes.	195 (13.0%)	176 (11.7%)	126 (10.5%)	174 (11.6%)	130 (10.8%)	111 (7.4%)	83 (5.5%)	995 (10.1%)
We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV set, etc.)	430 (28.7%)	527 (35.1%)	369 (30.8%)	418 (27.9%)	356 (29.7%)	407 (27.1%)	296 (19.7%)	2,803 (28.3%)
We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not expensive as a car or a flat, for instance	605 (40.3%)	609 (40.6%)	465 (38.8%)	579 (38.6%)	403 (33.6%)	660 (44.0%)	813 (54.2%)	4,134 (41.8%)
We can afford whatever we need for a good living standard.	228 (15.2%)	111 (7.4%)	195 (16.3%)	266 (17.7%)	277 (23.1%)	267 (17.8%)	293 (19.5%)	1,637 (16.5%)

In the first step, the sample takes into account the age structure of the population. Accordingly, a total of 1,860 (18.8%) young people aged 14 to 18 years, 4,149 (41.9%) aged 19 to 24 years, and 3,891 (39.3%) aged 25 to 29 years were included in the survey. In general, the ageing of the population is a relevant demographic trend in all seven countries. This development also implies many challenges for policymakers, especially in the areas of healthcare, social security and pensions. According to calculations by the European Commission, the declining proportion of young people in the total population is continuing<sup>10</sup>. This is also accompanied by a declining representation of youth interests and needs in society. A population increase observed in some countries is not due to a higher birth rate but to migration.

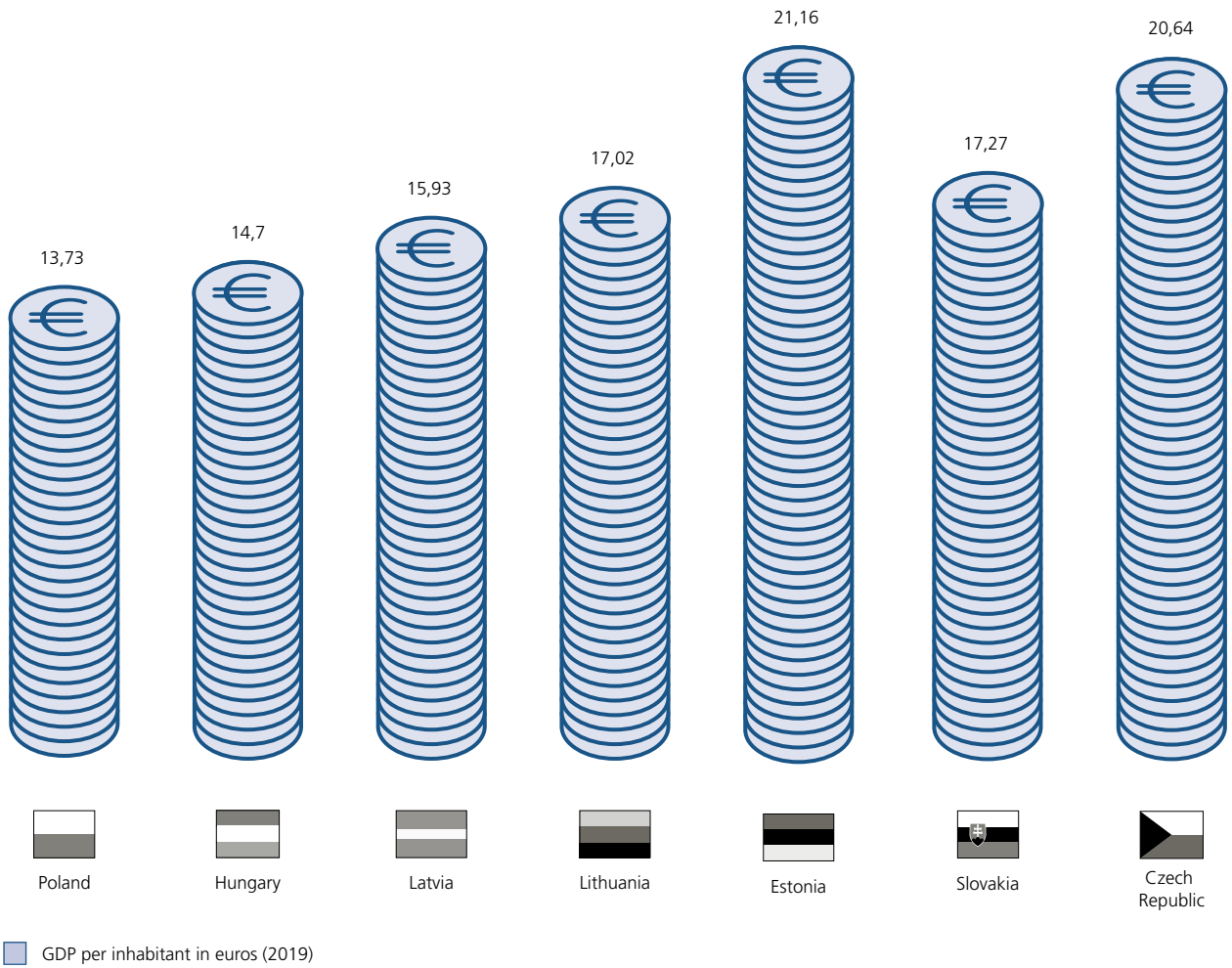
With the help of the standardised survey, it was also possible to trace the heterogeneous picture of young people with regard to their access to education. More than one-fifth (21.0%) have no or only a primary school certificate. About one-fifth (21.6%) of this group with a low level of education are aged 19 and over and who can be assumed to have left the education system with or without a primary school certificate. Furthermore, among the young people with low educational qualifications, comparatively more live in rural areas<sup>11</sup>, the economic situation is significantly worse<sup>12</sup>, and the education level of the mother<sup>13</sup> and the father<sup>14</sup> are significantly lower. In addition, young females are significantly less often represented in this group than young males<sup>15</sup>. Participants in Lithuania and Latvia tend to have a higher level of education, whilst those in the Czech Republic and Poland have a lower level.

The gender ratio, consisting of 4,363 (44.1%) male and 5,537 (55.9%) female respondents included in the cross-sectional sample, is slightly in favour of female respondents.

5,661 (57.2%) young people live in urban structures, whilst 2,798 (28.3%) grow up in rural areas. Almost two-thirds (62.4%) of young people aged 25–29 live in urban settlements, compared to around half (51.2%) of young people aged 14–18. This confirms the assumption of many studies that young people move more into urban areas as they get older<sup>16</sup>. Compared to other countries, Slovakia is the country with the highest proportion of young people living in rural areas, with a figure at 42.5%. In the Baltic countries, the proportion of young people growing up in

urban structures is the highest. This applies to almost 60% of young people in Estonia (59.1%) and almost two-thirds of all respondents (65.5%) in Lithuania. To find out about their economic status, the young people were asked what they or their families could afford. Taking into consideration the definition of relative and absolute poverty (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, 2022) the different living standards could be determined in this way and conclusions drawn about the economic conditions and possible poverty situations of young people. 331 youth respondents (3.3%) fall below the absolute poverty line and cannot afford enough food, heating or electricity. Just under 10% (995 young people) lack the financial means to buy clothes or shoes. A majority of 5,771 (58.3%) young people are economically well off, have a corresponding purchasing power and are, at least to some extent, able to afford luxury goods. Hungary is the country where most young people say they cannot afford clothes and shoes at 16.8% (total of all countries = 13.4%). At the same time, the lowest percentage of young people (48%) state that they are able to afford goods that go beyond their everyday needs (total for all countries = 58.3%). A different situation can be observed in the Czech Republic. At 6.5% (total of all countries = 13.4%), these young people are the least likely to be affected by poverty compared to all other countries. Almost three quarters of young people (73.7%) grow up in stable financial circumstances (total of all countries = 58.3%). These figures reflect the actual situations in the respective countries. After Poland, Hungary is the country with the lowest GDP per inhabitant. The Czech Republic, on the other hand, has the highest GDP per capita after Estonia (cf. Fig. 2 Gross domestic product (GDP) per inhabitant).

**FIG. 2: GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP) PER INHABITANT IN COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
 Figures in absolute numbers, cf. State Agency for Civic Education Baden-Württemberg (2022)







**5**

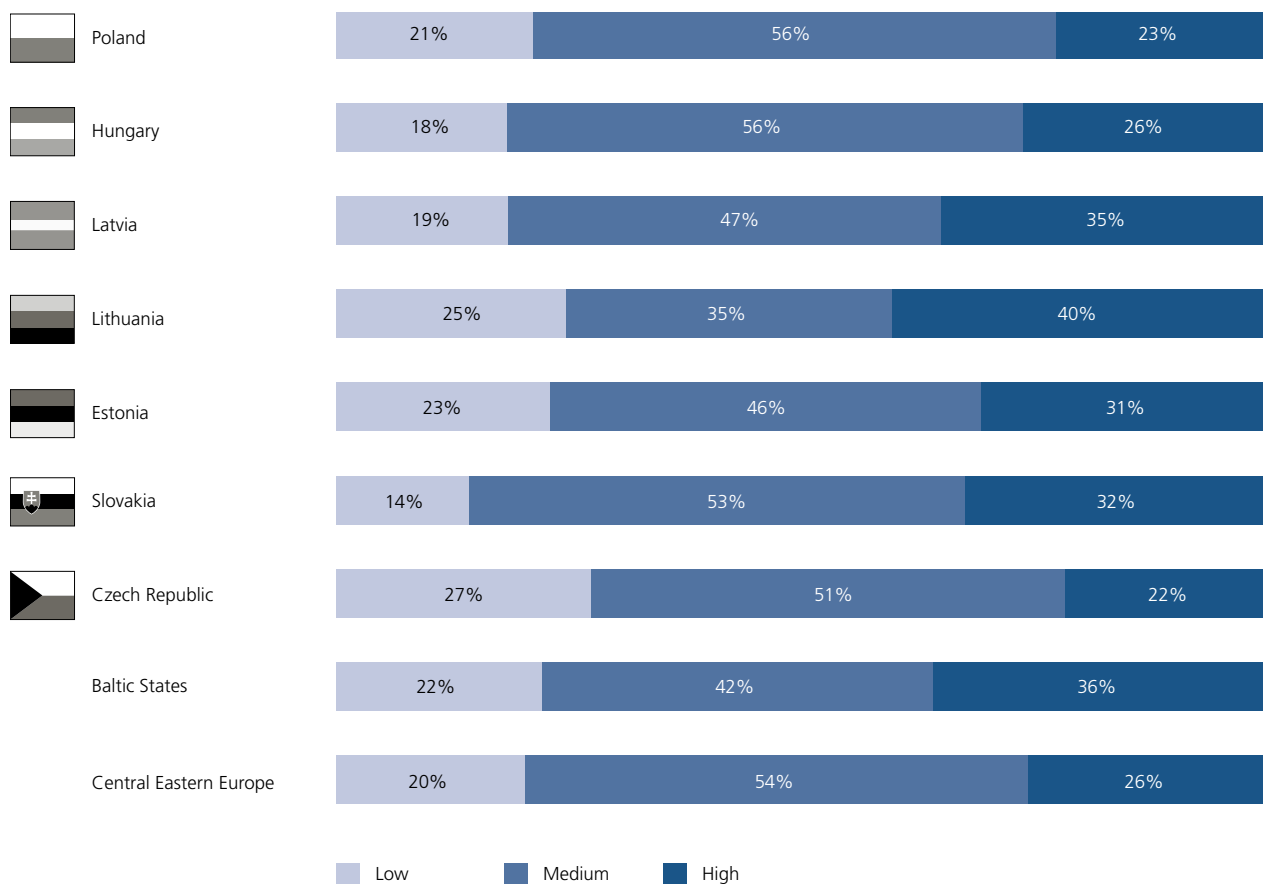
# **EDUCATION**



The education systems of the seven countries included in the study differ significantly from each other in some parts. For example, the designations of the educational pathways and the educational qualifications they lead to differ from country to country. In order to be able to compare the young people with regard to their educational qualifications and orientations, the respective country-specific qualifications were presented in a superordinate manner. Young people who have not completed any schooling or have completed primary school are placed as having a low level of education. A medium level of education is defined as young people who have attended secondary school or have completed an apprenticeship. Graduates of universities who have at least a Bachelor's degree or a doctorate are classified under high level of education.

Irrespective of the education system, however, there are strong correlations between the level of education of young people and the education levels of their parents in the countries studied. The chances of the children having a higher education increase if the mother of a young person from a Baltic State has an intermediate education and the father has an academic degree. In Central Eastern Europe, too, the education level of the offspring increases if the mother has at least an intermediate level of education, and the father's intermediate level of education is also sufficient to significantly increase the children's chances of attaining a higher level of education. Thus, not only in the Baltic States, but also within the countries of Central Eastern Europe, it can be seen that the chances of achieving a higher level of education increase in probability if the father in particular has a higher degree. Educational opportunities of the young generation in both regions are therefore strongly shaped by effects of origin.

**FIG. 3: EDUCATION LEVEL IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %**



Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, so that original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

When looking at the distribution of the education level of the young people surveyed, however, clear differences between the countries are noticeable. Young people in the Baltic States, for example, are more likely to have a high level of education (35.9%) compared to their peers in Central Eastern Europe (25.7%). In contrast, most young people in the Eastern European regions have an intermediate level of education. For example, more than 50% of young people in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia have an intermediate level of education. Young people in the Baltic regions of Europe thus have a markedly higher educational orientation than the young generation in Central Eastern Europe. They are particularly geared to obtaining an intermediate certificate.

Striving for the highest possible level of education is also visible in the Baltic States in the fact that 13% of the 14 to 18 year olds surveyed say that they are currently in higher education. This proportion rises to 25.4% in the 19–24 age category. In this age group, one in four is already in the process of obtaining an academic degree or already has one. More than every second 25–29 year old will already be an academic. In Central Eastern Europe, on the other hand, this age trend is not at all evident in the context of educational orientation. In these countries, only 2.9% of 14–18 year olds have the highest level of education. In the 19–24 age group, too, there are significantly fewer young people in academia (18.9%) than in the Baltic States. It is also interesting to note that more than 10% fewer of the 25–29 year olds from Central Eastern Europe (45.5%) have a tertiary education. This age-based comparison at least allows the assumption that young people in the Baltic States are already striving to continuously raise their level of education at a young age. After attaining a secondary school leaving certificate, it is not uncommon for young people to pursue an academic degree. In contrast, young people in Central Eastern Europe focus on acquiring an intermediate level of education early in their educational career. For example, 27.8% of 14 to 19 year olds and 72.4% of 19 to 24 year olds already have an intermediate school leaving certificate. At the same time, this also means that for the vast majority of young people in Central Eastern Europe, that they have achieved the maximum level of education. A university degree is pursued significantly less often.

However, the different educational orientations of young people in the surveyed areas cannot be viewed separately from the respective economic conditions or resulting conditions of the labour market. The economy of each of the Baltic countries is particularly characterised by innovative, intellectually demanding activities that are marked by technical, technological and digital advances as a result of historical developments (Melnikas 1999, p. 15). This means that the economy in each of the Baltic States is primarily characterised by information technology and the service sector, which requires relevant qualifications in these fields of work (Mets 2018; Dubra 2013). The young people also seem to develop an awareness of this situation and as a result, 75% of the respondents consider expertise and another 73% the level of education as the two decisive factors for finding a job. In line with this influence on the economy, the high educational orientation of young people in the Baltic States can also be understood as a response to the requirements they must meet to enter the labour market. In fact, it turns out that young people with a higher level of education also have the highest chances of finding a job that corresponds to their education.

In the Central Eastern European countries, however, young people are faced with different economic conditions. The Eastern European economies are particularly characterised by industry (Müller et al 2005). This also has an impact on the labour market, where 48.7% of young people with an intermediate qualification are in a job that also corresponds to their education. This means that young people there who hold an intermediate school-leaving certificate have greater chances of adequate, i.e. suitable, career prospects.

Although the young generation in the Baltic States and in Central Eastern Europe differ in terms of their educational orientations, what both groups have in common is that they align their educational aspirations according to the demands that are placed on them economically. Young people in both regions are thus striving to create the conditions for obtaining a suitable job through the degree they are aiming for or have achieved. This means that young people in Central Eastern Europe and the Baltic States ultimately negotiate their decision to complete their education in terms of (potential) employability

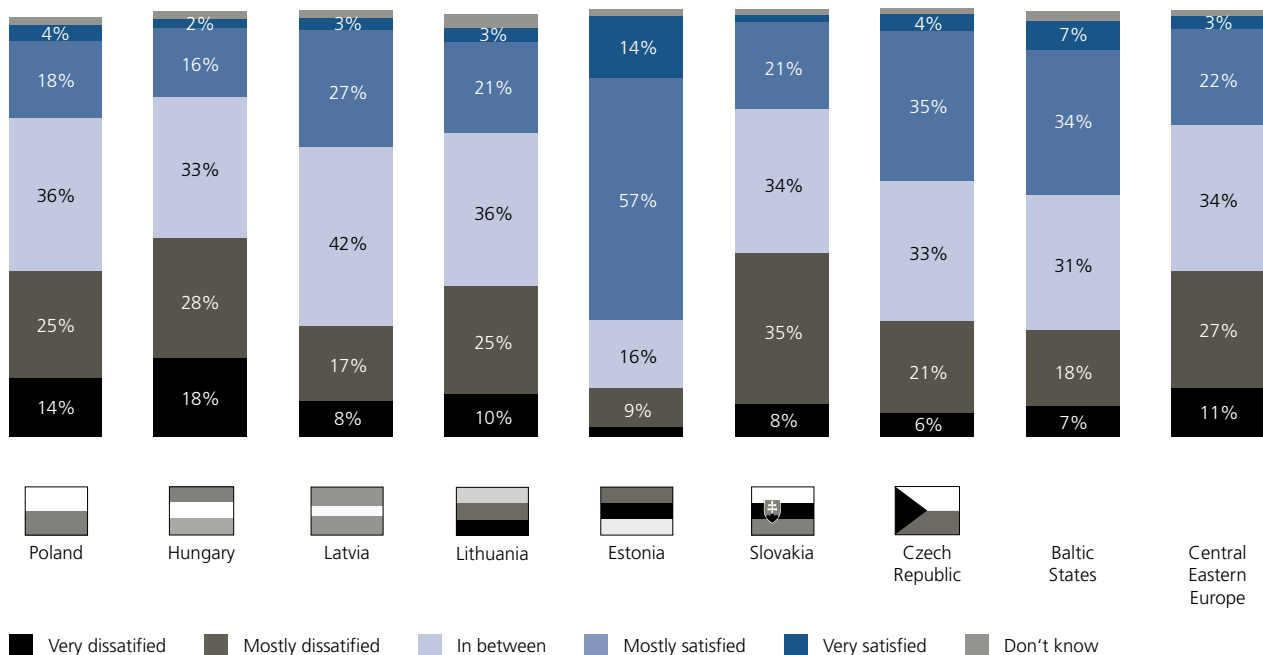
in the workplace. They primarily strategically align their educational ambitions according to which educational qualification they expect to have the best chances of finding a suitable job.

However, the level of education attained also has a significant effect on young people's satisfaction with their respective education systems in both parts of Europe. What is particularly interesting is that the satisfaction scores with the education system in both the Baltic and Central Eastern European countries are strongly related to the level of education attained by young people. Thus, among the satisfied Central Eastern European young people, the majority (44.8%) have a medium level of education. In the Baltic States, however, 50.9% of satisfied young people are located in the academic sector.

When comparing the satisfaction scores in the two regions more closely, further differences become apparent. At first glance, the young people surveyed in the Baltic countries appear to be significantly more satisfied with the education system than their counterparts in Central Eastern Europe. Thus, 40.4% of young people say they are quite satisfied or very satisfied with the education system. In Central Eastern Europe, on the other hand, only a quarter

(25.6%) share this positive assessment. In these countries, either one-third of young people are rather dissatisfied with the education system or have an ambivalent attitude towards it. Thus, the proportion of those young people in these countries who are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied are significantly higher than in the Baltic States. However, the Czech Republic seems to be the exception in this respect. There, 40.1% of young people say they are fairly satisfied with the education system whilst about a quarter (26.8%) express dissatisfaction. In Hungary, on the other hand, just under one-half (45%) express this kind of dissatisfaction with the education system, and in Slovakia, too, 43% of the young people appear to be comparatively dissatisfied. Even in Poland, the rate of dissatisfaction, at 39%, is just as high as the proportion of satisfied young people. In these three Central Eastern European countries, the young people surveyed also express a corresponding pessimism with regard to corruption in the education system, including with regard to the opportunity to participate in politics (cf. in more detail Baboš & Világi 2021, Bíró-Nagy & Szabó 2021, Justyna & Mrozowicki 2020/2021). Comparable scepticism and widespread resentment, on the other hand, seem less prevalent among Czech young people (Jungwirth et al 2021).

**FIG. 4: SATISFACTION WITH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %

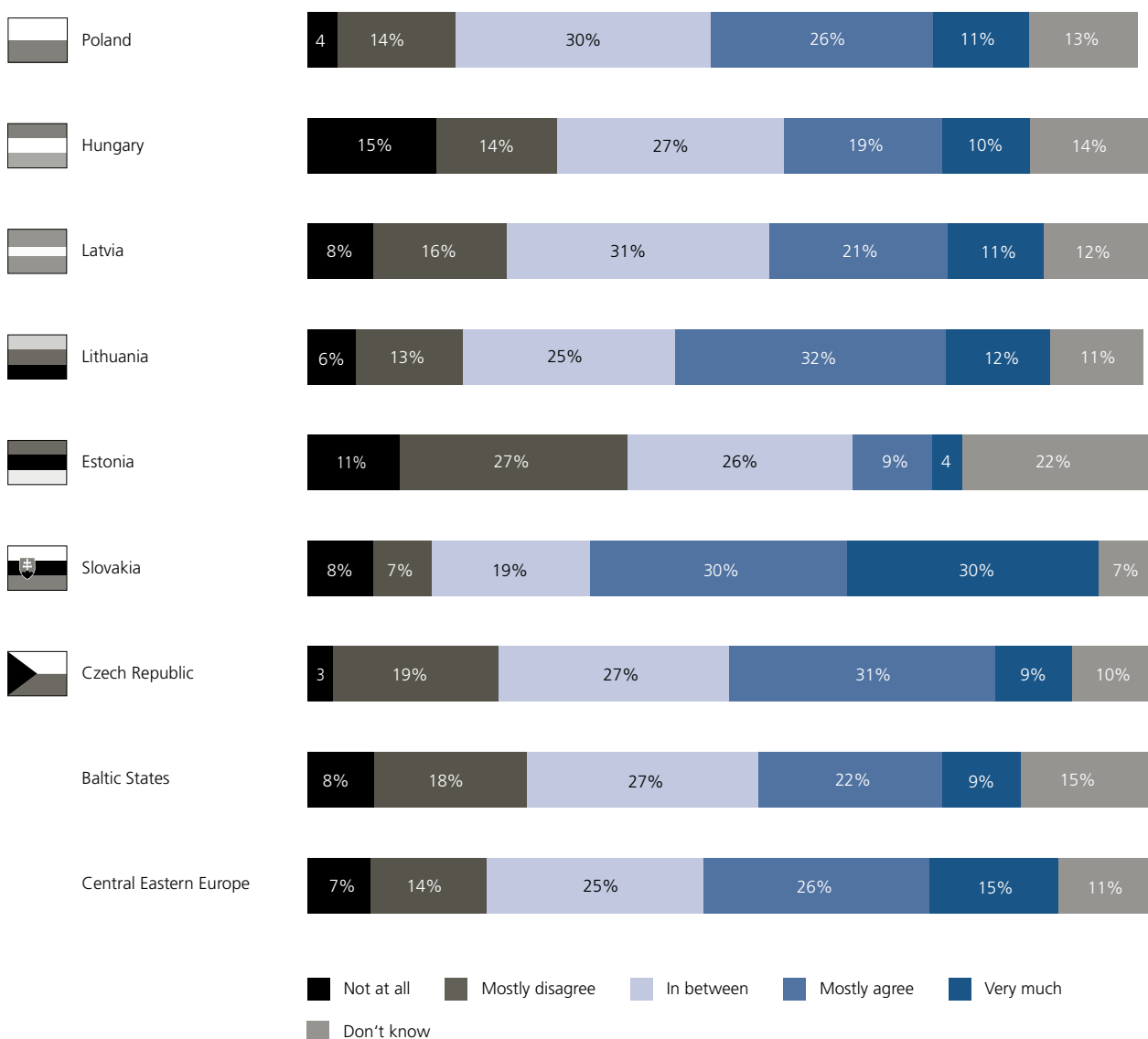


Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

Similar to the situation in Central Eastern Europe, the assessments of the Baltic young people also depend significantly on the degree of their scepticism. What is striking is that 25.6% of young people in Latvia are rather dissatisfied with the education system and 32.2% think that degrees can be bought there. Some 35 % of Lithuanians are rather dissatisfied with the education system and 43.8% are convinced that corruption exists. In comparison, young people in Estonia are less sceptical about obtaining degrees illegally. There, only ever one in ten young person (11.3%) expresses dissatisfaction with the education system.

Statistically, there is also a correlation between those who rate the education system as rather negative and at the same time show a high degree of scepticism with regard to the corruptibility of degrees. In the Baltic regions, young people are significantly more likely (28.6%) to express dissatisfaction with the education system if they are also convinced that corruption exists. Sceptical young people from Central Eastern Europe are also significantly more likely to be dissatisfied (27.2%) with their education system if corruption is assumed.

**FIG. 5: CORRUPTION IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %**





6

# WORK AND MIGRATION





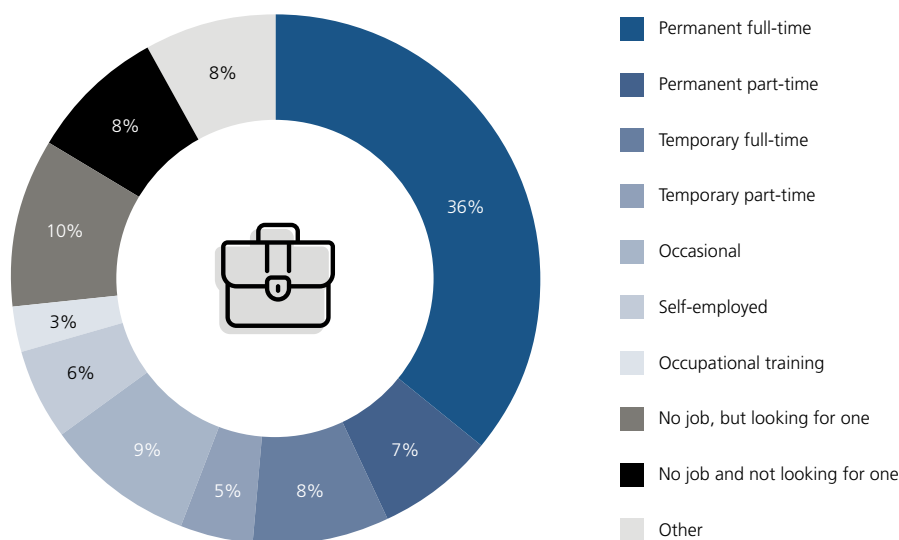
The transition from school to the labour market is an important step in young people's development. Unsuccessful transition not only has negative financial consequences but is also associated with social consequences. Both the paths into working life and the forms of employment are diverse. Internships, temporary and permanent employment, self-employment and many other forms of employment are what distinguish the world of work. In addition, there are many individual forms, combinations and changes of occupations. Migration is a way to open up to new job opportunities or to advance one's own education. At the same time, labour migration in particular is often associated with precarious employment, family losses, and a stereotypical burden on men in the world of work and women in managing the household and family

## YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORLD OF WORK

A look at the employment relationships of young people in the countries studied reveals a differentiated picture (cf. fig. 6 Current employment)<sup>17</sup>.

A large proportion of 36% is in full-time permanent employment, with a higher proportion of young females within this group<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, there are striking country-specific differences. Whilst the share of permanent full-time employees in Estonia is 43.8%, only a quarter (25.8%) of Czechs report being in the same type of employment. Overall, almost 10% of all young people (9.1%) do only occasional work, and here the proportion of female respondents is also somewhat higher (55.3% women to 44.7% men). Moreover, occasional employment is more common in Slovakia (19%) and the

FIG. 6: CURRENT EMPLOYMENT  
Young people aged 19 to 29, n=8,040; figures in %

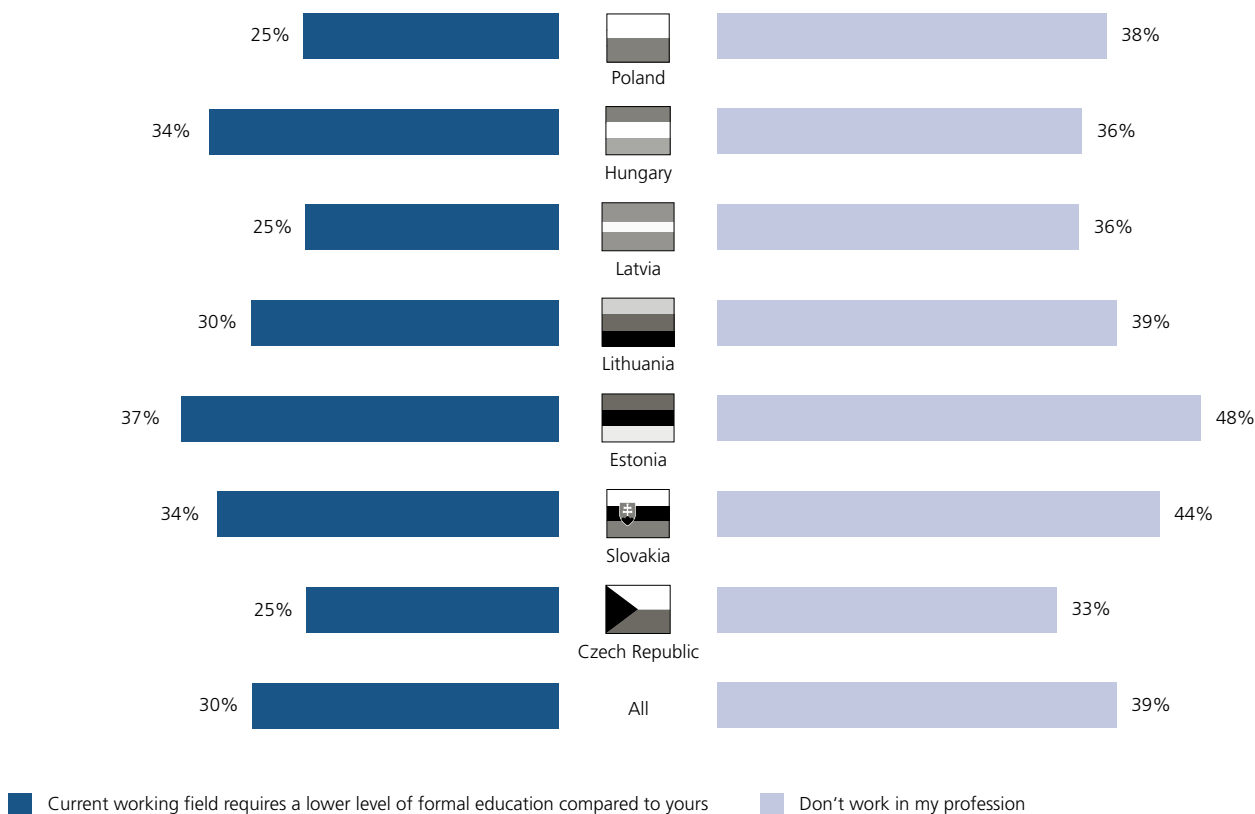


Czech Republic (12.8%). Another 6% of all young people between 19 and 29 are self-employed. In this respect, the proportion of male respondents and the proportion of respondents in Latvia and Lithuania are somewhat higher.

In general, it can be said that education determines opportunities on the labour market. This is also confirmed by the young people themselves when asked which factors are key when looking for a job. Over 70% cite level of education and expertise as the two most important factors. This is followed by personal contacts in private lives (60.6%) and with people in positions of power (59.5%)<sup>19</sup>. The available data also confirm that the higher the level of education, the higher the number of those in full- or part-time employment. More than half of the respondents (50.4%) with a high level of education are in full-time permanent employment, compared to only 19% of

those with a low level of education. Furthermore, a job's fit increases with the level of education. For example, almost two-thirds (69%) of 19–29 year old respondents with a high level of education say that they work in a field very close to their own profession, whereas only 38% of young people of the same age with a low level of education make the same claim. For about one-third of the young people, a clear discrepancy can be seen between individual training or level of education and the requirements of employers. A country-specific comparison of the fit between work and education or training shows that young people from Slovakia (37.1%) and Hungary (34.4%) work more often than average in fields that are below their actual level of education. Furthermore, a comparison of all countries shows a higher number of young people do not work in their profession, especially in Slovakia (47.6%) and the Czech Republic (43.5%).

**FIG. 7: FIT OF EDUCATION AND WORK IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
**Young people aged 19 to 29, n=8.0400; figures in %**



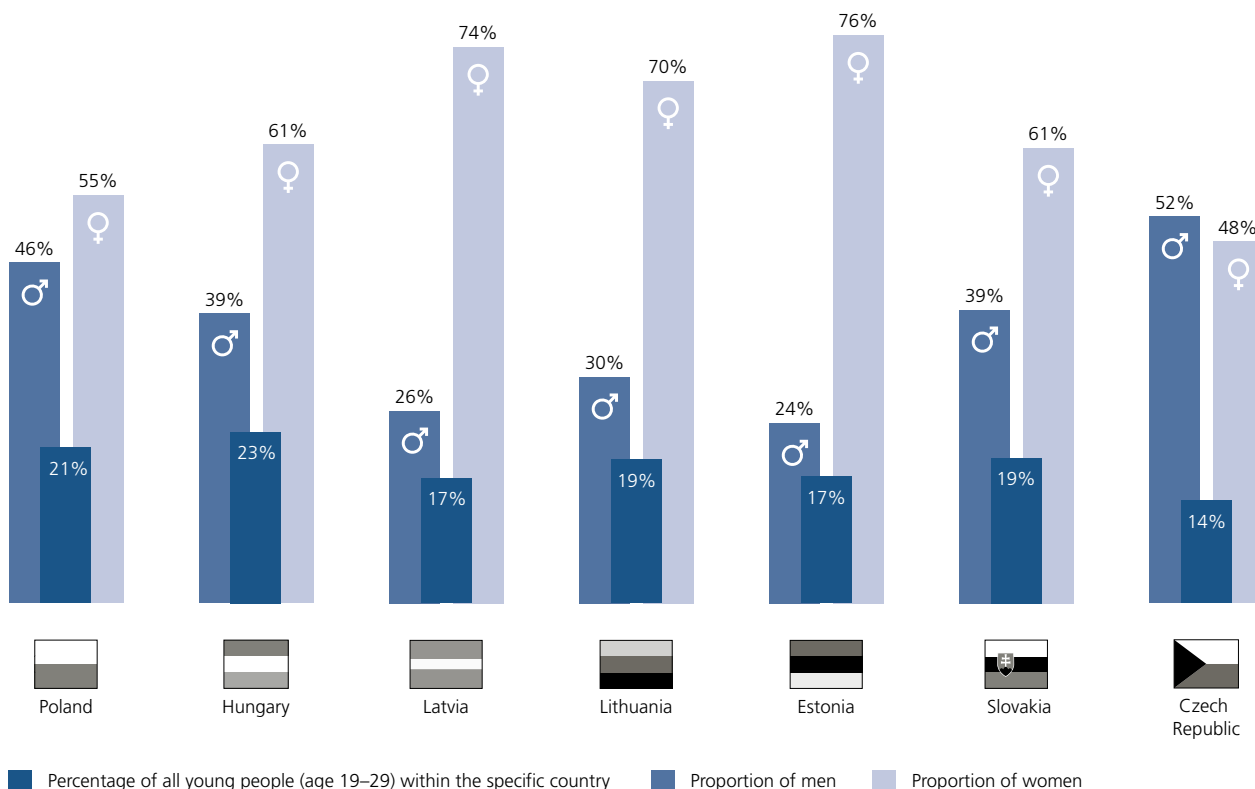
## UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Estonia, with a GDP of EUR 21.16, and the Czech Republic, with a GDP of EUR 20.64 per inhabitant, are the strongest countries economically. Poland (GDP of EUR 13.73) and Hungary (GDP of EUR 14.70) have the lowest GDP (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg, 2022). Latvia (7.5%) and Slovakia (6.4%) show the highest unemployment rates within the total population. The Czech Republic (2.1%) and Poland (2.9%) have the lowest unemployment rates (cf (Statista, 2022)<sup>20</sup>). Thus, high overall unemployment cannot be directly assumed for economically weaker countries. However, this is different when looking at unemployment among young people (cf. Fig. 8 NEET young people). In comparison, most young people are affected by unemployment in the economically weakest countries, Hungary and Poland. These young people are also referred to as NEET young people hereinafter<sup>21</sup>.

The economic strength of Estonia and the Czech Republic is associated with comparatively low unemployment rates among the young people surveyed.

Generally, more and more young women appear to be affected by unemployment. The only exception is the Czech Republic where the share of young women in the total youth unemployment rate is somewhat lower, at 48.3% (young males = 51.7%), with a total youth unemployment rate of 13.7%. The proportion of unemployed females is particularly high in the Baltic countries (Estonia = 75%, Latvia = 74.3% and Lithuania = 69.8%). Furthermore, this study also confirms a correlation between unemployment and poverty. Young people who claim to be unemployed are more likely to be in emergency financial situations in which they are unable to pay for basic needs such as food, heating, electricity.

FIG. 8: NEET YOUNG PEOPLE IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON  
Young people aged 19 to 29, n=1,501; figures in % per country<sup>22</sup>



## GENERAL MIGRATION FACTORS AND IMPACTS

The Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as the Visegrád States Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic are well-positioned compared to many other Eastern European and Central Asian states due to their own economies as well as their membership and trade as EU member states, yet here too there are many push factors that favour the migration of young people. Thus, the 1990s to 2004 were marked by post-Soviet migratory movements, exacerbated by political and economic instability. Furthermore, visa requirements and high costs made migration difficult. The year 2004 marks a turning point for all seven countries with their accession to the EU<sup>23</sup>. Freedom of movement within the EU and an increasing demand for EU labour facilitated migration within the European Union. In addition, the economic crisis of 2009/10 and the resulting rise in unemployment, bankruptcies of companies, etc. is another formative development. In most cases, migration serves the goals of finding work and securing income. In particular, an ageing society coupled with the migration of the young working-age population as well as the migration of well-educated workers coupled with a shortage of skilled

workers pose major challenges for the countries (cf. Mierina 2020, Blažytė 2020)<sup>24</sup>.

## THE DESIRE TO MIGRATE

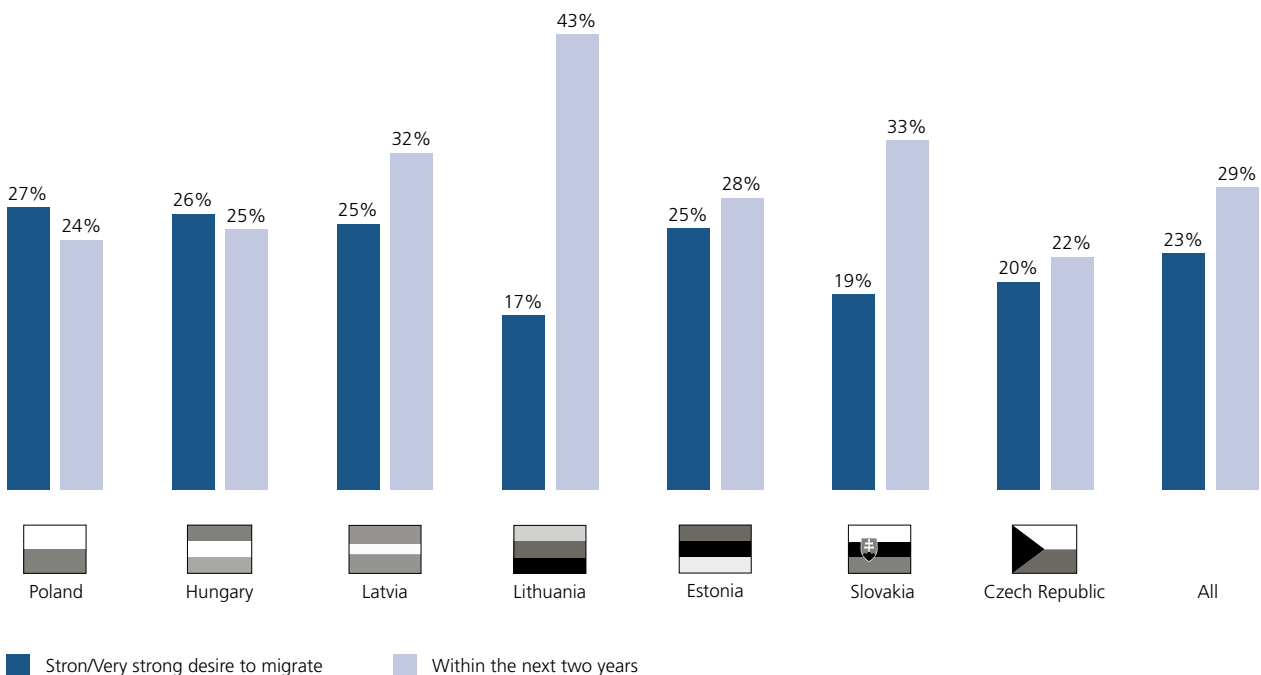
Available data show that only a quarter (25.9%) of young people cannot imagine migrating for more than six months. The desire to migrate decreases with increasing age. This is due, for example, to the fact that these young people more often already have their own family and are permanently employed.

Just under a quarter (22.5%) of all young people, on the other hand, have a strong to very strong desire to migrate (cf. Fig. 9 Proportion of young people with a strong desire to migrate and time of migration). As the above statements indicate, these are more often younger young people<sup>25</sup> who have not yet started their own family or taken up permanent employment.

The desire to migrate is particularly strong among young people in Poland (26.9%). The proportion of young people who have a strong desire to migrate is comparatively low in Lithuania (16.6%).

FIG. 9: PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A STRONG DESIRE TO MIGRATE AND TIME OF MIGRATION IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=2,226; figures in %



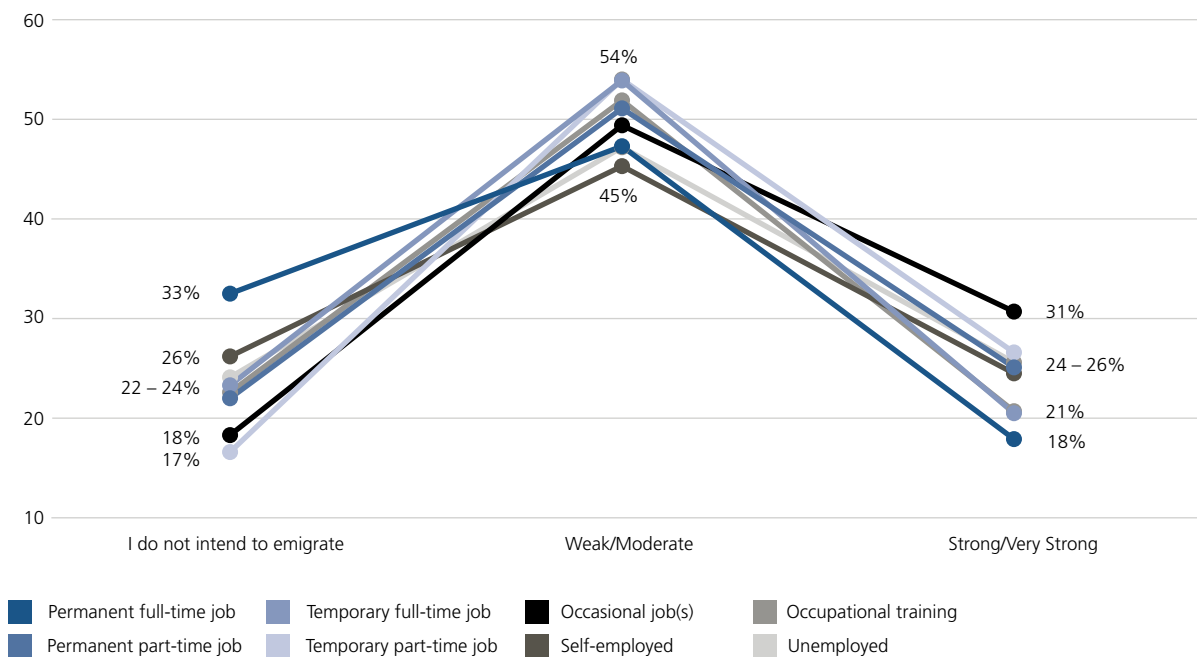
However, the figure also shows that a high number of young people who have a strong desire to migrate does not mean that they actually want to migrate in the near future. This means that in Lithuania, although comparatively few young people have a strong desire to migrate, it can be assumed, however that these young people are much more likely to realise this wish in the near future. 43.4% of Lithuanian young people with a strong desire to migrate would also like to do so within the next two years. Whereas Poland has comparatively the highest proportion of young people with a strong desire to migrate, only 23.8% of these young people actually plan to migrate in the next two years.

The current employment situation in which the young people find themselves has a clear impact on their desire to migrate (cf. Fig. 10 Desire to migrate and current employment situation).

It can be assumed that permanent employment gives young people the security to rule out migration for themselves. Almost one-third (32.5%) of young people in permanent full-time employment rule out migration for themselves. In contrast, a different picture can be seen in the group of part-time employed people. Among them, the desire to migrate is disproportionately strong compared to all other groups. Among those who have a casual job, this applies to about one-third (30.7%). Migration is out of the question for only 16.6% of young people with a temporary part-time job and for 18.3% with occasional jobs.

The young people were also asked about the country to which they would most like to migrate. The data are highly variable and cover a range of countries. Among the most popular are Spain (5.1%), USA (7.3%) and Germany (8.2%). A connection to Russia can no longer be recognised. Only just under 1% of all young people name Russia as their desired destination.

FIG. 10: DESIRE TO MIGRATE AND CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION  
Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in % (missing percent = DK/NA)



## OWN MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

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To determine how many young people actually migrate, the young people were asked whether they had already been abroad for more than six months. Just under one-sixth (16%) of all young people surveyed answered this question affirmatively. A differentiated picture emerges of those young people who look back on their experience of external migration.

As expected, the proportion of young people with a previous stay abroad increases with age. 8.7% of 14–18 year olds, 14.1% of 19–24 year olds and 21.6% of 25–29 year olds, say they have been abroad for more than six months<sup>26</sup>.

The gender distribution is significant among young people who look back on their own stay abroad. While this applies to about one-fifth (19.1%) of all young males, this is the case for only 13.7% of young females<sup>27</sup>.

In a country comparison, Lithuania is the country with the most young people with migration experience, with 21.4% indicating such an experience. This once again confirms the picture that young people there have comparatively less desire to migrate, but if they have this desire, they then also carry out these plans (cf. Fig. 10 Desire to migrate and current employment situation). Migration experience is lower in the Czech Republic (11.2%) and Slovakia (13.3%). These are also the countries that, together with Estonia, have the highest GDP. This opens up the view of classic labour migration, which is determined in particular by a country's economic strength and private financial situation.



7

# FAMILY





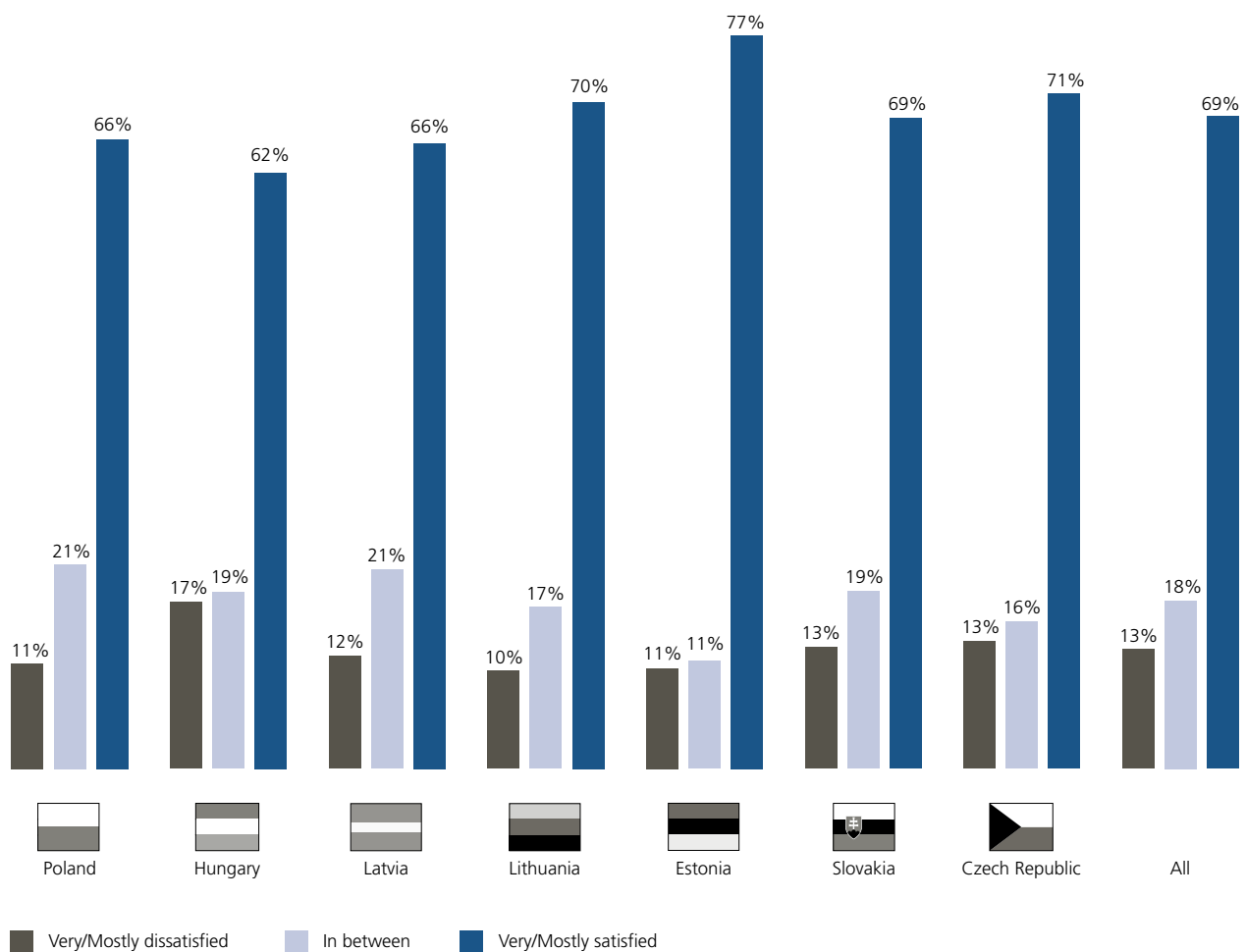
In all seven countries studied, the family is of enormous importance for young people. This applies both to their current situation and with regard to their future lifestyle.

## SATISFACTION

The majority of young people express a high level of satisfaction with their own family. More than two-thirds (68.3%) of young people say they are very or mostly satisfied with their family life. For these young people, family goes hand in hand with security, continuity and stability. The majority also report a participatory form of decision-making at home. However, these high approval ratings cannot hide the fact that the family triggers

ambivalent feelings or even represents a place with a high potential for conflict for some of the young people. Thus, 17.6% of the young people state that they have a differentiated attitude towards their own family. One in eight young people (12.5%) is even either completely or mostly dissatisfied with life in their own family. There are small but statistically significant differences between the genders. Thus, young males (14.1%) tend to be more dissatisfied with the family than their female peers (11.2%). In contrast, neither the age nor the region of residence of the young people surveyed plays a significant role in the assessment of family cohabitation. The values remain constant across all age groups as well as in the distinction between young people growing up in urban and rural structures.

FIG. 11: SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY LIFE IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON  
Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %



Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

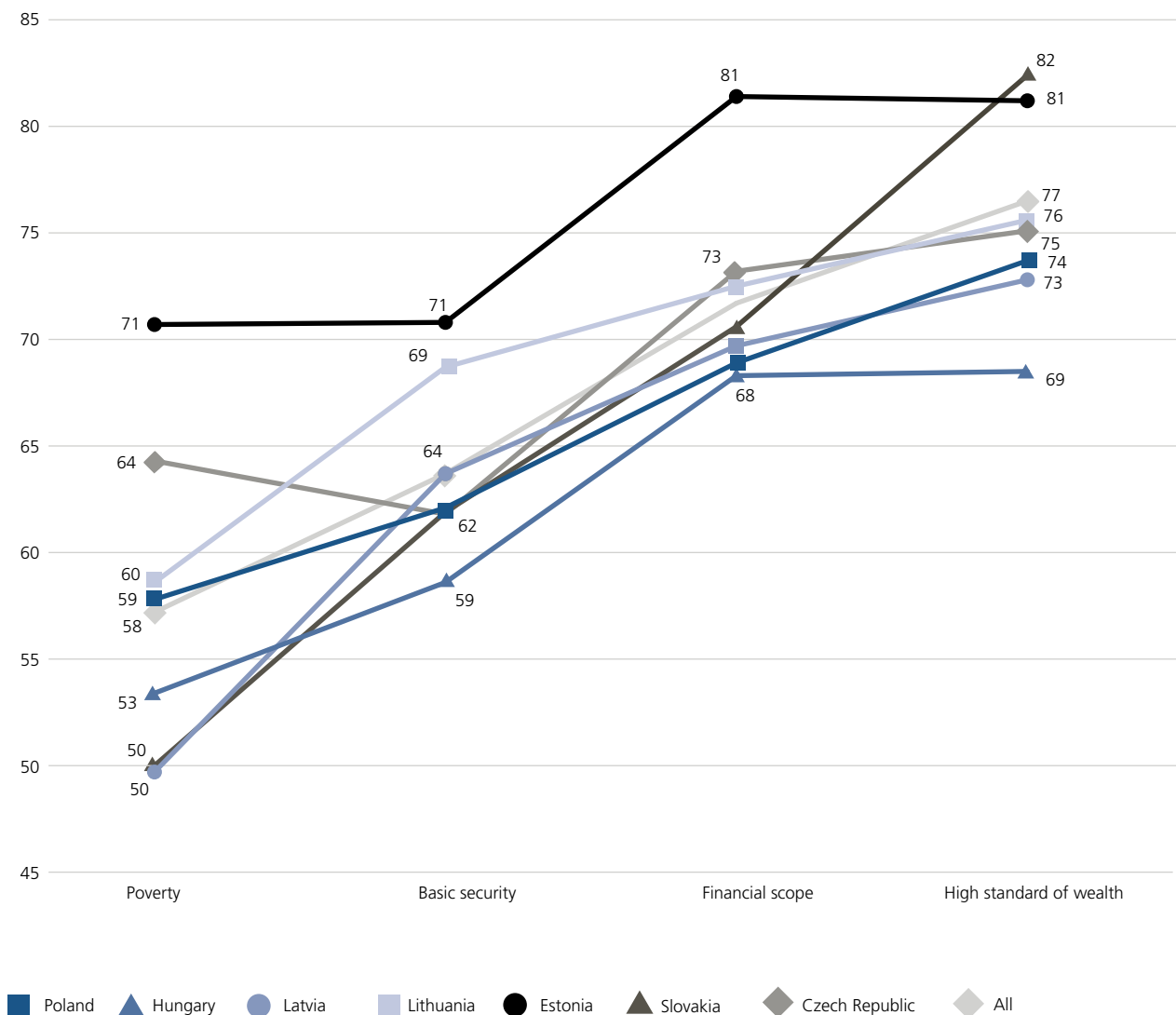
However, when comparing the young people according to their countries of origin, some obvious and statistically relevant differences become apparent. According to the survey, young people in Estonia are most satisfied with their own family life. This is true for more than three quarters (76.8%) of them. In Hungary, the corresponding approval ratings, also in comparison to all other countries, are significantly lower at 62.4%. In both Poland and Latvia, a disproportionately high percentage of young people can be observed who have an ambivalent attitude towards their own family. More than one in five young people in these

two countries state that, in addition to harmonious and positive experiences, tension and conflictual negotiation processes within the family also exist.

In all seven countries of Central Eastern Europe and the Baltic States studied, family issues are also social status issues that seem to depend on the financial opportunities of the family. Thus, the socio-economic situation also decisively determines how one's own family is assessed. The trend is always clear:

**FIG. 12: SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY LIFE IN RELATION TO THE FINANCIAL SITUATION IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; answers: very/mostly satisfied; figures in %



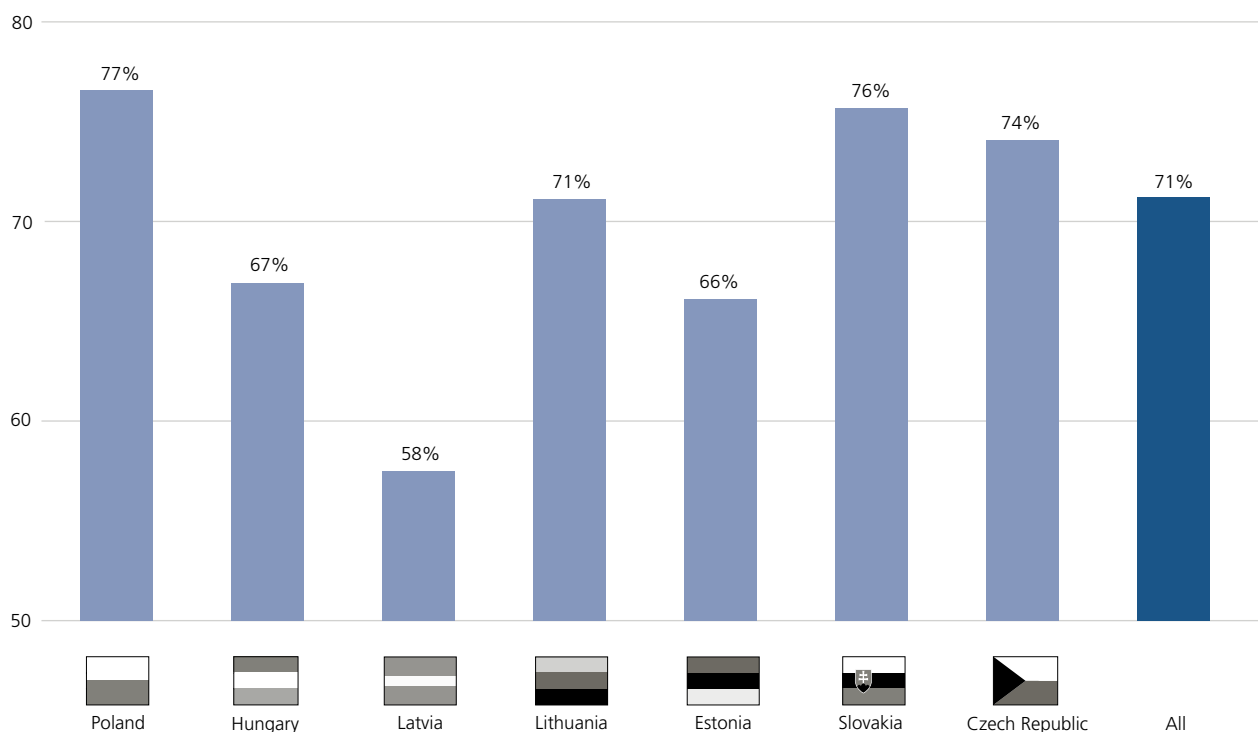
The more precarious the financial situation within the family, the more stressful the relationship with parents is assessed. Especially the everyday life of young people who are affected or threatened by poverty seems to increase the likelihood of tensions and differences of opinion within the family. On the other hand, young people who have a high material standard also enjoy a higher sense of satisfaction in the family context. However, these correlations vary in size and level across countries. Whereas in Estonia the approval rating of 70.7% is comparatively high even among young people from precarious backgrounds, in Hungary (53.2%), Slovakia (50.0%) and Latvia (49.7%) only every second person gets along well with their parents. Moreover: A non-negligible proportion of Hungarian young people (17.4%) disproportionately often state that they basically do not get along with their parents, often argue, or are in recurring arguments compared to their peers in all other countries. The stress can have different facets and, starting from financial hardship, originate in cramped housing conditions and lack of support services, which increase the likelihood of tensions and conflicts.

## FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS

Whereas in Poland (76.6%), Slovakia (75.7%) and the Czech Republic (74.1%) three out of four of the young people who still live at home state that they share a household with both their mother and father, in Estonia (66.1%) and Hungary (66.9%) only two out of three young people do so. In Latvia (57.5%), only slightly more than one in two people live with both parents under one roof.

The corresponding figures naturally change with the age of the young people. Thus, a creeping spatial detachment process from parents takes place in all seven countries studied. Whereas in the group of under 18 year olds about 80% of all young people still live at home, this applies to slightly more than half (51.3%) of the 19 to 24 year olds. Among the 25–29 year old respondents, only a quarter (24.5%) still share a household with their parents. At the same time, the proportion of young people who move in with their partner is growing.

FIG. 13: NUCLEAR FAMILY IN COUNTRY COMPARISON  
Young people aged 14 to 29, n=4,538; figures in %



Interestingly, spatial separation from parents seems to occur earlier in the Baltic States. In the 25–29 age group in Estonia, for example, only 14.3% say they live with their parents. The situation is similar for young people in Latvia (16.6%) and Lithuania (18.0%). In contrast, the corresponding proportion in Central Eastern Europe is significantly higher. Among Slovakian young people, as many as 41.6% of those aged 25–29 still live at home. Convenience thus plays a rather subordinate role for them. In fact, for almost two-thirds of them (60.4%), financial reasons are what prevent them from moving out. Only one in five young people in Slovakia (22.3%) say that they live with their parents because it is the easiest and most comfortable solution. In the Baltic countries, on the other hand, this is an important reason for a much higher proportion of young people in the 25–29 age group. In Lithuania this applies to 47.1%, in Latvia to 41.8% and in Estonia still to 34.7% of the young people. However, this should not hide the fact that for a considerable proportion of young people in the Baltic States, insufficient financial resources are an obstacle to living on their own. About one-third (Latvia = 34.1%; Estonia = 31.9%; Lithuania = 28.1%) say they would like to live alone if financial circumstances allowed them to do so.

## STARTING A FAMILY

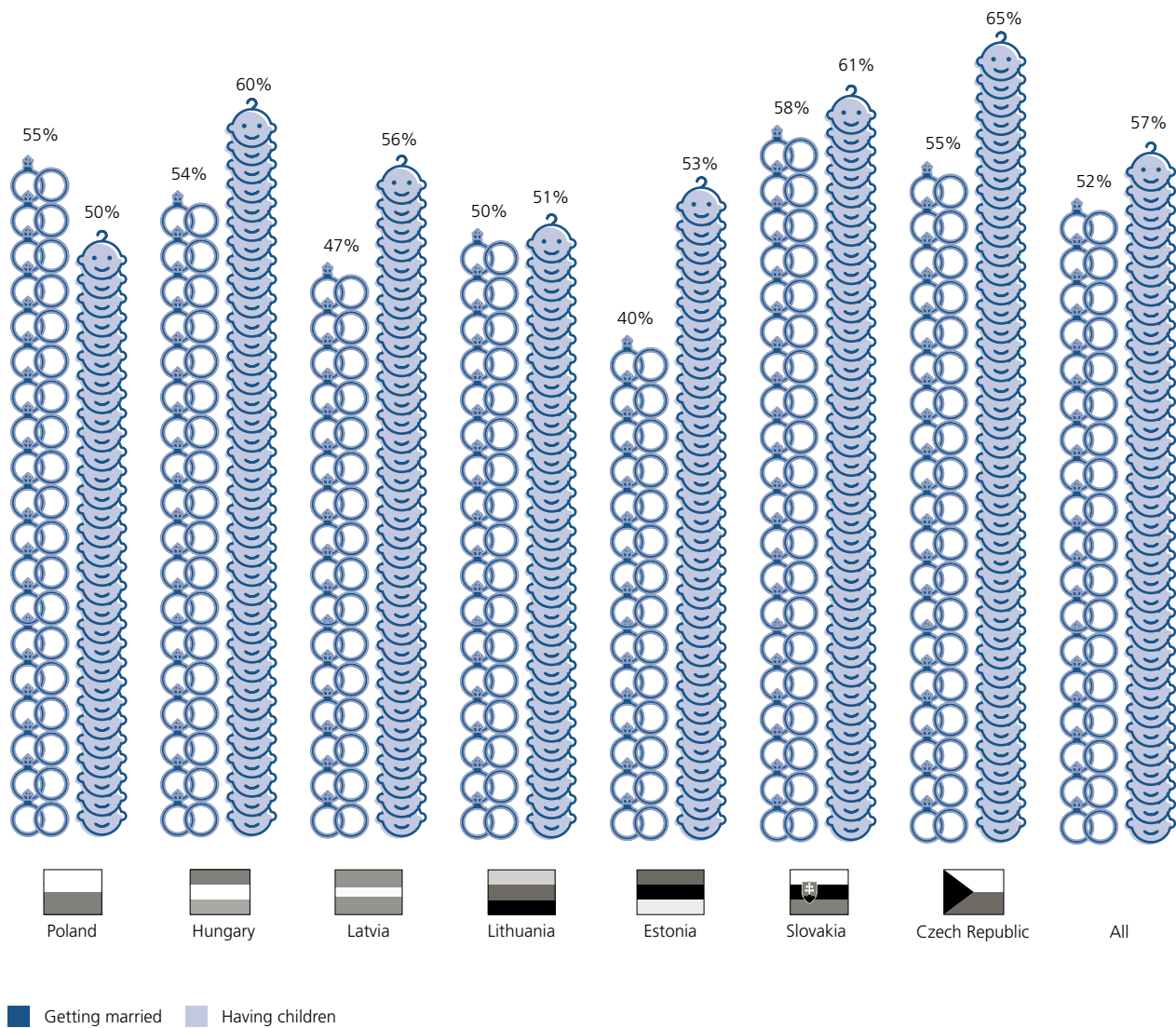
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The fact that family has a high priority in the lives of young people is shown not least by the fact that, despite all individualisation and career aspirations, it is always considered when planning one's own biography and with a view to one's own future. Starting a family of one's own plays a key role for the vast majority of all young people surveyed across all countries studied. Family is thus primarily thought of as being based on a classical traditional set of values: More than half of all respondents (57.5%) see their future in the combination of marriage and children. However, when considering the two issues separately, a differentiated picture of young people's ideas about the future in relation to starting their own family can be drawn. Accordingly, having children is considered more important than getting married. Whereas just under half of all young people (51.5%) say they want to marry at a later date, having children is an important or very important goal for as many as 56.7%.

Young people in the Baltic States, in particular, do not see marriage as a prerequisite for partnership and having children. Thus, young Estonians, in particular, do not consider marriage to be mandatory. Only 39.6% are in favour, followed by their peers in Latvia (46.5%) and Lithuania (49.7%). In Poland, on the other hand, the picture tends to be reversed. In the country traditionally shaped by the Christian faith and the Roman Catholic Church, marriage (55.3%) still ranks ahead of having children (50.2%). In an international comparison, this ratio represents a unique feature when it comes to the specific orientation of family formation. However, this relationship in Poland cannot be attributed exclusively to the high relevance of marriage but rather is reinforced by the fact that the aspiration to have children is articulated less frequently. More than one-fifth of Polish young people (21.8%) plan to not have children of their own also irrespective of the partner constellation. In addition, there is a high proportion of unexplored persons (19.7%) who pursue the desire to have children only to a limited extent. Taken as a whole, Poland represents the country among the Visegrád Group in which child planning is most often postponed among the up and coming young generation.

Irrespective of this, a significant urban-rural divide is discernible in the question of family formation for all the countries studied. The desire for marriage and children as a central goal in shaping one's own biography is significantly less pronounced among young people in urban structures than among their peers in rural regions. In contrast, the current financial situation does not seem to play any, at least no direct, role in this respect. Marriage and having children are always judged in a similar fashion by young people, regardless of their socio-economic situation. However, the fact that there is at least an indirect influence is due to the fact that satisfaction with the family of origin, which, as already established (cf. Fig. 12 Satisfaction with family life in relation to the financial situation in a country comparison) in all the countries studied here depends to a large extent on the financial situation in which the young people grow up, determines the view of marriage and desire to have children themselves (cf. Table 2).

**FIG. 14: MARRIAGE AND THE DESIRE TO HAVE CHILDREN IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
 Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; answers: very important/important; figures in %



**TABLE 2: FAMILY PLANNING AND SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY OF ORIGIN**

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %.

Satisfaction with family of origin	getting married			having children		
	important/very important	partly	not important/not at all important	important/very important	partly	not important/not at all important
very/mostly satisfied	56.4	21.7	18.6	62.3	17.0	16.0
partly	43.3	26.6	25.6	46.8	23.9	23.4
very/mostly dissatisfied	39.7	22.0	34.7	43.9	18.4	32.6

Thus, in all seven countries studied, those young people who express a high degree of satisfaction with their own family of origin are far more open-minded about getting married, for example. For 56.4% of all young people interviewed who give their family a positive rating, marriage is an important to very important goal in the further course of their biography. For those who perceive recurring conflicts in their family, this is true in only 39.7% of all cases. A more comparable picture with an even clearer discrepancy emerges when looking at the desire to have one's own children. Almost two-thirds (62.3%) of the young people who are satisfied with their family of origin would also like to raise children themselves at a later date. Only 16.0% would answer this with a negative response.

Accordingly, the orientation towards traditional family values can certainly be seen as a central characteristic of the current young generation in the countries studied, which is passed on from generation to generation through family socialisation processes. In other words: if young people perceive their own family in which they grow up as a place where affection, support, security, continuity and stability occur and participatory forms of negotiation and decision-making become possible in daily communication with parents and other family members, the likelihood that they will start a family themselves at a later stage also increases.

If we look at the actual time of starting a family, the process seems to be increasingly delayed, which is a development that has already been observed in Western European countries for several decades. The reasons for this are primarily financial obstacles as well as individualisation efforts, such as personal educational ambitions and career planning. The reported average age for starting a family, measured by when the intention is to have the first child, is 28 across all countries surveyed. Interestingly, the average age in the Baltic countries is below 28 years and in the Visegrád countries just above 28 years, although there is a high degree of dispersion in the figures.

A look at the corresponding distribution of age groups in the individual countries underscores the initial impression and at the same time allows for a differentiated view. For example, young people in Latvia tend to start family planning earlier than in all other countries. Almost one-third (31.5%) plan to have their first child before the age of 25. This desire becomes virulent for the majority of young people in the Czech Republic between the ages of 26 and 28. 40% aim for this age when planning a family. In contrast, the birth of the first child in Hungary is expected at a relatively late date. Just under one-third (29.4%) expect to do so at the age of 29 or 30, and a further almost 15% do not intend to do so until after their own 30th birthday. In both cases, the value is disproportionately high by international standards.

**TABLE 3: DESIRE TO HAVE CHILDREN BY AGE GROUP IN COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %**

Age groups	Countries							Gesamt
	Poland	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Estonia	Slovakia	Czech Republic	
up to 25 years	27.3	22.4	31.5	26.5	25.1	21.3	24.2	25,1
26–28 years	33.6	33.4	27.9	31.9	33.8	36.8	40.0	34,4
29–30 years	27.9	29.4	28.6	28.2	27.5	29.6	27.0	28,3
31 years and older	11.2	14.9	12.1	13.3	13.6	12.2	8.9	12,2

Clear differences can also be seen in how many children the young people surveyed would specifically like to have. However, only two-thirds of all respondents even dare to make a forecast at all. Among those who gave corresponding information, the average number is 2.18 children. There are no notable differences between the sexes. In contrast, the difference between young people growing up in the countryside and in the city is much more significant.

This confirms the trend that was already visible in the basic desire to have children: young people in rural regions are not only generally more open to family planning as a whole compared to their peers growing up in urban structures but are also willing to raise more children.

In the country comparison, too, a tendency is noticeable that runs along the border between the Baltic States and the countries of Central Eastern Europe. Baltic young people plan to have more children in the course of their lives than is the case among young people in the Visegrád countries. For example, young Estonians (like their peers in Latvia) are underrepresented in the group of young people who express “only” a desire to have two children, and significantly overrepresented in the group of those who desire a family with three or even four or more children of their own. On the other hand, a contrary trend can be observed in the countries of Central Eastern Europe, especially in the Czech Republic, where young people comparatively seldom mention the desire to have more than two children. Poland is an exception in this regard.

**TABLE 4: DESIRED NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON**  
**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %**

Number	Countries							Total
	Poland	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Estonia	Slovakia	Czech Republic	
1 child	12.4	16.2	18.7	16.6	15.2	14.2	12.3	14.9
2 children	63.1	59.3	53.2	63.0	52.8	62.2	69.6	61.1
3 children	18.6	21.2	23.6	15.9	27.0	18.7	14.1	19.5
4 and more children	5.9	3.3	4.5	4.4	5.0	4.9	4.0	4.5

8

# GENERAL VALUES, ATTITUDES AND WISHES



## SATISFACTION

Looking at the young people's statements regarding the question of how satisfied they are with their lives in general, what stands out is that both the Baltic and the Central Eastern European regions show a rather satisfied young generation.

Thus, from the Baltic States, a total of 64.8% of respondents say they are generally very or fairly satisfied with their lives. Almost the same proportion of young people in Central Eastern Europe (62.9%) share this assessment. In contrast, about one-fifth (22%) of all young people across all countries are rather dissatisfied with their own lives. There are no notable differences between the age groups and sexes in this respect. This also applies to the comparison between young people living in rural or urban areas.

However, what significantly influences satisfaction with life is their financial situation. In both the Baltic and Eastern European countries, the more financial resources they have, the more satisfied young people are with their general living situation. Aside from the aspect of financial

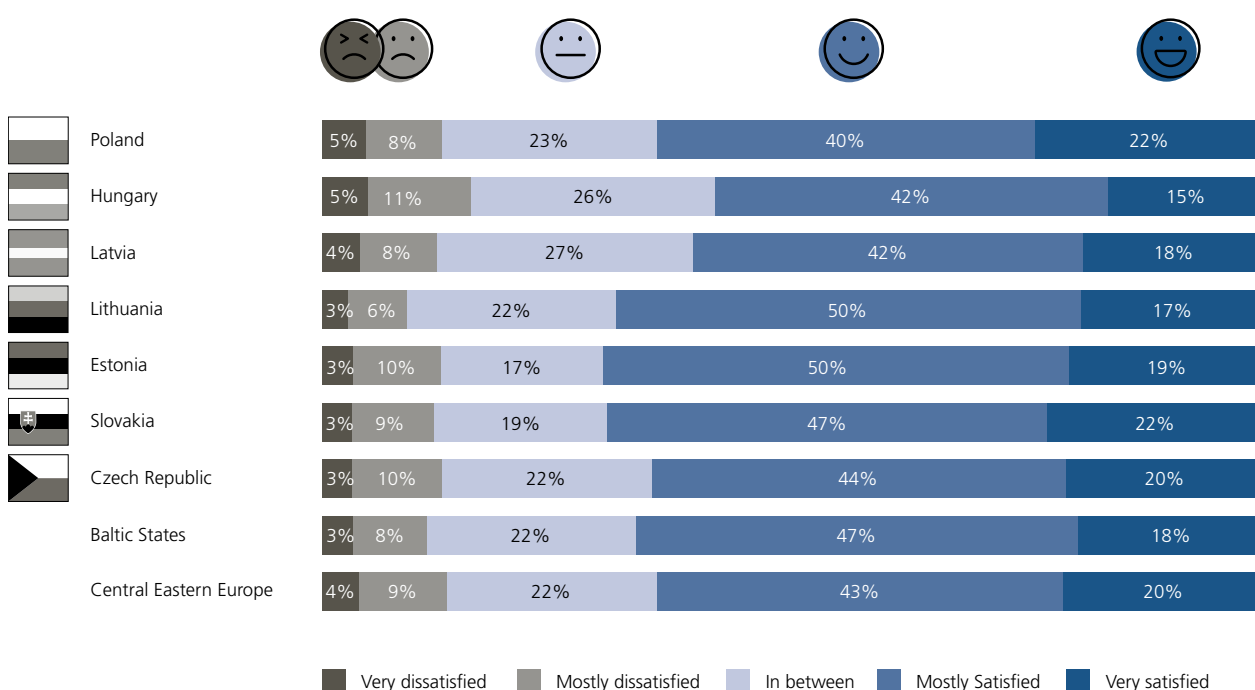
security, social factors above all are used by young people to determine their subjectively perceived level of satisfaction. This includes the sense of well-being within the family and the peer group, although the circle of friends seems to have an even stronger effect on satisfaction with life overall. In the Baltic States, satisfaction with one's own education also plays a somewhat greater role in terms of subjectively perceived satisfaction with life than is the case in the context of Central Eastern Europe.

At the level of individual countries, it is noticeable that young people in Estonia have the highest Level of satisfaction. Compared to Latvia and Lithuania, they are not only more satisfied with their lives overall but also express satisfaction significantly more often in relation to their own family (76.8%), circle of friends (78.8%) and their education (69.0%). Young people in Latvia, on the other hand, are much more reserved in all areas.

In Central Eastern European countries, young people in Slovakia and the Czech Republic in particular are more satisfied in all areas compared to their peers in Hungary and Poland.

FIG. 15: SATISFACTION IN LIFE IN GENERAL IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON

Young people aged 14-29, Baltic States n=3,900, Central Eastern Europe n=6,000; figures in %



## FUTURE FORECASTS AND LIFE GOALS

Similar tendencies can be seen in the future forecasts of young people in the Eastern European as well as in the Baltic regions. Young people from these two geographic areas are always more optimistic about their personal future development than about the future of their own country.

However, young Baltic people are somewhat more optimistic. A relative majority of 39.3% there think the future will improve in the Baltics and only 23.3% expect it to get worse within the next 10 years. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, only less than one in four (24%) are convinced that the situation in Eastern Europe will improve in the future. Here, a relative majority of 39.2% expect the situation in their country to worsen in the future. It is mainly the young people in Slovakia (39.4%) and also in the Czech Republic (39.2%) who provide a pessimistic assessment. In these two countries, young people also express dissatisfaction with regard to the opportunities that are opened

up to young people for participation in politics (Jungwirth et al. 2021; Justyna & Mrozowicki 2020/2021).

In addition to this political disillusionment, worries and fears also contribute to cautious forecasts for the future. For example, 83.1% of young people in the Baltic States and 87.8% of Central Eastern Europeans are very concerned about increasing environmental pollution and climate change. Concerns about the economic situation, labour market situation and social inequality are also no less widespread. In the Baltic States, three quarters (75.4%) express concern about the labour market situation. 77.5% do the same with regard to social inequality. This even applies to 83% of young people in Central Eastern Europe. 73.6% are afraid of unemployment. This indicates that there is widespread concern among the next generation of young people in both regions studied about the extent to which their countries will be able to respond adequately to future societal, global or even economic challenges.

Young people, in contrast, are much more optimistic about their personal future.

FIG. 16: FUTURE FOR YOUR OWN COUNTRY IN 10 YEARS  
Young people aged 14–29, Baltic States n=3,900, Central Eastern Europe n=6,000; figures in %

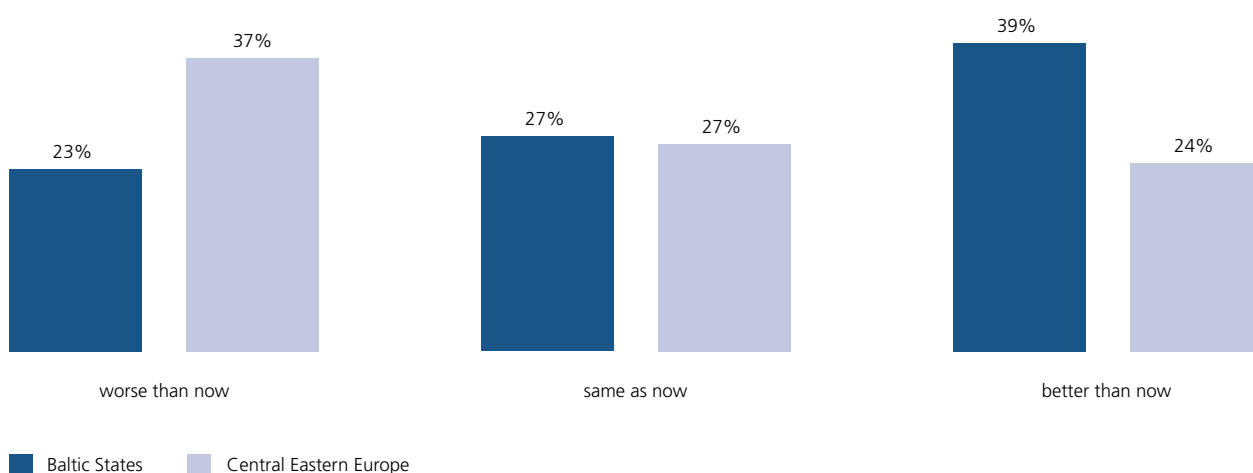
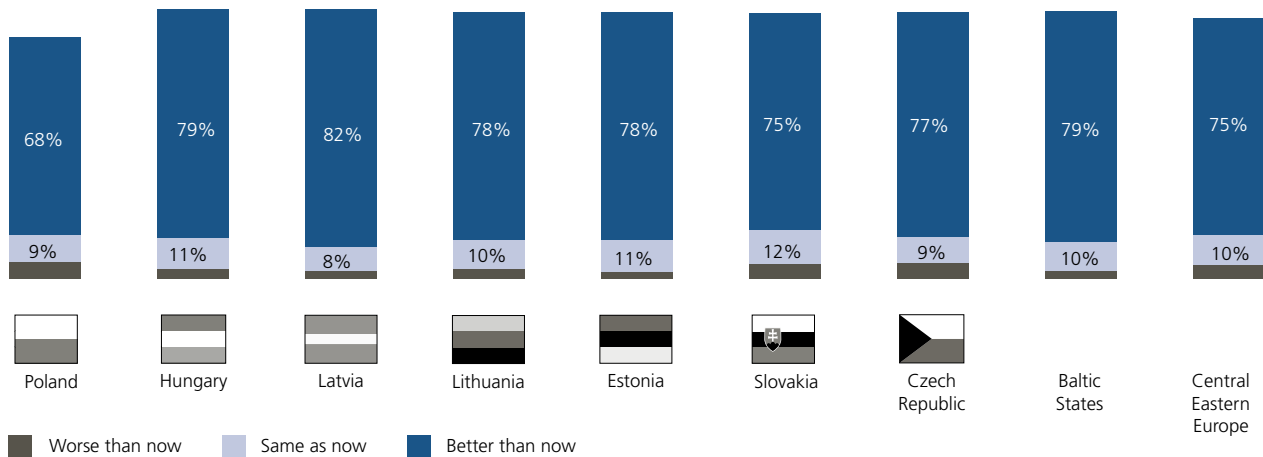


FIG. 17: PERSONAL FUTURE IN 10 YEARS IN A COUNTRY COMPARISON

Young people aged 14–29, Baltic States n=3,900, Central Eastern Europe n=6,000; figures in %



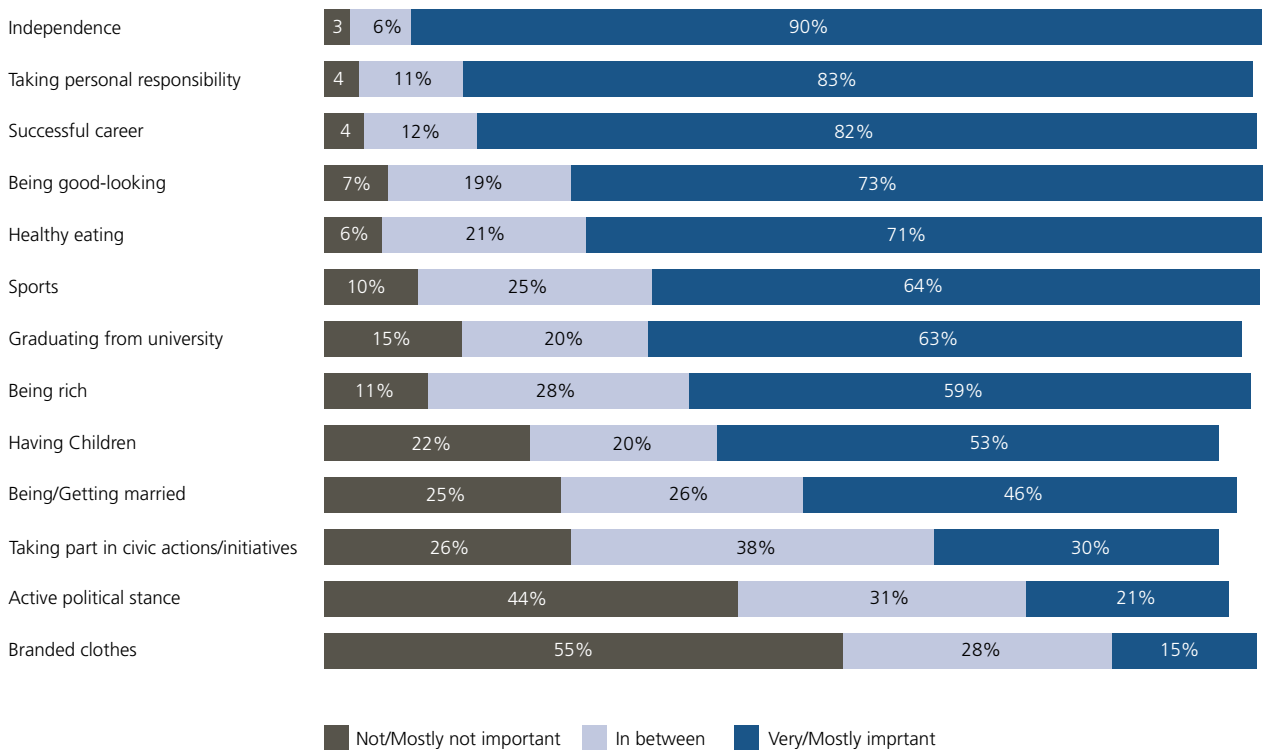
Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

79.4% of young people in the Baltic States expect their personal situation to improve within the next ten years. This also applies to three quarters (74.6%) of young people in Central Eastern European countries. This shows that in both regions studied: young people consider achieving

their own personal goals to be quite realistic and are thus optimistic about the future with regard to the personal development of their lives. Young females are somewhat more optimistic about their own future compared to their male peers.

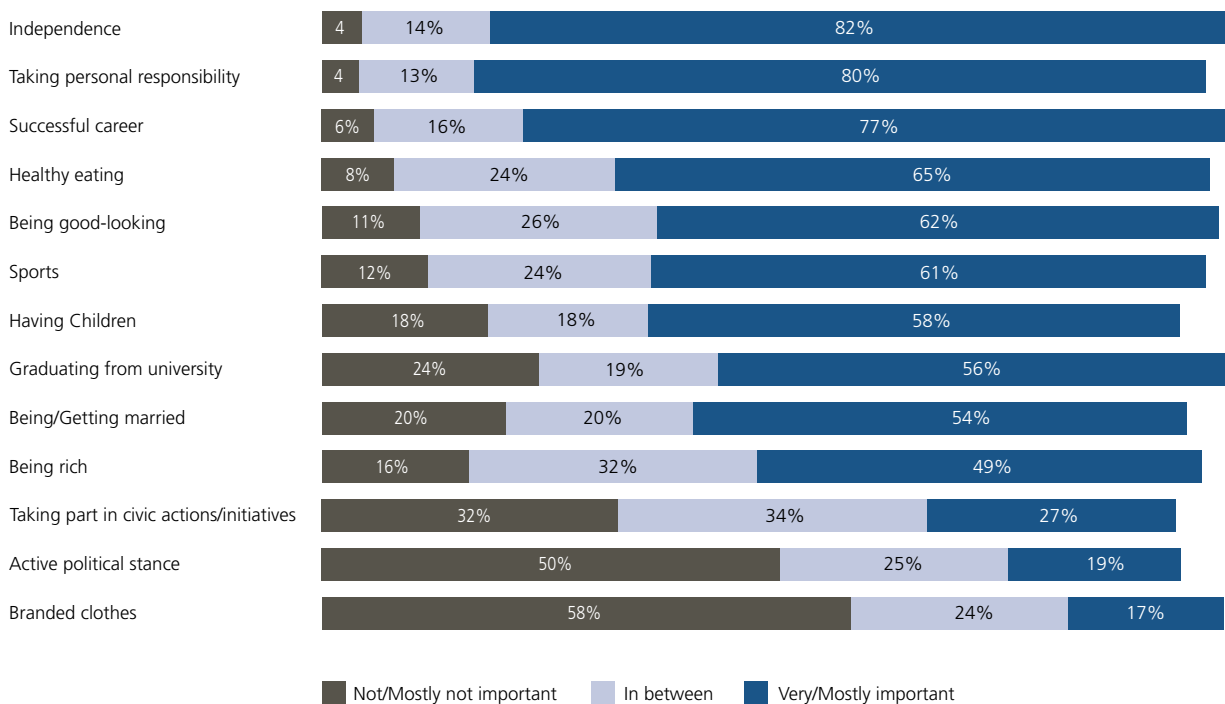
FIG. 18: IMPORTANT GOALS AND VALUES IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BALTIC STATES

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=3,900; figures in %



Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

**FIG. 19: IMPORTANT GOALS AND VALUES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE**  
**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=6,000; figures in %**



Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

In addition to independence and taking personal responsibility, it is important for young people to build a successful career. In Central Eastern Europe, it seems that even an intermediate level of education is sufficient to achieve these goals and to be able to live as independently as possible. As they have for the most part already successfully acquired this level of education between the ages of 19 and 24 and have already (almost) achieved their goals, they are also thus confident about their future.

In the Baltic States, on the other hand, a high level of education seems to be the basic prerequisite for young people to achieve these goals. The longer education path also means that they increasingly do not have the relevant qualifications until between 25 and 29 years of age and are only more confident about their own future at this age. Thus, although individualisation or self-realisation is the focus of the young people surveyed in both regions, its attainment is spelled out differently and is achieved in different age ranges.

## RELIGION

Religion seems to be of less importance for the growing generation of young people both in the Baltic States and in Central Eastern Europe. For example, 61.2% of young people in the Baltic States that they do not belong to any religious faith. Accordingly, less than half (51.5%) participate in religious events at all. 24% seek out these events no more than once a year. Of the religious young people (38.8%), most (18.5%) identify themselves with the Roman Catholic or Protestant church.

Unlike young people in the Baltic States, those in Central Eastern Europe are more religiously oriented. The majority of 56.4% feel they belong to a religious faith. At 42.3%, most are members of either the Roman Catholic or the Protestant Church. Young people in Eastern Europe also attend religious events more often: 16.9% say they participate monthly or even weekly. Religion is still part of everyday life especially for young people in Poland and Slovakia. In both countries, about one-third regularly attend religious events such as church services.

Those young people who describe themselves as religious and are also more involved in their faith community also differ from the other young people in terms of their life goals and their value orientation. In Poland, for example, it can be seen that, on average, both independence (83.5%) and taking responsibility (85.6%) are more important to the strongly religion-oriented young people than to other young people in Eastern European. Although self-

fulfilment is also very relevant for them (which at first glance does not distinguish them from other young people), they seem to negotiate this goal through other aspects. Traditional values, above all, play a central role. Self-fulfilment is primarily defined by marriage and the assumption of responsibility by pronounced social and political commitment.

FIG. 20: RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Young people aged 14–29, Baltic States n=3,900, Central Eastern Europe n=6,000; figures in %

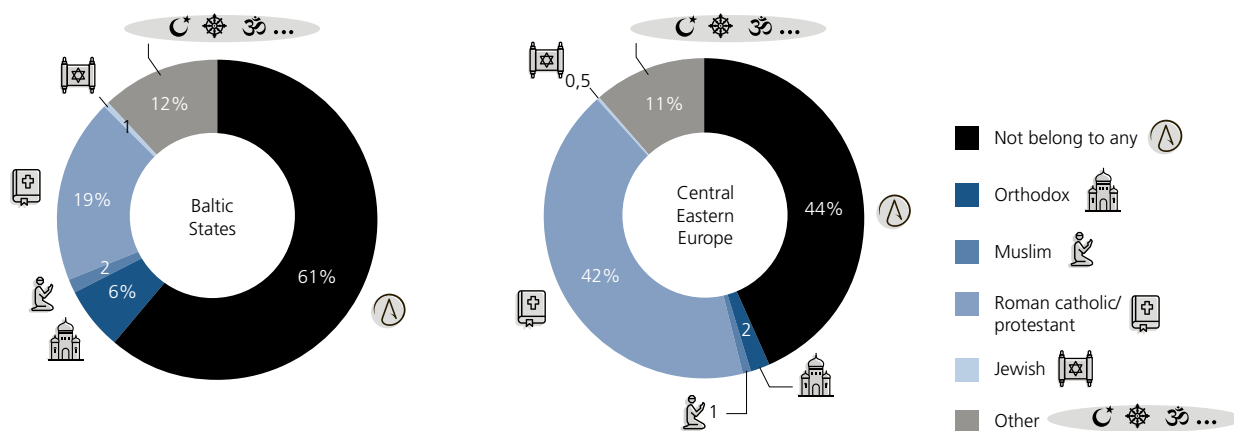
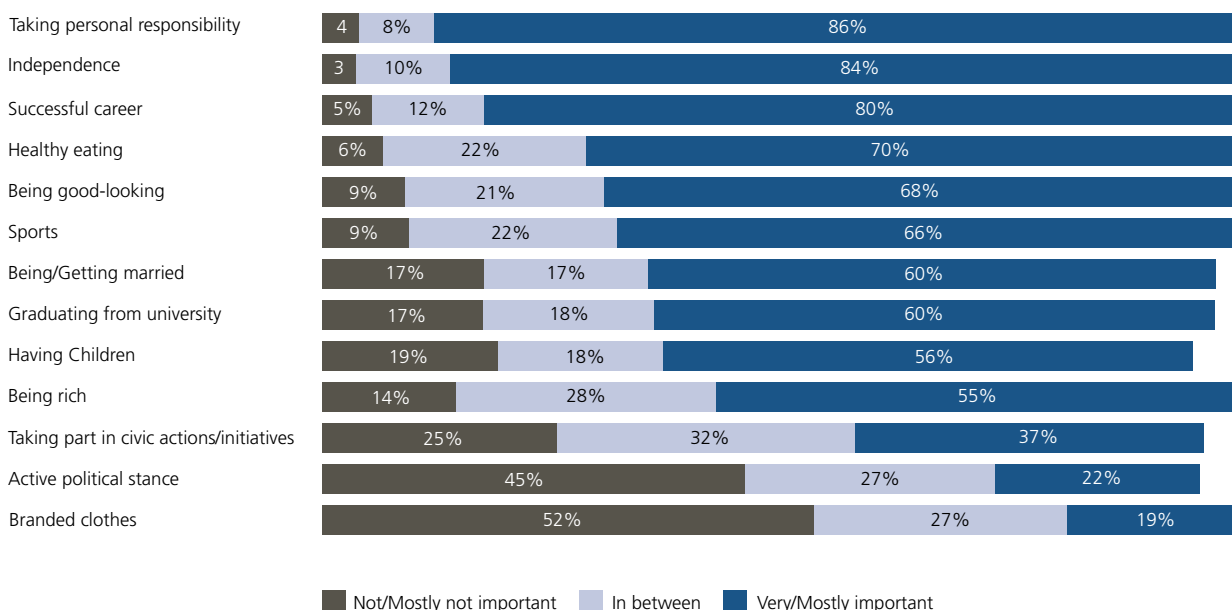


FIG. 21: LIFE GOALS AND VALUES OF RELIGIOUS YOUTH IN POLAND

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=453; figures in %



Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

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# **POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND INVOLVEMENT**

Undoubtedly, political interest is an inseparable source of attitudes towards the political system, actors and institutions (Prior 2019). The more one is interested in politics, the deeper one's political knowledge and the more likely one's opinions are based on cognitive and affective components. Therefore, the study of political interest is a central, if not the most important, topic in political sociology.

## POLITICAL INTEREST

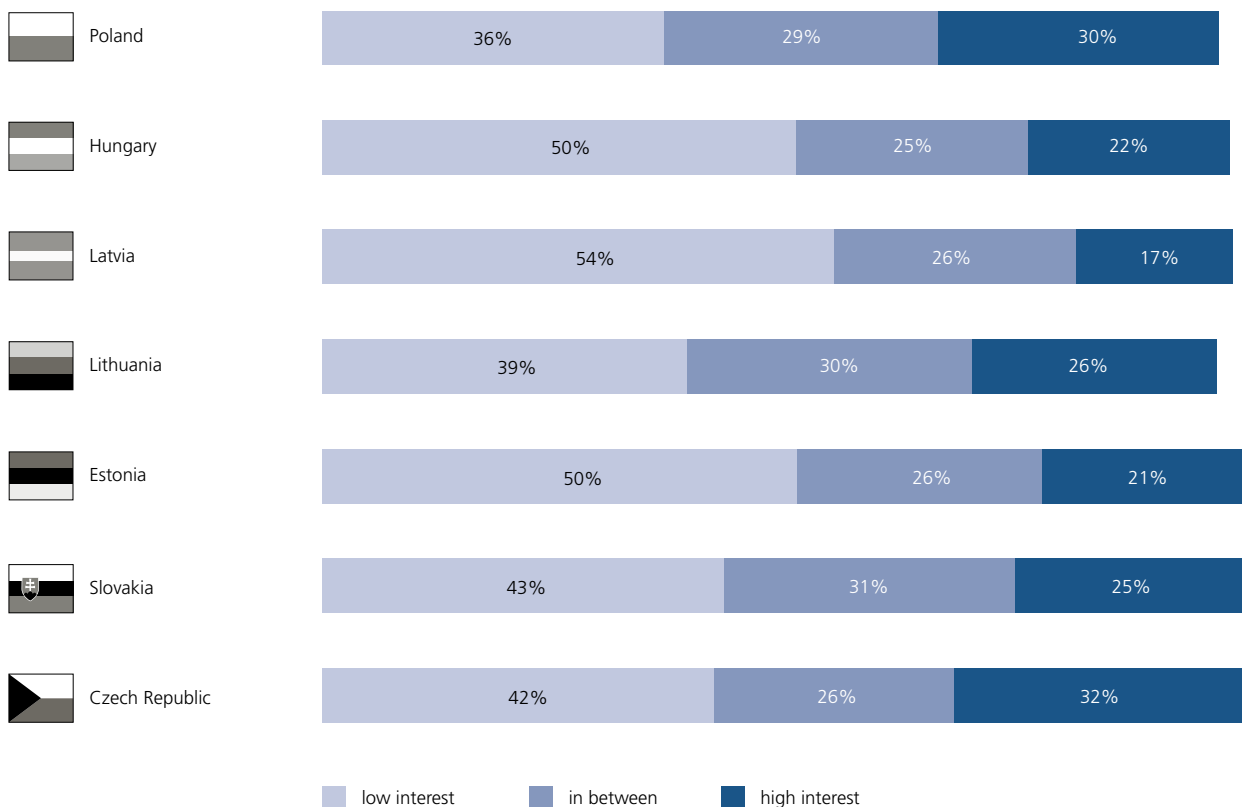
Only 5.5% of young people in the Visegrád and Baltic countries are very interested in politics, and a further 19.4% are somewhat interested. By contrast, the proportion of those not at all/mainly not interested is 44.5%, i.e. a difference of magnitude between those who are interested and those who are not. Political interest tends to be stronger among young people in Central Eastern Europe and lower in the Baltic States.

Of the seven countries surveyed, the Poles are the most interested in politics, with 30% very/ mainly interested and only 36% of Poles not at all/ mainly not interested in public life, Fig. 22: Personal interest in politics. Furthermore, the least interested in politics are Latvians youth, with more than half of them (54.3%) choosing not at all/ mainly not interested, compared to only one-sixth of those very/ mainly interested (16.7%).

Political interest is a little higher among men than women<sup>28</sup> and among those aged 18 and over than in the even younger age group. The political interest of young people in the seven countries differs significantly along the lines of Bourdieu's cultural capital (mother's education, own educational attainment). The higher the mother's education level and the more schooling the young person has completed, the higher their political interest will be<sup>29</sup>.

FIG. 22: PERSONAL INTEREST IN POLITICS

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; 1=not interested at all to 5=very interested; figures in %



Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

Only one in six 14/15 year olds often talk to their parents or friends about politics – although this is less common among Baltic youth than among their peers in Central Eastern Europe.

The correlation seems that the more one talks about politics, the more one becomes involved in the subject. After a while, one naturally becomes more interested in politics (Kroh-Selb, 2009). This is no different among young people in Central Europe and Baltic States. Of those who never talk about politics at home - or among friends - nine in ten (89.3%) are either little or not at all interested in it. In this case, we are talking about an under-socialized family environment (Jennings-Stoker-Bowers, 2009). In contrast, 32.0% of young people who very often talk about politics in a family environment or with friends will be somewhat interested, and 52.1% will be very interested. The correlation is therefore almost linear and holds in all countries.

One third (33.4%) of young people in all seven countries surveyed rarely discuss political issues, while only 3.6% do so very often. Therefore, most of them live in an environment where public and political issues are not part of everyday communication.

Overall, on a five-point scale, the seven countries have a conversation average of 2.60. It is lowest for young Baltics (2.51 points) and highest for young people in the Visegrád States (2.65 points).

Some sociodemographic and sociocultural factors further demonstrate the close correlation between political interest and political discourse. The children of graduate mothers, highly-educated youngsters, and those living in a mainly urban environment are not only more interested in politics but also have a much higher frequency of political discussions.

## POLITICAL CONFORMITY AND REPRESENTATION

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On political issues, young people in V4 tend to take a more conformist stance than in the Baltic states.

One-third (32.7%) of young people in Central Europe fully agree or quite agree with their parents on political issues, while 28.0% somewhat disagree or entirely disagree. This is significantly less common among young people in the Baltic States. Here it is just one in five (21.7%) who agrees with their own parents' generation on political issues; for 29.4% this is either rather not the case or not the case at all. The adoption of family patterns varies across the seven countries. The highest rate of conformity between the parental and youth generations in terms of political attitude patterns can be found in Hungary. 40.5% of Hungarian young people agree with their parents on political issues. In Lithuania (20.5%), Latvia (22.4%) and Estonia (22.6%), this applies to only one-fifth of all young people.

Among the seven countries, young Hungarians are the most likely to agree with their parents, but they are also the least aware of their parents' political views.

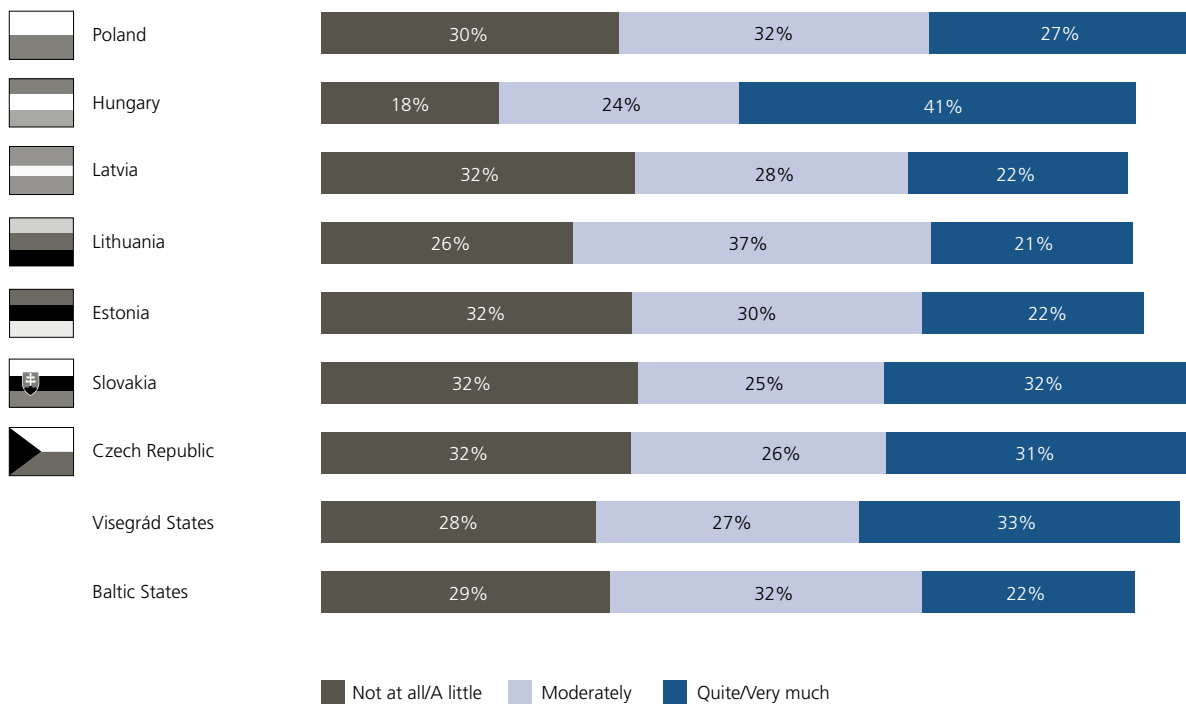
Women, the youngest (15-18-year-olds), those living in more urban areas, those whose financial situation is more favourable and young people with more cultural capital tend to agree with their parents on political issues. In all countries, the mother's education and the subjective perception of her financial situation show a statistically significant correlation with conformity, but gender and age do not.

Half of the young people in the Visegrád States feel that they are not represented by the political elite.



FIG. 23: POLITICAL AGREEMENT WITH PARENTS BY COUNTRY

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; data in %, question: "To what extent are your political views and beliefs in line with your parents?"



Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

The literature on Hungarian youth (Szabó & Oross 2021, Bíró-Nagy & Szabó 2021) draws attention to the exclusive behaviour of the Hungarian political elite and the sense of exclusion of young people from politics.

Half of 15–29 year olds in the region feel that political elites do not sufficiently represent their interests. Only 1-2% think that young people’s interests are well represented in politics. The proportion of young people with a very negative opinion varies from country to country, with 8-8% of Czechs and Slovaks, 17% of Poles and 20% of Hungarians giving a mark of 1 on the 5 point scale.

Overall, the least negative opinion is held by Czech 15–29 year olds (2.52 points on a scale of 1 to 5), followed by Polish and Slovak young people (2.45-2.45 points). The most negative opinion is held by Hungarians (2.38 points). Hungarian young people are not only the most apolitical and the most conformist but also the least satisfied with their political representation. If a section of society feels that their interests are not represented, i.e., no one takes

up their values, they will take little interest in public issues. This is a vicious circle, however, because the more apolitical they are, the less ‘interesting’ and important they become to politics, and at the same time, the more they feel this, the more they may withdraw from public affairs.

In contrast, young people in the Baltic countries seem to have a tendency to have greater trust in the political leadership of their respective home countries. Compared to young people in the Visegrád States, they are significantly less likely to say that their interests are not represented by politics.

The perception of political representation is less a function of sociodemographic or sociocultural factors than political interest and ideological affiliation. Those who rate themselves as more right-wing in all countries are more satisfied with the political representation of young people, while left-wingers tend to have a more pessimistic view. Those who are not interested in politics are the most negative about representation in all countries.

## VOTER TURNOUT AND HOLDING POLITICAL OFFICE

Young Latvians have the lowest propensity to vote, while Slovaks have the highest.

Our research has also looked at different forms of political activity that require individual involvement and resources. Electoral activity (participation in the previous and next elections), political office-taking, and various forms of democratic citizenship participation, from signing petitions to participating in the work of political parties, NGOs, and demonstrations.

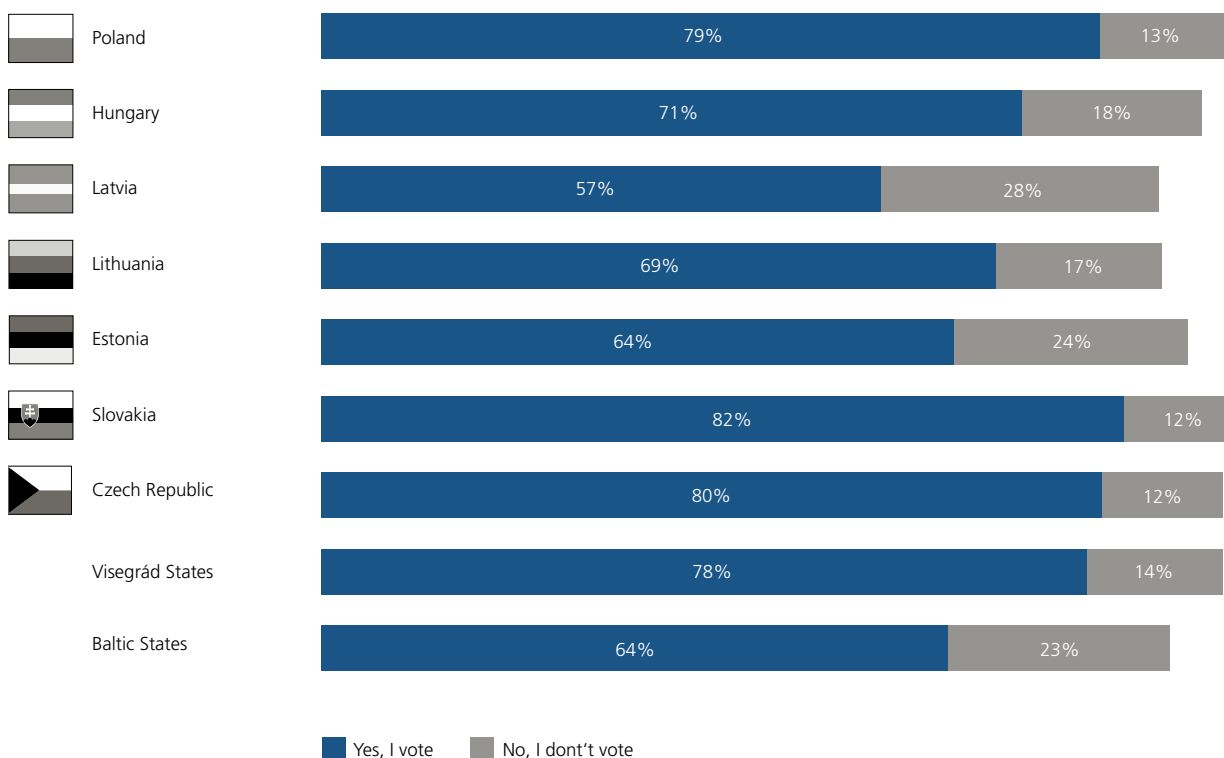
It is methodologically challenging to justify comparing the participation of young people from the V4 countries in previous elections, as the elections were held in different years. Retrospective recall of elections held at various times can cause significant bias. Overall, 47% of young people in the seven countries self-reported having participated in the previous election, and 21.5% did not participate, although they had the right to vote. Although there are

clear differences between young people in the Baltic and Central Eastern European countries. For example, one-third (30%) of all Baltic youth say they deliberately did not participate in the last election despite being eligible to vote. In the Visegrád countries, this applies to only 16.1% of respondents.

The question of future willingness to participate in the elections is methodologically more justifiable (Fig. 24 Vote intent).

Young people in Slovakia are the most likely to want to participate in a future parliamentary election (81.7%), followed closely by young people in the Czech Republic (79.5%) and Poland (79.3%), while Latvians are the least likely to vote. Only just under half of them (57.0%) signalled their willingness to participate in future elections. For 28.3% this is out of the question. In any case, a clear trend is discernible in this respect: Young people in the Baltic States are significantly less likely to express the intention to vote in the future compared to their peers in Central and Eastern Europe. Accordingly, there is also a higher proportion of undecided voters.

FIG. 24: VOTE INTENT  
Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %



Note: "no answers" are not shown in this graph.

Among 14–29 year olds in the seven countries, participation is higher than average among those living in metropolitan areas, those in good financial positions and those with high levels of cultural capital. Among the low-educated Central Europeans, just under 80% said they would participate. In comparison, the proportion of those in the high-educated category reached 90%, a trend that holds for all countries.

Traditional forms of political participation (Theocharis & van Deth 2017) include taking political office. The demand for it is low in all countries, and there is little difference in responses. A slightly higher proportion of young people in Slovakia would be happy to take up political office than those young people in others.

Currently, 0.9% of young people in Central Europe and in Baltic states hold political office, while almost a third (28.3%) categorically reject it. Interestingly, the categorical rejection of political office is much less pronounced among young people in the Baltic States than in Central Eastern Europe. Whereas about one in five of the Baltic youth (21.1%) cannot imagine themselves in political office under any circumstances, this is true of one-third (33.7%) of the Central Eastern European youth (highest in Poland, 36%). Moreover there is a clear gender gap in the potential acceptance and rejection of political office in all countries surveyed. Men are much more open to political roles than women.

However, an important aspect is that right-wing 15–29 year olds are the most likely to be open to political office in all Visegrád countries. 16% of 15–29 year olds aged 15–29 in the Czech Republic (mark 8–10 on a scale of 1–10), 22% in Hungary and 23–23% in Poland and Slovakia would like to hold a political office. The “enthusiasm” is lower on the left: 9, 12, 10 and 21% of young people in the countries mentioned above, respectively.

## IDEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES

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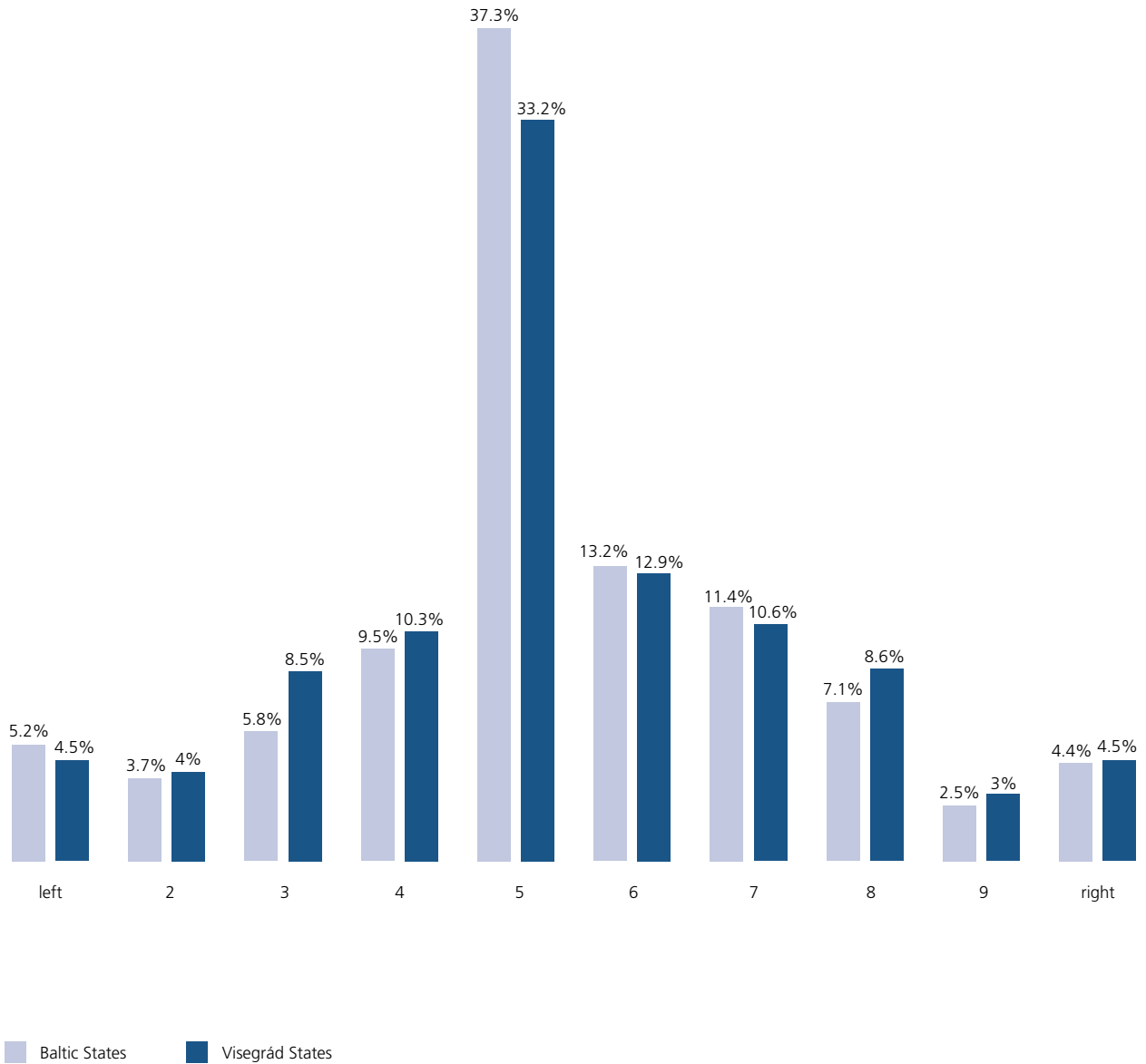
In our research, young people in the seven countries placed themselves on a classic left-right ideological “thermometer”. At one end of the scale (value 1) is the extreme left, and the other is the extreme right (value 10). Figure 25 (Ideological affiliation in Baltic and Visegrád countries) shows that there are no significant differences between the young people in the two regions studied. The vast majority of young people in the Baltic States and Central Eastern Europe show a clear tendency towards the political centre.

Analysis at the individual country level shows that young people in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia are more similar than significantly different in terms of left-right value orientation. Indeed, most of them place themselves in the middle, choosing a category 5 or 6 (35%). Except for Polish young people, around 15-18% are on the left side of the scale (categories 1-4), while 18-25% are on the right (7-10).

Based on the averages of the ideological scale, young people in the Czech Republic take the most right-wing position of the four Visegrad countries, with an average score of 5.71, but this is still actually in the middle. They are followed by young Hungarians (5.45) and then by Slovaks (5.41).<sup>30</sup> More than a quarter of Slovak and Hungarian young people cannot or do not want to place themselves on the left-right scale. Unknown ideological orientation is the highest-scoring category for Slovak young people.

The ideological character of Polish young people is worth mentioning, as it is slightly different from the other three Visegrad countries. One-third of the young Poles in the sample are left-wing, 29% are centrist, and one-fifth are right-wing (average on a scale of 1-10): 4.98). Thus, according to the FES 2021 survey, Polish 15-29-year-olds are relatively the most left-wing<sup>31</sup>. The trend observed in Poland can also be observed among young people in the Baltic countries especially in Estonia and Latvia.

FIG. 25: IDEOLOGICAL AFFILIATION IN THE BALTIC AND VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES  
 Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %



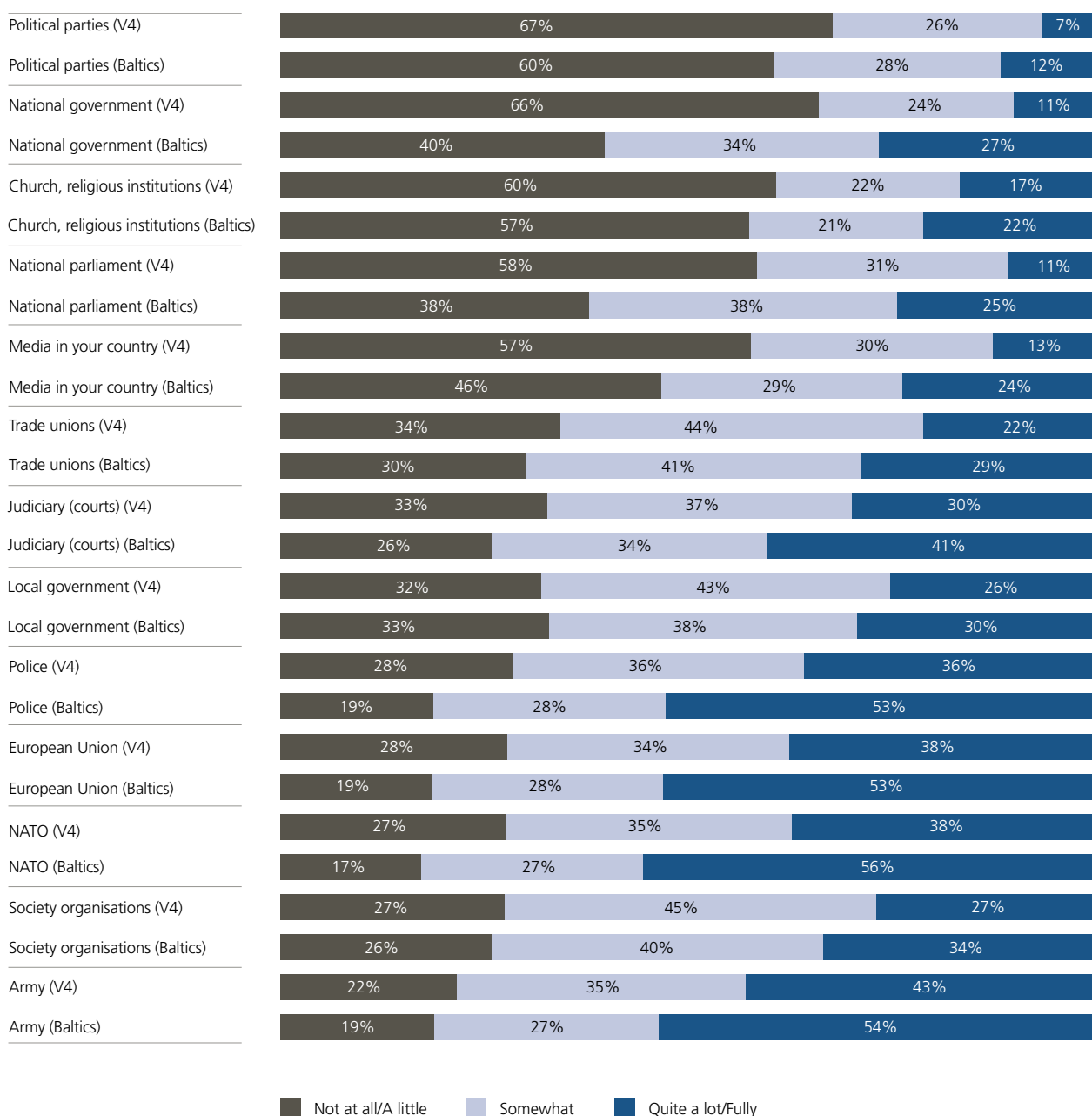
## INSTITUTIONAL TRUST AND PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Institutional trust is seen by many as one of the pillars of effective governance. European data suggest that higher institutional trust is associated with higher interpersonal

trust at the micro-level and higher economic performance at the macro level. In the “fresh democracies” of East-Central Europe, trust levels are lower and more volatile (Boda & Medve-Bálint 2012). In contrast, trust in political institutions seems to be more firmly anchored and set among young people in the Baltic countries.

FIG. 26: LEVEL OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN THE BALTIC AND VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %



State organisations of the judiciary and the executive branches in particular enjoy a high level of trust among the upcoming young generation. In the Baltic States, the judiciary branch and the police receive high approval ratings especially among young people. 40.7% and 53.0% respectively express their unreserved trust in these institutions. In addition, about one-third trust civil society organisations and local governments. This basic trust, which is evident in the social picture, also in comparison to Central Eastern Europe, points to consolidated democratic conditions in the countries of the Baltic States and goes hand in hand with a high degree of individually perceived security. In contrast, governments and parliaments at the national level, the media in the respective countries, as well as the Church and other religious institutions are viewed much more critically. The lowest trust scores are given to political parties (Baltic States = 12.1%; CEE = 7.1%). International alliances, on the other hand, are trusted very much: The European Union is very popular among the majority of young people (53.3%) in the Baltic States. Only 18.5% take a negative stance here. As a military alliance, NATO also enjoys strong support among a clear majority of 55.8% of young people in the Baltic countries. This also applies to the armed forces at home (54.0%). These values are also interesting if one takes into account that the assessments were made well before the war in Ukraine. Accordingly, political and military organisations seem to contribute to a sense of security even among young people beyond international crises. It is to be expected that the approval ratings have continued to rise further the background of the global threat situation. This is certainly also true for the young people in Central Eastern Europe who were studied. Their statements tend to indicate a comparable picture of opinion. Thus, the level of trust in political institutions are pronounced in a similar direction even if the scepticism is recently higher and the pronouncement is at a lower level.

Looking at the basic attitude of young people towards the form of the political system, we find that democracy is a viable and favoured form of government for three quarters of all respondents (Baltic States = 65.7%; CEE = 63.9%). Even if this represents a clear majority, at the same time it should not be neglected that every tenth person (Baltic States = 9.5%; CEE = 9.7%) rejects democracy and a quarter have at least a differentiated attitude towards this form of socio-political commitment (Baltic

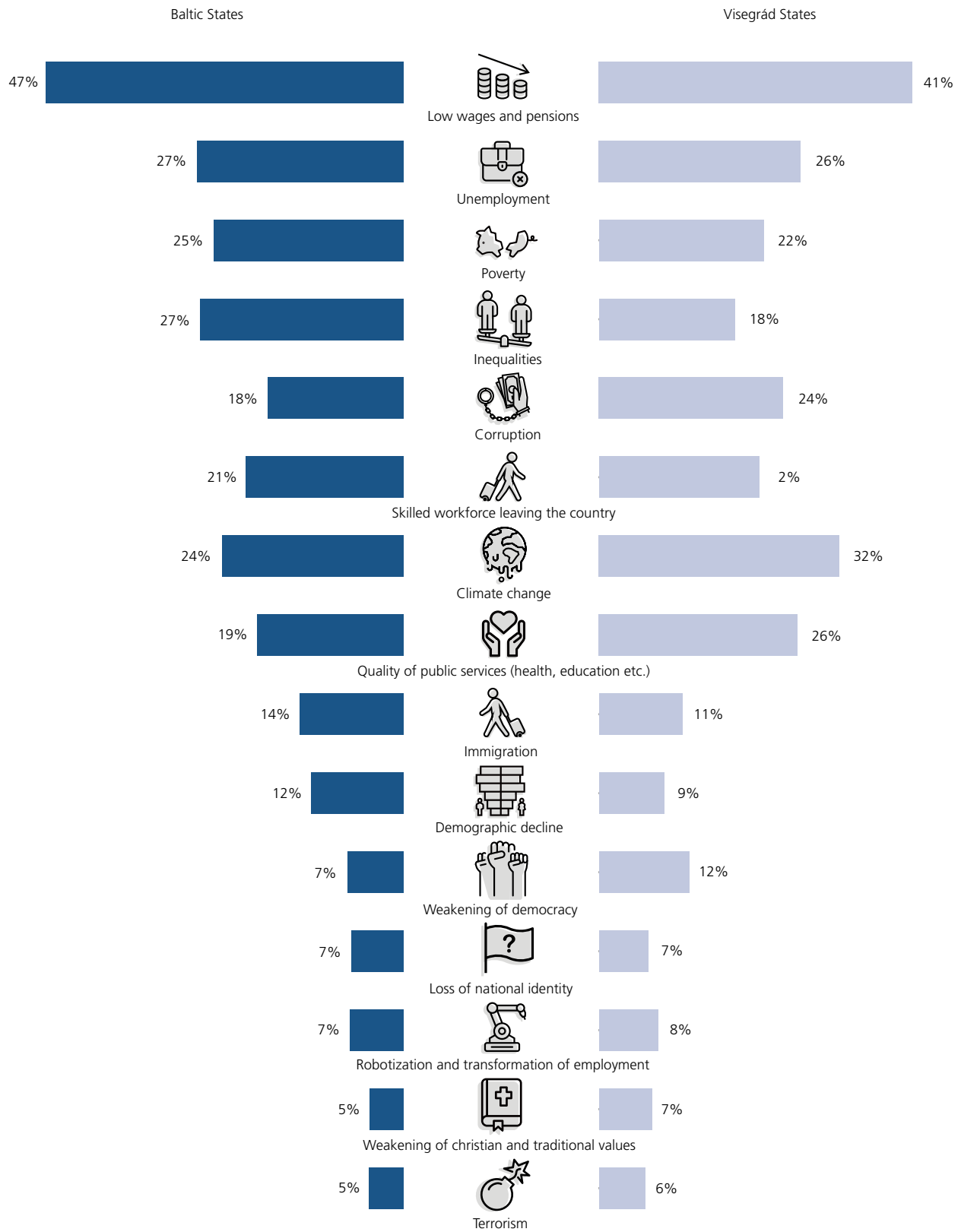
States = 24.8%; CEE=26.4%). Every fifth person (Baltic States = 22.8; CEE = 19.0%) even considers dictatorship to be the better form of government under certain circumstances. This is matched by the fact that every second young person (50.2%) is in favour of a political leader who rules the country with a strong hand for the common good. Fundamental political socialisation processes can be seen as decisive for attitudes in this regard. In other words: once awareness of democracy is internalised, the likelihood of advocating authoritarian ideas is significantly lower. Expressed in numbers, this means: two-thirds of all young people surveyed (65.5%) who are in favour of democracy categorically reject dictatorship as a form of government. These correlations can be observed across all countries included in the study, regardless of region. It is also mainly these young people who see going to the polls as a civic duty. 61.7% of the young people in the Baltic States and 54.0% of the Central Eastern Europeans agree with this statement in principle or even unreservedly. Two-thirds (Baltic States = 66.5%; CEE = 67.3%) would consider it important or very important to participate more in political processes anyway, especially since about half of all young people surveyed from the Baltic States (45.8%) and the countries of Central Eastern Europe (47.3%) would describe themselves as currently too uninformed politically. Only every fourth young person in the Visegrád countries (21.6%) and only every fifth young person in the Baltic countries (23.4%) believes that they have a sound knowledge of politics.

However, this does not mean that this is an apolitical young generation in the regions of Europe studied, rather, the opposite is the case. Thus, most of the young people we interviewed have a good sense of the central social challenges in their home countries. Today's issues are often also tomorrow's challenges.

Interestingly, the prioritisation of the expected problem situations is at a comparable level regardless of the region in which the young people grow up (cf. Fig. 27 Next decade issues). According to the available data, for young people in both the Baltic countries and Central Eastern Europe, economic and socio-economic aspects are the key issues of the future. Almost half (41.3%) of young people living in Baltic countries expect that "low wages" will be one of the key issues to be addressed politically in the coming decade. In Central Eastern Europe,

FIG. 27: NEXT DECADE ISSUES IN THE BALTIC AND VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES

Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %



four out of ten of the young people (41.3%) share this assessment. The following issues in the ranking, such as unemployment, poverty risk, social inequality and brain drain, are directly related to this. Climate change is very important at least for some of the young people. For one-third of young people in Central Eastern Europe and for about one in four in the Baltic States, it is the central challenge of the future. Areas such as the fight against corruption and quality of public institutions such as health and education also play a non-negligible role, especially for young people in the Visegrád countries. In contrast, issues such as the fight against terrorism, the transformation of the labour market, the loss of national identity or the weakening of Christian and traditional values are rarely on the minds of today's youth. Only a small proportion of young people attach high importance to them as a future topic.

## NATION-STATE ATTITUDES, XENOPHOBIA AND VIEW OF EU

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The nativist ideology, whose message is the preference of native-born people over immigrants, is an increasingly dominant phenomenon in US and European politics, with the rise of nativist forces shaping party systems in Western countries (Davis et al. 2019). It is not an unknown phenomenon in the Visegrad countries either, and it has been mainly on the rise in the Visegrad countries since the migration crisis of 2015. The anti-immigration narrative has perhaps been most strongly present in Hungary in recent years, with the Hungarian government building its communication strategy on this issue in the second half of the 2010s (Bíró-Nagy 2021). The long-term result of this intensive campaign is that nearly two-thirds of young Hungarians (63%) disagree that the country should accept more immigrants. This is the highest figure in the region, although young people in the Czech Republic and Slovakia hold similar views.

The majority of young people in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are anti-immigrant. Young Poles are the most tolerant and least nationalistic in the region. National pride is strongest among Czech and Slovak young people.

Polish young people are the least anti-immigrant in the region (39% reject the idea of accepting immigrants), and several other questions show that Polish young people are generally the most tolerant and least nationalistic of the Visegrád countries. Only 20% of young Poles agreed that only genuine Polish citizens should live on Polish territory. 27% thought that immigrants should adopt Polish traditions and values. In both cases, this was the lowest proportion in the region.

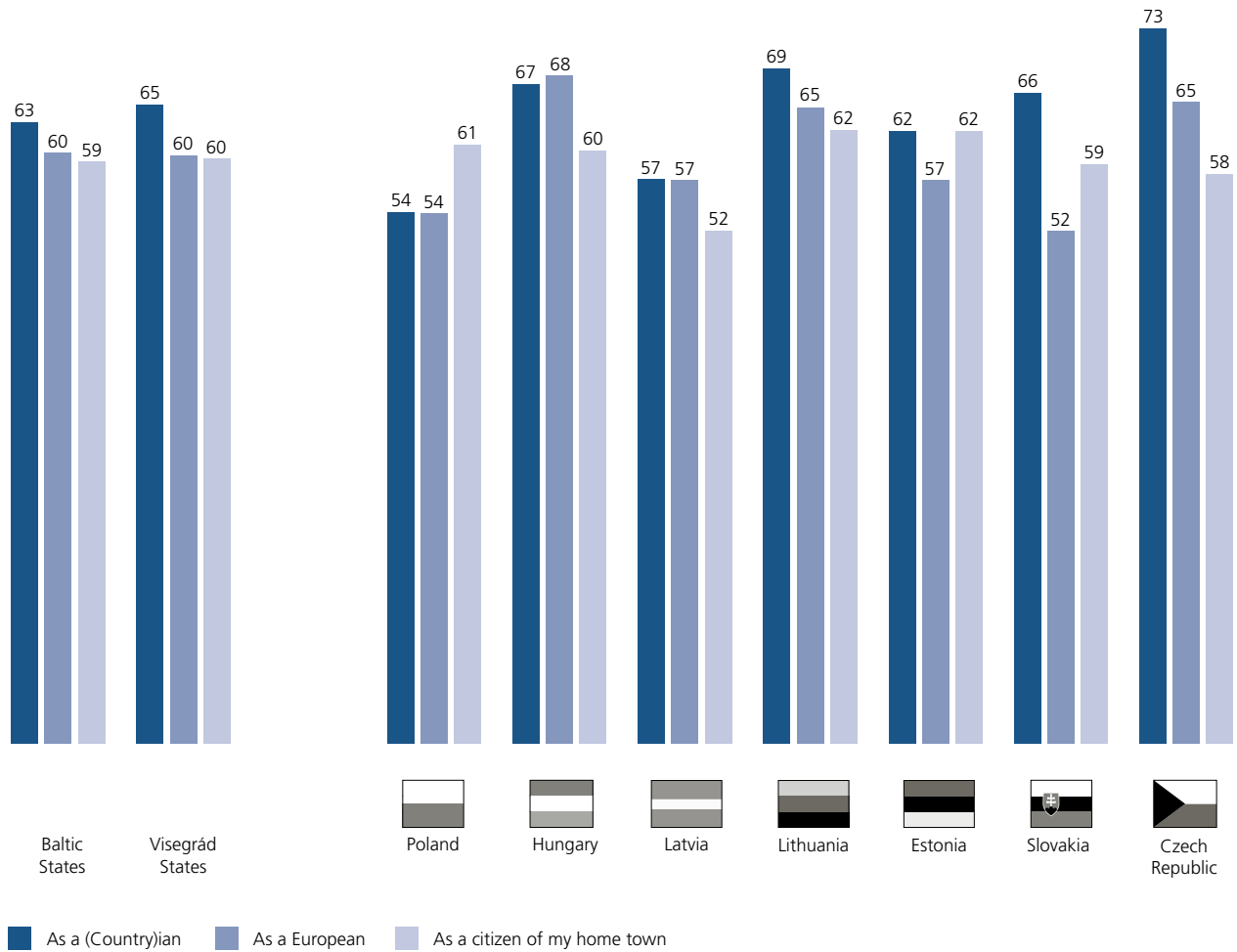
Young people in the Czech Republic and Slovakia have very similar views on these issues and a more nationalistic outlook than Poles. Half of the young people in the Czech Republic and half of the young people in Slovakia think immigrants should adopt their traditions and values. Half of the young people in these two countries also have some form of national pride, while the proportion is more than ten percentage points lower among Hungarians (40%) and Poles (39%). At the same time, young Hungarians are the most likely (30%) to think that it would be best if only Hungarians lived in their country. A somewhat different picture emerges when looking at the attitude patterns of young people in the Baltic States. Comparable nation-state tendencies cannot be observed in the three Baltic States in this form. Rather, there is a much greater welcoming culture, less fear of foreignness coupled with a certain national pride among the younger generation there. In Lithuania, for example, only 29.1% of young people reject the admission of immigrants. In no other country studied can such a pronounced willingness to accept immigrants be observed. Young people in the other two Baltic countries also hold similar attitudes. Here, compared to the Visegrád States, a much more open attitude is taken. This also applies to the opinion that only people of the same national origin should live in their own country. This attitude is taken significantly less often especially in Lithuania and Latvia compared to young people in Central Eastern Europe. Only every sixth person in the Baltic States holds this view. In Hungary, on the other hand, it is almost every third person (29.2%). However, the integration of people of foreign origin seems particularly important to them. Here, a radical approach is favoured among young people in the Baltic countries: more than half of young people in the Baltic States, and thus again significantly more often than among their peers in Central Eastern Europe, believe that immigrants should adopt the traditions and values of the host country (Estonia = 55.2%; Latvia = 52.0%; Lithuania = 40.7%).



Moreover, a pronounced national pride is particularly noticeable in Estonia. Two-thirds of Estonians (64.5%) are proud to be citizens of their country. This is an absolute top value in international comparison. This is significantly less the case in Lithuania and Latvia and also in the other Central Eastern European countries.

FIG. 28: : PERSONAL COUNTRY/REGION AFFILIATION

Young people aged 14–29, n=9,900; “very much/completely” responses; figures in %.

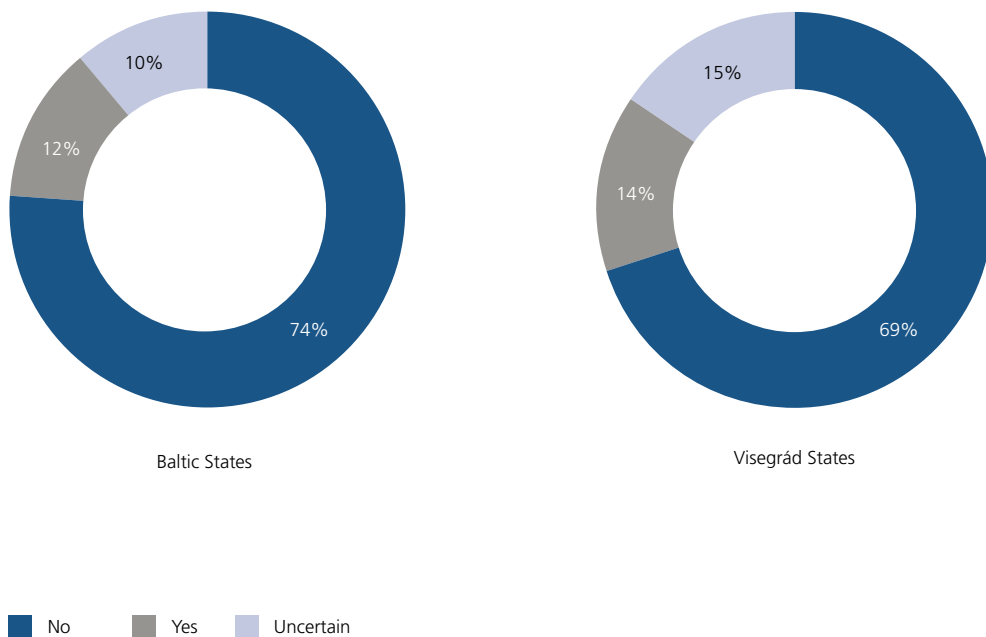


However, the fact that this attitude is by no means accompanied by demarcation and a focus on one's own country is already clear from the fact that Estonian young people, together with their peers in Latvia and Poland, are the least likely to refer to their nation-state identity and see themselves exclusively as citizens of their country. Rather, the location in Estonia plays an essential role. 62.3% see themselves as citizens of their home town. In an international comparison, only Lithuania has comparable regional ties. However, this does not mean that no European perspective is taken in this regard, rather, the opposite is the case. A pro-European attitude is evident in all essential points. More than half (57.3%) see themselves as

Europeans at the same time. Leaving the EU is not a conceivable option for 72.6% of Estonians. This unequivocal stance towards the EU is particularly often taken in the Baltic States. Three quarters of all young people surveyed in the Baltic States (74.2%) give a clear rejection to leaving the European Union.

In comparison, "only" two out of three of all respondents hold this opinion among young people in Central Eastern European countries. Moreover, one in six of them (15.1%) is not sure about this. In the Baltic States, this applies to only one in ten (10.7%).

**FIG. 29: OPINION ON LEAVING THE EU**  
**Young people aged 14 to 29, n=9,900; figures in %**





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# **CONCLUSION**



This study examines young-adult life between individual and self-determined lifestyles as well as factors that influence and limit the decisions as well as attitudes of young people. These include the respective socio-economic conditions on a personal and country-specific level, family support as well as their own and parents' education level.

Key findings from the study can be summarised in five points:

1. Young people in all countries studied strive for independence. They want to take responsibility for their own lives and have a successful professional career. They are optimistic when it comes to achieving their personal goals.

As regards the future development of the respective countries, however, the assessment is somewhat cautious. In view of current and anticipated future social and global challenges, young people seem to be rather sceptical about the extent to which countries will react adequately at the national level.

2. A dependency between young people's educational aspirations and country-specific economic conditions is noticeable. Young people strongly align their ambitions with the respective requirements of the country. Their aim is to achieve the best possible economic usability in the form of employment by obtaining the necessary level of education. In Central Eastern Europe, an intermediate level of education seems promising. Young people in the Baltic States, however, expect to have the best chances on the labour market with higher levels of education. In both regions, there is a direct correlation between the individual level of education and training and the respective personal economic situation.
3. The transition from school to the workforce is more difficult for the younger generation in economically weaker countries, and there is a higher risk of unemployment. What also becomes evident is that young women are disproportionately affected by unemployment.
4. The search for support and security in one's own family as well as the high importance of starting one's own family are core values among the young people surveyed. A strong family bond is often the reason for a high level of satisfaction in young people's lives whilst economic and socio-economic aspects are increasingly seen as central challenges.
5. Young people appear to be very satisfied with international organisations as well as the judiciary and executive institutions. In contrast, trust in national politics, especially the work of government and parliament, is comparatively low. Overall, however, the majority of this generation favours democracy as a form of government and the European Union as a unifying set of values.

The key findings from the representative survey of almost 10,000 young people from the Baltic States and the Visegrád countries show that today's young people face major challenges. This implies that there is increasing pressure to make decisions in relevant areas of life. Individual, social and economic factors in particular have an impact on young people's lives. This goes hand in hand with a great deal of freedom such as mobility (labour migration within the EU) for financially well-off young people. At the same time, there are also numerous restrictions and a lack of upward mobility processes in place for young people who grow up in precarious economic circumstances.

The current crises contribute immensely to young people's insecurity. Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and all its consequences for Europe, such as the lack of raw materials and persistently high inflation rates, impact the reality of young people's lives. These not only leave them with a feeling of powerlessness but also harbour the danger of increasing social division and precarisation. Examples of this are exclusionary practices towards refugees and foreigners, gender inequality and legal restrictions for the LGBTQIA+ community.

In view of these developments and the social challenges they bring about, young people should be given special attention. This requires more than just pure symbolic measures such as political efforts in the way of large-scale investments in educating children and young people. This is the case simply because education in modern societies acts as a foundation. Perhaps it is even as a linchpin, a central key not only to economic but also social and cultural participation that thus shapes future opportunities and lives. Incidentally, young people are aware of this early on in their lives as the available data show. However, achieving educational goals also remains a question of social affiliation. Opportunities in social advancement for the socially disadvantaged thus rarely exist. Accordingly, structures need to be in place. This is a core task of government where access to education, not only in theory but also in practice, is equally available to all young people in order to minimise social disparity. If this succeeds, an investment in young people will be an investment in the future of Europe.



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# **FOOTNOTES**





- 1 The heads of government of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary met at Visegrád Castle in Hungary in 1991 and since then have formed a close circle that consults and cooperates on many political decisions including to have more influence together in the EU and NATO (Lippert, 2020).
- 2 In the Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the age limit was chosen between 14 and 29 years. A total of 45 young people aged 14 were interviewed in this study (15 in Estonia, 11 in Latvia and 19 in Lithuania). In Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary, the age limit starts at 15 years.
- 3 Within the participating countries, the following proportions of young people in the total population have been assumed (rounded values in 2020/21, number in brackets = proportion of total population): 6.26 million (16.5%) young people in Poland (Statistical Offices Poland, 2020)1.6 million (15%) young people in the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office, 2021)1.57 million (16%) young people in Hungary (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2020)0.93 million (17%) young people in Slovakia (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2021) 0.45 million (16%) young people in Lithuania (Official Statistics Portal Lithuania, 2021)0.31 million (16%) young people in Latvia (Official statistics of Latvia, 2020)0.20 million (15.5%) young people in Estonia (Statistics Estonia, 2021).
- 4 In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, young people between the ages of 14 and 29 were interviewed (Absolute number of 14 year olds who were interviewed: 15 persons in Estonia, 11 in Latvia, and 19 in Lithuania). 15–29 year olds were interviewed in all other countries.
- 5 Low education: No formal education or primary education
- 6 Medium education: vocational, technical secondary or secondary education
- 7 High education: BA degree or higher than BA degree (Master/PhD)
- 8 Urban = young people who describe their place of residence as “Urban (city)” or “More urban than rural”
- 9 Rural = young people who describe their place of residence as “Rural (village)” or “More rural than urban”
- 10 According to calculations by the European Commission, which draws up a European comparison of population trends from 2016 to 2080, all seven countries must expect a population decline. The following figures are provided for the population development 2019–2080 for the seven countries participating in this study: Czech Republic (-7.2), Hungary (-11.8), Slovakia (-13.0), Estonia (-13.2), Poland (-23.6), Latvia (-35.3) as well as Lithuania (43.2%) cf. Loew (2019, S. 11).
- 11 34.2% of young people with low educational qualifications live in rural areas and 48.5% in urban areas. In comparison, 20.7% of young people with a high level of education live in rural areas and 67.1% in urban areas.
- 12 20% of young people with a low level of education do not have enough money to buy clothes or shoes. Whereas among young people with a high level of education, the figure is 7.3%.  $Chi^2= 244.063$ ;  $df= 8$ ;  $p= 0.000$   $r_s= 0.101$  (educational attainment/economic situation).
- 13  $Chi^2= 870.587$ ;  $df=14$ ;  $p= 0.000$   $r_s= 0.140$  (own level of education/ mother’s level of education)
- 14  $Chi^2= 323.382$ ;  $df=14$ ;  $p= 0.000$ ;  $r_s= 0.038$  (own level of education/ father’s level of education)
- 15  $Chi^2= 69.494$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p= 0.000$  (own level of education/gender)
- 16  $Chi^2= 83.434$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p= 0.000$  (age/settlement structure)
- 17 Within the following consideration of the current employment situation, only young people between the ages of 19 and 29 are considered, as the majority of young people between the ages of 14 and 18 are still in school and/or training.
- 18 Of the 2,893 (36% of all young people aged 19–29) in full-time employment for an indefinite period, 53.6% are women and 46.4% are men.
- 19 Percentages of relevant factors in the job search calculated by combining “Very important” and “Mostly important”.
- 20 Unemployment rates for total population for all participating countries: 7.5% Latvia, 6.4% Slovakia, 5.6% Lithuania, 5.2% Estonia, 3.7% Hungary, 2.9% Poland and 2.1% Czech Republic.
- 21 NEET = Not in Employment, Education or Training.
- 22 Absolute number of NEET young people: 175 Latvia, 245 Slovakia, 235 Lithuania, 174 Estonia, 279 Hungary, 242 Poland and 151 Czech Republic.
- 23 Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary were all admitted to the EU in 2004, cf. Federal Foreign Office (2022).
- 24 For example, Mierina estimates that over 13% of the Latvian population has been living in diaspora since 2000.
- 25 29.7% of 14-18 year olds, 24.1% of 19-24 year olds and 17.3% of 25-29 year olds have a strong desire to migrate.  $Chi^2= 285.409$ ;  $df=12$ ;  $p= 0.000$  (desire to migrate/age).
- 26  $Chi^2= 189.092$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $p= 0.000$  (migration experience/age).
- 27  $Chi^2= 130.986$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p= 0.000$  (migration experience/gender), CramersV 0.115
- 28 Average score political interest: men (2.83) versus women (2.51), on a scale from 1(not at all interested) to 5 (very interested)
- 29 Testing the effect of the above sociodemographic and sociocultural variables on political interest in a linear regression model, it is found that, in order, gender, own educational attainment, mother’s highest level of educational attainment, subjective income position and type of residence have the greatest influence on the level of political interest.  $R^2=0.040$ ,  $F\text{-test}=32,974$ ,  $sig=0.000$ . Multicollinearity zero.
- 30 Note that the arithmetic means on a scale of 1 to 10 is 5.5 points. Young people in the Czech Republic are only slightly to the right of the mean, while young Hungarians and Slovaks are very close to the norm, just a thin hair to the left. We argue that they would be centrist rather than characteristically left or right-leaning.
- 31 However, it is worth checking this finding with other research, as there is little support from previous European Social Survey (ESS) data. Indeed, in waves 7 and 8 of the ESS, the Polish 15-29 age group - although with a low number of items - was more right-wing than left-wing.

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# **ABOUT FES YOUTH STUDIES**



This publication is a part of the FES International Youth Studies. Starting in 2009 FES has conducted numerous Youth Studies around the globe. Since 2018, Youth Studies focus specifically on Southern Eastern Europe, Russia, Central Asia, Eastern Central Europe and the Baltic States. Further studies are being planned for the Middle East and Northern Africa as well as in individual countries around the globe. The International Youth Studies are a flagship project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in its endeavour to research, shape and strengthen the democracy of the future. It strives to contribute to the European discourse on how young generations see the development of their societies as well as their personal future in a time of national and global transformation. The representative studies combine qualitative and quantitative elements of research in close partnership with the regional teams aiming a high standard in research and a sensitive handling of juvenile attitudes and expectations.

A dedicated Advisory Board (Dr Miran Lavrič, Univ.-Prof. Dr. Marius Haring, Daniela Lamby, András Biró-Nagy and Dr Mārtiņš Kaprāns) supports the methodological and conceptual design of the Youth Studies. The Board consists of permanent and associated members and provides essential expertise for the overall project.

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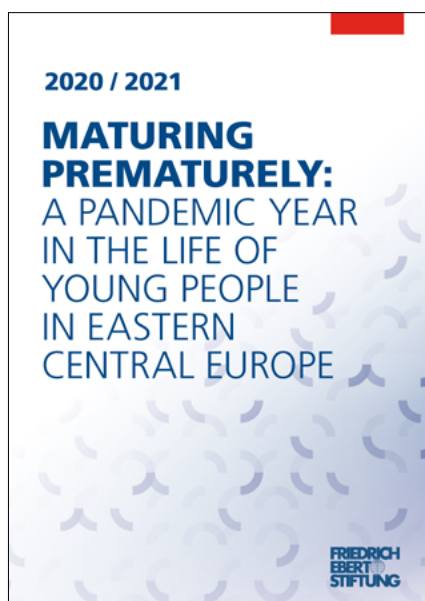
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## OTHER YOUTH STUDIES PUBLICATIONS

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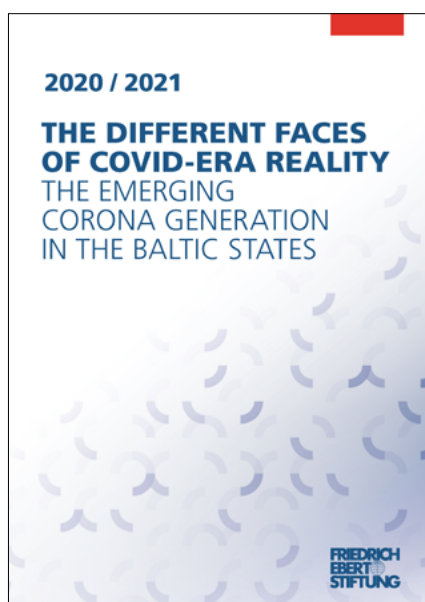


The coronavirus pandemic has been a great shock to societies in Central Europe. The restrictions it has brought about are extensive, and must have been particularly new for the young generation that cannot remember the eras before the democratic regimes were established in this region. In this report youths' experiences of the first year of the pandemic were studied in four countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted in each country, in which young people talked about a variety of topics and issues that had impacted their lives. In the study, it is argued that in areas like healthcare, inter-generational relationships, and education young people were pushed into becoming like adults, that is, into maturing prematurely.



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The goal of this research report is to explore the life of youth in the Baltic States during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021). The report focuses on how young people perceive and make sense out of social as well psychological changes caused by pandemic and how they position themselves in terms of these changes. The focus of this study lies on young people between the age of 14 and 29. The report is based on online interviews with 30 respondents that were conducted in April 2021 via the platform MS Teams. Ten respondents were interviewed in each of the Baltic States.



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