



# YOUTH STUDY BULGARIA

2018/2019



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## YOUTH STUDIES SOUTHEAST EUROPE 2018/2019:

“FES Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2018/2019” is an international youth research project carried out simultaneously in ten countries in Southeast Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia. The main objective of the surveys has been to identify, describe and analyse attitudes of young people and patterns of behaviour in contemporary society.

The data was collected in early 2018 from more than 10,000 respondents aged 14–29 in the above-mentioned countries who participated in the survey. A broad range of issues were addressed, including young peoples’ experiences and aspirations in different realms of life, such as education, employment, political participation, family relationships, leisure and use of information and communications technology, but also their values, attitudes and beliefs.

Findings are presented in ten national and one regional study and its accompanying policy papers, which have been published in both English and the respective national languages.

# YOUTH STUDY BULGARIA 2018/2019

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## 1

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contains the main results and conclusions of a national sociological survey of Bulgarian youth, and is representative of young people aged 14–29. The research was organised, methodologically developed and funded by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. For the second time after 2011–2015, the Foundation set out the goal of determining the attitudes of young people in different southeast European countries. In 2018, the survey has the advantage of being conducted practically simultaneously in ten countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Slovenia, and Serbia) and with an almost identical questionnaire, now providing for maximum similarity and comparability of data both at regional and chronological levels.

In Bulgaria the fieldwork was carried out by Gallup International, and the analysis of the data was conducted under the general editorial supervision of Petar-Emil Mitev and Boris Popivanov and collaboration of Siyka Kovacheva and Parvan Simeonov. In the analysis, in addition to statistics produced by the quantitative survey in Bulgaria and the other nine countries in the region, conclusions were drawn on the basis of applied qualitative methods (focus groups and in-depth interviews) while using secondary interpretation of statistical data (mostly from the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute and Eurostat) and data from previous surveys along with verification of these data and hypotheses found in scientific literature in the field of youth research.

As a result, the report provides an opportunity for in-depth and critical insight into the attitudes of Bulgarian youth in a number of areas: family life and leisure, education and employment, socio-economic status and mobility, socio-political attitudes, and political participation.

From a *socio-demographic* perspective, young people more often enjoy good health and, more often than not, are satisfied

with their appearance. Smoking and consumption of alcohol are more a consequence of a tense, insecure life than social status. Modern technological devices are in widespread use. To the extent that there is social differentiation, it tends to relate more to the number of mobile phones, laptops, etc., in a household rather than their presence or lack thereof. A family home, and frequently having one's own room in it, is a mass phenomenon and are not a function of economic possibilities. Self-assessments of households' financial situation generally tend towards the average; compared to the situation at the beginning of the century, the trend is positive across the board. The Roma community is obviously in a separate category, exhibiting the lowest levels in the various indicators.

Two types of activities are prevalent in *leisure time*: passive (listening to music, watching films and "not doing anything") and communicating (spending time with the family, or going out with friends). Young people are active users of market products. Surfing the Internet, including exchanging opinions on products and services, is a more widespread activity than watching television. Gender is an important factor in the allocation of free time: young women are more likely to communicate with the family, watch TV and read books whilst young men tend more to go in for traditional pursuits, such as going out more frequently with friends, visiting bars and cafes, and engaging in sport. Socio-economic inequalities do play a role in determining leisure activities, but individual preferences are no less significant. Regardless of their financial possibilities, young people are able to maintain the lifestyle of active users with broad social contacts.

When it comes to *values*, there is resurgence in traditional, more conservative orientations in people's view of the world, and the preservation of traditional religious identities. Unlike the extreme individuality witnessed during the transition period, we are

seeing more social awareness and solidarity among young people without this “dethroning” personal independence and freedom. Social injustice, corruption, and poverty are foremost among what respondents regard as serious and critical issues of our time.

The theme of *family and friends* is complex and multi-layered. Attitudes of young people towards the informal micro- and public macro-environment are polarised. There is a high degree of confidence in the informal environment (including family and parents) and a noticeable distancing from political leaders (civil discomfort). Marital relations are more stable than they were a few years ago. Life in a legally consummated marriage figures prominently in preferences. (70 per cent of people see themselves as being married in the future.) Notions of a desirable, two-person family unit predominate.

The most acute problems are the low birth rate among the Bulgarian ethnic majority and early births (by “children”) among the Roma ethnic minority. Sexual freedom is marked and welcomed; although in most cases it does not extend to the LGBT sphere (45 per cent of respondents express a somewhat negative attitude towards homosexuality). Sexual culture appears to have developed to a higher level than was measured in previous research.

The wish to migrate among Bulgarian youth has been gradually decreasing over the past two decades (61 per cent do not want to emigrate in 2018, as compared with 47 per cent in 2014 and only 14 per cent in 2001), but it still remains a chronic problem afflicting both the high- and low-skilled workforce. The decision to emigrate does not seem to be perceived as a turning point in the life of a young person, necessitating serious preparation and awareness. Intra-European mobility creates an environment where moving from one country to another is now perceived as one option among many others that can be modified or abandoned without any grave consequences for a person’s life strategies. Stagnation and a lack of prospects in Bulgaria have become specificities of the social environment characterising the lowest qualified groups, forcing them to seek a way out for themselves outside the country. Material motivations for mobility are categorically predominant. Practically no political or ethnic motives for emigration are reported. Europe is a potential migration option for Bulgarian youth much more than, for example, America, which was in first place during the beginning of democratic changes (42 per cent of those wishing to emigrate in 2018 prefer Germany, while 39 per cent favour Great Britain, and 17 per cent would opt for the USA when up to three destinations can be stated). The most noteworthy aspect of the current situation is the presence of a Bulgarian diaspora in the world that serves as a major stimulant to informal migration for all social and ethnic groups (42 per cent of those who wish to emigrate have the support of, or an invitation from, someone abroad). The results indicate that more comprehensive, in-depth and centralised information on the labour market situation in Bulgaria and EU countries as a whole is needed. Moreover, appropriate channels for dissemination of such information

need to be developed and promoted. By so doing, the illusions and inaccuracies that informal ties sometimes encourage in planning emigration could be avoided.

*The educational system* in Bulgaria is marked by a clear dichotomy among young people: an upper social strata and a bottom one. Existing social inequalities are reproduced in schools and universities. One thing that these two extremes share is an increased criticism of educational services and the specific requirements regarding training programmes on offer. There is a pressing need to develop practical positions and internships in the course of educational training through cooperation between state and municipal institutions, on the one hand, and the non-governmental sector and business on the other. A visibly functioning educational infrastructure is often unable to offer the basic standards required for practical training. The Roma ethnic group remains structurally mired at the bottom on almost all indicators. There is a growing need for a comprehensive new policy towards the Roma minority with a focus on young people. Looking at young people in general, educational motivation often correlates with aspects relating to the family. Parents with a higher level of education strongly stimulate pursuit of higher education by their children. Although pursuit of higher education is still a common aim, the unidirectional growth trend over the last few decades has been broken (73 per cent of persons surveyed expressed a desire to obtain a degree in higher education in 2014 compared to 59 per cent in 2018). “Belief in corruption” among young people has reached unprecedented heights (54 per cent are fully or partly convinced that exams and evaluations are purchased). The “market society” has in other words produced a notion of education as a “market”.

Among young Bulgarians, *finding employment* has seen a pronounced positive development, which is associated with EU integration and emergence from the post-crisis situation. Some of the problems identified in the 2014 survey are still present: an insufficient match between educational preparation and employment; the startlingly inadequate labour integration of young Roma individuals, also due to their low level of education. While the number of young people who are not involved in education, training or work is not growing, it is nevertheless of significance, and is often reproduced across generations (such as in families that have no work experience at all). This is why special efforts are needed to stimulate motivation for education amongst those young people whose own parents have no education or only a low level of education.

*The political sphere* for young people is framed by a triad: a low interest in politics (7 per cent are interested in politics as a whole), a low level of political participation, and a low level of motivation for a political career. Taken all together, these three dimensions pose a risk that the political elite will reproduce itself completely and open the way for casual political careers. This underscores a need for reform of the secondary school system in order to improve education of pupils on public and political issues, and the introduction of appropriate formats (training seminars,

summer schools, etc.) to augment political information among more pupils and students who are more aspiring in this area in addition to those pupils who are more oriented towards social sciences. The political alienation of youth is expressed in feelings of a lack of representation and age discrimination. Conventional political participation (party membership, etc.) is greatly discredited. The need for measures to systematically involve young people in the process of making, advising and evaluating policy decisions in institutions is becoming increasingly evident. A national and European identity is viewed as more important than identification with a political party or ideology. This is a prerequisite for the Bulgarian political process in the future to be based on current ideas of what is national and European. Euro-optimism is highly prevalent in young people's (geo-) political consciousness (50 per cent confidence in the EU, compared to 13 per cent for the Bulgarian National Assembly). Nationalism is developing in tandem with Europeanism, without coming into any conflict with it at the

present juncture. Indeed, Europe offers a political and economic model that contrasts with the supposed deficits of the Bulgarian political and economic situation. Young Bulgarians have strong views on democracy (62 per cent view democracy to be an important value). At the same time, undemocratic tendencies are accompanied by a mass perception of deficits in democracy, rights and law and order. It is paradoxical that young people simultaneously state that they consider themselves right-wing (and more market-oriented) (with 7 per cent describing themselves as left-wing compared to 24 per cent right-wing) while supporting left-wing (and more socially oriented) priorities. We are witnessing a stigmatisation of leftism as a label, but also an ever more salient social and collective self-awareness.

The research comes to the conclusion that socialisation of Bulgarian youth in social values and traditions has been relatively successful, while at the same time there has only been an extremely limited realisation of potential for social initiative.





## 2

# INTRODUCTION

## YOUTH: CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

“Challenge” has become one of the most frequently used terms in journalism, and from there has gone to become part of everyday communication. People are largely unaware of how the famous historian Arnold Toynbee developed his philosophical-historical theoretical construct, however: the history of civilisations is a chain of challenges and responses. These challenges confront elites with knotty problems that they must unravel. If their response is successful, civilization will move forwards, and if they fail – it will die.

Modern society is on a historically new spatial-temporal continuum: we live in a global world in which processes are unfolding at an unprecedented pace. We are witnessing a globally “liquefied” society to use a term coined by Zygmunt Bauman (“liquid society”). The lack of a global government is making the risk of chaotic pitfalls and unforeseen conflicts ever more tangible.

For modern young people, global society is not just an airy-fairy phrase. With one click, a person can read *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *The China Times*, *The Moscow Times*, *The Tehran Times* ... they can buy a traditional Bulgarian martenitsa produced in ... China. They perceive a less pleasant face of the world in the guise of refugees and migrants, especially in their capacity as bearers of distant cultures.

Regional society is even more tangible. People look towards Europe in their major life events – education, work and qualifications. Bulgarians study European languages, personal contacts are sought. People also have concerns regarding the European Union – for the sake of political correctness: homosexual marriages, admission of refugees, and dependence on Eurocracy.

National society is taking on two different functions. On the one hand, it serves as a “base to rebound” towards a regional or global perspective. On the other hand, it offers basic identities the only secure protection.

The future of the multi-level modern civilisation depends on whether it comes up with an adequate response to the problems

involved. First and foremost are global problems. *Mutatis mutandis* it applies to regional and national societies with their *differentia specifica*. Success depends largely on the new generation, on tomorrow’s elite, which will grow out of and be selected from its ranks. At the same time, socialisation standards articulated in the past are no longer sufficiently effective. In a sense, society is increasingly unprepared for its young people. There are risks of a generational stalemate: society does not understand its youth; this youth does not accept its society.

Young people are expected to produce a response. At the same time – it is also a multi-level problem: global, regional, and national.

One of the main premises of the “2018 Bulgarian Youth” study is: society must know its youth.

## THE RESEARCH

The research results that we are presenting here are part of an international project that is being implemented in 10 countries of former Eastern Europe. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation is the initiator, funding organisation and project promoter. In a sense, the project is a continuation of the cycle of surveys carried out in the same region in the period 2011–2015. Within the framework of Bulgaria, the survey was performed in 2014 by Gallup International Balkan; the results are interpreted in a monograph (Mitev and Kovacheva: 2014).

This year is witnessing the 50th anniversary of institutionalised youth surveys in the country, conducted by the great Bulgarian scientist, sociologist and political scientist Prof. Mincho Semov. In the intervening period, an analytical overview of the history and achievements of sociological research of youth in Bulgaria has been published (Mitev: 2016).

The aim of the present study is to produce a sociological portrait of the generation in the 14-29-year-old age group and to report on the changes that have taken place. The theoretical

approach of Bulgarian researchers is based on the “socialisation-juventisation” hypothesis, which conceives of the bilateral interaction of society and youth as a relatively independent socio-biological group. Society socialises youth, and incorporates it into a system of norms, values and institutions. Youth is not a passive recipient; it is responsible for a reciprocal effect, bringing about change in the public system, and rejuvenating society. The purpose of the study can be refined and spelled out in more precise terms with this in mind. It is necessary to determine the effectiveness of socialisation and its impact on the one hand, the potential offered by youth on the other, and the factors, guidelines and obstacles that exist in each of the cases.

The tasks of the study are to identify the most important factors in different spheres of youth consciousness and behaviour: demography; leisure and lifestyles; family and friends; value attitudes and religious beliefs; mobility; education; work; and politics. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used. The fieldwork was carried out by Gallup International Balkan and the interpretation was performed by co-collaborators at the “Ivan Hadjiyski” Institute of Sociology: Prof. Petar-Emil Mitev DSc., Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boris Popivanov and Parvan Simeonov, as well as Assoc. Prof. Dr. Siyka Kovacheva from Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”.

We would like to express our special gratitude to Maria Petrova from the Bulgaria Bureau of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation for her efficient organisation of the work. We would also like to thank Zhivko Georgiev and Iren Tsenkova from Gallup International Agency for providing the empirical foundations for the study. Snezhina Stoyanova, Hristina Todorova and Yuliana Galyova, co-collaborators at Gallup International, also helped out. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution made by Svetoslav Mitev in the further processing of data from various studies. Nor must we fail to mention the important role played by Romyana Boyadzhieva with regard to the content and technical editing of the text.

## METHODOLOGY

In Bulgaria as of 31 December 2017, young people (15–29 years of age) accounted for 15.37 per cent of the country’s population. Four years previous to this, as of 31 December 2013, young people in the same age group numbered 1,240,836, or 17.12 per cent of the country’s population. This change is part and parcel of the demographic collapse in Bulgaria, brought into sharp relief during the transition.

A comparative view of our region (according to Eurostat) shows that young people account for a lower percentage of the population in Bulgaria than in Serbia (17.0 per cent), Croatia (17.3 per cent), Romania (17.4 per cent), Macedonia (20.8 per cent), Albania (24.5 per cent), as well as in comparison to the average percentage of young people for the EU-28 (17.2 per cent). Bulgaria is comparable to Greece (15.5 per cent).

TABLE 2.1.: **Population between 15 and 29 years of age as of 31 December 2017**

Population	Total	Male	Female
Country total	7,050,034	3,422,409	3,627,625
15–19	313,032	160,986	152,046
20–24	325,198	167,828	157,370
25–29	445,237	229,275	215,962
Youth total	1,083,467	558,089	525,378

Source: National Statistical Institute

The survey was conducted in Bulgaria between 22 January and 6 March 2018. *General population* – 1,148,907 people. A *two-stage cluster sample* divided into administrative regions (28 regions) and by urban areas (administrative centres, small towns and villages). *Volume of the sample* – Planned – 1000; realised – 1016 respondents. *Fieldwork control* – reliability testing of 5–10 per cent of the sample. The team used its own interviewing network, covering the whole country – all kinds of places, all regions and areas within them.

Interviewees were selected, instructed and vetted in accordance with professional standards. *Logical viewing and selection* – by means of a software program for logical checks, identification of factual, logical, etc. contradictions in respondents’ responses during interviewing. *Data retrieval* – based on indicators such as gender, age, place of residence and ethnic origin. Data on these parameters were taken from the “National Statistical Institute 2016” and the “2011 Census” for Ethnic Origin. *Statistical error* – tolerance of +/- 3.1 per cent.

## STRUCTURE OF THE SAMPLE

<b>Gender</b>	
Male	51 per cent
Female	49 per cent
<b>Age groups</b>	
14 – 15	11 per cent
16 – 19	21 per cent
20 – 24	29 per cent
25 – 29	39 per cent
<b>Place of residence</b>	
Capital city	21 per cent
Regional centre	35 per cent
Town	20 per cent
Village	24 per cent
<b>Level of education</b>	
Higher	16 per cent
Unfinished higher	19 per cent
Secondary	33 per cent
Unfinished secondary	21 per cent
Primary	6 per cent
Unfinished primary	4 per cent
<b>Social-professional status</b>	
Pupils	25 per cent
Students	10 per cent
Employed students	9 per cent
Employed	44 per cent
Unemployed and inactive others	11 per cent
<b>Ethnicity</b> (according to the interviewer, with 55 per cent non-response)	
Bulgarian	83 per cent
Turkish	7 per cent
Roma	8 per cent
Bulgarian Muslim	2 per cent
Others	1 per cent
<b>Father's level of education</b>	
MA / PhD	17 per cent
University	8 per cent
Professional / Technical secondary	41 per cent
Secondary	20 per cent
Primary and unfinished primary	12 per cent

Mathematical and statistical processing of quantitative data was performed using the SPSS package. The data were subjected to one-dimensional, two-dimensional and multi-dimensional analysis, and hypotheses were checked by the Chi-squared method, t-test analysis and dispersion analysis.

The qualitative methodologies included *in-depth interviews* and *focus groups*. A total of 12 in-depth interviews were conducted. The selection was made in accordance with the indicators of gender, place of residence, age and ethnicity. Group discussions were conducted in two focus groups. In the first group, respondents were aged 14–19. In the second the age group was 20–29 years of age.



# 3

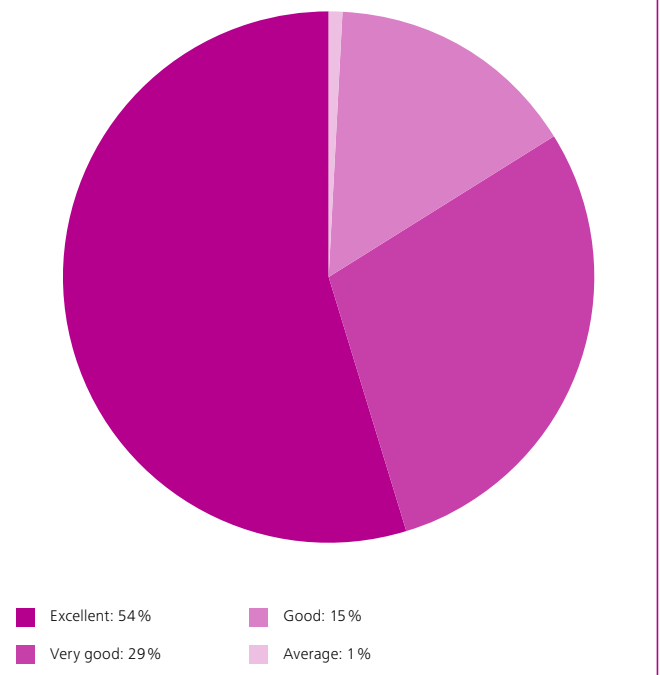
## YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN "TO HAVE" AND "TO BE"

Some of the most important things that affect the lives and attitudes of young Bulgarians are their health and their property. In many ways, the formation of their values, the way they live and view their surroundings, and their aspirations for the future are determined by how they feel physically, how they assess themselves as regards their health condition and appearance, and what material things they have in their possession. "To have" and "to be" are certain categories that are sometimes in conflict, yet sometimes they have a common base.

### HEALTH

The usual premise is that the young person is healthy most of the time.

FIGURE 3.1: **How do you evaluate your health on the whole? (per cent)**



In the sample there were only two respondents who evaluated their health as bad. The highest level of excellent health is enjoyed by the early teen group (64 per cent of 14-15-year-olds), whilst the trend dips slightly downwards with increasing age (47 per cent of 28-29-year-olds). The decrease in the number of “excellent” responses is, however, accounted for by the increase in the number of “very good” responses. The majority of young Bulgarian people do not report serious health problems.

Higher status seems virtually unrelated to self-esteem in this respect. We do not find a substantial accumulation of alarming responses in any social strata. Interestingly, “excellent” health is more typical of small towns (69 per cent) than the capital (51 per cent). The same also holds true more for the Roma community (62 per cent) and Turks (73 per cent) than for ethnic Bulgarians (53 per cent). Taking into account the geographical distribution of minority groups, we can assume that the tensions of the big city and concerns about the polluted environment and quality of food give rise to concerns about personal health. Higher education brings with it a keener awareness of health issues and the potential dangers associated with them. A less educated person sometimes dismisses as insignificant some minor health problems that more educated persons would consider important, at least to a certain extent. This probably explains why young people who have only undergone primary or lower education state their health to be excellent much more often than college graduates (65 per cent to 42 per cent).

Satisfaction with one’s health and satisfaction with one’s appearance are quite closely connected, and they make up an essential part of a young person’s perception of themselves.

On the whole, young people (71 per cent) like how they look.

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Young Bulgarians in 2018 have the feeling of being healthy and good-looking.

Harmful habits, which are damaging to health in one way or another, usually have consequences in later life. However, it is interesting to examine their distribution.

Men are more regular smokers than women (34 per cent to 25 per cent). The survey does not fully corroborate WHO data, according to which Bulgaria is the only European country in which a larger proportion of women smoke than men. It is true that in this case we are talking about the age of youth, amongst whom stereotypes typically held by more mature people have not yet formed. If, in the youngest age segment, 4 per cent of 14-15-year-olds smoke regularly or occasionally, and this looks like a positive finding, the figure jumps to 60 per cent for 28-29-year-olds and must be cause for concern. Tobacco smoking is a strong factor in social differentiation. Education, income and ethnic origin actually “filter” it. Smoking daily is a habit of 42 per cent of people on average and 16 per cent of university graduates, 39 per cent of

FIGURE 3.2: **Do you smoke cigarettes? (per cent)**

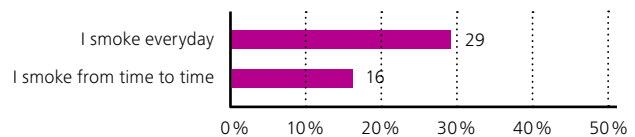


FIGURE 3.3: **Do you drink alcohol? (per cent)**

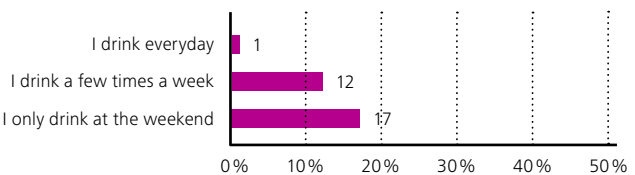
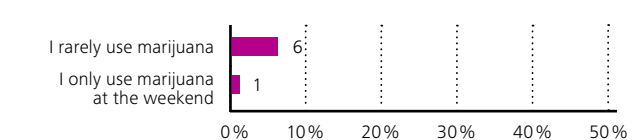


FIGURE 3.4: **Do you use marijuana? (per cent)**



the poor and 28 per cent of the rich, 62 per cent of young Roma and 27 per cent of young Bulgarians. The higher strata of society seem to be more resistant to the temptation of tobacco – whether this is because of a specific environment and lifestyle, in which smoking is not considered to be “modern” and “cool”, or because they are more aware of the harm it causes.

Like tobacco, the use of alcohol increases with age. Only 2 per cent of the youngest and nearly 40 per cent of the oldest in the youth population drink at least once a week. The overall trend still seems to be the same. The tendency to drink alcohol at least a few times a week differentiates people with secondary education from those with higher education (20 per cent vs. 5 per cent), poor from rich (15 per cent vs. 7 per cent), and young Roma people from young ethnic Bulgarians (29 per cent vs. 11 per cent). Considering that regular use of tobacco and alcohol products requires a great deal of money, it is, at first glance, paradoxical that we find this in those groups where financial means can be expected to be limited. We can probably attribute this to a more stressful and uncertain life that stimulates the enjoyment of unhealthy habits, regardless of the undoubted burden they impose on personal and family budgets.

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It is not so much financial opportunities as difficulties in life that contribute to the greater use of cigarettes and alcohol.

Unlike cigarettes and alcohol, which are more often associated with the more difficult life of the more "unprivileged" youth group, marijuana is an "elite" and "teenage" pleasure. Because of its greater cost, the specificity of the contacts through which it can be acquired, and the nature of the social environment in which it is used, "grass" is most widely used among 16-19-year-olds (9 per cent), the rich (11 per cent) and people living in the capital (20 per cent). In all youth groups (excluding residents of Sofia), roughly nine out of every 10 persons state that they have not used soft drugs, and this also indicates that we are not faced with an increasingly popular "fad".

## OWNERSHIP

Contemporary achievements of civilisation and the pressure of consumer culture intensify the importance of what possessions a young person and their family have. It is not just a matter of forming a wealth hierarchy, but also of accessing different possibilities (from a social environment to an appropriate education) as well as personal psychological development (Figure 3.5).

The high value attached to ownership of a house or an apartment is not surprising. By tradition Bulgaria has been among those

countries in Europe with the largest proportion of people owning their own home. This is still the case, and the situation with young people shows that this continues to be widespread. There is no group in which lack of this key private possession does not hover at around 1–2 per cent. This also applies to the highest youth segments, for whom it is assumed that living in rented housing is most prevalent. Their responses probably include not just their own personal household, but also that of their parents.

To the extent that there are differences, these are manifested in the number of homes – half of the wealthy (52 per cent) have two or more compared to one-tenth (12 per cent) of the poor. The largest number of homes is owned where the supply is most limited, in the capital, although this is probably due to the ownership of villas or houses in the countryside. Unemployed people and minorities do not lag drastically behind in the general picture. We can also see for certain that the vast majority of respondents have their own room in the family home. In almost all groups, this number varies between 80 per cent and 90 per cent, but the unemployed (71 per cent) and Roma (62 per cent) are the worst off in this respect. And not a single rich respondent does not have their own room! One can say that income and wealth matter, but this is not decisive in the area of housing. A large proportion of young people do not count their personal or family home as an

FIGURE 3.5: Do you and your family own ...

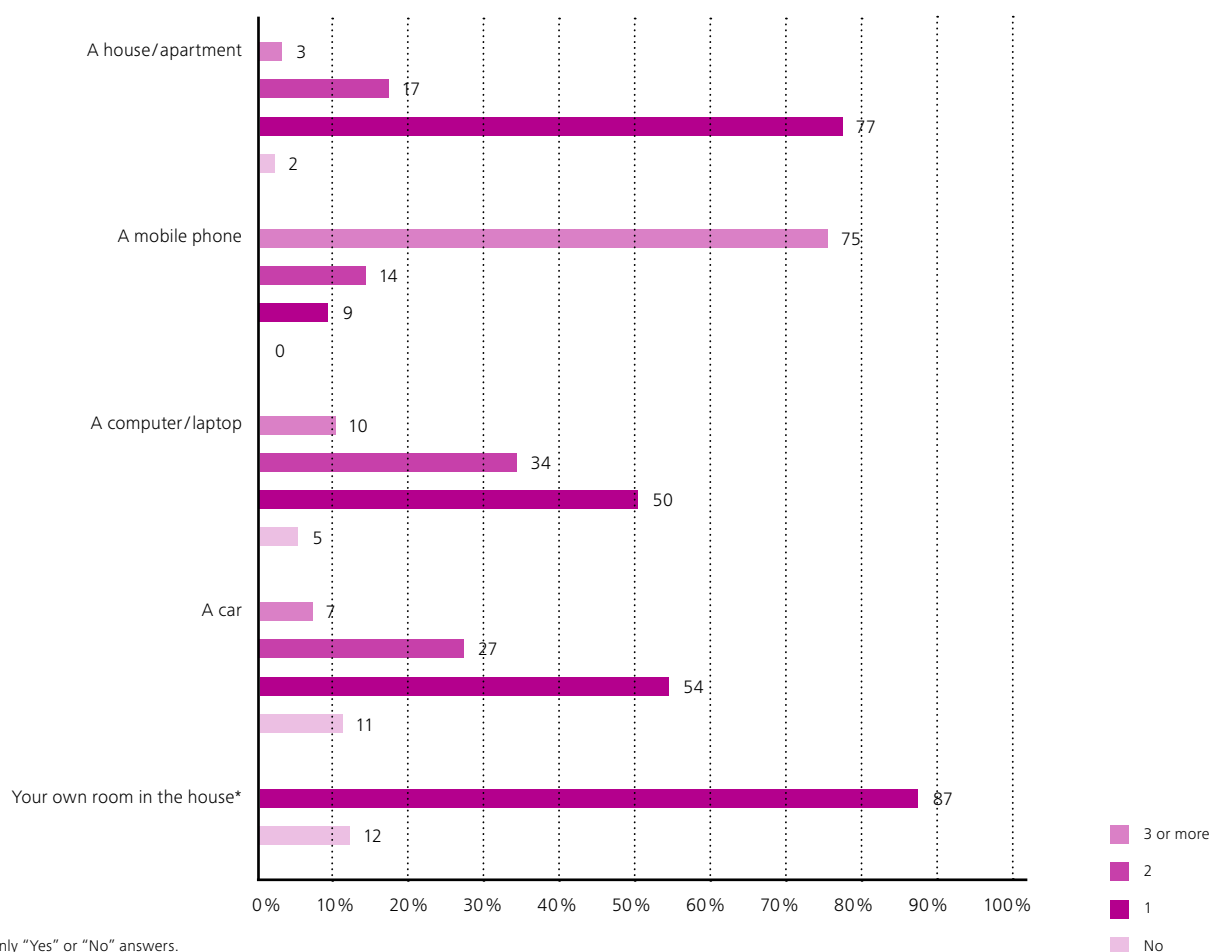
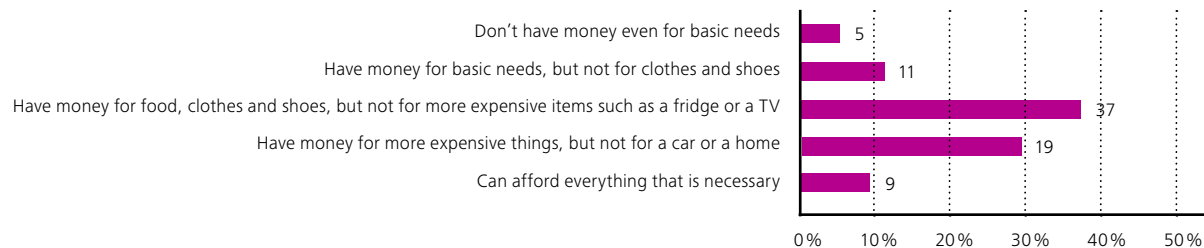


FIGURE 3.6: **Financial condition of the household. (per cent)**

asset that determines their socio-economic status. Poorer people have houses or apartments and are still poor.

Socio-economic status is not determined by home ownership.

Young Bulgarians demonstrate a great appreciation of possessing basic technical acquisitions. That which was once referred to as “modern codes”, and which underlies stratification of youth, has become a widespread reality. It is no longer a question of the actual presence, but rather the number of respective objects. The data show that virtually every member of respondent families has a mobile phone, and in the homes of almost half of young people there is more than one computer or laptop. This allows for individualised usage and is typical of a new kind of modern living standard that is not measured simply by income scales.

Computers and laptops have long since ceased to be luxury items. The question regarding them is not so much “whether” as it is “how many”.

Ethnic distance is most salient in terms of computer and laptop possession. The number of mobile phones is also part of this trend, albeit in far more modest terms. There are differences between the rich and the poor, between the capital and villages, and between working and unemployed people, but these differences are smaller, and it is possible that these will be increasingly eliminated. In all groups, well over half the respondents report that their family have three or more phones. The biggest difference is that between Bulgarians (83 per cent) and Roma (62 per cent). Given the fact that Roma families have more members on average than Bulgarians or Turks, this becomes even more significant. Still, here as well the positive trend is undeniable and its importance should not be underestimated. The group discussion with schoolchildren in a metropolitan area with a predominantly Roma population was inter-

esting. It turned out that phone and the social networks play an indispensable role in everyday life including, as is evident, in social groups threatened by marginalisation.

In the next illustration, we see a picture showing the number of private cars. It is striking that gender inequality has completely disappeared. In all of the types of responses, the relative share of men and women is exactly the same. The second car in the family is particularly important because it is often this one that is used by the young respondent. The rich have the highest percentage of car ownership – every fifth person (21 per cent) has three or more in their family, whereas this is only true for one in every fifty (2 per cent) of the poor. The “wealth-minority” axis again indicates extremes when it comes to possessions. In the sample, we do not find a single wealthy young person whose family does not have a car, nor is there any Roma individual whose family has three or more at their disposal.

We can consider assessment of the material condition of the young people from another perspective.

Material status is strictly related to consumer possibilities. It turns out that a significant number of young people (more than two-thirds) “can make ends meet”, and in excess of one-third do not experience significant financial difficulties. In general, extreme or relative poverty only figures in a limited sense. However, the details are also important.

Education plays a direct role in determining a higher standard of living.

The wealthier stratum includes half of the university graduates and one-third of respondents with primary or lower education. The same is confirmed by the educational level of parents. In the two highest categories of living standards, we find 55 per cent of young people whose fathers have a Master's or PhD and only 13 per cent of those whose fathers have (unfinished) primary education. In addition, we can detect a correlation between the *level of education* and the number of books that young people had in the home where they grew up. Those who stated that they had more than 100 books account for 53 per cent of the rich and 18 per cent of the poor.



The ethnic divide is particularly strong. Only 5 per cent of young Roma individuals can afford more expensive things, and not one of them can afford whatever they want. At the same time, persons of Turkish origin demonstrate material possibilities similar to those of Bulgarian origin. It is noteworthy that citizens in the capital city (42 per cent) do not live with much greater satisfaction than those in district centres (39 per cent) or small towns (37 per cent). This is certainly surprising, given the well-known fact that wealth in Bulgaria is concentrated mainly in Sofia.

There are processes of social stratification that are increasingly dividing “rich Sofia” from “poor Sofia” – rich neighbourhoods from the suburbs.

This is, by the way, a trend that is characteristic of big cities across Europe. And one more observation: the “rich” are not so rich, nor are the “poor” so poor. One in every four wealthy youngsters in the sample (24 per cent) stated that they experience material difficulties, and one in every five poor persons (20 per cent) can afford a car or home, or whatever is needed for a good standard of living. All of this means two possible things – either we should gradually move in the direction of a revision of the categories with which we subdivide the different material possibilities of people or we should focus more attention on the criteria which people themselves use to determine their status.

Regional comparisons underline the Bulgarian specificity. In the framework of the same survey from 2018, it can be seen that EU Member States such as Bulgaria and Romania exhibit higher levels of economic deprivation among young people (respectively 16 per cent and 17 per cent in sum total for the first two answers to the question relating to the financial situation of the household) than, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo (6 per cent), in which the standard of living is lower. Self-assessment, of course, is subject to cultural and socio-psychological factors, but it is important. Bulgarian and Romanian results could reflect the ever-increasing cost of living in both countries. They could also indicate greater and more critical expectations against the background of long-term growth in material possibilities over time.

This is why we have to note something more important regarding a comparative chronological aspect. The material standard of households where there are young people – whether this relates to their parents’ or their own – indicates a radical change compared to the period of transition. At the watershed between two centuries – 1999–2000, under the leadership of prof. Ivan Szelenyi the largest comparative study of poverty in former Eastern Europe (range: Poland, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria) was carried out. The scale of impoverishment in Bulgaria was astonishing, even against the background of the collapse experienced by almost all the countries. With these data, one can now evaluate the path that has led to a qualitatively new situation.

TABLE 3.1.: **Absolute poverty, in terms of consumption**

Consumption	2000	2018
Don't have money even for basic needs	27	4
Have money for basic needs, but not for clothes and shoes	45	11
Have money for food, clothes and shoes, but not for more expensive items such as a fridge or a TV	24	37
Have money for more expensive things, but not for a car or a home	3	29
Can afford everything that is necessary	...	9

Note. In 2000 the age group was 18–30. In 2018, it is 14–29.  
Source: Ivan Szelenyi (ed.) Poverty underpost-communist capitalism.

The difference is so great that it would appear that these are two different countries.

## CONCLUSION

- Young Bulgarians more often than not feel healthy and happy about their appearance. Material possibilities are on the increase, but do not explain this self-assessment.
- Tobacco smoking and frequent use of alcohol are a social problem prevailing among poorer and more vulnerable groups of young people.
- The tendency to possess one’s own a home, characteristic of Bulgarian society, is being carried on by younger generations. Having one’s own home is not a socially differentiating factor and is not perceived as a material asset.
- Possessions of devices and objects (computer, mobile phone, car) are a mass phenomenon. Social distances among young people are apparently not related to whether one has these or not, but rather by how many one has.
- The differences in material standards are mainly influenced by factors such as education, employment and ethnicity. Gender and place of residence themselves do not matter. With increasing age, young people tend to see a rise in their material standard, providing them a positive outlook for future growth.
- The Roma ethnic group is distinct and stands at “the bottom” of almost all indicators relating to the categories: “to have” and “to be”.



## 4

# FREE TIME AND LIFESTYLE

Free time in modern societies is a vital area, alongside paid work, in which there are plentiful opportunities for the individual to invest time and money in entertainment and communication, creativity and personal expression. Participation in leisure activities contributes to the physical and psychological well-being of individuals and the quality of their lives as a whole (Roberts: 2016). Sociological research unambiguously shows that the tendency towards globalisation is reflected in human lifestyles, along with manifestations of global and local hybridisation in tastes and preferences (Nilan and Feixa: 2006, Roberts et al: 2017).

For young Bulgarians, leisure time has become important with the transition from a traditional to a modern society where working “from darkness to darkness” and “sips” of happiness during festive dances on the village green (Hadjiyski: 2002 – 1) have been replaced by a distinct division into working time and time for rest and leisure. Under the one-party regime, organised forms of leisure activities were imposed, while informal youth subcultures appeared as an expression of protest (Mitev: 1984). With the social transformation that began in 1989, young people assimilated market-style forms of cultural consumption as a means of expressing their individual interests and tastes (Mitev and Kovacheva: 2014).

## LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

The current study has made it possible to compare the frequency of 18 activities on a five-level scale.

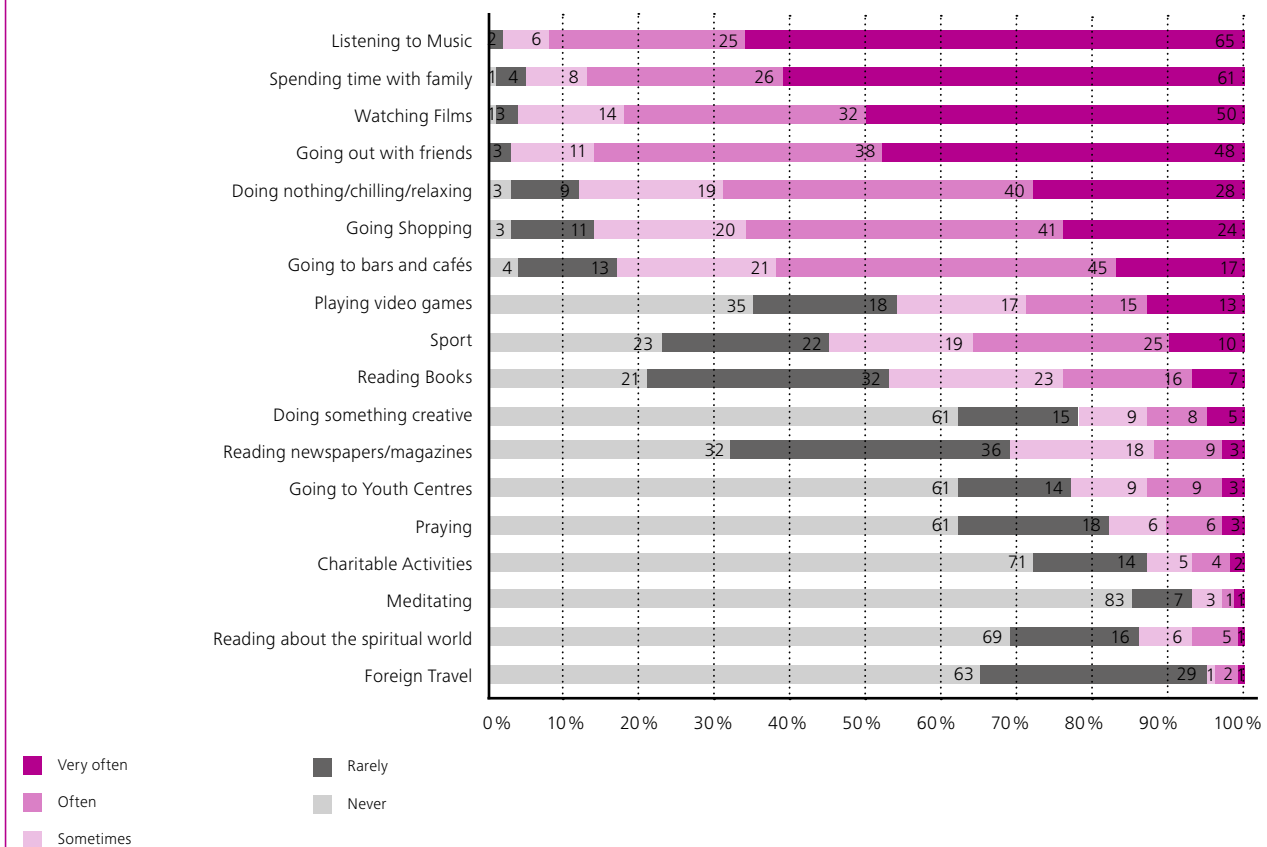
Amongst them, we can distinguish between completely passive activities like “relaxation”, activities that do not require a lot of effort on the part of young people, such as listening to music, and very active areas such as engaging in sports, creative activities and volunteer work. Many of the activities involve communication with other people – family and friends, while others are largely individual, such as praying and meditation. Some activities require more financial means, such as going to restaurants, cafés or bars, and shopping, others need less, like spending time with the family or listening to music. As a whole, passive activities, with a significant amount of “doing nothing” and communicating with family and friends, predominate in the leisure activities of young Bulgarians.

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The two activities that are most common in the everyday life of young people are listening to music and spending time with the family.

A comparison of the structure of free-time activities of young Bulgarians in 2018 with people from the younger generation in other countries would allow us to interpret this picture better. The data available from the previous study of Bulgarian youth (Mitev and Kovacheva: 2014) show that in the order of preference there are significant coincidences – for example, listening to music and going out with friends are among the three most frequently practised activities in both surveys.

FIGURE 4.1: Frequency of activities during free time.



Note: The levels on the scale were defined as: "Never"; "Once a month or less often" (Rarely); "A few times a month" (Sometimes); "At least one a week" (Often) and "Every day or almost every day" (Very often). The difference between the total scores and 100 per cent comes from answers "Don't know" or no answer given.

In order to better understand the importance of leisure activities to young Bulgarians, it is necessary to look beyond the general structure and see how different activities figure in the everyday life of the different groups of young people, and how these depend on age, gender, education, family and ethnic origin.

The most significant differences in the regularity of *listening to music* can be seen among the age groups, with listening every day decreasing with age. For adolescents (15–19), three quarters (73 per cent) listen to music every day or almost every day, but this figure drops to 62 per cent for young people over 19 years of age.

Almost all young people state that they *spend time with their family*, with young women more often spending time with the family every day (67 per cent) than men (55 per cent). Daily communication with parents is characteristic of 70 per cent of adolescents, and this figure decreases gradually with age. The proportion of those spending time daily with the family is higher in the case of unemployed people, Roma individuals, ethnic Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, as well as among those whose parents have primary and lower education. The regions that display the most frequent communication with the family are those in the northeast and northwest, accounting for over 70 per cent of responses.

*Going out with friends* is also an important and fundamental activity for young people in their free time, but is less frequent than communicating with family members.

*Reading books* is a rare pastime for modern young persons. One-third of young people read rarely – once a month or less, and one-fifth never do. Those who read most are university graduates and students, and those who do so least are people with primary and lower education and the unemployed. There are people who do not read at all in all groups, even among university graduates (10 per cent). Here ethnic origin shows a very high level of stratification – 72 per cent of the Roma population say they never read.

*Reading newspapers and magazines* is an even less common activity among Bulgarian youth today.

*Sport* is also a rare pastime for young people. The proportion of men who take part in sporting activities regularly is three times more than the respective number of women. The proportion of women who never do any sport (33 per cent) is more than twice the figure for men in the same category (14 per cent). Dependence on age is almost linear – the number of non-active individuals grows with advancing age from 14 per cent among the youngest to 29 per cent in the older group while, conversely, the proportion of regular participants in sport drops from 20 per cent among the youngest to 5 per cent among the oldest. Almost half of unemployed people do not exercise at all. The same goes for over half the Roma community. Only 5 per cent of rich children never engage in sports.

*Watching TV* every day shows a noticeable increase as a practice for unemployed people, reaching two-thirds. The education of respondents and their parents, as well as the social status of their families, do not have a major influence, but the connection between the figures and place of domicile is significant and in the expected direction. 59 per cent of young people living in villages watch films every day, whilst the same is true for only 45 per cent of those living in large towns and the capital city. This is the most popular activity for young people in the northeast region (66 per cent). In comparison, in the southwest region, the figure is only 41 per cent.

*Creative activities* (writing, painting, playing a musical instrument) are pursued to a greater or lesser extent in the free time of just over one-third of young Bulgarians. These activities are more prevalent among young women, among whom almost half are involved with artistic activities. Adolescents are more creative than young people aged 20 and over, and those without work are the group with the smallest interest in art. The influence of parents' social status is quite evident, with the proportion of young people not having any creative activities increasing from 46 per cent among rich families to 69 per cent among the poor.

*Video games* are a popular pastime for young Bulgarians, more so among males than females – 76 per cent of men and 53 per cent of women play video games more or less frequently during the week, with this figure including 20 per cent of men on a daily basis, but only 6 per cent of women. Frequency declines with age.

All young people *rest* ("chill, relax"). "Just resting" was chosen as a leisure activity by 96 per cent of young Bulgarians. This is "done" every day more often by men, adolescents, and young people with primary education, unemployed people, Roma individuals, the poor and people living in villages and those in the northeast and the northwest region.

*Going to restaurants* (bars, cafés, clubs) is something that once again nearly all young people do (96 per cent). Men do this on a daily basis more often (20 per cent) than women (15 per cent). The frequency increases with age, reaching a peak among 20-24-year-olds and then falling in the upper age group. Students, unemployed people and the Roma community, young people from villages and the northeast region most often visit such establishments, with there being no dependence on the material status of the family since the question encompasses "establishments" with a very broad range of consumption in financial terms.

*Going to a youth centre or a club of interest* figures in the free-time activities of one-third of young Bulgarians. Data show that this is dependent on the social status of the family – among wealthy people 44 per cent have no such interest, with this figure rising to 69 per cent for young people from poor families.

*Voluntary work, such as participation in social projects, initiatives and associations*, is much less popular among leisure activities: 71 per cent of young Bulgarians do not engage in such activities. Participation in social projects and organisations is more widespread among young women than young men; mostly in the case of students, and at least in the case of the unemployed.

Participation increases, albeit only slightly, according to parents' education and social status.

*Praying* does not figure in the activities of 61 per cent of young people in Bulgaria, with this being more characteristic for young men than for young women – 66 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively. The most influential factor is religion and ethnic group, with Muslims praying most often. Also of great significance is the factor of age, with prayer playing no part in the lives of 74 per cent of young people aged 14–15, 67 per cent among those aged 16–19, 62 per cent with 20-24-year-olds, and 52 per cent for those between 25 and 29.

*Meditation, and practising yoga* or similar is an element in the lives of about 11 per cent of young people, with this being more common among ethnic Bulgarians, university graduates, rich people and citizens of Sofia.

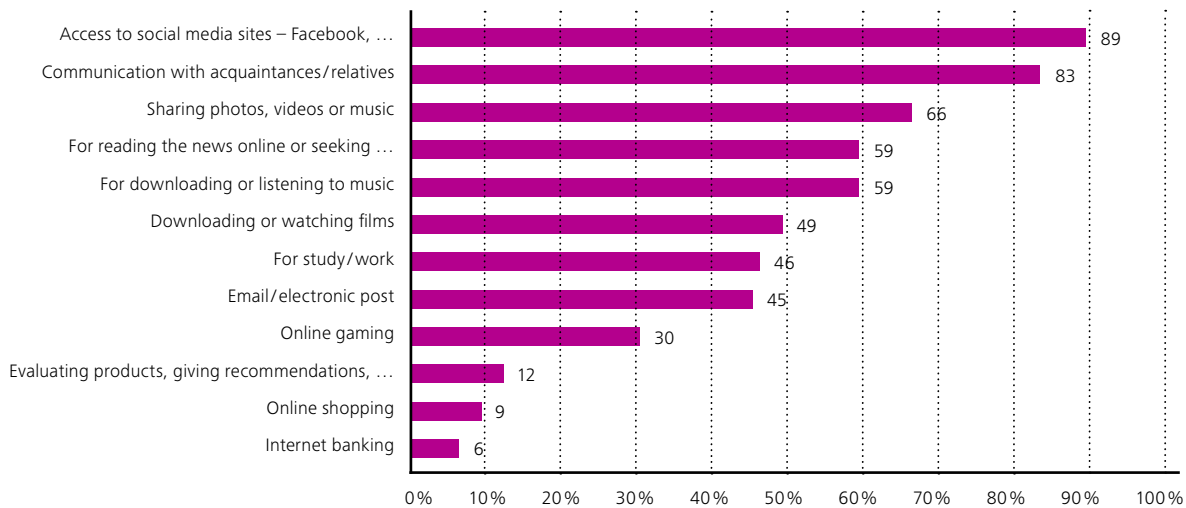
*Shopping* is a popular activity, with 41 per cent doing this at least once a week, and another 24 per cent almost every day. Women are twice as likely as men to go shopping daily. The strongest dependency is on age, with only 14 per cent of teenagers going shopping on a daily basis, whilst this rises to 33 per cent in the 25-29-year-old group. The proportion of shoppers is surprisingly higher for unemployed people, the Roma community, the poor and village dwellers, but also among graduates. Here we can talk about different styles and products, not just about frequency.

63 per cent of young Bulgarians have never *travelled abroad*, but this number falls to half in the group of 25-29-year-olds. Only 48 per cent of university graduates do not travel abroad at all, whilst this is true for 75 per cent of young people with primary and lower education. Once again, the most disadvantaged are unemployed and Roma people – most of them have not travelled abroad. More often, those from wealthy families with university-educated parents and residents of the capital city have been abroad.

While surfing the Internet stands out among the most widespread activities, the goals which young people are following in entering the web are different.

If young people as a general rule use the Internet to communicate with friends, it is interesting to know what the number of friends online is and how many young people also communicate with outside of the network. Young people are equally divided into two groups: those with up to 100 "online" friends and those with over 100. The number of friends drops sharply when young people answer the question as to how many of them would identify as close friends in real life. Here, one-half of young people have up to 20 "close" friends, the other half have more than 20. If half the youth have 20 or more friends both in social networks and outside them, we cannot extrapolate the negative impact of online communication to what counts as "live", at least in terms of the number of contacts with friends, if not as regards content and intensity.

FIGURE 4.2: Purposes of "frequent" usage of the Internet.



Young people have a high degree of confidence in social networks, particularly regarding their "responsible" use of the personal data of consumers.

One-third trust social networks greatly or completely, while those who do not express trust by stating "completely" and "rather trust" account for half this proportion – 17 per cent. Political institutions in the country can only envy Bill Gates when it comes to trust and confidence of young people.

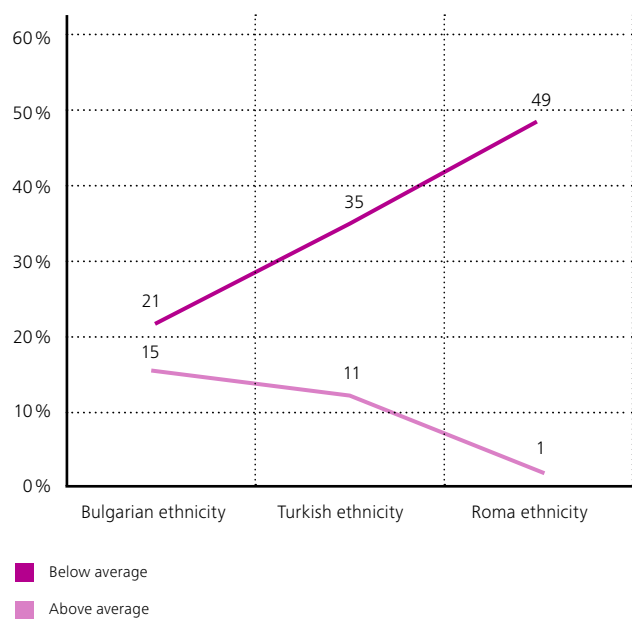
## FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND RESTRICTIONS

Regardless of whether they are active or passive, most leisure activities require not only time, effort and an appropriate attitude among young people, but also financial means. Invited to evaluate their personal financial possibilities – "the money you have for your own needs compared to that of other people of your age in Bulgaria in general", the respondents put themselves in the middle of the scale.

The size of the community does not have any significant bearing. Figure 4.3 clearly shows the scissor-type effect of social inequality (at least according to the self-perceptions of young people) according to ethnicity.

Young Roma people, who predominantly have primary and lower education, with parents who also have a low level of education and belong to lower social strata emerge as the group not only with the most limited financial means, but also with a structure of free time characterised by passive consumption and very little time being devoted to sports, reading, surfing the Internet and creative activities.

FIGURE 4.3 How much money do you have for your personal needs in comparison to people of your age?



Financial possibilities are reflected in the frequency of relatively few of the leisure activities of young Bulgarian people.

The impact of the factor of *financial possibilities* on reading books and newspapers is statistically significant; also significant, but to a lesser extent, are sports, creative activities such as painting, and playing an instrument. The frequency of these activities increases with an increase in the financial resources available (in the opinion of the young people themselves). The frequency of shopping, going out with friends, and even going to bars and restaurants does not display any predictable pattern – for example, a

quarter of those with financial resources below the average very often go to a bar; the same is again true of another quarter – those with more than average financial resources. Consumption in leisure time is dependent not only on economic factors but on the tastes of young people.

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

Differences between young people with regard to preferences for one or another leisure activity testify to the making of one’s own lifestyle, which in turn is a stage in the formation of one’s own identity. The data tell us something about the formation of female and male styles in the enjoyment of leisure time among young people.

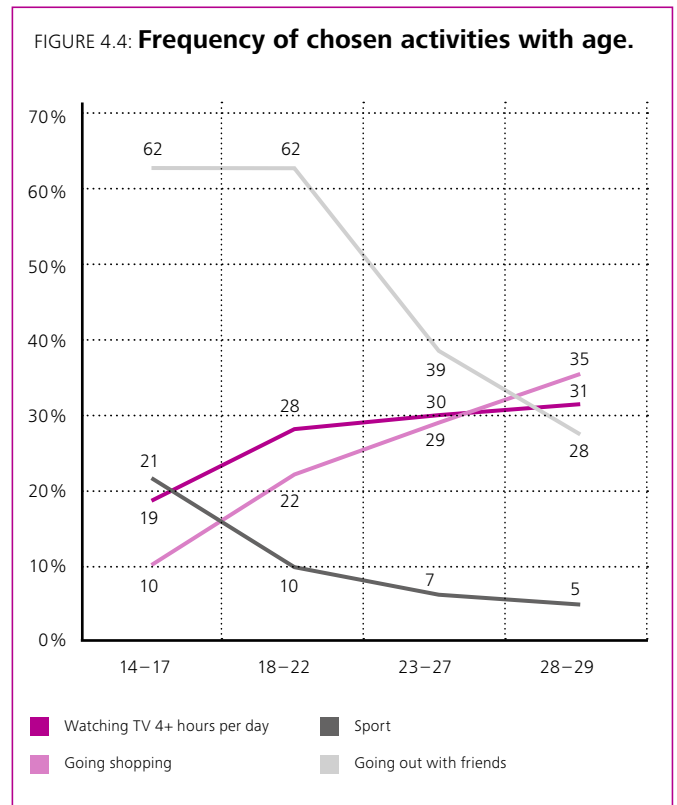
Despite many common features, male and female styles of entertainment differ significantly along the lines of traditional expectations of gender roles.

Young women spend more time with their family, and although they do often go out with friends and go to bars and restaurants, they do so less often than young men. They like going shopping much more often than young men. They read more and engage in sport less. They prefer creative activities (writing, drawing, playing a musical instrument); they also watch movies and television more often. Young men, although they regularly communicate with their family, go out with friends and go to the restaurant more often. They read less, do more sports and more often play video games. They spend a little more time browsing the Internet, and they also play games more often than women. They use Facebook and other social networks, and upload and download pictures just as much as women.

There are also specifics in the use of leisure time by young people in smaller and larger populated areas. The lifestyle of young people in villages differs in that people here go out with friends, go to pubs, including youth clubs, and, when they are at home, watch films and TV more, but read fewer books and newspapers. Young people in large towns and the capital city have a style of leisure-time behaviour that is associated less with passive activities such as watching movies and television, and more with creative pursuits and spiritual pursuits such as meditation and reading personal-development books. They engage in sport as much as younger people from smaller communities, but travel abroad more often.

Age differences in patterns of leisure time also lead us to interpret the trend towards an increase or decrease in the degree and frequency of pursuing the different activities more generally as a transition to an established style of behaviour that today’s

youth will also continue in the next stage of life – adulthood. In Western literature, leisure time has been squeezed into the life-cycle of the individual (Gershuny: 2003; Roberts et al: 2017), which means that, with the transition from youth to adulthood, time devoted to leisure activities declines irrespective of personal preferences, and this is mostly related to the establishment of a family. The data from our study shows a decrease in active pursuits, a narrowing of social contacts and an increase in passive activities along with age.



Although these trends are not absolute, the data show that maintaining an active lifestyle poses something of a challenge for young Bulgarians.

## LIFE TRANSITIONS

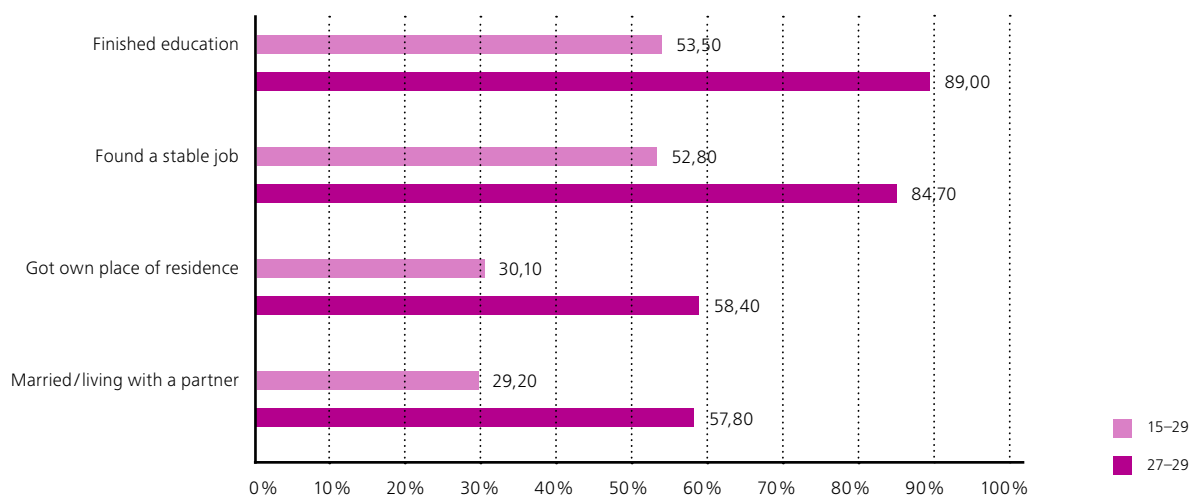
During the life stage of youth, there are at least two more exceptionally important transitions: from education to employment and from the parental home and family to the establishment of one's own home and family. At a certain historical stage, every society devises its own socially acceptable models for making these transitions in social time and space, for their duration and coherence. Although the real transitions are patterned on the dominant concepts of "ideal time" for key life events, such as finishing school, leaving the parental abode, starting a family, etc., they still differ. Our results allow us to determine when these turning points occur in the life of the young generation today.

The majority of young people in Bulgaria display the normal path in life transitions: finishing school, starting work, leaving the parental home, getting married and giving birth to the first child.

Life transitions in Bulgaria are comparatively short – by the time they are 19, 50 per cent of men and women have completed their education, they have started temporary work (shortly before or shortly after leaving school) and for another year on average they move from temporary to permanent employment. Co-habiting and getting married are postponed in time, with children coming on average one year later. Gender differences are very small: on the whole, young men in Bulgaria start work one year earlier and start a home and family a year later than young women. (Figure 4.5)

On the whole, young people in Bulgaria make the transition from education to employment faster than the transition to self-sufficient housing and their own family. At the end of the period of youth, practically everyone has made their way onto the labour market. The fact that only half of them have started a home and family, and the other half postpones these life events till the next stage of life, however, indicates somewhat unsuccessful labour integration.

FIGURE 4.5: Fundamental life transitions of young people.





## CONCLUSION

- Time devoted to leisure activities takes up a significant part of young people's day, and many of them set aside time "almost every day". Two types of activity are most frequent. We can define the first as "relaxing" or "passive": listening to music, watching films, and "doing nothing". The second type involves communication-related activities: time spent with family and going out with friends.
- Young Bulgarians are active consumers of commercial products.
- Surfing the Internet has overtaken watching TV primarily because of the possibility it offers for people to communicate with friends and relatives and share pictures and information.
- Young people are not a completely homogeneous group, and internal differentiation affects the structure of leisure activities. Girls are more likely to engage in family-related activities, watching TV and reading books, while boys spend time doing what would traditionally be expected, going out more often, going to bars and cafés and engaging in sports.
- Socio-economic inequalities among young people also have a significant influence on the free time of young people in Bulgaria. Along with this, however, many differences in youth consumer styles are due to individual preferences, not just economic inequalities. Irrespective of their financial possibilities, young people are able to develop lifestyles of active consumers with broad social contacts.
- There is a reduction in the time spent on active leisure activities outside the home with increasing age. We could recommend a higher level of engagement with extracurricular activities such as sport, creative activities and voluntary work to compensate for financial constraints and the cultural capital of the family, and to form interests that can withstand the pressure of family and professional obligations in the adulthood.
- Young people go through the transition from education to employment faster than the other important life transition – from the parental home and family to setting up their own homes and marriage or cohabitation which is largely postponed.



## 5

# VALUES AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

## HIGHER DEGREE OF SOCIALISATION?

In the 2014 survey there was an indicator “Which of the following values do you consider current/modern in modern Bulgarian society?” with 13 sub-questions. The four values most often stated are:

- *Looking good* – 85 per cent
- *Being independent* – 80 per cent
- *Having a career* – 75 per cent
- *Being responsible* – 72 per cent

In 2018 an indicator offered respondents a scale of 1 to 5 to rank the importance of 16 different values. The leading responses (“very important”) are:

- *Being true to your friends* – 77 per cent
- *Being true to your partner* – 76 per cent
- *Being independent* – 75 per cent
- *Having children* – 70 per cent

The indicators differ in that in 2014 we understand responses as public opinion, whereas in 2018 these are the personal opinions of respondents. Still, they are comparable, as in the first case the community environment is considered the reference group for the young person. The list of main values has been retained.

Only one response tops the list both times – *being independent*. But the context is very different. In 2014 it is “Me, Me, Me”, whereas in 2018 it is “The others, the other, the children”. In 2014 *individualism* stands out – this blossomed during the transition in the ‘90s, reaching levels of extreme egocentricity. In 2018, we observe greater *sociality*. The difference is significant. Meanwhile it is possible to locate it in the relatively small, informal friend and family environment. It is not politicised or ideologised. This is the

social environment closest to the individual, so to say the extended “I”, includes one’s friends, intimate boyfriend/girlfriend and one’s own children.

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Youth’s excessive individualism is decreasing on the account of youth sociality.

Is there a trend towards greater sociality in the broader meaning as well?

Attitudes towards political activities and participation in civil initiatives are decidedly sceptical. As in 2014, these are the least positively evaluated values. A broader and probably more precise overview reveals attitudes towards European values.

The indicator systematically used since the ‘90s was proposed by colleagues from France. Young Bulgarians indicated first *market economy* and *democracy*. There was a specific social context. These were keywords in political debates and in the media, officially stated goals, adopted by the left and right wing. Young people’s responses were undoubtedly and inevitably affected by this context. Now we can analyse the changes as well as continuity in values.

TABLE 5.1.: Significance of European values for young people in Bulgaria (as a per cent)

Values	1997		2007		2014		2018	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
<b>Freedom</b>	37	III	34	III	43	I	81	I
<b>Democracy</b>	42	II	43	II	40	II	62	III
<b>Market economy</b>	53	I	53	I	39	III	45	VIII
<b>Equality</b>	30	V	29	IV	36	IV	56	IV
<b>Free enterprise</b>	33	IV	28	V–VI	28	V	52	VI
<b>Solidarity</b>	15	VIII	11	VIII–IX	20	VI	53	V
<b>Profit</b>	20	VI	28	V–VI	18	VII	64	II
<b>Tolerance</b>	15	IX	11	VIII–IX	15	VIII	49	VII
<b>Competition</b>	16	VII	19	VII	14	IX	41	IX

Note: All data are for 15-25-year-olds.

Source: The international Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 1997; Gallup International, 2007; 2014, 2018.

It is evident that the responses in the '90s were not only subject to external influence, but were also due to complete immersion in a new value system. Freedom is at the heart of democracy; it is its essence. Today's priority is on a deeper definition. Back in the '90s, profit was a key motivating mechanism in the market economy. During the transition, the popular "market economy" played the role of a fig leaf concealing neoliberal capitalism. "Capitalism" was a notion lacking popularity or positive associations among the mass public, without enjoying any affinity in political circles. The transition is over. The need for a fig leaf has disappeared.

The new tendencies displacing the main values of the recent past – *market economy, democracy with freedom and profit* – display certain continuity. The orientation during the transition was not by chance or due to media influence. The situation today can be considered as a sign of growth, a reflection of more effective rationalisation of realities, or of a realism with regard to values.

This is, of course, the positive interpretation. The fact that *freedom and democracy* are among the top four values gives cause for another moment of reflection. Love of freedom and democracy are highly valued when they are lacking. And this lack is mentioned in numerous political assessments.

The growing importance of solidarity as a value is noticeable from the fundamental results. Before us we see another sign of the fading impact of the transition, when the popular maxim was "it is every man for himself".

The aggregate data indicate that there is a trend towards greater sociality amongst the new generation, without this sociality being politicised or at least offering a civic impulse.

Strong interdependencies in factors underlie values. The logic according to which "health is most valued by the sick" also stands out. Thus, for instance, equality is valued most by: women; the

youngest (14–17 years of age); the poorly educated, the poor; village inhabitants; and the Roma community. In other words – by social groups that to a certain extent feel "less equal". However paradoxical this might seem, "profit" is very important for Roma people, the poor, and inhabitants of small towns, and it is more important to those with secondary school education than to those who have been to university.

In other cases, motivation relating to real opportunities for expression and affirmation are striking. Thus, the market economy is valued more by the rich and wealthy, by highly educated people, university students and ethnic Bulgarians (it is very important to 49 per cent of Bulgarians, 38 per cent of Turks, and 29 per cent of Roma people). Attitudes towards free enterprise are similar.

It should come as no surprise that solidarity is especially valued by the unemployed and those with work but, due to other motives – one's world view and life experience – by the highly educated and the highest age group of 25–29 years of age as well.

Freedom stands out as an extremely homogenising factor valued greatly by men and women, school and university students, ethnic Bulgarians, Turks and Roma people alike.

TABLE 5.2.: **Rejection/acceptance of some social practices**

Practice	Rejection	Balanced attitude	Acceptance	Don't know
Abortion	32	24	29	14
Homosexuality	45	19	18	15
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	62	14	14	8
Accepting/giving a bribe	66	15	10	7
Using connections to find employment	33	22	34	8
Using connections for access to services	34	21	37	8

Note: Scoring is on a 10-point scale, where 1 means "cannot be justified" and 10 means "always justified" and "rejection" applies to 1 to 4 points, "balanced attitude" to 5 and 6, and "acceptance" to 7 to 10.

## REJECTED PRACTICES

Additional, yet important insight into the overall predisposition is offered by attitudes toward several disputed, but prevalent issues.

A strong rejection of bribes and citizens' bad faith is evident in the general attitude. It is worth noting that the issue of paying taxes is nuanced – "given the opportunity to", hence attitudes here do not relate to fear of criminal prosecution, but rather to civic consciousness. It is in this context that answers indicate a relatively high level of civic loyalty. The predominantly negative attitude towards bribes is not surprising.

Combatting corruption, including at high levels, is acknowledged as a civic priority, legitimised and encouraged by the EU.

A negative attitude towards homosexuality dominates the picture. In this regard, there is no difference compared to the results from the 2014 survey. Homosexual practices are considered immoral and unacceptable in Bulgarian traditions.

Gay parades are not capable of removing the notion of "Sodom and Gomorrah". A relatively greater tolerance is displayed by women (22 per cent) than by men (14 per cent), as well as by people with higher education (21 per cent) compared to poorly educated people (15 per cent).

Attitudes toward abortion and "pulling strings", especially when it is specified that this involves access to services, including hospitals and institutions, are balanced.

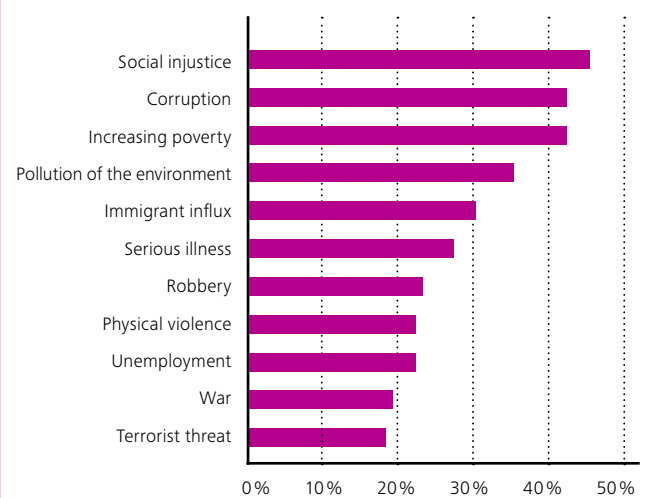
## ONTOLOGICAL FEARS

The issue of "catastrophic conscience" was the subject of a large sociological survey in the 90s, and was reported on at an AAASS (American Association for Advancement of Slavic Studies) conference, held in Boca Raton, Florida in 2000. In 2014, the configuration of fears revealed by the youth survey highlighted *unemployment*, *poverty* and *labour insecurity* as those issues causing most concern. This year we are observing a new focus: *social injustice*. (The overall results are illustrated in Figure 4.1.)

The less pronounced fear of unemployment is not accidental; it is easily understandable, considering the trend towards stabilisation of the labour market. Nor is the high ranking of social issues like injustice and corruption accidental. The most common understanding of "social injustice" is polarisation of society into poor and rich, where wealth is accumulated by dishonest means. An important role is played by lack of trust in the fairness of the judiciary. This undoubtedly makes the burden of corruption even more oppressive – it is possible for it to remain unpunished. Fears of poverty are not *passé*, although the most severe phase of impoverishment was more than two decades ago.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that more than one-third of young people are very worried about air pollution and climate change. It may also be noted that Sofia is the capital with the worst air pollution in the European Union.

FIGURE 5.1: **Disturbing/troublesome issues for Bulgarian society.** Answer: "It worries me a lot".



In 2014, the disturbing problem of emigration of Bulgarians became a focus of attention. In 2018, the influx of immigrants and refugees remains a disturbing threat. These are new fears that were not only not a focus in the 90s – they have not surfaced in

surveys in the new century so far. These fears are less pronounced than in countries in Central and Western Europe, but salient enough to serve as a card in the political game.

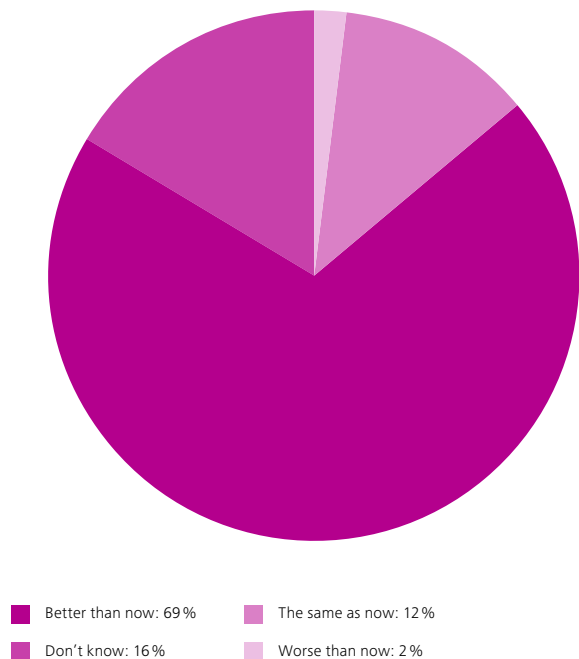
Overall it is worth noting that no threat is considered significantly disturbing by at least half of the young people.

There is no overwhelming fear in the mass consciousness of the young generation.

## OPTIMISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

An optimistic predisposition comes naturally to young people. “When young, a path is easy to follow, and simple seems the entire world’s sorrow,” to use the words written by Pencho Slaveykov, one of the classics in Bulgarian literature.

FIGURE 5.2: **How do you see your life in ten years’ time? (per cent)**



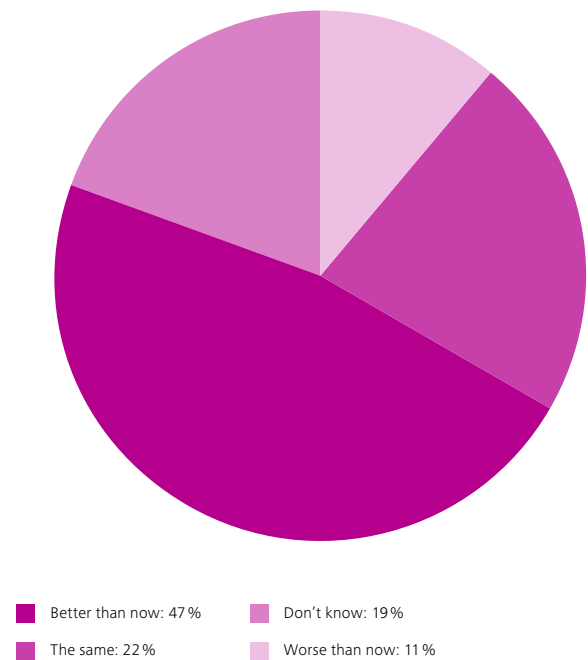
Pessimistic attitudes are rare, but are slightly higher among poor people (4 per cent) and those living in villages (4 per cent).

Young women (71 per cent) have more positive expectations than young men (67 per cent). The most optimistic age is between 16 and 19. An important factor in this optimism is higher education, and is especially evident among ethnic Bulgarians.

There is another important aspect in interpreting the data. The social group with below-average income living in the north-east region have greater expectations of a better life, i.e. not those currently well off.

The expectations of Bulgarian society are once again positive, but not to the same extent.

FIGURE 5.3: **Expectations regarding the future of Bulgarian society in general. (per cent)**



Comparison with 2014 is indicative: back then one-third of young people (33 per cent) gave an optimistic response. Now this number has risen to nearly half of the respondents (47 per cent), and if one considers only the persons giving a specific response – more than half. Attitudes of people with higher education, university students and working students are especially positive.

Pessimistic predispositions are salient among the unemployed (18 per cent), the Roma community (22 per cent) and those living in the northwest region (26 per cent). The most impoverished region in Bulgaria displays the bleakest prospects in national expectation.

## RELIGIOSITY

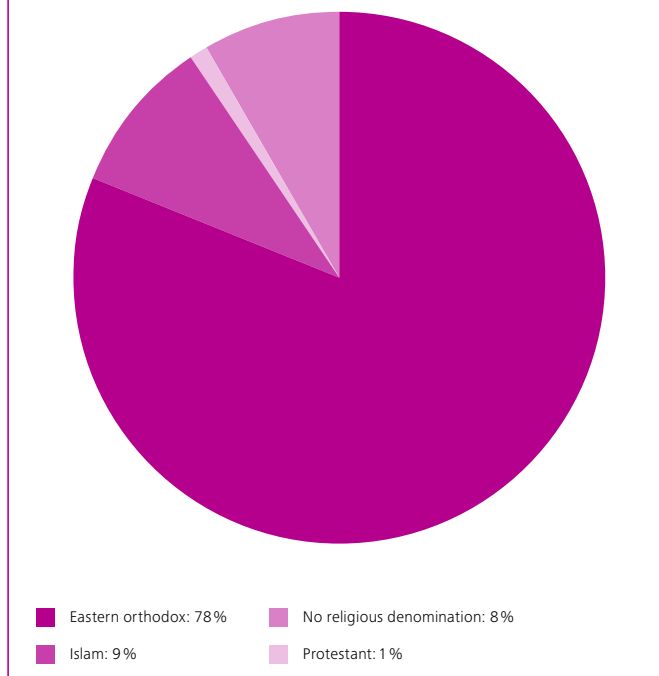
The self-assessments performed by the young people surveyed reflect the traditional Bulgarian religiosity: more than three-quarters state that they are members of the Eastern Orthodox confession, and one-tenth as Muslims. Only one per cent are Protestants and there are even fewer Roman Catholics. 8 per cent are religiously indifferent (Figure 5.4).

Certainly, the criterion is formal to a certain extent. In the survey, religious faith is explored using the question “How important is God to you?”, and religious practice – by enquiring about attendance of religious ceremonies.

The indicator “How important is God to you” provides a scale of one to ten with responses ranging from 1 (“not important at all”) to 10 (“very important”). It is not clear how methodologically

correct this is, i.e. how can faith be quantified with a specific number with significant differences being reflected between two numbers.

FIGURE 5.4: In what religious denomination would you place yourself? (per cent)



Another flaw with this indicator is that it offers no possibility of comparison with the 2014 data. There is another aspect. In international research, one can witness a trend towards belief in a personal God being replaced by belief in a higher being (“Believing without belonging”; Voas, Crockett: 2005). The indicator used does not allow for such differentiation to be made.

If we take a step back from these critical remarks, we can say that the results do not seem surprising. A weak faith in God (responses 1–4) is attested by 20 per cent of the respondents. Responses in the middle of the scale (5–6) were submitted by 26 per cent. For 25 per cent it would appear that God is significant to their lives (responses 7–8). And for about one-fifth (18 per cent) God is important or very important (responses 9 and 10).

As tradition has it, women are more religious; relatively negative responses are provided by 27 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women; the exact opposite is the case with the most positive responses – 14 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women.

Religious scepticism is more pronounced among younger people (14–16 per cent), while religion is most important to the older age group – 25–29 years of age (22 per cent).

Those persons in employment are more religious than school and university students. The fewest believers are to be found in the capital city (12 per cent of responses in the 9- and 10-point range), with this figure rising in regional centres (18 per cent) and reaching its peak in small towns (23 per cent), and close to villages (21 per cent). As observed in other surveys, the poor are more religious than the rich.

Religious practice is quite limited. Only 4 per cent of respondents attend a religious service once a week and 8 per cent about once a month. The greatest attendance is registered by services during religious holidays (35 per cent): events more of a ritual and celebratory than cult nature. 46 per cent of respondents do not attend places of worship, or do so less than – or no more than – once a year.

Bulgaria stands out with its lower level of religiosity compared to its neighbours Greece, Macedonia and Romania.

This is evident from data on parents’ religiosity: one-third (33 per cent) are not religious at all or are more or less non-religious, 45 per cent moderately religious, 15 per cent more or less religious or very religious. This is the family environment in which young people grow up, and data as a whole show that it is passed on to the younger generation.

## CONCLUSION

- Young Bulgarians preserve their traditional religious identity. In terms of their lifestyles, they are strongly secularised. The level of religiosity replicates attitudes held towards the religion of the parents’ generation.
- Changes in values on the whole point in a positive direction: greater sociality, departing from the extreme individualism typical of the transition. Personal independence is still a priority for young people, but it is combined with a better understanding of solidarity and its social role. A greater optimism prevails regarding the future of the country.
- A problematic new focus is fears of social injustice. The painful perception of an increase in corruption is mounting. Fears of growing poverty have not been surmounted.
- Injustice, corruption, poverty – these are the main fears and problematic “knots” in national societal development. Youth sensitivity has not yet overcome these fears.





## 6

# FAMILY AND FRIENDS

## THE INFORMAL AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Data from the survey reveals that young Bulgarian people live in a relatively comfortable family and informal environment. This is visible most of all in the great trust in family – parents, sisters, brothers, spouses and partners: 86 per cent have complete trust, 10 per cent – trust; or a total response adding up to 4 and 5 (on a scale of 5) are given by 96 per cent. The attitude towards friends is also especially positive – 39 per cent expressing complete trust, 43 per cent trust – a total of 82 per cent. In third place is the attitude towards other relatives – 40 per cent voice complete trust and 30 per cent trust – a total of 70 per cent.

The factor of dependencies points towards a continued paternalism among ethnic minorities and residual paternalism among young Bulgarians living in villages and small towns. One indicator is the attitude towards the wider family circle and neighbours. It is no secret that in the capital city and big towns young people have long-distance, virtual friends, yet do not even know the names of their physical neighbours in the block of flats in which they live. In small towns and villages, the informal distance between young people on the one hand and relatives and neighbours on the other is significantly shorter.

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Young Bulgarians are comparatively satisfied with their informal environment.

It is worth noting the prevalence of age dynamics in attitudes towards friendship (Figure 6.1).

This is illustrated by the ontogenetic path of a young person. During the period when the individual matures, communicating with friends and peers is of paramount importance. With social integration, the living environment changes. The new family becomes most important.

The informal environment is an important factor in socialisation. Relations between peers, classmates and colleagues from different ethnic and social groups are shaped in this environment and it is of importance to the social climate. Certain well-known phenomena include, for instance, banal nationalism and/or class resentment. The results of the survey provide no grounds for such fears (Figure 6.2).

In this case, the more significant indicator is the responses of young people from ethnic minorities. Most Bulgarians live in an ethnically homogenous environment, offering fewer opportunities for contacts with peers of a different ethnicity. This is also visible in differences between the capital city and the countryside: the least positive responses are to be found in the capital, where there are almost no ethnic Turks, while the Roma community lives separately from people from other backgrounds in ghettos.

The social environment, unlike the informal one, does not offer the same psychological comfort. The majority of young people express no trust at all (51 per cent) or no trust (18 per cent) in political leaders. Attitude towards people with different political beliefs are reserved, though not extremely negative. This also goes for people of different religions or different nationalities. The predominant attitude is neutrality.

FIGURE 6.1: **Attitude towards friends. (per cent)**  
Answers: "I have complete trust".

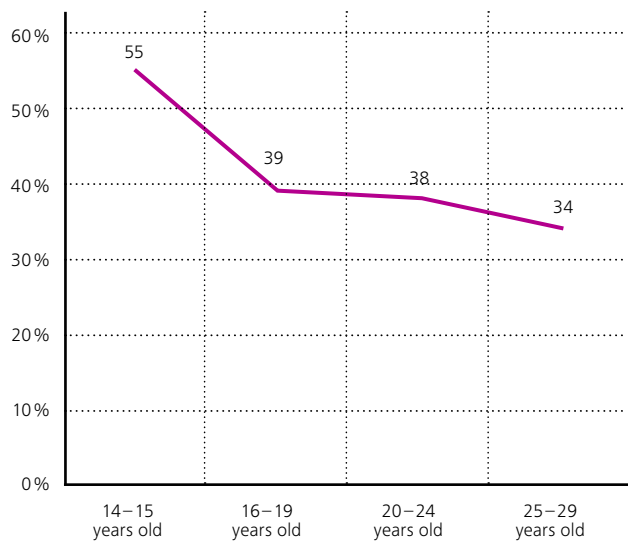
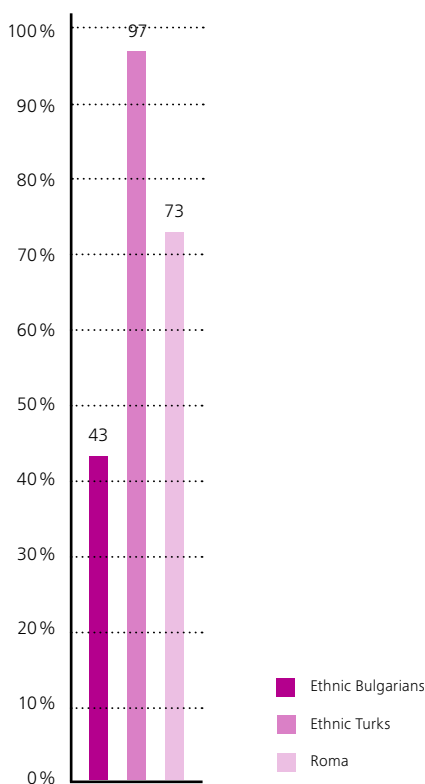


FIGURE 6.2: **Friends from another ethnic group. (per cent)** Answer: "Yes"



## DELAYED LEAVING OF THE PARENTS' HOME

A young person becomes independent or, as they say, stands on their own two feet, by starting a job, i.e. when they have their own personal income, their own family and own home. Unlike countries in northern Europe, where young people leave their parents' family relatively early, in Bulgaria two-thirds (65 per cent) of young people live in their parents' home, with their mother (67 per cent), father (59 per cent), brother/sister (35 per cent), and grandparents (13 per cent). Very few possess or live in their own home (3 per cent were acquired by their parents, 3 per cent by themselves, 7 per cent rent, paid by themselves).

The reasons for this situation are of an everyday nature – above all, material. In general, the data replicate the 2014 picture.

Material stimulus and convenience delay the process of moving out of the parents' home.

Throughout the entire region, living with parents is more often explained by citing financial reasons only in Slovenia. Not only in Bulgaria, but also in the eight other countries, the everyday advantages mentioned constitute a key motive. We once again observe confirmation of the psychological comfort of young people in the informal environment. A significant number of them prefer living with their parents, not only because they do not have the necessary resources to pursue other options, but also because they like it.

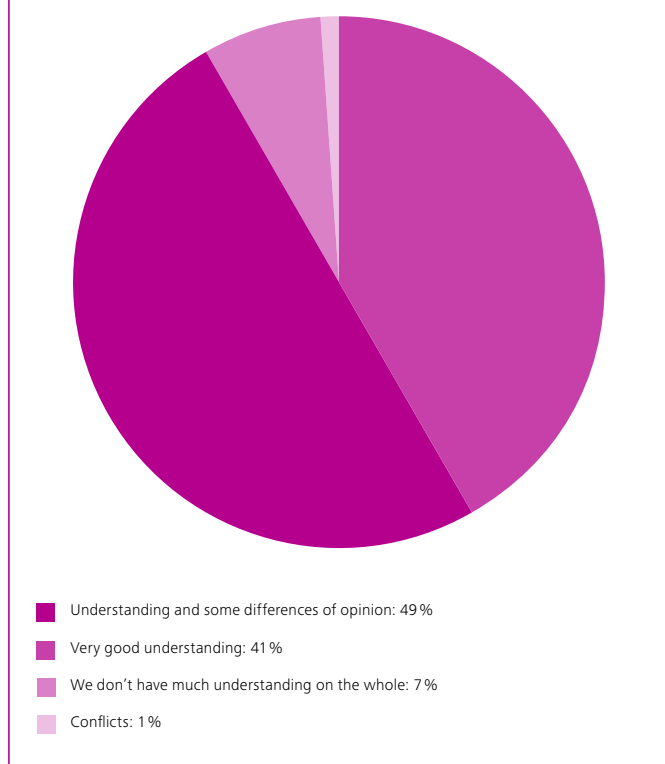
## GENERATIONAL COHESION

The cohabitation of young people with their parents is undoubtedly facilitated by relatively good relations.

As in 2014, positive responses dominate across the board – a total of 90 per cent. Compared to the previous survey, the proportions accounted for by the two responses have changed. Now it is more often the case that relations are acceptable (there is an "understanding") despite differences. The change should be considered as natural along with the strengthening of factors that make young people more informed and more independent-minded nowadays.

Something else is worrisome: 25 per cent of Roma people admit they often fight with their parents or their relations with them are fraught with conflict (for ethnic Turks the percentage is 5 per cent; for Bulgarians 7 per cent). This setting with the various disagreements and conflicts is extremely unfavourable for socialisation of children and young people. This is even more so when one considers that this normally applies most of all to families with poorly-educated parents. The combination of poor education and

FIGURE 6.3: Relations with parents. (per cent)



high emotionality is explosive. Meanwhile, the demographic structure is changing and relative share of Roma among infants, children and young people is growing. The problems of education and emotional culture are becoming an issue of utmost national importance.

The non-coincidental character of the family cohesion identified is perhaps best demonstrated by young people's assessment of parental child-raising. The level of satisfaction is markedly high. The question "Would you raise your children like your parents raised you, or would you do it differently?" evokes a positive response by almost two-thirds (64 per cent), incl. 39 per cent "in almost the same way" and 25 per cent "in exactly the same way". It is perhaps even more indicative that there is a 70 per cent positive response amongst those with highly educated parents. This suggests that it is not a question of mechanical patriarchal inertia, but rather a critical (and positive!) rationalisation of personal experience.

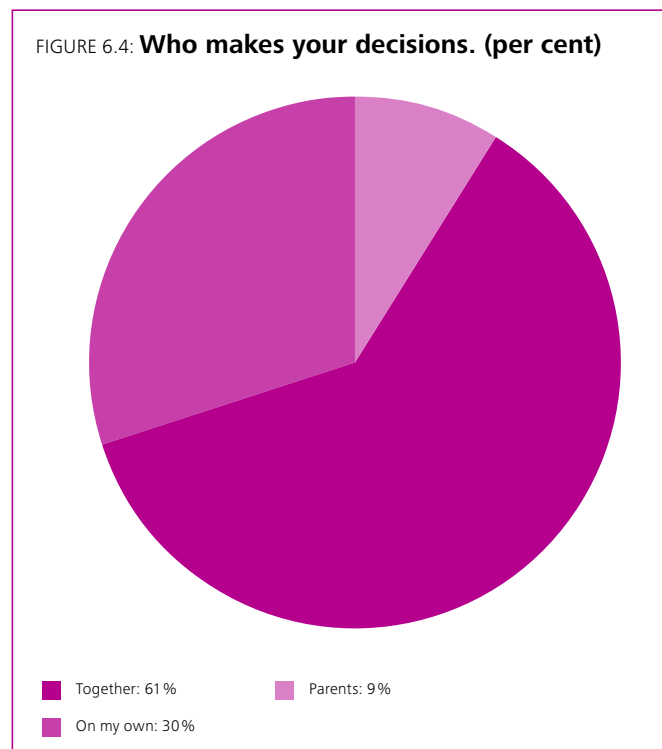
The survey also gives us some idea of the forms of parental pedagogy. The data do not indicate broken families, although we are visibly increasing the distance from obvious "old-school" rules, which allowed and even recommended a "pedagogical slap". Pedagogical "liberalism" tempers parental strictness rather than devaluing it or displacing it. Parents demonstrated to a great extent their serious and caring commitment to the socialisation of their children both in the informal and institutional environments. It is probably these practices of avoiding extremes and promoting both freedom and control that give rise to a positive attitude among young people towards the model of the parent family. Many young

people evidently do not associate either a disinterest or "dictatorship" with it.

## INDEPENDENCE OF DECISIONS

The next indicator seeks to measure family cohesion and facilitate a better explanation of its strength in connection with important decisions.

FIGURE 6.4: Who makes your decisions. (per cent)



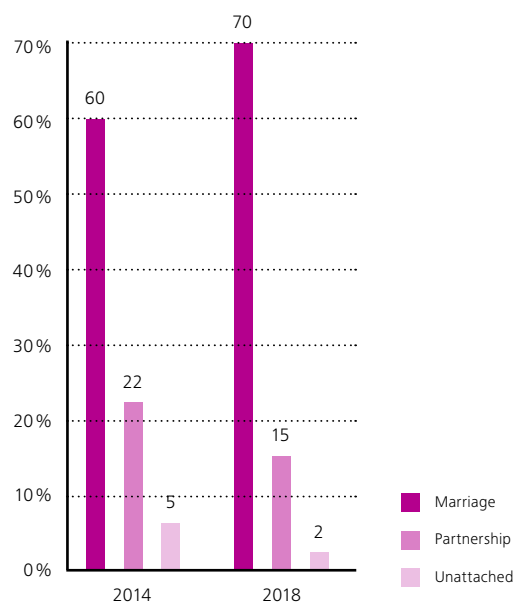
The conditionality of age is extremely important. Parents have the say in the case of 39 per cent of 14-15-year-olds and only 1 per cent of 25-29-year-olds. Independent decision-making is attested by 2 per cent among the youngest cohort, then rising to up to 41 per cent for the oldest one. Another circumstance is interesting. Making decisions together is equally prevalent in both age extremes: 58 per cent of 14-15-year-olds and 55 per cent of 25-29-year-olds. The data also implies growing emancipation and gradually developing responsibility. This explains why the independence of Bulgarian youth is also reflected in the field of personal choices and not only and not that much in material guarantees (like a home and property).

For the oldest age group (25–29 years of age), the most important thing is the influence of the spouse or partner (35 per cent) – more important than the influence of parents or anybody else. This is also a natural consequence of logical and normal transitions in life.

## FAMILY STATUS AND FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

The majority of the respondents (61 per cent), as can be assumed, are single. 16 per cent live together with their partner; 13 per cent are married; 9 per cent are in a relationship without living together.

FIGURE 6.5: **Expectations for the future of the family. (per cent)**



The transition towards independent family life is evidently still just beginning. How young people see their family future is of great importance.

The value of a legal marriage is on the rise.

For a 70 per cent majority (65 per cent of men and 76 per cent of women) their future lies in the classic monogamous family – legally married with children. No respondents see their future as married but without children. An unwedded partnership but with children is a prospect considered plausible by 13 per cent and the same relationship but without children is envisaged by 2 per cent. Apparently, the attitude towards children is an important motive in opting for the married family model. Children lend meaning to a legally married family.

In a regional context, only in Slovenia are preferences in favour of marriage lower than in Bulgaria. In the other southeast European countries, this value is over 80 per cent, in some places even reaching 90 per cent. In this sense young Bulgarian people are part of a general trend of “revival of marriage”.

A significant change has taken place in Bulgaria since 2014. Back then, 60 per cent saw themselves in a traditional marriage, i.e. 10 per cent less than now, while 22 per cent could see themselves in an unwedded relationship, i.e. 7 per cent less now than in 2014. This might strike one as surprising, but time has not favoured unwedded partnerships. We could assume that results also correlate with the greater significance assigned to the immediate surroundings and the psychological comfort of the parental family – in short, both are in line with the more pronounced yearning for (and finding) security in the micro-environment. It is worth emphasising that marriage is most preferred by people with higher education (80 per cent) and university students (61 per cent), and significantly less by the poorly educated (60 per cent). Marriage is positively viewed more by the rich and well-off (75–76 per cent) than by the poor (60 per cent). Social groups with a more stable social status – real or expected, are also more oriented towards a stable marital status.

The notion of a happy life is closely related to the family. Among four proposed options, the respondents first of all assigned “very important” to having children in order to have a happy life (a total of 81 per cent; 75 per cent men and 87 per cent women). This was closely followed, with almost the same results, by the macrocondition of living in a nice country (75 per cent) and having a spouse or partner in life – 74 per cent. The picture is completed by the presence of a lot of friends (very important to 48 per cent, important to 28 per cent).

Children, a spouse, a nice country, a lot of friends... A sensible and understandable youth ideal.

In view of national issues, it is very interesting that Bulgaria should have good demographic prospects if the stated attitudes towards children are carried through with.

On the practical side of the issue, other questions are explored.

## MARRIAGE – WHEN? CHILDREN – HOW MANY?

The opinions of men and women on the best age for marriage differ significantly.

TABLE 6.1.: **Best age for getting married (per cent)**

Age	For women		For men	
	2018	2014	2018	2014
Up to 20 years old	9	7	2	3
21–24 years old	15	25	6	10
25 years old	27	27	14	14
26–29 years old	19	27	23	36
30 years old	9	5	25	18
Over 30 years old	2	1	13	7

In the awareness of an insecure world and lack of trust and confidence in the social environment, a successful career often assumes a higher priority than getting married. And the prevailing opinion is that the former requires more time. The opposite view, the other age extreme, appears to be unattractive, while security in professional development is either not valued highly enough or is considered unachievable. Thus, births among “children” retain their potential even if this is associated with a consummated marriage: 9 per cent favour a women’s being aged up to 20 now as opposed to 7 per cent in 2014. This is typical of the Roma minority.

The problem of “children giving birth to children” is widely discussed in public. It is a question not only of the health risks to underage mothers but even more so their severely restricted socialisation capacity. The problem was discussed in the focus groups within the survey.

The focus group held especially with school students from an area of the capital with a predominantly Roma population showed that there is a heightened sensitivity regarding this question. It is evidently being discussed within the family environment; there is an understanding of it being an issue. Here are a few exemplary opinions: “Our parents are worried about whether we will get married young”, “A child taking care of a child”; “That’s how it is in our neighbourhood”, and so forth. Students in a school with a predominantly Roma population consider it normal to get married at 19–20 years of age. They think it would be good to have two children.

The image of a two-child family is prevalent in the society in general despite the domination of the single-child constellation.

## MOTIVES BEHIND THE CHOICE OF A SPOUSE

The indicator provides nine different options and is entirely rational. Emotional relations are not considered. No place for love? In 2014, this was the leading motive for young people’s choice.

The designated motives are separated into three main groups according to level of importance.

The first and categorically most important to young people is related to the personality. Personality (82 per cent) and common interests (77 per cent) are “very important” for the choice of a partner. The focus is stronger than in 2014, when the personality was perhaps associated entirely with love.

The second group of factors relates not so much to inner qualities as it does external traits: appearance of the chosen one (39 per cent), level of education (32 per cent), approval of the family (31 per cent) and national origin (31 per cent). In all these cases, the assessment of “very important” accounts for about one-third. Here we have another example of the growing importance of family for young people. We could infer that with the transition to adulthood the role of family approval would decrease and this is indeed the case, but not at such a rapid pace – in the upper age

groups people are concerned about the approval of their family with almost the same relative share as the average result for the sample. The alternative explanation – patriarchal rigidity – plays a role among the Roma population, where family approval of marriage is considered to be “very important” by 71 per cent.

If we consider this second group of factors relating to external traits in terms of their importance among different age segments, we see that it is possible to split them up into two groups. The role of factors based on identity and appurtenance, continuity (family opinion, national origin) has remained steady, whereas the importance of appearance and education has diminished significantly at the expense of personality and common interests.

Third in ranking (about a quarter of the responses for “very important”) are religion (27 per cent) and economic standing (23 per cent). The moderate importance of religion is related not only and not so much to the lack of religious enthusiasm as it is to the religious homogenisation of the country. In most regions, it is most probable that the potential partner has the same religious identity, so closeness and difference on this point are not considered to be a factor.

Special attention is drawn to the lack of a capitalist mindset. Wealth is stated to be important (32 per cent) or of significance (28 per cent), but it is not a determining factor for the vast majority. It is interesting to note that wealth is cited more often by the youngest, 14–15 years of age (29 per cent) rather than the highest age group of 25–29 years of age (20 per cent). We can suppose that wealth in this case is an expression of success. For similar reasons, it is most often stated by Roma people (47 per cent). Wealth and success have been a theme so often and for so long in the media and mass culture that it could not but have some effect on value hierarchies.

Other than these three groups of factors, there is one which is marginalised: the importance of virginity. Only 9 per cent of the respondents consider it very important and 5 per cent consider it important. For 57 per cent this is not important at all or is of almost no significance (responses 1 and 2).

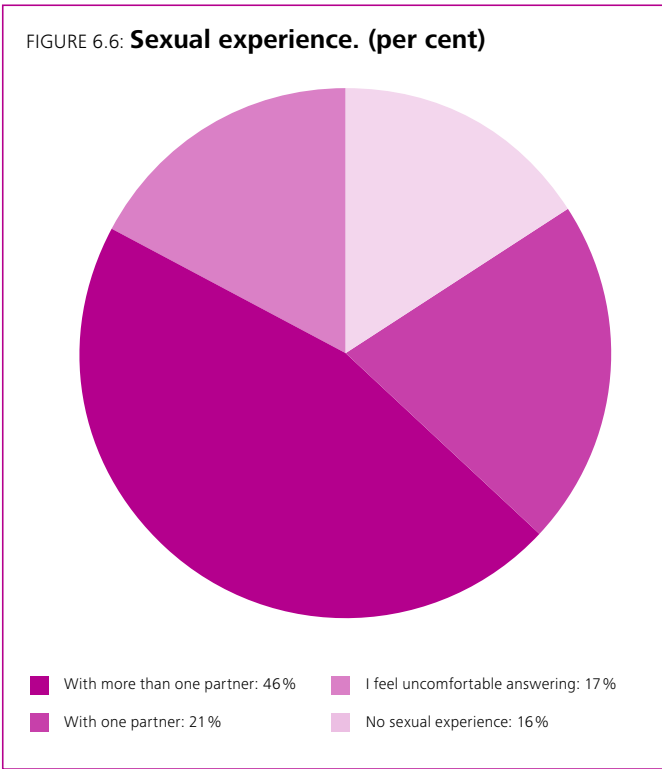
This result is entirely in line with changes in sexual behaviour and the sexual culture of the new generation.

## SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

If we believe the declarative attitudes (Figure 6.6) the relative share of young people who have not had sexual contacts has dropped from 21 per cent in 2014 to 16 per cent now. Meanwhile, the percentage of those who have had sexual contact with more than one partner has increased – from 40 per cent in 2014 to 46 per cent now. There is a development towards a sexual “opening up”.

Most frequently the first sexual contact occurs between the ages of 15 and 18 (56 per cent). In other words, by the time they have finished secondary education (and obtained full civil rights), the majority of young people have started their sex life.

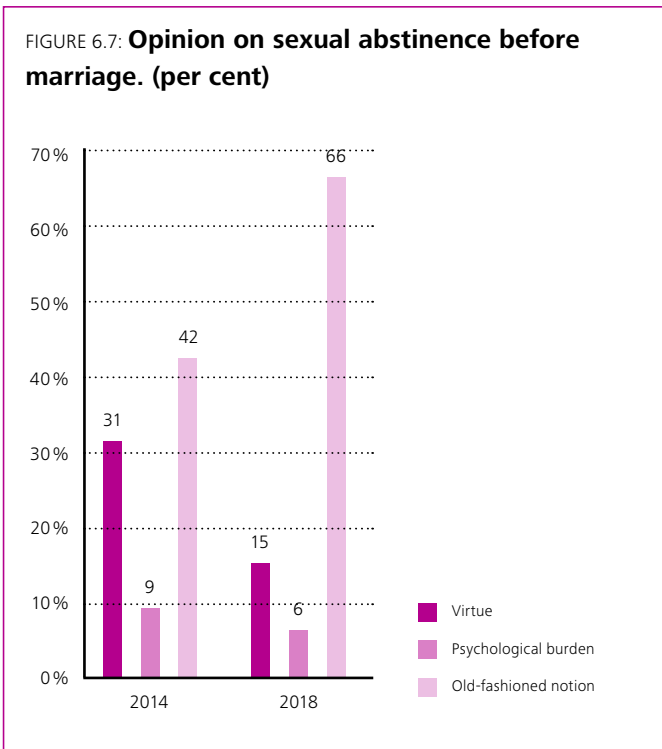
FIGURE 6.6: Sexual experience. (per cent)



The change of public opinion regarding sexual abstinence must be seen in this context (Figure 6.7).

The idea of sexual abstinence as a virtue involves two options – a value applying to both sexes or a value applying only to girls. In 2014 those expressing a positive opinion considered it applicable to both sexes. In 2018, the dwindling number of persons expressing this point of view mostly applied to girls.

FIGURE 6.7: Opinion on sexual abstinence before marriage. (per cent)



From different points of view, it is apparent that sexual abstinence is outdated and merely a relic of traditional society. It is no accident that the main concentration of positive responses is to be found among members of ethnic minorities, persons living in villages and secluded areas of the country.

One positive result of the survey is that the sexual culture is also developing along with sexual openness.

In 2014 only one-third (35 per cent) of respondents stated that they always as a rule use birth control. This number has now risen to more than one-half (55 per cent). Even with the caveat that we are interpreting stated positions, this change – in a relatively short period of time – is marked.

## CONCLUSION

- Attitudes towards the informal micro and public macro environment are polarised. We observe a cohesion and high level of trust in the informal surroundings and clear distancing from political leaders, as well as civil discomfort.
- We have registered trends towards a greater stability in family-marital relations. The image of a desirable two-child family still predominates, but there are still no guarantees that this can be achieved. The problems are a low birth rate among the majority and early (“children’s”) births among the Roma minority.
- Sexual openness continues to develop, but has not yet reached the sphere of homosexuality. Sexual culture, measured by the use of contraceptives, has developed significantly.







## 7

# YOUTH MOBILITY

## PREPAREDNESS TO MOVE

Moving abroad to study or work is a key event in the life of a young person, which changes almost all their habits, practices, stereotypes, friendships, educational and professional contacts up to that point in time. Any decision on such a life-changing step should be taken after several preconditions have been met and a certain level of preparedness attained.

It seems that over time the situation has settled somewhat, with the vast majority of young people being oriented towards staying in their home country.

A look at the different “sections” of young Bulgarians complements and further deepens the picture. The intention of young people to stay in Bulgaria has educational implications: the higher the level of education, the more marked this intention (76 per

cent of university graduates do not plan to emigrate compared to 54 per cent of those who do not have secondary education). Ethnic distance is also visible: 63 per cent of Bulgarians and 52 per cent of Roma people do not plan on leaving. The desire to emigrate is strongest (13 per cent) in the least developed northeast region. However, we cannot state that it is a greater priority among the more vulnerable and underprivileged elements of society. A relatively lower desire to remain in the country is attested by the rich (53 per cent) and those living in Sofia (56 per cent). Even now, one could conclude that emigration is a path preferred more by those who see no prospects here (educational, professional, material) and hope to find better opportunities abroad, but also for those who have a significant head start in Bulgaria and, precisely because of this, believe it is natural to continue their education or career in more developed countries.

FIGURE 7.1: **How strong is your desire to move to another country for more than six months? (per cent)**

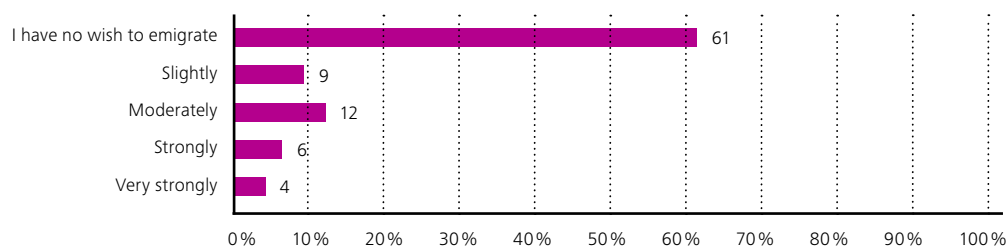
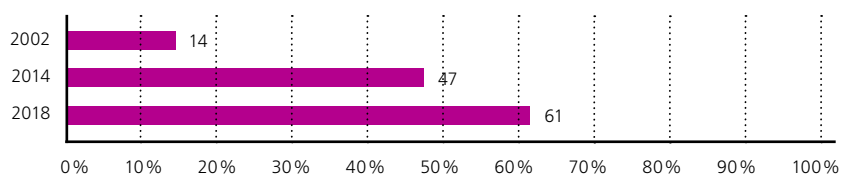


FIGURE 7.2: **Rejection of emigration. (per cent)**



Source: Gallup International, 2002, 2014, 2018.

The desire to emigrate can be evaluated along diachronic lines: in comparison with previous surveys it is decreasing, and indeed drastically.

No “epidemic” is evident now, but we can certainly detect a “virus”. Bulgarian democratic development is marked by constant fears of a chronic “brain drain”. A more appropriate framework with which to analyse the processes underlying youth mobility would explore not only the draining of “brains” but also of “hands”, because data indicates a desire to emigrate among low-qualified groups, oriented mostly towards manual labour.

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### The desire of young people to emigrate is decreasing.

The qualitative methods applied within the framework of the survey (in-depth interviews, focus-groups) confirm the hypothesis of a shift in the migration “peak”. Young people face the question, but not as an imperative. An 18-year-old would go abroad to study and come back – he says he would come back due to ties to his home country. A 14-year-old girl says she knows many people who would like to study abroad but then come back later. A 24-year-old university student says she does not even think that living conditions in the West are better than those in Bulgaria. An 18-year-old schoolgirl is surprised how many people actually prefer to stay in their country; until recently she thought the opposite was the case. There is a feeling that migration is not a primary goal, nor is it thought of as that inevitable.

The decline in the desire to emigrate is actually a common trend in the entire region, excluding Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia. Compared with the previous round of the regional survey (2011–2015), in 2018 the relative share of young people who did NOT give the categorical response “I have no intention of emigrating” has dropped from 71 to 58 per cent. The most significant drop (by about 50 per cent) is to be seen in “new” EU Member States like Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. Perhaps processes related to EU-membership have strengthened belief in the opportunity for achieving one’s goals in one’s own homeland.

The analysis of preparedness to leave Bulgaria requires specification in time (Table 7.1).

Of those respondents who more or less state a resolute will to emigrate, almost half have no clear idea regarding the timeframe for going abroad. This in itself shows that their preparedness is more of an intention and general attitude that they prefer *some time*, rather than *now*, but not along the lines of concrete plans.

TABLE 7.1.: In what time frame do you imagine leaving the country?

Time	per cent
Within the next 6 months	10
Within the next 2 years	20
Within the next 5 years	13
Within the next 10 years	5
More than 10 years from now	2
Don't know	44

Base: Those planning to emigrate

To a large extent one could draw the same conclusion with regard to those persons who place their desire to migrate within a period of ten years or more because this excludes any immediate actions on their part, nor can it be considered a firm and final decision. Adopting this perspective, we can once again discern two groups with more concrete plans for leaving: first are young people who have primary education or are uneducated, and second – richer people and citizens of Sofia. Albeit in a different way, in both cases the plans are more specific, which implies some real preparation.

Expectations regarding the duration of the emigrational experience are, of course, relative, especially before having practically got off the ground. But this expectation is directly related to psychological readiness – it is one mindset to be preparing to leave the country “forever”, and a completely different one related to the idea of finding a job to make a living in another country or the so-called “gurbet” (work abroad). The results of the survey are remarkable. Only 14 per cent of potential migrants are considering emigrating for ten years or more (which in practice is tantamount to saying for life), while as many as 37 per cent conceive of this as a period of under five years and 38 per cent have difficulty determining the timeframe of their intentions. Unemployed people (22 per cent), the Roma community (21 per cent), citizens of the north-east region (21 per cent) and the rich (17 per cent) exhibit the highest levels of desire to emigrate “forever”. It is clear that in the first three cases the sense of a lack of prospects is so marked that respondents cannot imagine a situation in Bulgaria in their whole lives where there would be a real opportunity in which their aspirations would become a reality. Among richer young people there is a strong trend towards conscious life decisions being made in favour of a life abroad – a choice for which they have been preparing themselves for a long time. Their wider opportunities and better qualifications in Bulgaria offer a potential these young people would like to leverage there, where opportunities are even greater and the qualifications even higher.

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Plans for short- and medium-term mobility are the most prevalent. Emigration is rarely considered to be a “life decision”.

In this structure once again, young people from EU Member States exhibit short-term emigration plans is a widespread phenomenon. The desire for mobility within a five-year period is most salient in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia. At the other end are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Albania.

The in-depth interviews and group discussions held in Bulgaria do not suggest any decisive ambitions to permanently leave the country, either. The intention to come back for one reason or another stands out. One 21-year-old student stated:

“I personally see myself here in Bulgaria in thirty or fifty years. I want to be active in some way in public life in Bulgaria, so that we are not just a name on the map... It might be economically difficult, i.e. there might be no jobs, but I want to help rescue our country.”

A 22-year-old student did not want to look so far ahead into the future:

“In general, I would like to return, but – as they say – it’s all in God’s hands”.

Actual preparedness for emigration is not very salient.

The steps that young people have taken to leave Bulgaria filter their intentions. Two-thirds (67 per cent!) of those planning on emigrating have not actually undertaken anything in this direction. The remainder are separated into two groups. One smaller group (11 per cent) has started along the classic individual path of mobility – getting in contact with potential universities or employers. The other, almost twice as large (19 per cent) has taken advantage of relatives and friends abroad. This is the collectivist path, more widespread among southern European nations. One’s own social contacts, and not so much official channels and intermediary agencies, are considered more trustworthy and efficient in the life pathway of an émigré.

## MOTIVATION FOR EMIGRATION

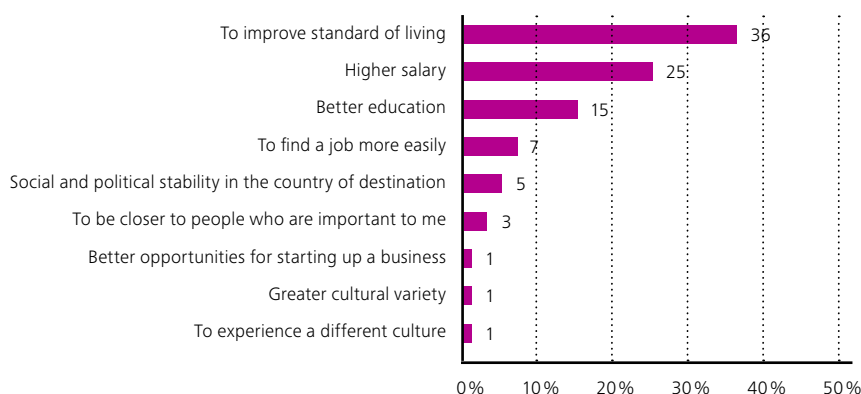
Different reasons can make a young person prefer life as an émigré. Our survey allows for them to simply be subsumed under the rubric “wants to live better” (Figure 7.3).

Financial motivation dominates across the board. A better standard of living and higher pay are closely related and correspond to the desires of 61 per cent of those planning to emigrate. Of course, this percentage should not close our eyes to differences in focal points. Thus, for instance, in comparison with men, women prefer a higher standard and are not so fixated on their own pay. On the other hand, working students and poor people consider the financial aspect to be a far more important factor. This would appear to be the vital issue that they need to resolve, while other aspects of this standard have, at least for the time being, have assumed a secondary role.

If we add opportunities for a better job and starting up a new business to the first two options, then the “material” side accounts for more than two-thirds of the responses. This is the trend in the region as well, where this “material cluster” attracts between 65 per cent and 85 per cent of young people planning to emigrate in all the countries. A better education is important as a stimulus, especially for the lower age groups, where it ranks first, but this decreases in importance with age. Even if education remains an intention, it becomes more of a means to achieve a better life. Cultural and emotional considerations rank far lower in importance. As qualitative data shows, the cultural and emotional connection with Bulgaria remains strong and for the time being it has not been shifted to the society (or even friends and relatives) in the target countries for migration.

Material stimuli to emigrate predominate across the board.

FIGURE 7.3: What is the main reason why you would move to another country? (per cent)



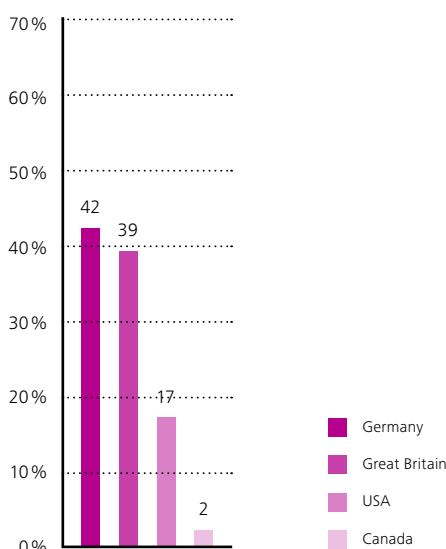
Base: Those planning to emigrate.

The survey does not specifically address the “internal” factors underlying migration, what is happening in Bulgaria or in the respondent’s life that makes them want to leave. We can discover these in a negative way: those positive goals whose realisation they see abroad would evidently be unachievable here, ranging from a better standard to better education. But life “abroad” is not idealised. The group discussions display some more critical assessments. Thus, for instance, a 17-year-old girl we will call M., a student of Roma origin, imagines that more optimistic opportunities in a possible future Bulgaria might look like this – “*people do not go work outside the country*”, because “*they are being misled*”; as well as: “*fairer*”, and “*better*”.

No matter what potential migrants are striving for, they need a place where they believe they can find it. The choice of a country to emigrate to is an integral part of the motivation to leave Bulgaria (Figure 7.4).

Data can be assessed from a comparative historical perspective. The first decade of democratic transition was characterised by strong migration inclinations towards USA and Canada. School graduates filled out applications for different American universities *en-masse*. Even popular music and literature at that time often revolved around these North American storylines. For Bulgaria, the process of European integration noticeably changed priorities. The possibility of being closer to friends and family, the low cost of education in most European countries, and the gradual opening of EU Member States’ labour markets to Bulgarian workers have created a new, more pragmatic set of expectations and actions.

FIGURE 7.4: **Where would you prefer to move to?**  
(per cent)



Note: Up to three answers can be given. Base: Those planning to emigrate.

Currently Germany and the United Kingdom stand out in the choice of young people in all groups. With regard to Germany, the traditional image of a stable social country where crises are rare and people are valued for their contributions to society per-

haps plays a role. There are scarcely any surprises. Germany is certainly the leading prospective destination for young people from all countries in the region excluding Montenegro, where the USA is still first. The UK, on the other hand, is often interesting due to lower taxes and easier procedures for finding a job, but mostly and perhaps foremost because of the English language, which a majority of Bulgarian young people speak or think they speak and consider a key precondition for successful integration into local society. Of the ten countries in the comparative survey, the UK is in the top three of desired emigration destinations in all four EU Member States (Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Croatia) and, among the others, only in Albania.

Young Bulgarians have a practical attitude towards migration, viewing it as internal mobility within the EU.

The US, perhaps with the image of a “country of unlimited possibilities”, turns in the best result among the youngest respondents (24 per cent of 14-15-year-olds would go there), but also among university students (28 per cent), perhaps due to the force of attraction emitted by summer student brigades in America.

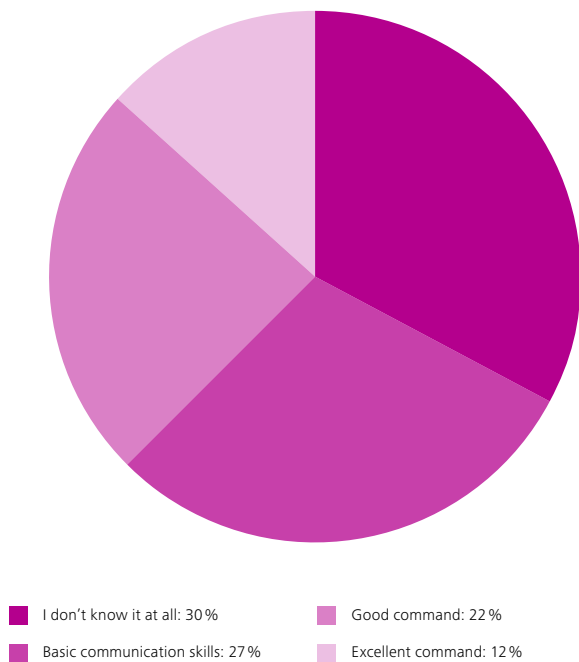
## ADAPTABILITY OF POTENTIAL MIGRANTS

Speaking the language of the desired country of emigration is a key precondition for integration into its society. Establishing institutional contacts or maintaining social and collegial relations, and most of the time even performing the job itself (excluding both extremes with regard to the spectrum of workers’ qualification – domestic care and the IT sector) is impossible without fulfilling this precondition.

The results are of a declarative nature and should be interpreted with caution. It is not rare for the presence of a certain language in the educational curriculum to suffice for those learning it to state that they speak it, even though they might only possess rudimentary, basic skills. Nonetheless, it is worth noting a significant proportion of young people state that they intend to emigrate to a country, but do not know, or hardly know, its language.

Of course, better language skills are stated to be possessed by groups having more possibilities and/or who are more exposed to education involving language training. 24 per cent of persons with higher education state that they possess excellent knowledge of the language, compared to just 10 per cent of those with secondary education. The coefficient for rich and poor is 36 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively, while for the capital and small towns it is 21 per cent to 5 per cent, respectively. There is a visible differen-

**FIGURE 7.5: What is your level of proficiency in the official language of the country you would prefer most? (per cent)**

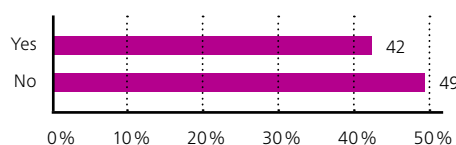


tiation mechanism causing different social strata of Bulgarian society to receive unequal access to foreign language skills.

Adaptation for emigrants involves not only a linguistic phase, but also assimilation into the social environment. The presence of compatriots who could provide support in the initial steps on foreign territory constitutes an important factor in the gradual negotiation of this critical period (Figure 7.6).

Respondents can be practically split into two groups. The 42 per cent who have an invitation to depart to the respective country or have a promise for support if they decide to emigrate there include groups of different age, social statuses, residence and capabilities. Furthermore, as the data show, these people are interested in a vast array of countries. We can thus state with certainty that, three decades after the era of democratic change, Bulgarians have formed a significant diaspora abroad.

**FIGURE 7.6: Do you have an invitation or support from someone you personally know living in the most desirable host country? (per cent)**



Base: Those planning to emigrate.

The presence of social connections in one's own ethnic group in the desired country is a virtual given for potential Turkish (61 per cent) and Roma (70 per cent) migrants. The low proportion of such stated by the highly educated (32 per cent), 14-15-year-olds (26 per cent) and university students (27 per cent) probably indicates a notion of emigration as the product of their own efforts without serious support from outside, rather than a lack of relatives or friends abroad. In stark contrast to this, those with secondary education, citizens in villages and the northwest region and the unemployed exhibit levels exceeding the country average and confirming the hypothesis of restricted capabilities being compensated by strengthening social relations and informal emigration channels. The power of informal social relations is also demonstrated by statistical dependencies. Whether young people planning emigration have support from relatives or friends abroad or not has a significant influence on whether they have contacted them for support (Cramer's  $V = .45114$ ) or have not initiated any preparations to leave (Cramer's  $V = .43707$ ).

Social relations and especially the presence of relatives and friends abroad play a significant role in an inclination towards mobility.

## CONCLUSION

- The desire to emigrate among Bulgarian youth has decreased over the years, but maintains its status as a chronic problem, involving both high-skilled and low-skilled labour.
- The decision to emigrate does not seem to be considered as a turning point in the life of a young person requiring serious preparation and awareness. It is due mostly to the chances of the common European mobility.
- Stagnation and lack of prospects in Bulgaria are beginning to characterise the social environment, making the lowest qualified groups most likely to seek a solution outside of the country.
- The financial motivation for mobility dominates in all groups. Emigration has no political or ethnic preconditions.
- Europe is to a great extent the destination for potential migration by young Bulgarians.
- The major factor characterising the current situation is the existence of a Bulgarian diaspora around the globe which stimulates informal paths to emigration.



## 8

# YOUTH AND EDUCATION

## ASPIRATIONS TOWARDS EDUCATION

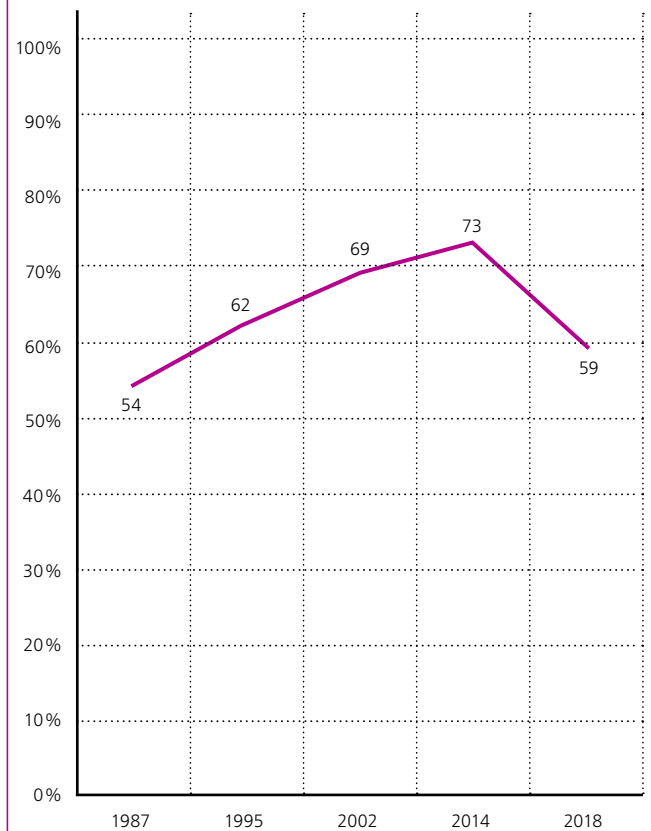
Aspirations towards education in terms of data in the survey can be analysed from two perspectives: the type of education young people aspire to (primary, secondary, higher) and the estimation of attainability of the goal they set (to what extent do they believe they can achieve it).

The majority of respondents (54 per cent) express a preference for different forms of higher education (specialist's, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree).

Higher education is a goal for more young people than those who can realistically be expected to obtain degrees based on current trends. This is nothing new; in recent years educational aspirations in Bulgaria have traditionally remained high. The trend towards a "feminisation" of attitudes also continues unabated: 47 per cent of males are oriented towards higher education compared to 62 per cent of females. Meanwhile, the data imply a certain change.

Even since the era of actually existing socialism, aspirations towards higher education have been growing consistently among young people. In 2014 we registered a situation where more than two-thirds of respondents wanted to graduate from university, with the desire to obtain a university degree dominating all the main groups of young people (according to gender, size of community, income, and professional status), excluding the Roma ethnic group. Four years later, aspirations towards higher education have ebbed. The trend would appear to have been "broken".

FIGURE 8.1: **What is the highest level of education that you aspire to achieve? (per cent)**  
Answers "University education"

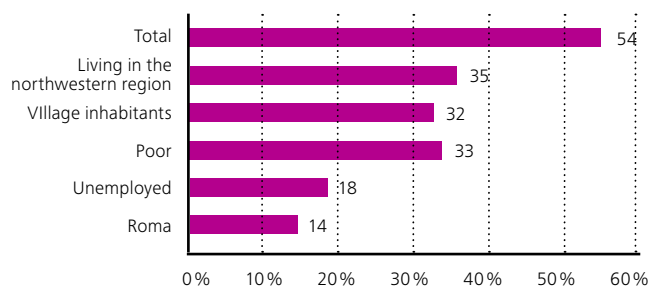


Note: The age group in 1987, 1995, 2002 and 2014 was 15-25 years of age.  
Source: National Research Institute of Youth, 1987; Gallup International, 1995, 2002, 2014, 2018.

The desire for higher education is decreasing slightly, especially among more vulnerable groups.

The aspiration for a university degree among young Roma people is again noticeably weak (14 per cent of all Roma respondents). But in the current survey the respective percentage stating that they have this aspiration has also dropped to below half for ethnic Turks (31 per cent) as well as for unemployed people (18 per cent) and even for those working and not studying (33 per cent). Social stratification, regional distribution and the place of residence are differentiating factors. While 77 per cent of rich young people state a desire to graduate from university, the same is also attested by merely 33 per cent of young people who are poor. This response is given by 63 per cent of those living in the capital and just 32 per cent of young people in villages and village areas. This is the response voiced by 63 per cent of inhabitants of the most highly developed southwest region, including the capital Sofia, and 35 per cent of young people in the northwest region – the most underdeveloped area, not only in Bulgaria, but in the entire EU.

FIGURE 8.2: **What is the highest level of education that you aspire to achieve? (per cent)**  
Answers “University education”



At the same time, those not having a preference for anything more than primary education have a clear social portrait: a Roma man aged 20–29, unemployed, poor and with parents who do not have higher education, either. The lack of a will to climb the educational ladder is reproduced in both ethnic and generational terms.

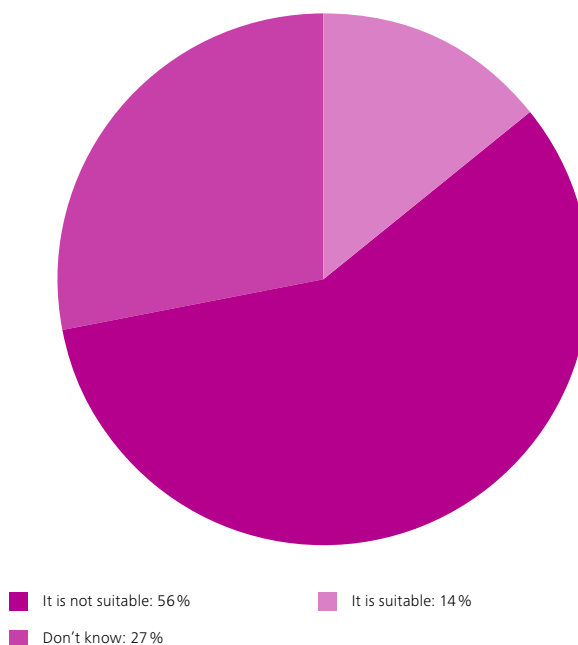
## ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Satisfaction with the quality of the education received is relatively high – half of the respondents give full or partial positive answers.

At the same time, education constitutes a transition to work and practical occupational activities. In this sense, it is a normal

expectation for the educational system to provide preparatory training that is designed to facilitate this transition as effectively as possible. Student satisfaction is an issue necessarily related to the understanding of students regarding the suitability of education for working life.

FIGURE 8.3: **In your own opinion, in Bulgaria, is school and university education suitable or not suitable for job-seeking and job opportunities, and requirements of employers in general?**



A critical stance becomes more pronounced with age, which means with the duration of stay in school or university and direct contact with the labour market (62 per cent among 25-29-year-olds compared to 37 per cent of 14-15-year-olds). Young people with higher education are the most critical (69 per cent versus merely 41 per cent of those with primary or lower education), ethnic Bulgarians (61 per cent compared to 38 per cent for ethnic Turks and 43 per cent for Roma people) and those living in the capital (60 per cent versus 47 per cent of those living in villages). We could say that higher status (social, educational, etc.) increases the likelihood of negative assessments. The understanding of the labour market is clearer and deeper-going. The greater expectations directed towards personal professional orientation may also be an influential factor leading young persons to be more sensitive towards deficits in the education system when it comes to preparing them for the future.

Restricted opportunities for practical education play a role in understanding difficulties in adapting to the labour market.



37 per cent of respondents stated they have performed an internship or practical position during their education. Social status has a differentiating function here as well – a positive response was provided by 45 per cent of the rich and 28 per cent of the poor. It is probable that practical skills are acquired in a “private” manner, including outside the education system. Its capacity turns out to be restricted from another point of view. Only 31 per cent of those living in the capital city have performed traineeships or internships. In other words, the big metropolitan city is not capable of providing the necessary infrastructure for such activities.

Deficiencies in language preparation can also be a barrier to efficient integration in the current labour world both here and abroad. Group discussions indicate a clear knowledge of this problem, even among the youngest. One 14-year-old schoolgirl said:

“I think our education has to be made better mostly by learning foreign languages at school because now you need additional lessons to learn it well and that is what’s most important.”

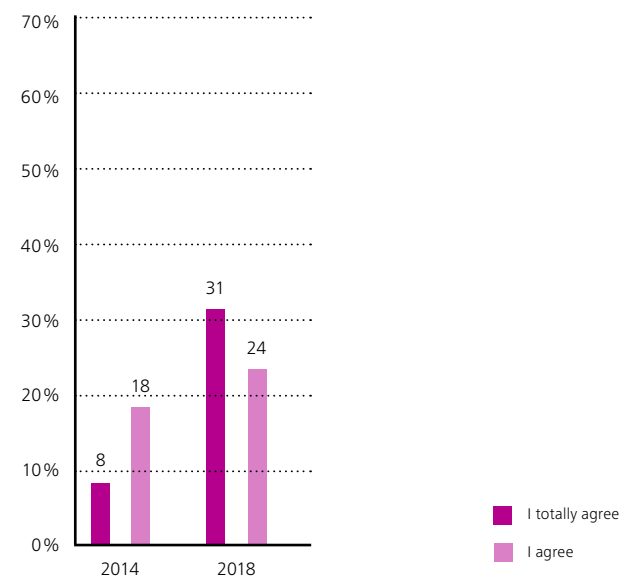
This all offers a basis for critical evaluations of the overall condition of education in Bulgaria. On one hand, there is a lack of good practice, while on the other awareness of bad practice is growing. Undoubtedly the problem with corruption has a direct impact on attitudes of young people regarding the education they receive (Figure 8.4).

In a period of just four years, we observe a significant increase in the perception of corruptibility in the education process among all young people and in the various groups. 58 per cent of ethnic Bulgarians, 61 per cent of the rich and 56 per cent of those living in the capital are certain that buying exams and grades is of a regular, non-sporadic nature. All these values are above the country average and show that the environment of corruption is not a “preserve” of vulnerable groups. The temptation to turn the entire education process into a “grade market” grows when there are greater financial capabilities. It is indicative that, just like in 2014, working students respond positively to the question regarding the purchase of exams significantly more often (66 per cent in 2018 against 57 per cent of students who do not work).

It is not difficult to see the correlation between greater financial resources and less time for education on one hand and the stimuli for the attainment of educational success by financial means. The conclusions of the survey in this area are among the most important and the most unpleasant.

The sense of corruptibility in the educational process is increasing on a worrisome scale.

FIGURE 8.4: **Do you, or do you not agree that in some schools/universities in Bulgaria, grades and exams are “bought”?**



Note: In 2014, the question was “Do you believe that in your school/university grades and exams are bought with money?” And the answers were: “Yes, often” and “Yes, sometimes”.

Even more essential than personally engaging in or being a witness to corruption is a mass belief that it is a constant element in the educational process. Corruption in society is a corrosive element in all social systems – it is hard to believe it would not afflict the educational system as well.

## EVERYDAY LEARNING

The assessment of the difficulties in the educational process involves reflection on personal life experiences in school or at university as a place. The will and desire to attend classes is of key importance to both educational achievements and attainment of the future goals of a young person. The Bulgarian educational system, though burdened by strong criticism from students, has preserved its status as a relatively attractive place.

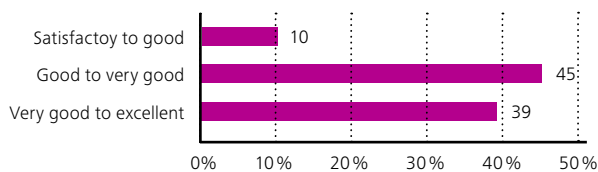
Only 11 per cent of respondents say that life in school/at university is somewhat difficult and stressful. 45 per cent – indeed, almost half – are on the other side of the scale. Educational life is perceived to be easiest to Roma people (51 per cent), perhaps due to their poor motivation to invest a lot of effort in their education. The poor experience more difficulties than the rich (18 per cent as opposed to 7 per cent). This could probably be because of the financial problems involved in meeting expenses relating to the educational process (from textbooks and student books to food, clothes and other expenses) and to the often-demotivating environment in “peripheral” schools. It appears to be easier in villages (51 per cent) than in the capital (40 per cent), which is also understandable. “Stress” as a rule is more typical of a bigger city than smaller villages, while the environ-

ment of friends and family in a smaller village contributes to more “comfortable” everyday life in school.

Academic success, though relative, is a criterion underlying the results achieved in the time spent in the education system (Figure 8.5).

Traditionally, girls turn in better educational results than boys. 48 per cent of girls have high grades, compared to just 29 per cent of boys. The lowest results are, as expected, to be found among the Roma community (33 per cent), but also Turks (21 per cent), whereas for ethnic Bulgarians poor school/university students only account for 8 per cent.

FIGURE 8.5: What has your average grade been over the last year? (per cent)



Note: Base: Those still in education.

Good results are not just the fruit of personal ambition. They need a motivational social environment, more financial resources to cover educational needs, rather than a family that considers excellent grades to be a formality.

It also depends on individual preparation. The data indicate that time spent studying has an effect on average results in education. The statistical dependency is significant: Cramer's  $V = .20753$ . But does a smoother transition to employment depend on educational results?

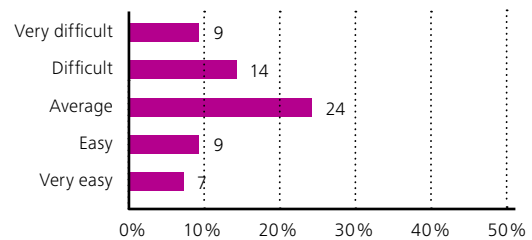
## PROSPECTS

The prospects of education are employment. We shall now see to what extent Bulgarian education performs this function in the opinion of young people.

Higher education seems a relatively stable guarantor facilitating the process of finding a job (32 per cent of those with higher education feel that this provides them the best chance, compared to just 9 per cent of young people with primary or lower education).

A critical attitude towards the educational system does not change the fact that, in the end, investments in one's own education pays for itself in the labour market due to easier access to work. The judgement of a young person as to how easy it will be to find a job correlates with average success in university studies (Cramer's  $V = .17245$ ). We can narrow the focus of the question. Education does not prepare one for just any work, but rather for work in a specific field, “a career in the degree subject”. Among young working people in the sample, 81 per cent stated that they are working at a job related to or close to their degree subject. This figure reaches an astonishing 99 per cent with university graduates.

FIGURE 8.6: In your personal opinion, will it be difficult or easy for you to find a job after you complete your education? (per cent)



Note: Base: Those still in education.

Higher education has a direct influence on access to a job in the degree area.

One of the highest proportions of those performing a job different than their degree subject is to be found in the capital (24 per cent), precisely due to the wide range of professions available.

## CONCLUSION

- Education is on the one hand a differentiating factor. Separate groups with different achievements, capabilities and goals stand out. On the other hand, it is precisely education in this form, irrespective of its flaws, that proves to be a path towards achieving the best possible occupation for young people.
- Education exhibits two extremes among young people – “the peak” and “the lows”. Social inequality is replicated in school and university. The common point between the “extremes” is a highly critical attitude towards educational services and specific requirements with regard to the preparation.
- The Roma ethnic group persists at the bottom in practically all indicators.
- In many cases motivation for education assumes the nature of a systemic family-related structure. Highly educated parents stimulate children's aspiration towards higher education.
- Although striving for higher education remains significant, its tendency to increase over the past decades has ebbed.
- Awareness of corruption among young people has reached unprecedented levels. The “market society” has instilled a belief that education is a “market”.





## 9

# YOUTH AND WORK

The 2014 survey unveiled some important issues relating to the transition from education to work: significant youth unemployment, especially in some regions; a gap between educational preparation and the occupation performed; relatively low pay for young labour power; constraints on young people achieving their aims; pathologically high unemployment among young Roma people.

The results of the new survey provide an opportunity to determine and assess the changes that have occurred.

## SCOPE OF REALISATION IN EMPLOYMENT

The survey data display a relatively positive picture. First of all, from a comparative regional perspective, Bulgaria has the lowest levels of youth unemployment and is last in this indicator (the leading position is held by Kosovo with almost four times as much). Secondly, it appears that, out of all employed young people, 74 per cent are working on a contract basis, while two-thirds (65 per cent) have a full-time contract. In this respect, young Bulgarian people once again come off best in the region – five times better than young people in Montenegro, for instance.

5.3 per cent of all working young people in the sample work with a temporary (“civil”) contract, while 4.7 per cent work as temporary labour. Job security is directly dependent on the level of education. 72 per cent of those with higher education, 54 per cent with secondary education and just 4 per cent of young people with lower education work full-time. As can be expected, Sofia is the most favourable place (Figure 9.1).

The number of young people who are unemployed and actively looking for a job is 7 per cent, while 4 per cent do not work and are not looking for a job – a total of one in ten of all respondents. This is largely an ethnic issue. Of the young Roma community, 28 per cent are unemployed and 20 per cent are neither working nor looking for a job, i.e. half of the young Roma people are absent from the labour market and this form of integration in society. We should add that another 12 per cent work in a temporary job. We cannot be indifferent to this problem. It is not a new one, but it has not been surmounted.

Employment also has a regional aspect. Unemployment is significantly higher in the northeast and northwest regions.

One in four young people in the northwest region – the poorest in the entire European union – feels that this circumstance hindered them in finding a job (Figure 9.2).

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The “precariat” is not a developed social group in Bulgaria.

According to Eurostat data, in 2017 young people (ages 15 to 29) accounted for 57 per cent of the temporarily employed in Spain, 42.1 per cent in Croatia, 39.3 per cent in France and 37.3 per cent in Germany. In Bulgaria the rate is 7.8 per cent. This difference may be due to Bulgaria’s late entry into the club of neoliberal economies, but in this case, it puts the new generation of young people in a favourable position.

FIGURE 9.1: Permanent employment/education. (per cent)

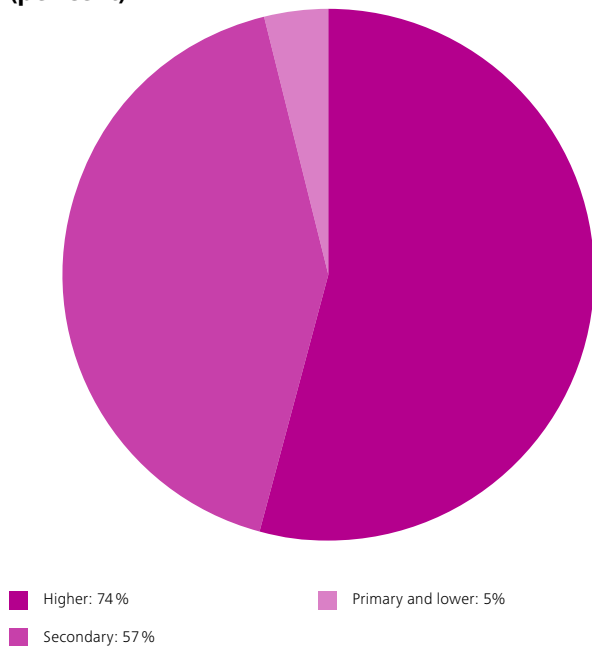


FIGURE 9.3: Preferred sector in choice of employment. (per cent)

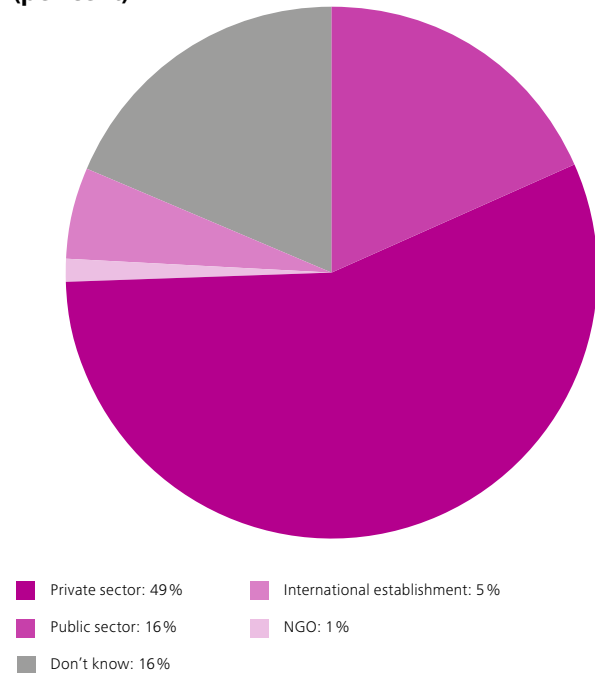
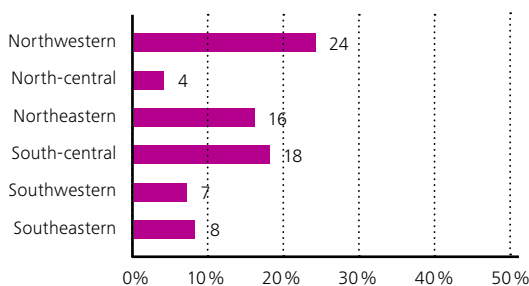


FIGURE 9.2: Moving to another town/region for suitable work. (per cent)



One specific question in the Bulgarian survey focuses on the intention of young people to start their own private business. The results are as follows:

TABLE 9.1.: Is starting a private business part of your personal plans? (per cent)

Answers	Total	14–15	16–19	20–24	25–29
Yes	17	10	18	20	16
No	57	50	48	58	62
I have already started	3	–	1	2	6

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERE

Sociological surveys as early as in the '90s, when the state sector dominated, have shown that young people unlike older ones prefer to work in a private company. The generational gap has been preserved in the new century as well. The new survey does not highlight any new findings – it simply confirms an already established pattern.

The tendency towards working in the private sector – both as an aspiration and as an actual situation – remains consistently high.

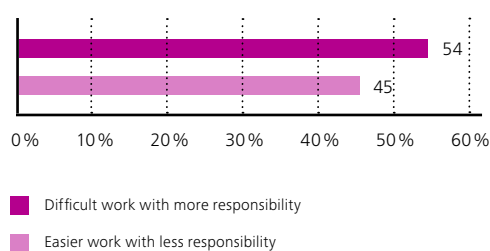
The age graph shows the origin, growth and decline in business enthusiasm.

In the context of surveys carried out over the entire duration of the transition, we see a relatively constant share of about one-fifth of young people who are inclined towards starting their own businesses.

In 2014 a new aspect in the qualities of candidate-businesspeople was identified. Unlike at the beginning of the post-communist transition, when “business” too often meant “trickery”, in modern-day European Bulgaria, willingness to take the economic initiative is related to a greater sense of responsibility and accompanied by a desire to test one’s strength and not easy gains.

The 2018 survey confirms this relationship and reveals its non-random character.

FIGURE 9.4: Preferred type of work/intention to have a private business.



## SOCIALLY IMPORTANT FACTORS IN OBTAINING WORK

The public opinion of young people can be mapped by ranging responses according to how often the highest category (“very important”) has been selected.

The summary of the results (Table 9.2) offers some unexpected and contradictory results: the role of chance and predestination stands out. Both factors devalue personal efforts and skills!

The magic aura of luck seems more appropriate for the poorly educated. Indeed, Roma people believe in luck the most (79 per cent), but one should not jump to conclusions.

Belief in luck in the capital is greater than in the countryside. Furthermore, 70 per cent of highly educated persons believe in it. We should maybe take into consideration that, at higher levels, there are greater career opportunities and more fortune is experienced along the path to achievement of personal goals.

TABLE 9.2.: Factors that young people in Bulgaria regard as important in finding employment

Factors	Very important (5)	Important (4)
1. Luck	69	19
2. Origin/region	67	22
3. Knowledge	65	23
4. Level of education	56	27
5. Acquaintances/ friends	54	29
6. Contacts with people in power	35	21
7. Education and/or experience acquired abroad	32	23
8. Party membership	15	12

Note: The answers are on a five-point scale from 1. “Not important at all” to 5. A “very important” factor.

Luck turns out to be a key factor in finding a (suitable) job.

Regarding the importance of predestination, we see a clear differentiation. In the northwest, the “regional” factor is very important to 66 per cent, while in the neighbouring north-central region this holds true for 41 per cent.

The role of connections (acquaintances, friends, people in power) is significant, although no longer among the most important factors. Differences relating to the category of the type of community are impressive. In smaller towns and villages, where most people or everybody knows each other, the role of “acquaintances and friends” stands out. This applies even more to the factor of “contacts with people in power”. Responses should not be analysed only from a subjective angle. In smaller towns and villages, local authorities influence the “labour market”; they hire, i.e. the intrusion of public authorities is greater and more direct.

## INDIVIDUAL MOTIVES FOR WORK ORIENTATION

Conclusions as to individual motives can be drawn based on an indicator on the standardised response card as well as on questions used systematically in Bulgarian surveys. A general idea is provided by the following responses:

TABLE 9.3.: Factors involved in taking a decision about starting work

Factors	Very important (5)	Important (4)
1. Income/Salary	87	11
2–3. Job security	81	16
2–3. Job satisfaction	81	14
4. Working with colleagues you like	69	23
5. Perspectives for career development	63	24
6. Enough free time	60	27
7. Working with people	55	25
8. Opportunity to do something useful for society	52	27

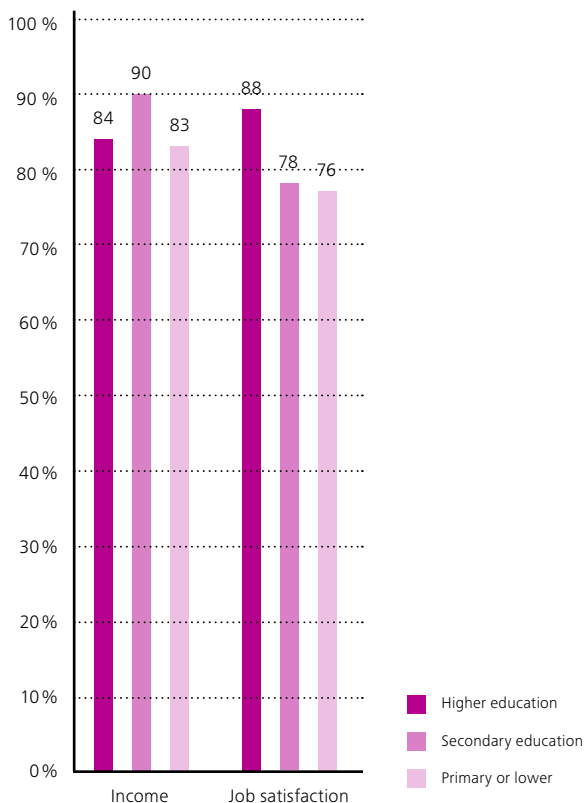
Note: The answers are on a five-point scale from 1. “Not important at all” to 5. A “very important” factor.

The paramount importance of the amount of pay for labour is confirmed across the board, especially among young men – 89 per cent (83 per cent among women).

It would be overly hasty to conclude that the new generation of young people is grossly capitalistic. It is typical among university students (92 per cent), and ethnic Bulgarians (87 per cent) – more so than members of ethnic minorities (79 per cent of ethnic Turks, and 83 per cent of Roma people) that pay is the most important factor. It is valued most in the capital and least in villages. Evidently, it is a matter of more valued criteria, and greater expectations of the standard of living. In the capital, where there are more possibilities for use of money than in villages, the temptations of consumerism are more pronounced. In the wake of the transition, money has been affirmed as the universal key to achievement of life opportunities and a criterion of success.

grows during adulthood after adolescence and encounter with the realities of life demonstrates the importance of the moral criterion. This is most pronounced among the highly educated (55 per cent) and least marked among the poorly educated (41 per cent). It is more widespread among young Turks (55 per cent) than among young Bulgarians (48 per cent), while just 16 per cent of young Roma people prefer honesty. We should not conclude that attitudes here are simply a function of ethnicity. There is a major correlation with stratification: the poor value success more. Another difference is in the type of community: honesty is valued most in smaller towns and villages, whereas traditions, as described by Ivan Hadjiyski, have maintained a greater salience and everything is more visible. The greatest desires for success are to be found in the capital.

FIGURE 9.5: **Factors in choice of employment/ education.**



Success at all cost in life is highly valued by the young, but with age it gradually succumbs to moral criteria.

Another specific question in the national survey sheds light on the individual motivation: “What kind of job would you prefer if you had to choose: better paid but less interesting or more interesting with less pay?” 68 per cent of all would prefer a better paid job, 17 per cent would prefer a more interesting one, and 15 per cent could not give an answer.

The preference for a more interesting job can be considered a criterion for aspiration to self-realisation. It is more often encountered among the youngest cohort (21 per cent of 14-17-year-olds versus 13 per cent of 28-29-year-olds), among women and the highly educated (25 per cent as opposed to 13 per cent for those with secondary education). Thus, the sociological portrait of young people with an aspiration for self-realisation can be said to include two rather different categories: romantic school girls and qualified specialists with creative inclinations.

In the youngest years, the need for better pay is logically enough less pressing – young persons live with their parent families. This is one kind of logic. When they begin a life on their own, the need for better pay becomes more acute.

The other logic at work is that at higher levels of education opportunities for creative self-realisation open up.

From a retrospective vantage point, the percentage of young people who would prefer a more interesting job to better pay remains relatively constant after the transition period. Data surveyed in 2018 is comparable to the results of a 2002 survey.

A specific question in the Bulgarian survey provides an opportunity to evaluate the encroachment of capitalism. The question is “What is more important to you personally – success in life at any cost, albeit with moral compromises, or honesty and integrity, whilst sacrificing personal interests?” Among all respondents, 40 per cent prioritise success, 46 per cent state honesty, and 14 per cent could not state an answer. Young women (52 per cent) value honesty significantly more than young men (40 per cent). Age dynamics are also interesting. The focus on success grows between 14 and 24 years of age. After the age of 25 it drops to the levels of early youth. The aspiration of self-affirmation naturally



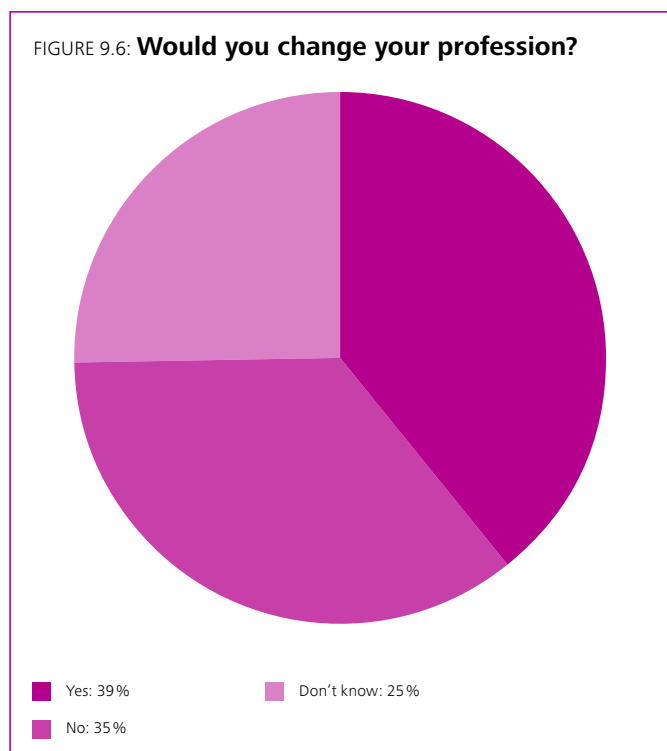
## SATISFACTION

The in-depth interviews and focus groups in the survey showed that the main topic is the gap between expectations and the realities of the labour market. These include expectations of both young people and employers.

One 19-year old boy put it this way: “You can always find a job. What is important to me is that I like what I do, and I hope that it’s in my line of studies. My friends are oriented towards the modern field and where a lot of jobs can be found. Now that’s IT, but I personally wouldn’t specialise in that because I don’t like it, but young people are keen on well-paid jobs”.

One 24-year-old lady referred to differences in expectations regarding work and pay – among both young people as well as employers. “The divide between expectations and reality” is really big, she said. She also knows many examples of unfair employers. “The criteria are too high, but on both sides, because if you ask some people graduating now they’ll tell you that they won’t work for 500 levs. And from the point of view of the employer, young workers want a lot of money, yet sit around doing nothing all day. This underscores the differences in the mind-sets of both sides and a gap is created.”

The level of satisfaction is assessed with a very specific indicator on the response card: “If you had the opportunity to change your profession would you do it?” The responses of young people in work do not show a favourable picture:



Logically enough, those who would not change their profession are most numerous among the highly educated (52 per cent). Higher education makes the bond between persons and their professions stronger. We could expect to see a higher percentage. Among those with secondary education, more people

would change their occupation, albeit not a vast majority (39 per cent). It follows that we should bear in mind the fact that Bulgarian secondary education is still inadequate in preparing people for occupations. Thus, starting a job depends on chance factors, and the notion of an “occupation” itself is, to a great extent, relative.

A desire to change one’s occupation can be witnessed among people with lower-than-average income and the poor. It is not difficult to decipher the motives: paths to a better start are sought.

## CONCLUSION

The labour aspirations of young Bulgarians has experienced a certain positive development in connection with European integration and surmounting of the post-crisis situation.

Some of the issues expressed in 2014 are still valid today. Notably:

- Partial correspondence between the labour market realities and educational preparation. This issue indicates above all a need for reform of the educational system.
- A shocking picture of partial labour integration of young Roma people due to their low levels of educational preparation.
- The presence of young people who do not study and are not working or looking for a job remains a fact, though the survey indicates that this phenomenon exists on a smaller scale.

The lack of a national strategy for integration of young people in the labour market is evident.



## 10

# YOUTH AND POLITICS

## INTEREST IN POLITICS

There are several levels manifesting young persons' political interests: the extent to which they follow political processes and seek to be informed about what is happening; their personal involvement in political events of a different order; and their readiness to directly participate in politics, and positions upon which decision-making depends.

The instances of inclusion of young people during the Bulgarian transition are primarily related to the initiation of protest as an express of dissatisfaction among young people. The previous study conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation was carried out precisely in a situation in which there was just such a "peak" in which society itself, not just the youth of the country, was highly politicised. In the wake of mass protests – early elections, an unsustainable parliamentary constellation, new protests, European elections, new pre-term elections – it was normal to expect a strong interest in politics on the part of young people. In fact, the relative levels of interest were not that marked, with over half of the respondents attesting to a lack of interest. What is the picture four years later?

TABLE 10.1.: **Interest in politics**  
Positive answers (per cent)

Answer	2014	2018
Interested in politics in general	N/A	7
Interested in Bulgarian politics (domestic, foreign)	40	14
Interested in EU politics	31	11

The decline (in both categories) is threefold (!) And this is indeed one of the most remarkable findings of the current study.

The collapse in interest in politics is a phenomenon with long-term consequences for the political socialisation of young people as well as for the political future of the country.

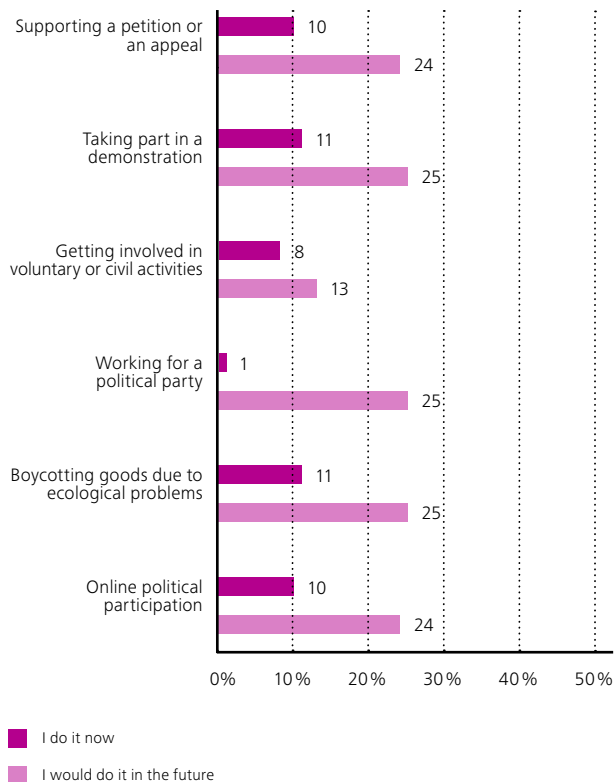
Such a steep decline in such a short time requires close analysis and can hardly be explained solely by the more dynamic situation in 2014, which has given way to a more relaxed state of affairs in 2018. Moreover, the situation is similar in the whole region, nor is Bulgaria the most drastic example (young Albanians and Bosnians, for example, are even more disinterested).

The internal segments of the large youth population are also of importance. Interest in politics increases consistently with age (3 per cent for 14-17-year-olds compared to 11 per cent for 28-29-year-olds) and with education (5 per cent for primary and lower to 12 per cent for university graduates). Income and place of residence do not have the same effect. The rich (11 per cent) do not differ significantly from the poor (9 per cent) and the capital city is at the same level as villages (6 per cent). Only one Roma individual and no ethnic Turk with a more marked interest could be found in the sample. Higher education seems to "open up" more topics and areas to young people, including politics, while age confronts them with problems that they realise are rooted in the political process. At the same time, minority groups practically remain subjects of political decisions without seeking to know more about them, while for richer individuals and those

living in the capital, politics is not an immediate part of their lives, nor do they look in its direction to find the tools needed to solve their problems. The market or other non-political factors may play a more substantial role.

Participation is an additional indicator of political socialisation of young people. It can denote various forms of personal engagement, but answers indicate that they are all concentrated in a small segment of respondents, rarely exceeding one-tenth.

FIGURE 10.1: **Forms of political participation now and in the future. (per cent)** Positive answers.



Readiness to participate in the future is of a declaratory nature and should not be overestimated. However, it does indicate a sort of “reservoir” for politicisation of young people which could be precipitated under certain conditions, possibly enhancing the “attractiveness” of political activities. In any case, the total alienation from conventional forms of political participation such as party membership or working for a political party is impressive. This, of course, is a European-wide phenomenon, but has a long history in Bulgaria itself, nevertheless raising serious questions about the proper functioning of the central institutions of democracy such as political parties, without which the citizens’ will cannot be transmitted to the government cannot be realised, in the future.

There is one remarkable exception in the trend towards depoliticisation among young people, and it involves the right to vote. 53 per cent (over half!) of respondents reported that they voted in the last parliamentary elections, while another 26 per cent did not do so because they had not yet reached the required voting

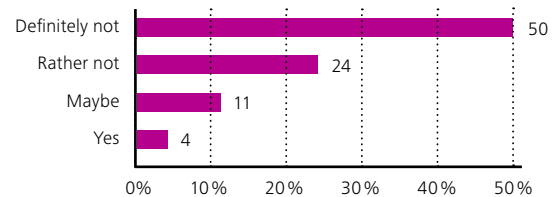
age of 18. This means that only one-fifth of the sample completely abstained from voting, which stands out sharply against the striking apathy suggested by other indicators. It is possible that positive answers to the electoral question have been overestimated and that voting is taking place on a much smaller scale. However, it must be concluded that, firstly, voting is “prestigious”, and secondly, young people vote *en masse*. This means that voting is the only political factor that can attract a significant number of the young, and they accept it as part of the things they “have to do”. There are two reasons for this: voting takes place much less often than other forms of participation (often requiring engagement on a regular basis) and, secondly, it is accompanied by the broadest sort of campaign and popularisation compared to other forms of participation, so it cannot fail but to reach the world of the young, even if this world is far from politics. Last but not least, the desire to vote is ultimately a real commitment by young people to democracy, important precisely against the backdrop of existing non-democratic trends in the world, in Europe and in our country.

A political career is the next stage of political inclusion, implying dedication to this activity, not just being involved with it periodically (Figure 10.2).

Obviously, the essence of a politician is not something that young people in particular find attractive. It is not an occupation that strikes them as very intriguing.

This weak interest in politics stands in direct connection with an understanding of what politics is and what it has to offer. Satisfaction with democracy in Bulgaria is not great. 8 per cent evaluate the state of democracy as very good, and another 22 per cent – as relatively good. A positive view of equality in Bulgaria is even rarer (6 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively).

FIGURE 10.2: **Would you like a political career? (per cent)**



In other words, we should not expect either a deeper interest or wider awareness in a sphere that, in the minds of young people, does not meet the high standards it has set itself.

The quality methods used lend more details to the picture without changing it. Among younger ages, in-depth interviews and group discussions also indicated no particular interest in politics. There is also a basic scepticism regarding this sphere, also associated with bias. A 26-year-old programmer, for example, said:

“For me, Bulgaria is a totally anti-political country – here all we talk about is party deals. It’s all just one whole thing; parties are just a show for the people.”

Often sceptical opinions about politics are not linked to anger; they are simply mentioned unemotionally.

Politics is also considered *a priori* to involve corruption. Especially indicative is the opinion of an 18-year-old student of Roma origin in Sofia regarding a politician:

“All politicians steal, obviously, most of all – X: he rules the whole state.”

A 25-year-old of Turkish origin, who is working, added, more by way of comparison:

“Not that there is no corruption in Western Europe, but it is less and a different kind; there it does not prevent the state from developing economically and providing quality public services to society.”

The main reason for dissatisfaction among young people, according to the survey, however, emanates not so much from the general state of democracy as it does from the opportunities for youth participation, and for youth to utilise democracy.

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It is widely believed that the voice of young people is not heard and cannot be heard in public and political processes.

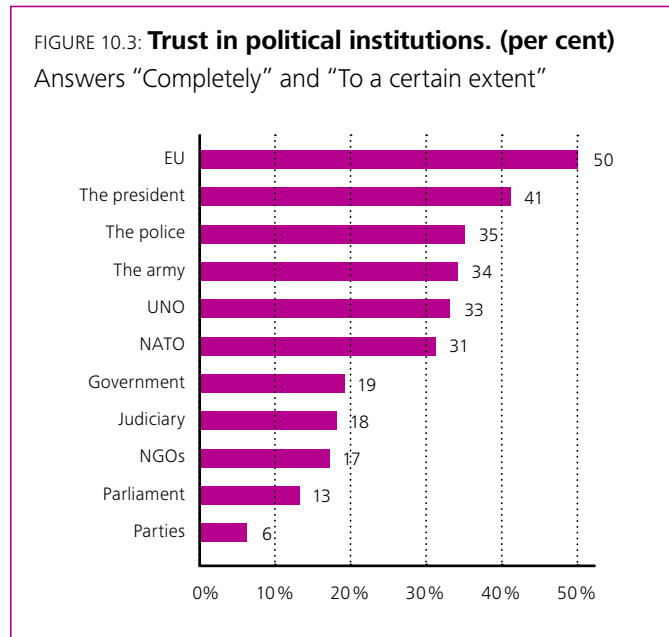
Only 2 per cent of young people evaluate the performance of youth in the political sphere as very good, while negative answers exceed 60 per cent. But even that is not an excessive level. The majority of respondents are of the opinion that young people in Bulgaria do not have enough rights. This issue evokes a negative response from 13 per cent with respect to ethnic minorities, 12 per cent with respect to religious groups, 25 per cent with regard to women, and 34 per cent with regard to children and 51 per cent with young people. More critical responses are only expressed with regard to the poor and people with disabilities.

The picture is striking. The majority view three groups in Bulgaria as not having enough rights: young people, the poor and people with disabilities. And on top of it all, one in every four young persons claim to have been discriminated against because of their age, i.e. because of their youth.

There is a situation at hand where young people are not seen to be represented at political level, but they do not think they can be represented through the existing mechanisms of the political system, i.e. through conventional political participation in its various forms.

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS INSTITUTIONS

Trust in political institutions is a factor that differentiates young people’s attitudes towards the political process, enabling us to focus on different accents.



National institutions have traditionally enjoyed less trust than their European counterparts. In the 2014 survey, the European Parliament was more than twice as trusted as that in Bulgaria, and the European Commission similarly more than the Bulgarian government. In European institutions people see a superior state of democracy and representativeness that young people apparently do not find at the national level.

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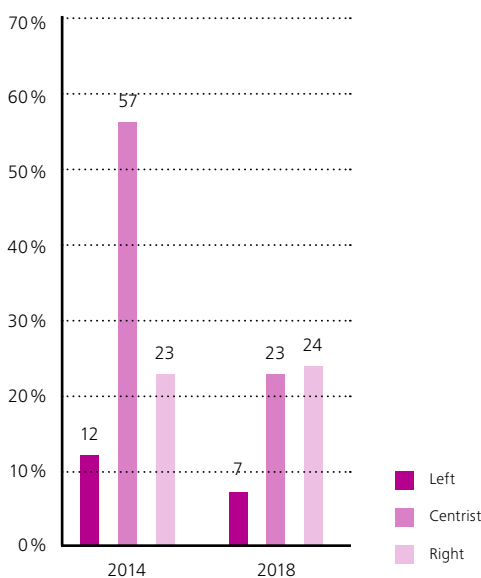
For the overwhelming majority, the European Union is a model for the main political and economic indicators, contrasting with Bulgaria as its poorest member.

From this angle, it is understandable why this comparison provokes such different levels of trust. But the national picture is not homogeneous, either. The three authorities in the democratic system which have the greatest importance in political decision-making – legislative, executive and judiciary – receive predominantly negative assessments.

## POLITICAL VALUES AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTIFICATION

Given what has been said about the distance that separates young people from politics, we should not be surprised to learn that 45 per cent of respondents refuse to answer or do not know what to answer when asked whether their political beliefs are on the left or right. This is a standard question and would logically imply a scale of 1 to 10, a spectrum going from left to right, where everyone can specify their place.

FIGURE 10.4: Political convictions – self-identification (per cent)



In 2014, right-wing identification was salient in only two countries in Eastern Europe – Macedonia and Bulgaria. In all other countries, young people had more left-wing or centrist convictions. The situation in Bulgaria has now shifted even more to the right, albeit minimally.

It is interesting to see how young people with left-wing convictions are distributed. The majority are women (57 per cent). The distribution between age groups is unusual. Let's go back in history for a moment. An anti-communist axiom from the 1920s and 1930s goes like this: "If you have not been a communist before you are 25, you have no heart. If you have remained a communist after 25, you have no mind."

The picture that the study paints is just the opposite. The smallest group of left-wing youngsters are to be found among schoolchildren and teenagers (2 per cent). And the largest (10 per cent) amongst those young people in the highest age bracket, 28–29 years old. It would appear that people move to the left with age.

The reason for stronger right-wing identification can be found in sources of political information and/or in more profound world views. The survey gives a clear picture of the sources of political

information. This can also offer us insight into the process of opinion formation.

Television (67%) and Internet (58%) are unquestionably leading in providing information to the youth. Conversations with the family (27%) enjoy growing importance. Besides, 38% of the respondents claim to have their political convictions fully or partially coinciding with those of their parents.

The results can be characterised as conditions underlying family consensus or family conformism. A positive analysis indicates a convincing trend to overcoming the political conflict between generations that could negatively impact social development. A sceptical view reveals the risk of reproducing views and perceptions without sufficient critical judgment and self-reflection on the part of young persons.

Continuity between generations, as in many value areas, also remains high in the area of politics.

In the context of the question regarding values and political self-identification, there are two findings. Firstly, the leading role of television can hardly depart from the dominant messages to be found in this media. Young people are systemically exposed to messages from the right. Left-wing interpretations are more likely to be consumed wherever the Internet is more the source of political information. And secondly, present-day parents, who are increasingly important in forming the views of today's youngsters, were the youngsters of the 1990s, most prominently as the harbingers of change in Bulgaria, and indeed a change which is understood as a right-wing change. But are there no deeper attitudes to be encountered this view of the world?

In youth research for 20 years now, we have been using an indicator of attitudes towards European values offered to us by colleagues from France, and more specifically, Professor Claude Tapia. Even at the beginning of the 1990s a striking difference could be seen: young Frenchmen appreciated *solidarity*, but this was last on the list of young Bulgarians; for them, the *market economy* was at the top of the list, followed by *democracy*. In 2014, for the first time in the world, the most important European value was *freedom*. The market economy was third. This was a major change. The change this time is even more profound. For young Bulgarians in 2018, *solidarity* (65 per cent) is a more significant value than *market economy* (53 per cent). *Freedom* (84 per cent) stands out even more clearly. Perhaps this is the most positive result produced by the study. Obviously, it is about greater socialism not only in the domestic sense but also in the sense of a wider opening up to society.

Attitudes towards solidarity as a value in present-day Bulgarian society have not been inherited from the socialist system. This is something that has been revived; it can be said to be due to suffering in the face of the new realities of life. To recall the widely

shared principle that held sway in the 1990s – “Every man for himself”. Now we are digesting the impact produced not only by the activities of mafia structure, criminal groups and short-sighted rulers, but also from these mass illusions.

The sharing of social and progressive political values is at a high level, without this having any link to individual political identification.

We are faced with a very interesting paradox. The survey asked respondents to respond to specific political issues that also have more global implications. One such question concerns social inequality: whether the gap between the income of the poor and the rich should be reduced. As one might suppose, the majority of young people with left-wing convictions responded positively. It is very interesting that the majority of those who were unable to specify their views as being on the left or right of the political spectrum were even more positive. Now for the paradox: only 17 per cent of right-wing youth disagreed with the fact that social inequality must be reduced; 42 per cent supported this leftist argument.

We find similar answers to another question: whether state ownership of business and industry needs to be increased. The majority of young people with left-wing beliefs (62 per cent) logically enough responded in the affirmative. The majority of those who did not identify themselves as being on the left or right of the political spectrum displayed exactly the same attitude (62 per cent). One again, we are faced with a paradox: a relatively predominantly positive response (44 per cent) was voiced by right-wing youth.

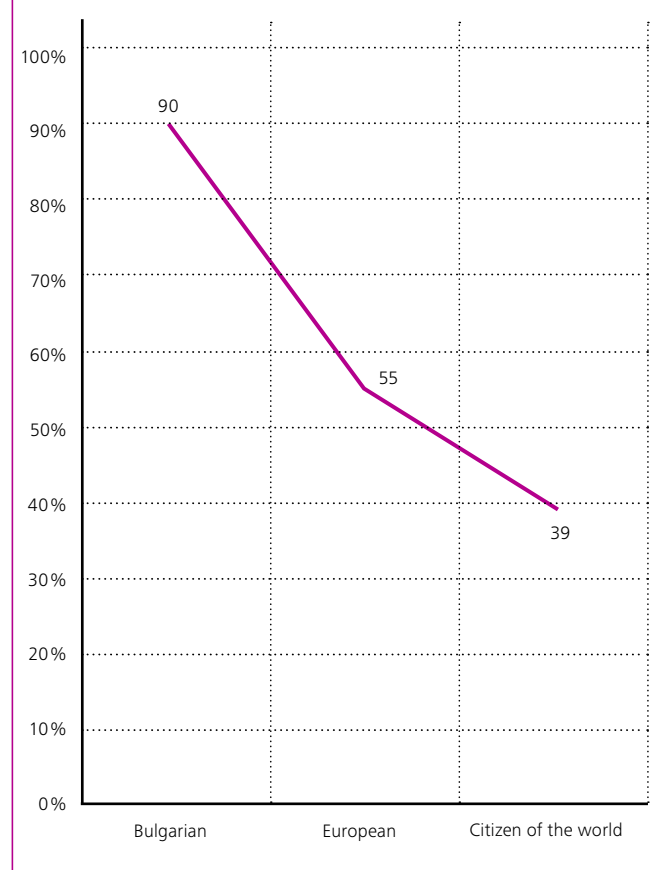
The two indicators are extremely significant in ideological terms. One relates to so-called *egalitarianism*, the other to so-called *statism*. In both cases an intense ideological campaign was conducted in favour of inequality and against state ownership. The results of the study indicate that the effects of these campaigns are beginning to fade. All that remains is an ever fainter ideological echo.

Let’s add the results of another indicator: whether the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is as caring as they should be. This is definitely a social issue. 91 per cent of young people definitely support this proposition. This applies to young people regardless of the region in which they live. Without exception, the situation is similar.

## NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Whilst the political attitudes of young people – due to lack of interest and poor awareness and because of a dearth of political trust – are contradictory and beset with a high degree of uncertainty and are moreover fickle (just as a reminder – 45 per cent do not know how to or cannot place themselves on a left-right scale!), the question of identity produces unexpected results.

FIGURE 10.5: **To what extent do feel you are a Bulgarian, a European, a citizen of the world? (per cent)**  
Answers “Completely” and “To a great extent”



There has been an increase in Bulgarian, European and cosmopolitan identity. The first conclusion one can draw: These identities are not mutually exclusive in the mind of a young person. This shows that, ten years after Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, there has been no clash of identities, and that the integration process, despite the difficulties, problems and curves involved, has not produced psychological collisions when it comes to identification. We also find that greater importance is being attached to identity. This has become more important on a significant scale in contrast to the apathy and scepticism that can be witnessed with respect to the specific political process and its institutional representatives. Age, education, income, and place of residence have almost no effect on national identity – even the richest overwhelmingly define themselves as Bulgarians. This observation applies not only to the dominant ethnic group in the country: 46 per cent of Turks and 38 per cent of the Roma community are the most



decisive in choosing among the five possible answers – they state that they consider themselves completely Bulgarian. 54 per cent of Turks and 28 per cent of Roma people are proud *without reservation* of being citizens of Bulgaria. People of Turkish ethnicity have traditionally shown greater affiliation and loyalty to the state than to the nation, unlike those of the Roma ethnic group. The levels are nevertheless quite high.

European identity introduces a different nuance, probably linked directly to the image of Europe as a political and economic model. Vulnerable and less-privileged groups also register greater fluctuations in their European allegiance – affirmed by 50 per cent of those living in villages, 45 per cent of unemployed people, 43 per cent of the poor and 29 per cent of the Roma community. Europe is, in many ways, synonymous with a high and prestigious social status. Lack of such a status causes respondents to distance themselves from Europe.

Euro-scepticism is weak, but it also goes hand in hand with a nationalist potential that should not be overlooked if we do not want conclusions to “become mired” at a very optimistic level.

### Nationalism is on the increase in tandem with pro-Europeanism.

A topical issue such as flows of refugees and migrants to Europe galvanises attitudes towards national defence against the supposed dangers that they harbour (Figure 10.6).

Hardly any positive answers are to be found here. Analysis of the different social segments shows that respondents do not distinguish between refugees and migrants virtually at all. Slightly fewer negative responses are registered among minorities, but this is not so much at the expense of positive answers as it is due to lack of opinion.

Qualitative data also underscore linkage of the refugee problem to terrorist threats. As one 26-year-old programmer stated:

“If refugees are trying to escape a war in Syria, they and their families will do anything to save themselves. Refugees are part and parcel of tensions in society that are associated with terrorist attacks. And no distinction can be made because terrorists are already in Europe.”

There is a classic nationalist question about accepting or rejecting “others”: “To what extent do you agree with the statement that it would be best if Bulgaria was inhabited only by real Bulgarian

ians?” was how this question was posed. 59 per cent are completely or to some extent in agreement with this statement! Looking at this entire European region, this figure is highest in Bulgaria of all places. By comparison, only 20 per cent of young people in Serbia, traditionally considered to be a nation with powerful nationalist sentiments, completely or to some extent agree that only real Serbs should live in their territory. These figures in Bulgaria decrease with the level of education, suggesting that the educational system encourages more complex thinking, acceptance of other points of view and more tolerance. There is practically no correlation of the results with the age of young people. However, they do increase with material status (72 per cent of the richest) and the size of the populated area (66 per cent in Sofia). “Elite racism”, which regards minorities and foreigners as a social nuisance, is not a strictly Bulgarian phenomenon, but definitely has a Bulgarian version. It is abundantly clear that young members of minorities make a clear distinction between “I feel I am Bulgarian” and “I feel I am a *real* Bulgarian”, seeing a danger of segregation in the latter. Only 11 per cent of ethnic Bulgarians disagreed with the claim, as opposed to 39 per cent of ethnic Turks. The notion of the Bulgarian nation as a nation only for Bulgarian ethnics unfortunately has a certain potential.

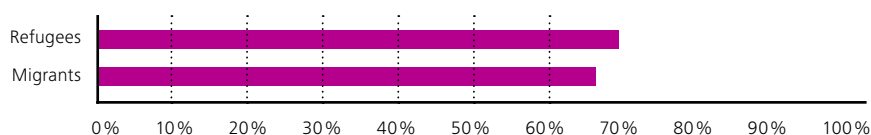
No refugees, only true Bulgarians ... This is a worrisome recipe. We should not overestimate the potential for mobilisation in this respect because even within the survey, enough data from indicators counterbalance the prickly thorns of nationalist perception. But it nevertheless also needs to be kept in mind. This discrepancy between (openly reproducing) Euro-optimism and (a concealed increase in) nationalism is an important factor warranting further research.

## POLITICAL EXPECTATIONS

Disenchantment with the functioning of Bulgarian democracy does not prompt young people to re-evaluate their opinions of democracy itself as a political system. There are very few (5 per cent + 9 per cent) who accept the assertion that “under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy.”

There are, however, those persons (34 per cent + 24 per cent) who believe that “we must have a leader to rule Bulgaria with a strong hand for the good of the public.” Even more importantly, political hopes are not as personal as they are connected to a party. Two-thirds of young people think that “in general, what we

FIGURE 10.6: **Should Bulgaria accept more refugees and migrants? (per cent)**  
Answers “Completely disagree” and “Disagree to some extent”





need in Bulgaria at the moment is a strong party representing ordinary people.” This response is particularly noteworthy because of the bias against political parties in recent years, a sort of allergy to political parties that was also commented on in the last study in 2014. At the same time, this party, in which hopes are concentrated, is an element of the future; it is not visible in today’s party system.

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There is a decreasing aversion to political parties in general, but dissatisfaction with specific parties is on the increase.

What issues do young people consider to be a priority for the Bulgarian government?

Four related issues are: *economic growth and development* (84 per cent), *reduction of unemployment* (81 per cent), *the fight against crime and corruption* (82 per cent) and *protection of human rights and freedoms* (79 per cent).

Immediately following these (the difference is not large), some other priorities are mentioned: *promoting growth of the population* (77 per cent), *social justice and social security* (77 per cent) and *improving the situation of young people* (77 per cent).

The economy and rule of law are viewed in their entirety as conditions key to prosperity. Thereafter, the social dimension of political expectations stands out. All development must ultimately be to the benefit of the people. It is clear from the qualitative techniques applied that youthful optimism, despite all conventions, reaches the political sphere – along with hopes for a better future for the country. A positive attitude is more typical of the youngest cohort as well as those who are furthest away from politics. One 21-year-old law student asserts:

“I think Bulgaria has the potential for development, but the time has not yet come ... As happens in historical processes, there is a decline and then – a rise, so I think Bulgaria will rise again ... A thousand, or two thousand years of history cannot be wiped out in fifty years.”

A political science student of the same age, however, sums things up like this:

“If we keep going the same way, in 30 years Bulgaria won’t exist.”

In short, according to young people, there are many preconditions to be met for Bulgaria to thrive, but as a people and a political elite we have the capacity to squander it.

## CONCLUSION

- There is a three-part conclusion drawn by young people today: a limited interest in politics, limited political participation, scant motivation for a political career. All in all, these three dimensions pose risks to the complete reproduction of the political elite. There are opportunities for random people to pursue a political career and make decisions on issues that affect both society as a whole and young people as well without having to have an informed and active political stance.
- The political alienation of young people is expressed as a feeling that there is a lack of representation and age discrimination. This discredits and renders fruitless conventional political participation.
- There is an increase in young people’s dependence on parental views for political orientation.
- National and European identities are more important than those of party and ideology across all groups. This has paved the way for the Bulgarian political process to become more and more modelled by perceptions of what is national and European in the future.
- Eurooptimism is a mass reality in youth (geo-) political consciousness. Nationalism is evolving hand in hand with it, and without opposing it at present.
- Europe serves as a political and economic model, onto which the purported shortcomings of the Bulgarian political and economic situation are projected.
- The democratic perceptions of young Bulgarians are a fact. Undemocratic tendencies along with this draw strength from a massive sense of democratic deficits and lack of order and rights.
- Young people paradoxically enough are accentuating both right-wing (and more market-oriented) self-determination and left-wing (and more social) priorities. We can talk about the stigmatisation of the leftist label in youth attitudes, but also about growing social and collective self-awareness.



## 11

# CONCLUSION

The study makes it possible to construct a sociological portrait of modern Bulgarian youth. In its entirety, the data paints a rich and multifaceted, three-dimensional and somewhat contradictory picture of a new generation.

The youngest members were born in 2004, i.e., they were only three years old when our country became a member of the European Union. All their conscious life has been in European Bulgaria. The oldest were born in the year when the Berlin Wall fell. They were still going to school when European integration began. Their higher education and their start in their socio-occupational careers make up what European Bulgaria is all about.

Perhaps this historical framework is crucial in explaining the underlying outcome of the change. In front of us we have a quieter generation. More open to the world – European and cosmopolitan identification are almost twice as pronounced, but not at the expense of national self-esteem, which is even more clearly evident. Fear of unemployment as well as unemployment itself in the country have steadily declined. The general tendency is towards normalisation, and not towards affirmation of any extremes. Nevertheless, the inner dynamics of youth as a socio-biological grouping are extremely important. We can observe homogenisation, but also make out an important stage in the reproduction of social inequality. There are aspects that do not make for easy summaries of traditional socio-demographic criteria.

The question of the new historical access posits a new angle. Through new technologies, young people are intensively caught up in the processes of globalisation. Consumer culture has developed to a new level. Trust in social networks is high. “Connectivity” is available. At the same time, physical communication with family and friends is growing in importance. The informal environment is of increasing importance to the socialisation, thinking and behaviour of a young person. Inter-generational cohesion has greatly alleviated differences between the parents’ and their children’s generation. Parental influence is key in a very wide variety of ways, from reading books to forming political convictions. Upbringing in the family is highly valued. There is no lack of

pedagogical practices in the parent family that youngsters would like to pass on to their children.

The study does not suggest any alarming precursors of social conflicts – generative, ethnic, or ideological. There are no particularly intense, acute or overwhelming anxieties revolving around a single specific problem. At the same time, sensitivities regarding social injustice and corruption should not be underestimated. Optimism about the future has grown, without having reached the point of seeing things in overly rosy terms, nor is this optimism evenly distributed.

The data indicates that conservative attitudes are on the rise. Conservative values do not manifest themselves in more retro-urban and closed groups, but rather in those groups that are more modern and more open to the world. It is not a matter of bringing the past to the present day, but about an orientation towards the world that is fuelled by the aspirations of security and stability in one’s own life. Life transitions that young people undergo, from education to employment and from parenting to family, are not seamless, but they appear to be free from severe shocks, and relatively smooth and normal. It is not even so much the results as it is the intentions that display a proximity to tradition – one’s own home, marriage (typically: the inclination towards a legally married, rather than a free partnership) has increased: two children, guaranteed work. Of course, sometimes realities do not quite align with plans.

Societal issues of importance to young people that were perceived in the past are being reproduced now. They are deepening, not because they are becoming more widespread – in some cases, they are more limited – but because they are not being resolved, and are becoming chronic. Certain vulnerable groups remain at the “bottom” socially speaking, without any clear prospects of their “pushing” their way out of it. Young people who do not study or do not work, the inhabitants of economically backwards regions, the most striking case (for many years!) being the Roma minority, segregated, removed from most social, educational and professional opportunities – these are examples associated with obvious

hopes for a short-term positive change. The classic “capital-provincial” divide, which has become a cliché in the media and among experts, rarely offers an explanation for processes characterising Bulgarian youth. Sofia is also a place where there are poor and rich, privileged and frustrated people, a socially stratified city – hardly an accurate measure of the “best” young people in the country.

The amount of serious criticism levied at education most often relates to the lack of practical preparation for future occupations. However, education is the most consensual path to success in life, and this is good news from the study. Higher education leads to be associated with more prestigious and better-paid work, higher material standards, and greater wealth.

Bulgarian youth is moving away from the extreme individualism typical of the post-communist transition. In the 90s, the saying used to be “Everyone man for himself”. As early as the end of the decade, the result was mass collapse, de-industrialisation and impoverishment of a large section of the populace. The lesson has not failed to reach the notice of younger generations. The survey indicates sentiment in favour of more sociality. Solidarity is more highly valued. Sensitivity to social injustice is more salient. The need to care for all members of society is acknowledged. At the same time, for young people, the search for a social solution remains in the realm of the informal environment, in the dialogue with relatives and friends, and not in political institutions. Political leaders and parties do not possess the necessary authority. Young

people have distanced themselves further from politics. Deinstitutionalisation is a fact of life. Motivation to participate is low. The mechanisms of the political system in Bulgaria are not recognised by young Bulgarians as a way of presenting and defending their interests. A large number of Bulgarian young people, in their values, attitudes and behaviour, are on the left of the political spectrum without suspecting it, and probably would not accept such an assessment. The troubled situation in Bulgaria has triggered a reaction to sociality, but not political self-reflection.

Europe is a reference point for the vast majority of young people. In many ways, from community principles to actual realisation, from material to personal perspectives, Europe expresses what young people do not see in Bulgaria. Europe in their eyes is doing what they would like to do in their country. Unlike at the end of the last century, even emigration is usually associated with Europe. National and European are the main categories that are employed to refer to the surrounding world.

The socialisation of young people is effective, if we measure it in terms of integration with public values and traditions, and deficient if we look at it through the prism of their participation in social processes and practices.

The rejuvenating potential of the new generation remains largely limited to the aggregate effect of individual life trajectories. Society needs institutional mechanisms that encourage and make possible the accomplishment of social aims and initiatives spearheaded by young people.





# 12

## RECOMMEN- DATIONS FOR YOUTH POLICIES

- Increased engagement of schools with extra-curricular activities, sport, creativity and voluntary work to compensate for constraints on families' financial and cultural capital and to foster interests that resist the pressure of family and professional obligations in the adult stage of life.
- Priority development of foreign language training in smaller communities and economically backward areas. Current conditions are proving to be inadequate to meet the needs of integration in an increasingly globalised world.
- The implementation of practical positions and internships in the course of educational training should be greatly encouraged through cooperation between state and municipal institutions on one hand, and the non-governmental sector and business on the other. It is apparent that the existing educational infrastructure is often unable to live up to basic standards in practical training.
- A focus of efforts to enhance motivation to undergo education among those young people whose own parents are uneducated or undereducated.
- Organisation of discussions on corruption in the educational system.
- There is an evident need for a strategy of labour integration for young people aimed at overcoming chronic problems: inconsistency between education and occupational objectives; job insecurity; and the fact that there are young people who do not study or do not work.
- More comprehensive, in-depth and centralised information on the state of the labour market in Bulgaria and other EU countries as a whole, initiating and promoting appropriate channels for its dissemination. This can avoid or at least minimise the illusions and misconceptions that informal contacts sometimes create in those who plan to emigrate.
- Measures to stimulate larger families – a second and third child in young families. Focused efforts to curb childbirth among “children” through more intense sex and civic education.
- Reform of the Civic Education System at secondary level so as to provide more adequate and attractive information on public and political issues. Establishment of appropriate formats (training seminars, summer schools, etc.) to increase political awareness among outstanding students apart from those that are oriented in the social sciences. Overcoming “functional political illiteracy” has become an important public task given the serious problems that its reproduction may present to political leadership in the medium and long term.
- Creation of opportunities for more systematic involvement of young people in the process of formulating, discussing and evaluating policy decisions in institutions. This is dictated by a growing distrust and distancing of young people from the political system in general.
- There is an increasing need for a comprehensive new policy for the Roma minority focusing on Roma children, young men and women. Based on data from almost all indicators of social, economic and political development, we can conclude that the actions taken over almost three decades have yet to achieve lasting and convincing success.

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