



2021

YOUTH STUDY SLOVAKIA DISSATISFIED BUT NOT LEAVING

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1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study focuses on young people in Slovakia aged 15–29. It makes use of quantitative as well as qualitative data collected in 2021 and it is based on a representative on-line survey in this age group (a sample of 1,500 respondents) and qualitative in-depth interviews (10) and focus groups (3).

- The 10 most important survey findings were that the proportion of young people in the Slovak society has continuously been declining and Slovakia has, compared to other V4 countries and Baltic states, the highest number of young people living in rural areas, which is partially reflected in their attitudes, in particular, an inclination towards conservatism and nationalism.
- Slovakia is one of the countries within the EU with a high percentage of young people who start living on their own at a later date (the »hotel mummy« effect) and, simultaneously, who delay starting a family. These trends are connected to low economic independence and the low availability of housing for young people. Moreover, delaying starting a family is also caused by the shift in values towards individualism, secularism and post-material values.
- Young people in Slovakia are inclined more towards individualistic than sociotropic attitudes and values. Activism aimed at the society is one of least interesting activities for young people.
- The Slovak education system has reached the worst results in the region of Central and Eastern Europe in many soft (survey-related) as well as hard (administrative) indicators, and the perception of the quality of teaching by students and their parents during the pandemic period even worsened (due to on-line instruction).
- Until 2019, the unemployment of young people in Slovakia was the highest among the countries monitored. Compared to the V4 and Baltic states, Slovakia has the highest proportion of young people employed in the public sector (by a factor of 50 per cent more than who wished to be). Most people work outside of the major area of study they completed are also overqualified for their position. It indicates a strong disharmony between the education system and the opportunities on the labour market, which is unable to offer adequate job opportunities to young people leaving the school system.
- The desire to live abroad/elsewhere in the EU in Slovakia does not significantly differ from the rest of the region, which is slightly surprising, considering the number of young people who left Slovakia in the past. Naturally, the most preferred destination for the highest share of young people is the Czech Republic, with minimum barriers in terms of language, culture and geography. Overall, the biggest motivators for emigration are economic factors; primarily, as it is generally perceived to offer a better economic environment, better pay, better job prospects and a higher standard of living. The desire to leave the country is also strongly influenced by the negative perception of corruption and the political climate.
- Recently, young people have become increasingly interested in issues such as climate change and social injustice, which has the potential to attract more and more young people. Since they care more about these issues and want to actively contribute towards solving social problems (their attention is drawn to sociotropic objectives).

- After elections in 2016, concerns were raised regarding the radicalisation of young people as an extreme right-wing party made it into parliament, due in no small part to their support, for the first time in the history of independent Slovakia. However, five years later, we are seeing a reverse in political preferences of young people who are rather more inclined towards liberal-progressive political forces. The proportion of young people who indicated they would vote for a right-wing extreme in the summer of 2021 is even lower than the figure for the adult population in public opinion surveys.
- Despite a decline in support for representatives of the extreme right, it is still noticeable, that attitudes among a sizable proportion of young people in Slovakia are still inclined towards nationalistic and xenophobic ideology. Even though young people see themselves as more tolerant than past generations, our findings suggest they are only slightly more tolerant in their attitudes compared to the entire population (towards ethnic and sexual minorities). However, there is an overall positive trend as the rate of tolerance shows a continual rising tendency among the population overall.
- Young people in the region surveyed clearly have the most negative attitudes towards the European Union. In Slovakia, the proportion of young people who would vote for leaving the EU is at its highest. The levels of mistrust towards the EU among young people in Slovakia are highest. Slovakia was the only country in the survey with predominantly negative assessment of the impact of the membership of the EU on the domestic political system.

TOP 5 POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- In a country such as Slovakia, where an ageing population is an actual issue, it is necessary to build conditions that will make it easier for the young members of society to start a family at an earlier age. Young people hold a deep respect for matrimony and value the family. Thus, the Slovak government should focus on policies that will materially improve the welfare of those who wish to start a family. Therefore, it should support, above all, the availability of affordable housing and an active employment policy for young people.
- In line with the findings of international organisations, we recommend strengthening the social position of teachers, which is one of the demotivating factors in Slovakia when considering a job in the school system. Demotivated teaching staff has a negative impact on the quality of the education system, which is currently assessed as one of the lowest values among the countries surveyed.
- In an effort to integrate young people into the labour market effectively and provide them with both, the appropriate professional occupation as well as high levels of job satisfaction, it is necessary to implement changes in the education system and the labour market. A particular focus should be on more flexibility in their major study areas, in terms of compatibility with current job opportunities. This will offer both job satisfaction and fulfilment through employment in the private sector. Therefore, the Slovak school system requires higher flexibility and more innovation in introducing new areas of concentration.

- In the social and political debate, it is necessary to pay enough attention to issues that are considered by young people as problematic and have an impact on the greater society (e.g., the climate crisis) and, by means of such issues, build bridges with young people that will provide them with more room to get involved in the political activities of the country and thus strengthen their civic competences.
- A low level of sociotropic orientation in young people can have a negative impact on their democratic development in future. Therefore, we recommend cultivating a perception among young people to not only focus on themselves and their individual success or satisfaction. Civic education, orientation, and a strengthening of mutual interactions between members of society are necessary for young people in Slovakia. This coupled with an heightened attention should be paid to the activities which get young people more involved in daily life in society.

2

INTRODUCTION

This study is focused on young people in Slovakia and it maps their attitudes, values and opinions in 2021. It is part of a broader international survey that was held in the V4 region (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) and Baltic states (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia). The main purpose of the survey project was to identify, describe and analyse attitudes and behavioural patterns of young people at present. The project was implemented by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and it is a follow-up of preceding surveys (2018–19; 2016; 2014–15) focused on young people in regions of South-Eastern Europe and countries of Central and Western Asia.

In the past decade, the attention of the European Union as well as its member states focused on young people, especially in connection to specific problems the generation is facing: lack of jobs, increasing extremism and, currently, also impacts of the pandemic. Thanks to interventions by the European Union and specific mechanisms of support to jobs for young people, unemployment among young people in the EU was reduced from a record high 24.4 per cent in 2013 to 14.9 per cent in 2019. The EU continues to support employment of young people, something which has also become part of the Recovery Plan for Europe. Moreover, the EU declared 2022 to be the “Year of Youth” in an effort to “strengthen the voice of the young” and focus attention on an important role of young people in “building a better future that is greener, more inclusive and more digital” (#EuropeanYearOfYouth).

This study also focuses on young people and, by means of empirical survey, tries to better understand and present to the public, attitudes of young people and their subjective perception of present day issues. For the purposes of empirical data collection in each of the seven countries that participated in the survey in 2021, we used the same, standardised questionnaire completed with questions specific for each country. Such a procedure made it possible to compare findings across the region. Along with the analysis of empirical data from Slovakia, the study thus also makes use of comparisons to neighbouring countries and the Baltic states, wherever survey findings are interesting from the comparative perspective. The document is also completed with data from other surveys or official sources, e.g. Eurostat, Eurobarometer, findings of the Slovak Statistical Office, OECD, etc.

The study focuses on various aspects of life of young people, including their value orientation, attitudes and experience of young people in Slovakia in areas of education, employment, political participation, relations in the family or expectations as concerns the future.

3

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION

Field data from Slovakia was collected in both stages of the survey – qualitative and quantitative – by the agency Ipsos.

QUALITATIVE SURVEY

The qualitative fieldwork consisted of n=10 in-depth interviews and n=3 focus groups. We broke down the target groups by age to reflect relevant life situations in as much as was possible:

- 14–18 years of age: secondary school education, school leaving examination and first decision making processes concerning the choice of future education and job
- 19–24 years of age: voting age, first steps to more independence and moving out from parents' home
- 25–29 years of age: completed university, entry to the labour market and beginning of parenthood planning

In the sample, we chose a combination of gender, life situation and education/position at work. Besides the capital city of Bratislava, the selection also included other towns (Solien, Prievidza and Banská Bystrica) identified to represent various regions of the country as well as poorer districts.

The qualitative data collection in the field was held between 26 and 29 April 2021. All interviews and focus groups were held online using the MS Teams platform. The average duration of interviews was 70 minutes and average duration of focus groups was 120 minutes. All participants signed the consent as regards their participation and data protection policy. Each interview and each target group were recorded in the form of video file and a transcript made of it.

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

The target population for Slovakia were all citizens of Slovakia aged 14 to 29, who have access to the Internet and speak the Slovak language. The sample of 1,500 respondents was selected from Ipsos Online Access Panel. The sample choice was based on quotas broken down according to age, gender and region to build a sample that best reflects the target population based on the above characteristics. The central socio-demographic data were defined in advance so respondents could be directly contacted by email.

Data was collected from 10 June 2021 to 20 June 2021. The questionnaire was provided by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in English, and it was translated to Slovak by Ipsos. The survey had the final medium duration of 19 minutes. Although the sample was carefully compiled to reflect population layers in terms of age, gender and region, a certain smaller deviation from the optimum structure occurred regardless. By setting weights, the structure of unweighted sample was adjusted to official data on age, gender and region.

SEGMENTS OF THE YOUTH

The Ipsos agency prepared, along with the data collection, segmentation of the youth population in countries surveyed. There were six different segments of Slovak youth formed using advanced statistical methods and based on various attitudes and opinions.

NEW LIBERALS

Respondents in this segment have an above standard economic situation, high level of education (and value education very highly) and live in urban areas. They mostly work in the private sector, and, on average, are agnostic. Their view of the situation in the country as well as of their own lives is rather positive and it is rather unlikely that they will consider emigration. What they are most concerned about in the future is the outflow of qualified labour force from the country, low salaries, retirement pensions and climate change.

HOPELESS ARTISANS

People in this segment are mostly men, living rather in rural areas and alone. Their level of education is, compared to other groups, the lowest and, most likely, they are experiencing financial hardship. Their view of life is rather pessimistic; they think that their lives will not improve, on the contrary, they are likely to get worse. They are open to emigration.

THE DISORIENTED

Young people in this segment belong to the lowest age group and live in rural areas. There is an above average share of pupils at secondary schools. They express concerns about topics that are currently discussed in media, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, low salaries and retirement pensions, immigration and terrorist attacks. In general, it seems they are not interested in politics and not well informed about it. For the time being, probably also due to their younger age, they do not have clear ideas and consistent sets of beliefs.

LEFT-WING INTERNATIONALISTS

In this groups, there is above-the-average representation of women, living in towns and studying at the university. Respondents in this groups postpone parenthood most of all. Their view of the future of their country is positive, yet they also express the desire to emigrate. They have above-the-average concerns about general social problems, such as social injustice, corruption, weakening of democracy and, above all, climate change.

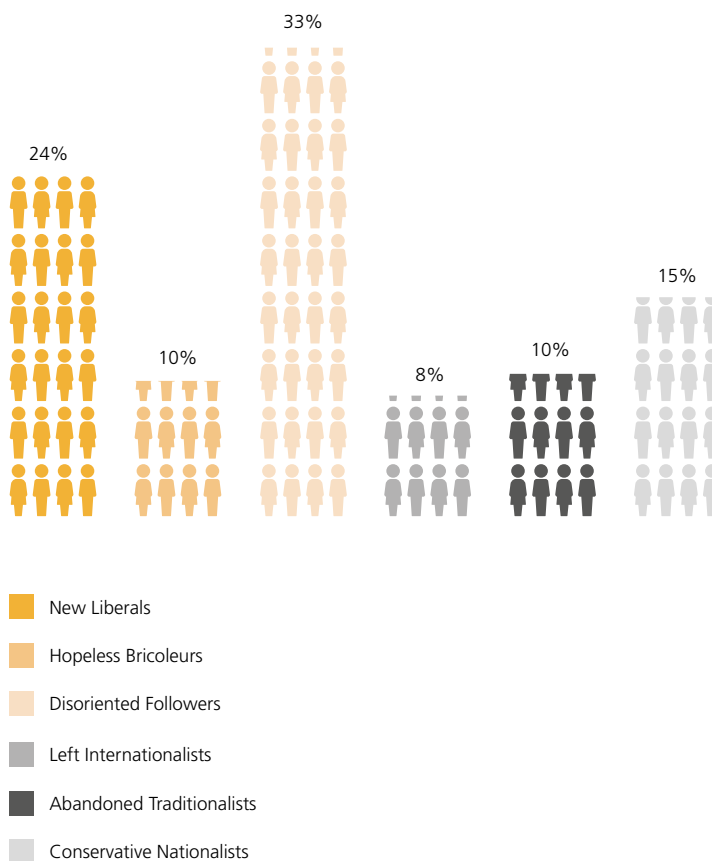
TRADITIONALISTS

Respondents from this segment probably have a low level of education, and they face financial problems. They often live with their partners and/or children. They are likely to not work in the area they studied, and they are not satisfied with their education. Their outlook for the future (both their own as well as the future of their country) is negative.

CONSERVATIVE NATIONALISTS

Participants in this group are mostly men aged 25 and more. Most likely they are married with children, consider marriage and family life as one of their top values. From the viewpoint of financial standing, they are around the average of the society, their view of life is rather positive, and they do not intend to emigrate. From the viewpoint of religious affiliation, this group is dominated by Catholics.

DIAGRAM 3.1: PERCENTAGES OF DIFFERENT SEGMENTS IN SLOVAKIA



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

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4

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTER- ISTICS AND TRENDS

POPULATION TRENDS IN THE SLOVAK SOCIETY

In the past few decades, the **aging population has become an important demographic trend in Slovakia**. It also brings several challenges to the field of public policies (in particular, pressure on the retirement pension system, health care and the social security system).

Based on several forecasts, the number of senior citizens in the Slovak population will almost double by 2060 with an overall drop of the number of people in the productive age (20–64 years) of around 28 per cent (Vaňo 2019). This trend is accompanied by a **stable decline in the number young people represent in society** (see Table 4.4). For example, in 2020, the percentage of people aged 0–29 had decreased by more than 11 per cent compared to the situation at the beginning of the millennium. From the viewpoint of long-term trends, the gradual decline is continuously present. Certain projections expect that, by 2050, the number of people aged under 30 in the Slovak society will go down to 27 per cent (Vaňo, Jurčová, Mészáros 2002).

TABLE 4.1: POPULATION UNDER 30 YEARS OF AGE IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Year	Total population of the Slovak Republic	Number of people under 30 years of age (%)
1996	5,373,793	45.92
2000	5,402,547	44.23
2004	5,382,574	42.33
2018	5,450,421	33.12
2020	5,458,827	32.55

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2021a.

As indicated by the Statistical Office of Slovakia, the long-term birth rate decline and increased mortality related to an ageing population has also resulted in decreasing natural population growth to such extent that, in years 2001–2003, there was natural population decrease, i.e. fewer people were born than deceased. After seventeen

years, this phenomenon reoccurred in Slovakia in 2020, when the number of the deceased exceeded the number of births by 2,439. Even though the negative balance was caused by a higher death rate due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reproduction trends are also not positive. Recently, Slovakia has experienced a decline in the number of live births for the third year in a row.

The total population growth in Slovakia is not caused by an increased number of children but by migration, as the number of people who have moved into the Slovak Republic in the past few years has been higher than the number of people who permanently emigrated from the country. (Statistical Office 2021b)

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUNG GENERATION

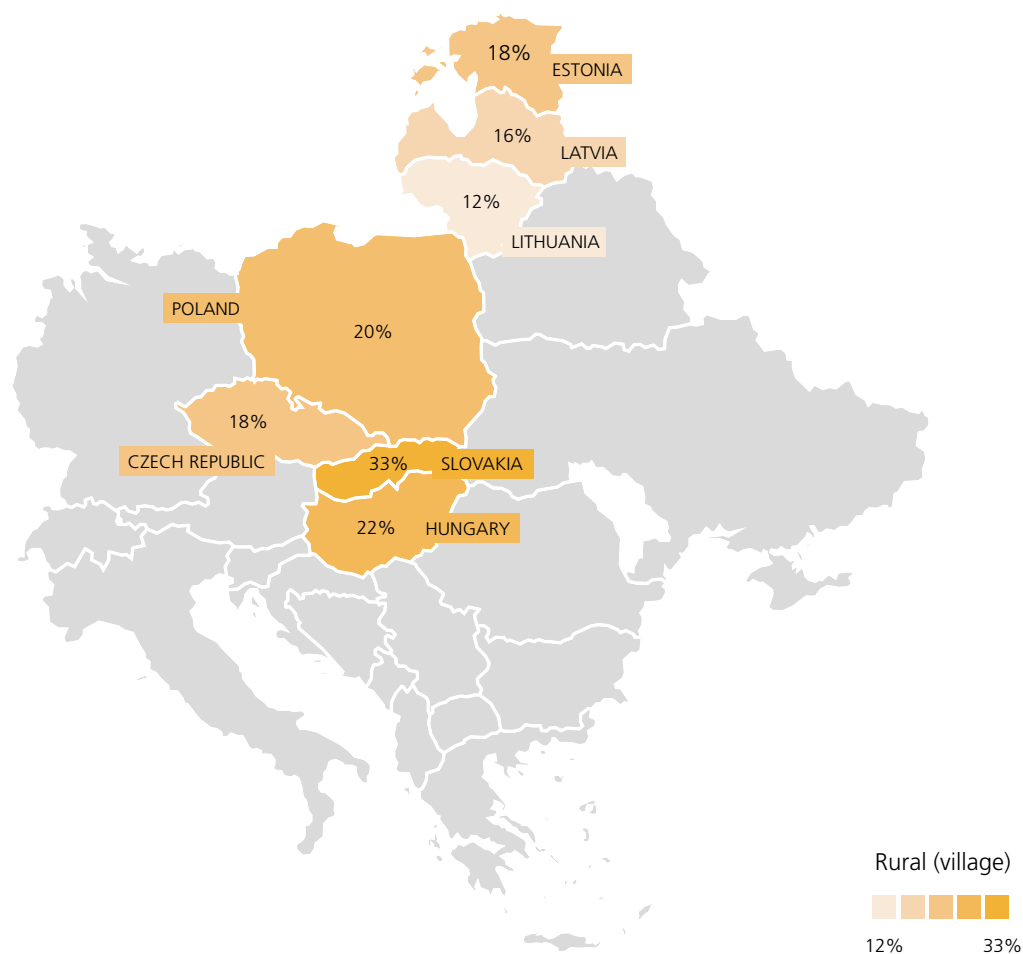
Young people in Slovakia who are the target group of this study (i.e. aged 15–29) represent, based on latest available data, a bit less than 17 per cent of the population (Statistical Office 2021a). **Most of them live in shared households with parents or a single parent**. This situation is different only in the category of 25–29 year olds, where 11 per cent live on their own and 54 per cent in households with a partner/spouse (FES Youth Study 2021). We will analyse this topic in more detail in Chapter 7.

Another interesting piece of data about lives of young people in Slovakia is the highest level of education completed by their parents, as it can influence not only the overall income of the household but also the support young people receive from their parents on socioeconomic mobility (Zwysen 2016). Based on the findings of our survey, the most commonly achieved level of education among mothers in Slovakia is secondary school with a school leaving examination, which constitutes preparation of university studies (46 per cent). In this indicator, Slovakia ranked first among V4 countries, whereby, in the remaining countries, the most frequent education level is vocational school or secondary vocational school. A similar type of the highest completed level of education also dominates for fathers, whereby, out of Visegrad countries, Slovakia has the lowest share of those who completed undergraduate or graduate university education (cumulatively only 19 per cent, while the V4 average is 22 per cent).

The perception of the social standing of one's own household in Slovakia is comparable to other countries in the V4 region. **Most young people in Slovakia consider the financial standing of their families to be good.** The income of a household is used to buy things they need for daily consumption (27 per cent) or possibly also more expensive products such as electronics (44 per cent). However, for most of them, it is also difficult to buy expensive goods, such as motor vehicles or flats. (FES Youth Study 2021)

What differs in Slovakia from other V4 countries, as well as the Baltic states, is the type of settlement where the majority of young people live. **In Slovakia, the highest percentage (as many as 43 per cent) of young people declared they live in a rural rather than urban environment** (compare Diagram 4.1). It has an impact on the everyday lives, attitudes and opportunities young people have.

DIAGRAM 4.1: PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS



Source: FES Youth Studies 2021.

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Based on multiple analyses, there are **strong regional differences** in Slovakia that are reflected in the general socioeconomic development of regions. While the surrounding region of Bratislava, the biggest and capital city of the country, is one of the most prosperous regions in the EU (162 per cent of the EU average) from the viewpoint of GDP per capita, other regions of the Slovak Republic are at 50–65 per cent of the EU average. **The unemployment rate of young people in the Bratislava region is under one per cent, however, in the most rural regions it has amounted to 13.2 (Central Slovakia) or even 24.8 per cent (East Slovakia), which is several times more than the total population unemployment rate in the region** (Eurostat 2019). Moreover, certain representative surveys also point out at differences in values and attitudes of young people depending on where they live. Based on findings of the Youth Council of Slovakia (2020), **young people in rural areas oppose otherness and have more negative attitudes than their peers their age from urban areas, not only toward foreigners and homosexuals but also liberals**. At the same time, they are more tolerant to antidemocratic parties, and they participate less in civic activities (such as marches, protests or demonstrations), which can be related to lower accessibility of such activities in rural areas.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Demographic trends point towards and ageing population, accompanied with a declining birth rate in Slovakia. In the past decades, we have observed an increase in the number of inhabitants in the country also thanks to immigration of EU/foreign nationals to the country.
- Young people in Slovakia are, from the viewpoint of satisfaction levels with the financial and economic standing of their household and education status of parents, comparable to the youth in other V4 countries. The difference rests in the fact that Slovakia has

the highest share of young people living in rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Due to the ageing population, it is necessary to continue developing policies that support young families and mothers with children. However, not solely in the form of a one-off contribution at the child's birth but also by public policies facilitating the balance between childcare and employment (e.g. pre-primary school care).
- Due to population trends, it is necessary to count immigration to Slovakia in the future as a phenomenon that will be a part of everyday life. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the acceptance of other EU/foreign nationals by the native population (especially to work to improve the xenophobic attitudes of many young people), as well as to improve the integration policies of the state.

5

YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION



The Slovak education system is a relatively complex public system with a relatively high number of stakeholders and young people who are part of it. In 2021, the pupil and student population of Slovakia included 856,288 persons, ranging from kindergartens to universities. Of this number, more than one half were primary school pupils (Statistical Office 2021).

Of the thematic fields analysed, education ranked the worst both in terms of the survey data among young people and from the viewpoint of various “hard” data. By many indicators, the Slovak education system reported the worst results out of Central and Eastern European countries.

PISA 2018 testing, the latest document available at the time of issue of this study, clearly puts Slovakia among the lowest ranked countries in regards literacy and scientific knowledge. In mathematical skills, the average for Slovak pupils was above their counterparts from Hungary and Lithuania (table 5.1).

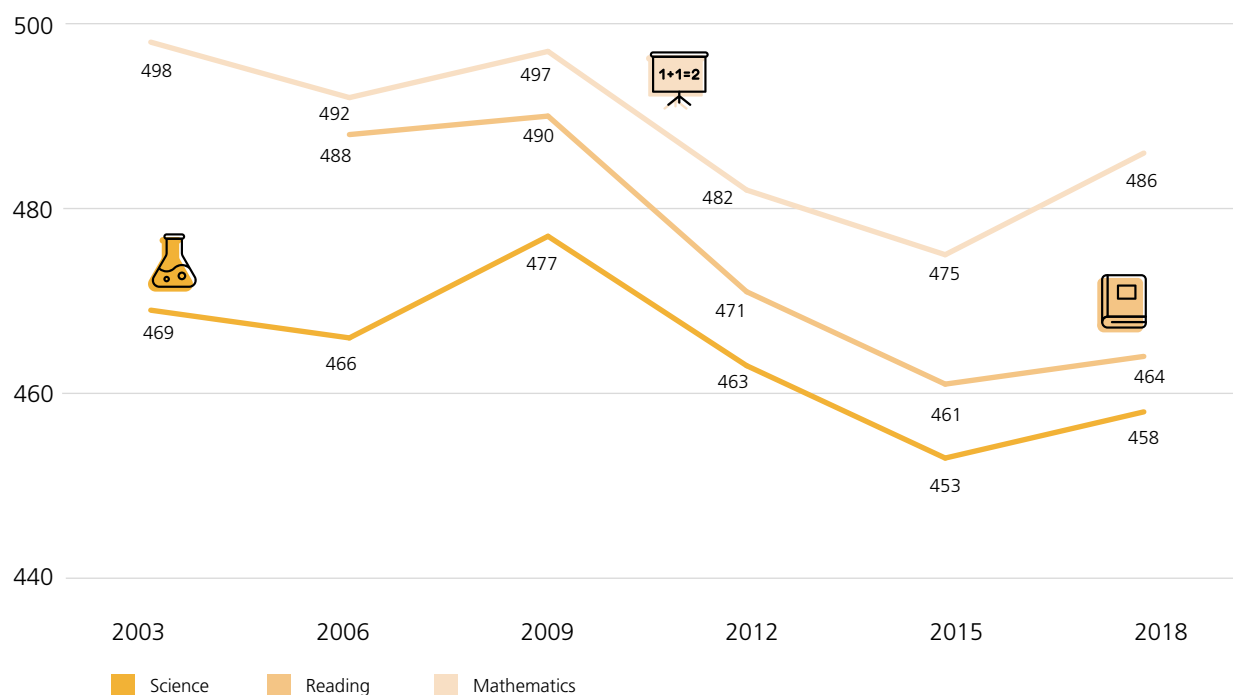
TABLE 5.1: PISA 2018 TESTING RESULTS

Country	Reading	Maths	Science
Estonia	523	523	530
Poland	512	516	511
Czech Republic	490	499	497
Latvia	479	496	487
Hungary	476	481	481
Lithuania	476	481	482
Slovakia	458	486	464

Source: OECD 2019a.

The values of PISA testing results since 2003, when Slovakia was included for the first time, indicates a long-term problem of the education system. From 2003 to 2009, results of pupils in main subjects were relatively stable. However, since 2009, there has been a significant decline observed in all three indicators. Only in 2018, did the average number of points increase again. Regardless, this increase is only moderate, and it does not compare favourably with the values from the 2000–2010 decade at all.

DIAGRAM 5.1: PISA TESTING RESULTS SINCE 2003



Source: OECD 2019a.

Systemic problems also point to other selected indicators that can be compared to the level of the European Union. According to the assessment of education system in the OECD report (2019b), Slovakia reported the lowest number of children engaged in the pre-school education in the entire EU (78.2% of children aged four or more in 2017). It is the pre-school education that is often of key importance to improving education results at later stages of schools (Karoly, Kilburn a Cannon 2006).

The country also obviously has a problem regarding teachers. Only 4.5% of teachers in Slovakia think the job of a teacher is respected in society, which is the least out of entire EU (the Union average is 17.7%).

At the same time, the literature also demonstrates a strong suspicion that teaching majors at universities in Slovakia are, to a large extent, just an easy way how to get access to a university degree, without any ambition to get a job in the field of study (Santiago et al. 2016).

The situation and the perception of the quality of the education system is also reflected in a response of a respondent in the qualitative survey (which is part of FES Youth Study 2021) to the question about what should be improved in Slovakia in the next 10 years:

“Certainly [there should be] better health care, as well as education as it is in rather bad condition. Because also my father, he was teaching for a while, but he says that he will not return there. ... It should also apply to teachers that people do what they like and not what they are forced into.”

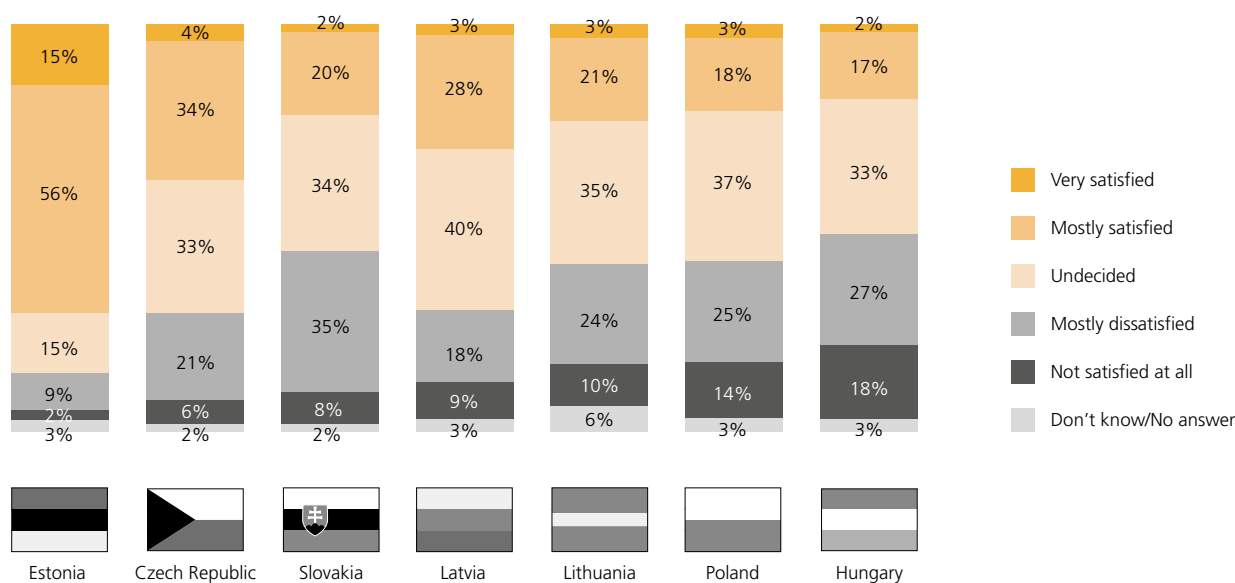
(respondent No. 2, 17 years).

PERCEPTION BY PRESENT-DAY STUDENTS

The level of satisfaction with the quality of education in Slovakia is relatively low. If we took both negative replies into account (rather unsatisfied and very unsatisfied), young Slovaks ranked the second least satisfied from among seven surveyed countries (43% stated they were not satisfied); a higher level of lacking satisfaction of the youth was observed only in Hungary (45%).

Estonia strongly distinguishes from all other countries. It has both, majority of young people satisfied (71%), as well as a significant advance to the second Czech Republic (38%). In Slovakia, the satisfaction with the education system is almost the same among age groups and 15-year-old respondents are as unsatisfied as young people over 25.

DIAGRAM 5.2: SATISFACTION WITH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

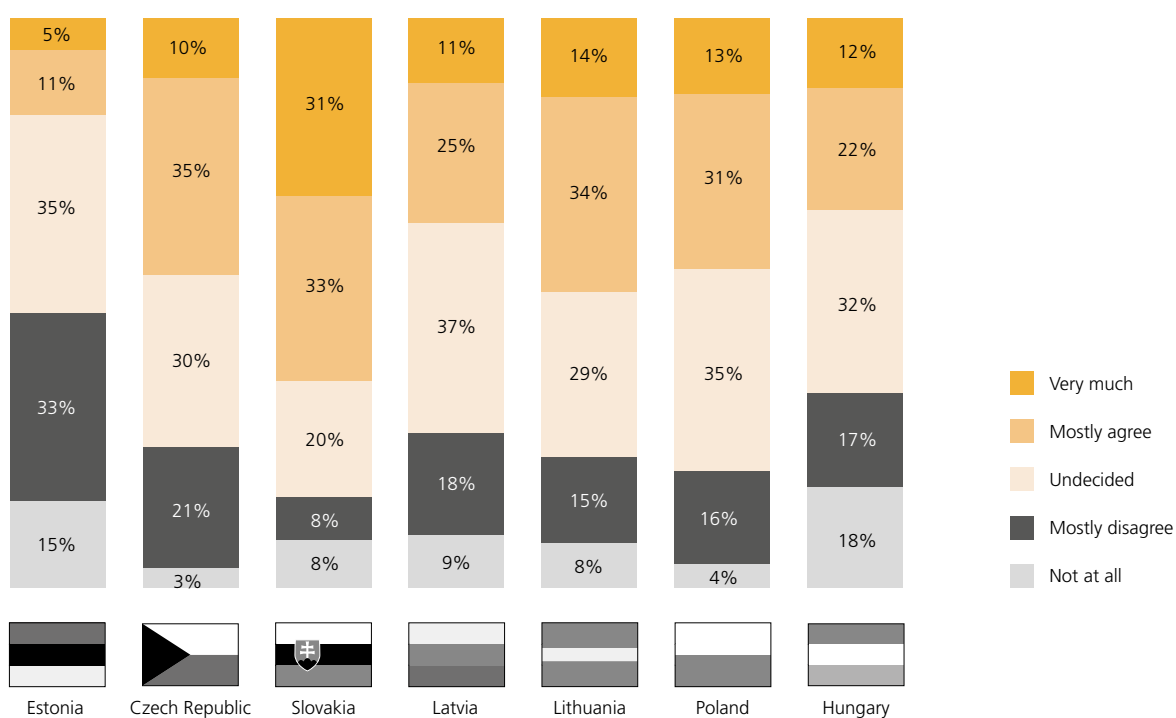


Source: FES Youth Study survey.

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The presence of corruption in the education system is an indicator that is perceived by the Slovak youth as clearly the worst one in its country. The question in the questionnaire concerned buying grades or examinations at school. Almost one-third of young people absolutely agree with the statement that there are cases of buying grades or examinations and another one-third is inclined to this opinion. The most positive view of the education system in this respect is among young people in Estonia (only 5% absolutely agree with the claim that the system is corrupted) and in the Czech Republic (10%).

DIAGRAM 5.3: PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM



Source: FES Youth Study survey.
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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the education system as it caused school closings for many weeks and forced teachers and students to shift to various forms of remote learning, mostly using online tools. Therefore, in the assessment of the education system, we will focus a part of the analysis also on aspects of remote education.

PANDEMIC AND ONLINE TEACHING

For most pupils and students, the pandemic meant teaching over the Internet. Based on data from the United Nations Organisation, schools were closed for 38 weeks between March 2020 and March 2021 (excluding holidays). Before we cast a look at the analysis on the perception of remote learning by students and pupils, it is necessary to mention that, due to various reasons, online remote teaching was not accessible to all children. Based on data from the Ministry of Education, there were around 128,000 children without teaching in an online format and 52,000 out of them did not take part in any form of teaching during the period of closed schools.

Out of the students and pupils who took part in online lessons, only around one-half claimed they had full equipment for that (51% of responses “I have everything I need”). Although another around one-third said they had “quite good” equipment, there are still relatively a lot of young people whose equipment was not sufficient.

It was the Slovak students and pupils who are most inclined to be of the opinion, out of Central and Eastern Europe, that they would rather have lessons in the class in the future. An absolute inclination to contact teaching in classes was stated by 23% of young people, while young people in the Czech Republic ranked second (19%; the average of analysed countries was 16%). However, correlation analysis has shown that there is no correlation between the equipment for online teaching and preferences of the method of teaching in the future (correlation coefficient $r=0.04$).

Another interesting view is how much time young people spend on activities on the Internet. 25% of young people spend more than two hours per day on school activities, whereas this share declines naturally with increasing age. 34% of young people spend more than two hours on work or other paid activities, with the highest proportion in higher age categories. However, young people spend most time on social networks with 36% of the people spending two and more hours per day.

There is a relatively alarming view at the age group 14–18 year olds, which should be predominantly composed of secondary school students. 29% of them spend two and more hours on school activities on the Internet while as many as 47% young people in that age group spend that time on social networks.

The time spent on the Internet, related to education, did not correlate with the time spent on social networks, neither with the perceived quality of teaching. However, we found a moderately strong correlation between the number of hours young people spent online as part of the lessons and the number of hours spend online on other education activities. This indicates that the activity of young people on the Internet can be influenced by the quality of the school and readiness of teachers to manage and engage children in remote teaching. Schools and teachers who managed this task could not just compensate their lessons in full extent but also get children involved in solving tasks that were not part of lessons. On the contrary, schools that managed the basic part of the teaching worse, as indicated by the data, could not motivate young people to other school or education activities either.

REMOTE TEACHING PERCEIVED BY PARENTS

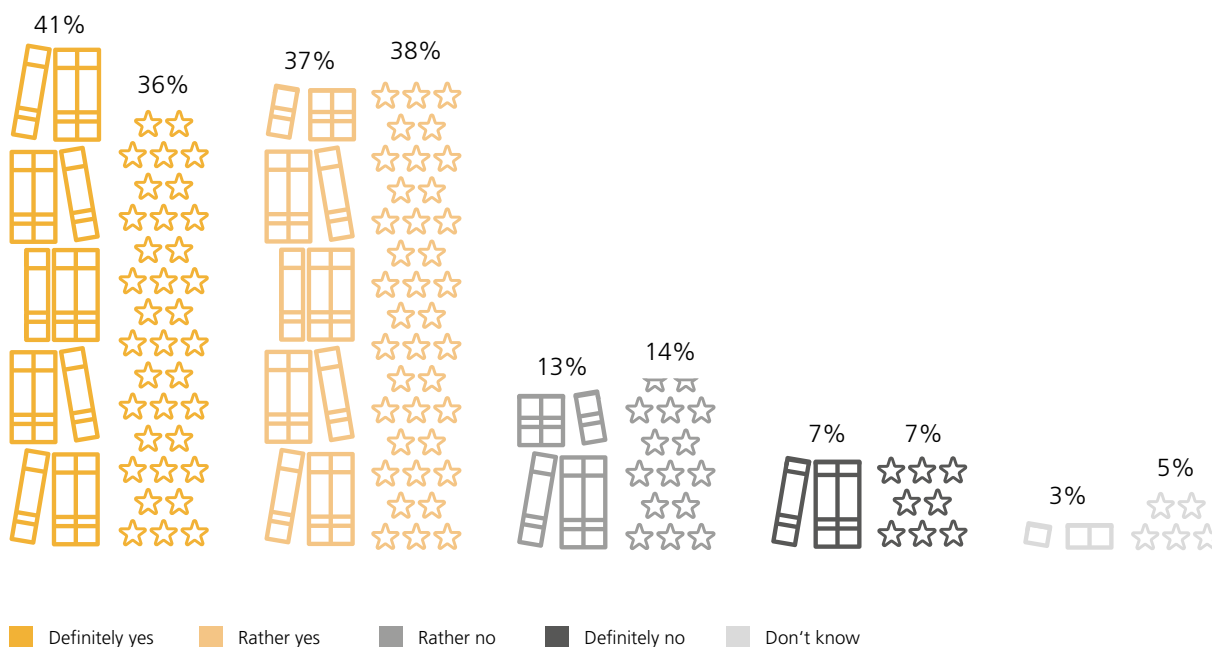
In the analysis of the education system, we will, in line with the survey of young people, also look at the assessment by parents, i.e. adult population. This is important for various reasons, let us emphasise two of them. First, closing schools and transitioning to remote teaching influenced parents who had to synchronise their own daily (mostly work) routine with the fact that children stayed at home too. Secondly, the transition to remote teaching also meant increased pressure on parents to partially take over the role of teachers and help children with the study.


Parents of children who went through online teaching during the pandemic referred to this experience strongly negatively. A general dissatisfaction with online teaching was expressed by exactly one half of parents (27% not adequate and 23% unsatisfied). On the other hand, only 15% were satisfied (2% extraordinarily and 13% strongly) and around one-third had a neutral position.


The reason for the predominantly low satisfaction rate with online teaching is, most probably, the perception of its quality. As shown in Diagram 5.4, almost three-quarters of parents think that their children do not learn the prescribed study content sufficiently at online classes. Even more parents expressed their concerns about the quality of education of their children in the case of repeated closing of schools and transition to online teaching. On the contrary, majority of parents did not have concerns about letting their children back to school regarding the SARS-CoV-2 virus (58%).

In their answers to possible online teaching in the future, after the end of the pandemic, majority of parents stood against this option (43% certainly not, 32% rather not). The rate of refusal declines proportionally with rising age of children and higher level of their education. The online teaching is most acceptable for parents of children studying at universities (although, it is still a minority, 38%).

DIAGRAM 5.4: PERCEPTION OF THE QUALITY OF ONLINE TEACHING



 I am concerned about the quality of my children's education in case they close schools again.

 Due to the school closures in Winter 20/21 children are lagging behind in what they should have learnt.

Source: Omnibus measurement 2muse, October 2021, presented at 2muse Talks on 23. November 2021, available on: <https://www.2musetalks.sk/seminar/39>

MAIN FINDINGS

- In both survey and administrative data, the Slovak education system has reached the worst results in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, including PISA testing of pupils.
- Additionally, corruption in the school system is perceived most intensively in Slovakia.
- During the pandemic, secondary school students spent more time on social networks than performing education related activities.
- Parents themselves assess the online teaching during the pandemic strongly negatively and most of them refuse this model in the future as inferior from the viewpoint of the quality of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A distinctive issue arose when compared with the rest of Central Eastern Europe is the perception that it is possible to buy grades. We recommend considering steps at the practical level to hinder such conduct as well as at the communication level to make it undesired and to motivate students to report it.
- We also recommend increasing the opportunity to engage with young people regarding pre-school education, especially by building available capacities and capabilities. Extending pre-primary education could, based on expert knowledge, could also contribute to better results at the higher education stage over the long term.
- In line with findings of international organisations, we recommend strengthening the social position of teachers that is, in Slovakia, one of demotivating factors when considering a job in the education system. Low-motivated teaching staff have a negative influence on the quality of the education system that is, even now, assessed as one of the lowest out of aforementioned V4 – Baltic region analysed.

MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVAKIA

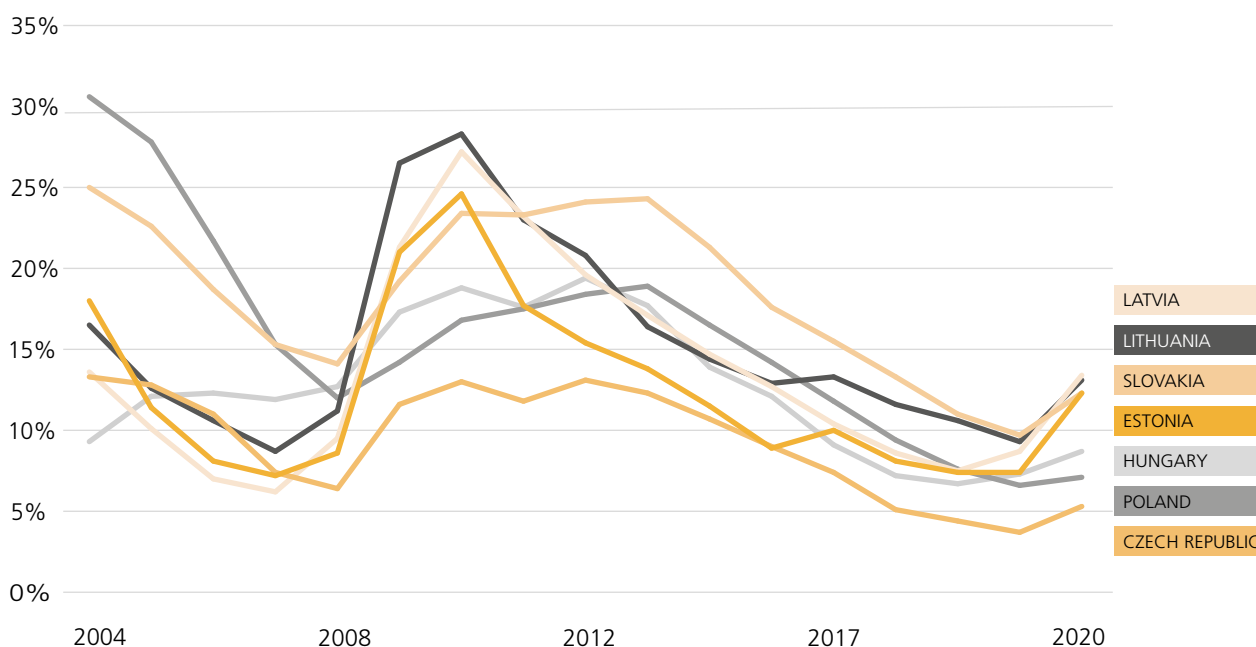
The transition between the school system and the labour market is one of the most important and, practically, necessary changes in the lifecycle of every person. Besides economic effects, there are also demonstrably negative psychological impacts associated with a failure to manage the transition from school to work (Creed, Muller and Patton 2003, Hartnagel and Krahn 1995). Džambazovič (2020) also points out that an unsuccessful transition to the labour market has negative side effects on the overall transition between adolescence and full maturity among young people.

Therefore, supporting employment of young people is a legitimate public policy objective. At the national level, there are several long-term policies for employment of young people. The European Union experienced a rise in unemployment among young people especially after the financial and economic crisis in 2008/2009. It supports employment of young people through various instruments. The 2014–2020 budgetary framework allocated

around EUR 6.4 billion for the Youth Employment Initiative (Council of the EU 2017).

The situation on the labour market in the Visegrad Four region is above the EU average, and it is slightly better than in the Baltic countries. Of the neighbouring states, Slovakia has had the highest unemployment rate among young people in the long-term and, prior to 2019, even higher than the three Baltic states. In the past, youth unemployment was also significantly reduced by migration to countries in Western Europe, whereby Slovakia ranked, along with Poland and Lithuania, to the top three countries young people were leaving. The number of students studying abroad has been increasing since the 1990s (Baláž, Williams a Chrančoková 2018). However, data from the Eurostat indicate a stabilisation of the number of Slovak students in EU countries in the past few years.

DIAGRAM 6.1: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15–29



Source: Eurostat (2021).

EMPLOYMENT AND THE PANDEMIC

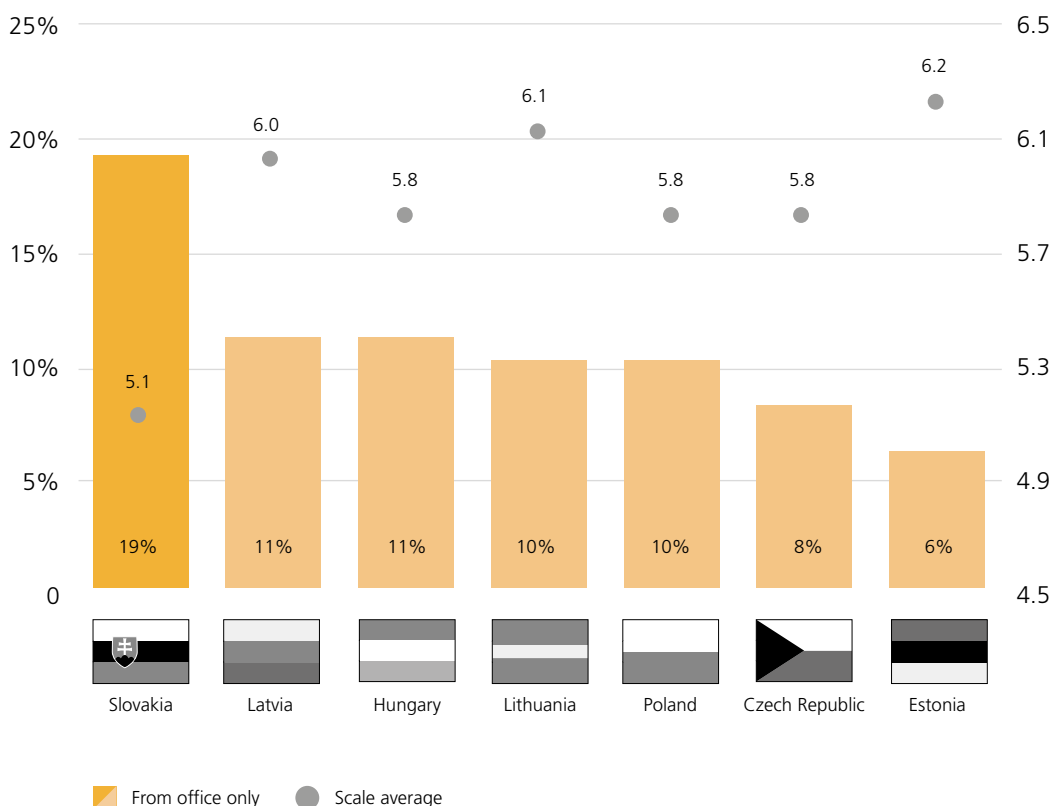
The youth unemployment figures also indicate that economic consequences of the pandemic affected the labour market and people aged 15 to 29. Based on Eurostat data, Slovakia reported 12.3% in 2020, which is an increase by almost three per cent. Naturally, as shown by the survey, the position on the labour market varies strongly across different age groups. In the group under 18, we noticed two dominant groups: young people with casual jobs (28%) and young people who have no jobs and are not even seeking employment. This group is in all likelihood made of secondary school students.

In age group 19–24, more than one-third have casual jobs (35%), and less than one-third (31%) have fully-fledged work regardless of the type of the employ-

ment contract. In the oldest age category, casual jobs are just a marginal issue (4%); it is dominated by permanent employment (50%) or another type of employment (26%, including self-employment).

One of the most discussed changes brought about by the pandemic of the new coronavirus regarding matters of employment was working remotely or what is known as telecommuting. Young people all over Central and Eastern Europe did not differ from each other in how they were prepared for working from home. Literally, Slovaks were found to be in the median range. **One-half of working young people claimed they had all necessary equipment for the home office, 29% declared “quite good” equipment for working from home. However, on the other hand, it means that still more than one-fifth of employed people did not have, to certain extent, sufficient equipment for remote work.**

DIAGRAM 6.2: INCLINATION TO WORK FROM THE OFFICE AFTER END OF THE PANDEMIC



Source: FES Youth Study survey.

Surprisingly, Slovak young workers have shown to be least inclined to work from home after the end of the pandemic. In the survey, respondents could choose (on scale of 1 to 10) if they are inclined to work from the office or from home in the future. Diagram 2 shows the percentage of people who opted for absolute inclination to work from the office as well as the median on the scale. In Slovakia, 19% of people indicated an absolute inclination to work from the office, whereas Lithuania and Hungary reported the second highest number (11%). We also looked at whether the inclination to one or another methods of work can be influenced by the extent of how young people are equipped for working from home. However, we did not find even a moderate correlation (for Slovakia, the correlation coefficient was $r=0.11$).

HOW TO FIND A JOB (IN THE FIELD OF STUDY)

Similar to readiness to work from home, Slovak young people do not differ much from peers their age in what is important for them when looking for a job. Out of six inquired reasons, most young people emphasised professional knowledge, which is very important in looking for a job for as many as 41% of people. Slightly behind that is formal education level of completed education, (30%) and connections, friends, family (27%). It is followed by contacts to important or influential people (22%) and, eventually, experience from abroad (19%). Furthermore, these figures, similar to the evaluation of the education system, show that young people perceive mechanisms of corruption (connection, contacts) as relevant and powerful in achieving successful positions, in this case, on the labour market.

Even though the perception of to what extent motivating factors are important in searching for jobs does not differ from monitored countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Slovakia is an unwilling leader in several respects. **Firstly, Slovakia has the lowest number of people working in their field of study or the highest number of people, compared to other countries, working outside of their field of study.** In Slovakia, this figure is almost one-half (47%), the average in the remaining countries is 38%. **Secondly, Slovakia has shown the highest number of**

people claiming they work in positions that require lower education. In other words, Slovakia, has the highest percentage of overqualified people for their current job positions (38%; the average other monitored countries is 28%).

Several reasons could explain why Slovakia has the highest number of people in Central and Eastern Europe who work outside their completed field of study. One possible explanation yielded by the analysis of surveyed data is experience in volunteer work (which includes internships during studies). The data also imply that people in Slovakia have the least experience in volunteer work (24%, the average for other countries is 32%).

We only focused on young people aged 25–29, who should no longer be in the education system and should be integrated into the labour market. Among those who performed volunteer work in the past, as many as 47% of the people worked in their field of study and 19% in a related sector. Of the young people who had no experience with volunteer work, on average 34% of them worked in their field of study and 16% of them in related fields. Statistical tests have demonstrated the significance of the correlation. Thus, taking part in volunteer work increases the likelihood that a person will find a job in their field of study. The reason for that can be acquiring skills as well as having a competitive advantage for future job interviews.

In the end, we also looked at sectors in which young people are working now and compared it to the sectors they would like to work in if they were able to choose (public, private, NGOs and international institutions). **Based on the survey, it seems that Slovakia today has the highest percentage of young people employed in the public sector (33%) of all monitored countries (the average for the remaining countries is 24%). Interestingly, the public sector is a desired sector for “only” 22% of young people. It is the first indication that a significant number of people does not work in the sector they would like to.** At a closer look at individual data, we can see that 43% of young people declared that their desired and actual sectors were identical. This is a relatively low number. However, to get the full picture, we need to stress that more than one-fifth of young people (23%) could not identify the sector they would like to work in.

FOREIGN MOBILITY: EXPERIENCE

Recent surveys show that international mobility of young people can significantly contribute to increasing professional skills when people with experience from abroad return to their homeland after some time (Williams and Baláž 2005). Thus, if young people in Slovakia consider professional skills and knowledge to be the most important factor when looking for a job, foreign mobility could help them with it.

However, young people in Slovakia have very similar experience in foreign mobility to peers their age from countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Approximately four-fifths of them have no work or stay abroad to study. Roughly 20% of young people who stayed abroad, almost one-half was part of university studies (8% out of all respondents). A bit fewer, 7% of young people, stayed abroad at secondary school.

Only very small percentage of young people worked abroad, most of them people aged 25-29, with a smaller number of people aged 19-24. **Thus, it is possible to assume that the school system is the main way young people in Slovakia gain experience abroad.** Unlike in the past, working abroad seems to be a weaker motivating factor. At any rate, it makes sense to be cautious with these statements as the survey probably does not cover people living abroad at the time the survey was conducted.

FOREIGN MOBILITY: DEMAND IN THE FUTURE

Similar to the experience of living abroad, the demand for emigration among young Slovaks is outside of average the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. If we disregard around one-fifth who already have experienced living abroad, the rest of young people is divided as follows: almost one-half have no experience staying abroad and are not planning on doing so, either. Around 30% of young people do not have such experience, but they are open to it in the future.

An important factor for accepting a stay abroad is age and the young people's stage of life. Among teenagers (14–19), a majority (55%) of people indicated their plans to try life abroad. On the contrary, in the oldest age group consisting of 25–29 years of age, most young people say they did not want a life abroad and do not intend to try it either (57%). Only 15% of young people aged 25–29 viewed this option positively.

Naturally, this is only a declaration of intent and not all plans will be realised in life. Secondary school students, could have biased positive preconceptions about a life abroad or possibly at least a desire to spend some of their university studies abroad. For the oldest groups, the stage of life could play the main role as they are starting their careers or starting a family, so moving abroad is not among their top priorities.

FOREIGN MOBILITY: GOALS AND REASONS

Young people who decide to move abroad most frequently mentioned the Czech Republic (13% of responses) as the ideal destination for them with Germany only slightly behind (12%). A list of the top five countries for emigration includes Switzerland (8%), Austria and the USA (7% both). This ranking is not surprising as the Czech Republic has been, in the long-term, a country with an above average number of foreign Slovaks as well as a country with the highest number of Slovaks studying abroad. Undoubtedly, this is due to the language and cultural proximity of both countries.

What is surprising, however, is the low position of the United Kingdom or Ireland which used to be top destinations for young Slovaks for decades, especially after the accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU. The most probable explanation is Brexit which has caused an administrative hurdle for long-term stays in the country and could have also caused a deterioration in Ireland's reputation.

We used two ways to find an explanation why some young people have a strong desire to emigrate. The first one, a direct open question about what would motivate young people to relocate to another country for more than six months. The most frequent factors mentioned by people with medium and strong desire were issues related to economic security and sufficient offer of job opportunities with appropriate reward. However, the second factor for young people with a very strong desire to emigrate were matters related to culture, ethics and political situation.

The hypothesis that the desire for emigration is strongly influenced by social and economic factors as well as moral and political perception of the world was also confirmed by the regression analysis. The strongest influence was shown in assessing more generally perceived well-being whereas corruption was perceived very strongly. In other words, the more negative perception of young people in Slovakia and the more present the perception of corruption, the stronger their desire to emigrate. In this comparison, the perception of individual freedoms or the general evaluation of democracy does not play a role in the desire to emigrate.

MAIN FINDINGS

- The labour market seems to be least beneficial for young people compared to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe.
- The unemployment rate for young people was the highest among those countries monitored until 2019. At the same time, Slovakia reported the highest percentage of young people employed in the public sector (50% more than had wished to be). It indicates that the private sector of the labour market is not able or willing to absorb the inflow of young people leaving the school system.
- Based on the survey data, Slovakia has the highest number of people working outside of their field of study. At the same time, these people are overqualified for their jobs.
- Young people perceive corruption mechanisms (connections, contacts) as non-negligible and influential in getting access to successful job positions on the labour market to a more significant extent than other factors (e.g. experience from abroad).

- The biggest emigration motivators are still economic factors, primarily the generally perceived economic security as well as unemployment. There is also a strong effect of the negative perception of corruption and political climate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In an effort to integrate young people into the labour market as much as possible and not just find jobs but also positions which offer job satisfaction it is necessary to make changes to the education system and the labour market setting.
- We recommend cooperation with the private sector and listening to reasons that prevent hiring young people, especially with regard to the imbalance between their completed fields of study and job offers.
- The perception of expertise as a very important factor, combined with above-the-average rate of over-qualified employment indicates that it is necessary to start building the expertise of pupils at earlier stages in education (e.g. vocational secondary schools or undergraduate university courses).
- It is also important to fight corruption that is perceived by young people as present to a large extent when looking for jobs, and it is also a significant driver in considering emigration of young people, which is an undesirable phenomenon from a long-term and demographic viewpoint.

7

FAMILY AND ORIENTATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE ON POST-MATERIAL VALUES

Family, bonds of friendship and a satisfied life surrounded by friends have been, in the long-term, among the most important values in the lives of young people in Slovakia (Iuventa 2013; Statistical Office 1994). This value orientation is also expressed in opinions and certain normative ideas related to the family. On the one hand, we see that family and traditional marriage retains, in general, a high status in the system of values of young people. However, on the other hand, individualistic strategies of young people today delay the age at which young people get married and start families. Single young people are increasingly focusing on self-actualisation, career success, and trying to “enjoy life” before they get married and start their families.

YES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY BUT LATER

Aspects of life related to the family, such as **marriage (57%) and starting a family (59%) are considered to be important by the majority of young people in Slovakia**. The truth is that leading positions in the system have been occupied by values related to personal development of individuals (see Chapter 8: General values, attitudes, and perceptions), yet the need of family life also ranked high on the scale of what matters to young people. As many as 62 per cent of the responses to the question how they see their future from the viewpoint of family opted for the choice “married with children” (by comparison, only 7 per cent of respondents chose the answer co-habitation with a partner and children, and 9 per cent prefer single life without children). There are two interesting aspects in this finding. Firstly, despite the existence of various forms of partner cohabitation, most young people in Slovakia still prefer traditional marriage, which copies behavioural patterns among the total population (for more, see Tydlitátová 2011, Podmanická 2019). Secondly, most young people aged 15–30 years are still in the process of planning to get married and start a family in the future¹. This finding is related to the **trend of delaying marriage and starting a family**, which has been observed in Slovakia since the 1990s, and it is related to the effects of social and economic transformation within the country, in particular, low accessibility of housing for young people and higher unemployment after the transition to the market economy (Podmanická 2019). Several

authors also point out the change in values, in particular the demographic transition that is characterised by individualism and a decline in the birth rate, occurred in post-Communist countries only after the change of the regime in 1990s (Mládek 1998, Káčerová & Bleha 2007, Podmanická 2019). The theory of a second demographic transition refers to changes in values that have an impact on demographics as well as family behaviour of individuals. Emphasizing personal freedom (in contrast to the altruism of the preceding period) leads to a weakening of the function of marriage and family. It does not mean that young people have completely given up on the possibility of having children; they just postpone starting families.

"How do I see my future? I hope to live with my girlfriend and maybe even with children. It would be great to have them before thirty, but it also depends on my girlfriend and how she will see it both because of school and work. Nowadays, when someone goes to college and starts a career and then has kids, it is incredibly challenging, especially for women. I certainly would not push my girlfriend into anything."

(ID1, 19 yrs)

Even in our survey, 68 per cent of respondents commented positively on the plan to have children in the future. In contrast, 19 per cent of young people do not plan to have children. When we compare this to preceding surveys, it is a dramatic increase as twenty years ago (in 2001), only 4.7 per cent of young people were not planning to start a family (Iuventa 2013). On average, the age our respondents consider optimal for starting a family is 28 years. In the younger age group (15–24 years) it is 27, and in the age group of 25–29 years, the prevailing optimum age for setting up a family is 30 years. This means that, along with growing older, the plans from “school” years are even postponed. It corresponds with the overall trend among the population, that most children were born to women aged 25–29, while, prior to 1989, as many as 75 per cent of children in Slovakia were born to mothers aged 20–24 (Filadelfiová 2005). Regarding the number of planned children, the average in our survey is 2.2 children per mother, which, however, needs to be perceived only at the number indicated. The fact that young women set up families later increases the probability of a lower birth rate.

Statistical data on the overall population say that total fertility in Slovakia decreased to around 1.5 children per woman, while, at the beginning of the 1990s, it was 2.1 and, in the 1980s, it was even 2.5 children per woman (Podmanická 2018).

Along with other factors (e.g. economic) that can contribute to delaying marriage and family life, **we also observed the trend of increasing secularisation among young people in Slovakia.** Whereas in 1994, i.e. after the origin of independent Slovakia, 84 per cent of young people claimed affiliation with one of the churches and 16 per cent were agnostic, ten years later, the percentage of religious young people was 61.7 per cent (26.6 per cent considered themselves to be agnostic). Today, as many as 31 per cent of young people do not declare affiliation with any religion. This is much more than for the total adult population, for which the share of agnostics amounted to around 12 to 13 per cent after 2000 (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, 2019). At the same time, even among those young people who declare themselves religious, there is a tendency towards more individual practicing of faith. Only 17 per cent of young people indicated attending religious ceremonies at least once a week in the year before the COVID pandemic (that is, at a time when there were no restrictions on public gatherings)².

Thus, young people are significantly more secular than older generations. Religious teaching of the dominant churches in Slovakia³ emphasise the value of traditional family, including the conception of children in wedlock and, in the long-term, has played an important role in stressing culturally conservative values, marriage and family in ranking priorities in life in the countries of Central Europe (Sobotka 2008). Similarly to other countries of the world⁴, it can also be observed in Slovakia that even despite the decline of young people with a religious affiliation, there is no deterioration of marriage and family as a value, yet it may have an impact on starting a family later in life. As punctuated by certain authors, **secularisation, along with the change in values which is related to the modernisation trend in post-communist countries** (see more on the shift to post-material values and individualism in other parts of this study), **significantly contributes to change in demographic behaviour** in countries of Central Europe (Thornton & Philipov, 2007).

HOTEL MUM?

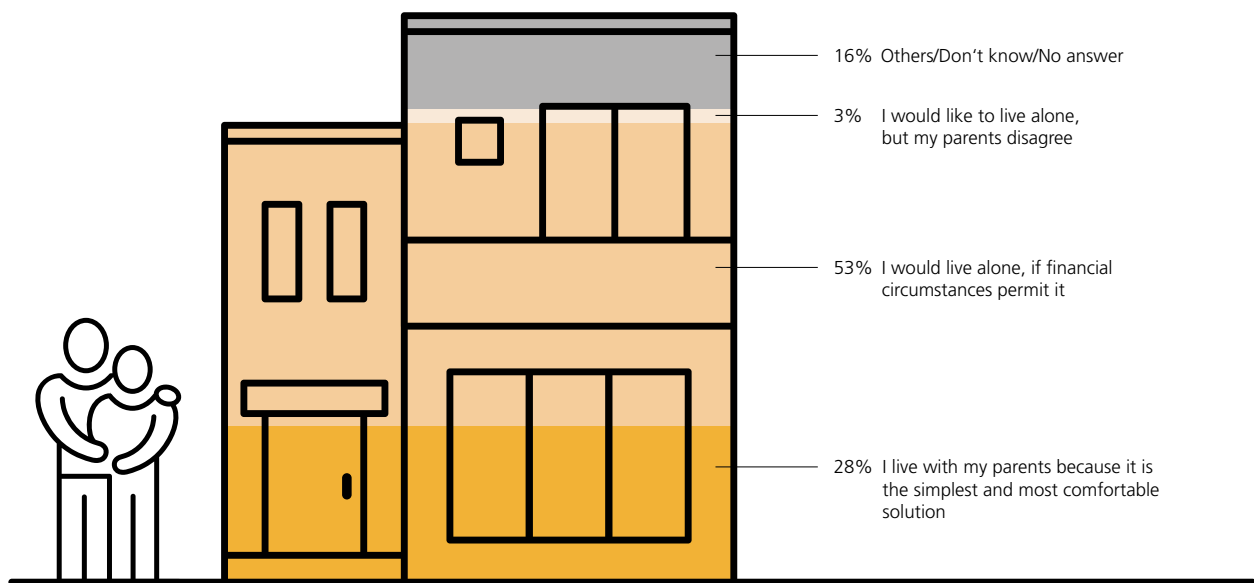
The generally positive attitude concerning starting a family can also be based on young people's own experience from family life as only 10 per cent of young people in our sample were not living with their families⁵. Based on our findings, most young people in Slovakia (68 per cent) are satisfied with their family lives, and only 13 per cent have an opposing opinion.

"We have a good, friendly, open relationship. There is no problem, ever – even in our family, and with both of our parents. We help each other financially, too... it has a positive affect on my life – I always enjoy it when they come, and when I can leave my children with them."

(ID5, 27 yrs)

More than one-half of the respondents live with their parents. It must also be said that such cohabitation is, in Slovakia, based rather on utilitarian grounds than on one's own preferences. As many as 53 per cent of those living in households with their parents would like to start living on their own if their financial standing permitted it. Only 28 per cent find it is comfortable and the easiest solution (see Diagram 7.1). **In general, most young people considered their relationships with their parents to be positive**, only 7 per cent of said they had conflicts or often arguments with their parents.

DIAGRAM 7.1: COHABITATION WITH PARENTS



Source: FES Youth Study

Such good relationships can also be related, among other things, to a relatively extensively perceived independence in decision making, which is very important for young people (Martin et al. 2018). **Most of our respondents (53 per cent) stated that they take decisions independently and 39 per cent take part in decision making with their parents.** Only 5 per cent of young people in Slovakia feel that decisions are exclusively taken by their parents. The perceived situation can be assessed positively because family, as the primary social cell, can serve as the basic participative unit in which (when working properly) young people can, generally in a non-hostile and non-competitive environment, get acquainted with mechanisms of participation in adopting decisions.

Cohabitation of young people in shared households with parents also has its adverse side, in particular, as it is cohabitation they are forced into (due to circumstances), i.e. inability or lack of possibility to start living on their own.

Based on Eurostat data (2021), 70 per cent of adult young people (18–34 years of age) in Slovakia live with their parents, in “hotel mum”, whereby the EU average is at 50 per cent. In this indicator, Slovakia is a “leader” among EU countries. According to statistics, young people usually leave their parents’ homes at the age of 30.9 years (the EU average is 26.4 years). This unflattering primacy of Slovakia can be related to a weak financial situation as well as a persisting unavailability of housing. In 2019, every fifth young person in Slovakia aged 20 to 34 was neither studying nor working (EU-LFS 2020), which indicates that a relatively large part of young people often had to rely on the financial support from parents or the state, with no opportunity to find their own housing, e.g. in the form of a loan. The low availability of housing for young people basically stems from the rise of property prices⁶ and very limited availability of affordable rented housing⁷.

POST-MATERIAL TURN

Our data indicated an observable trend in the continued inclination of Slovak youth towards post-material values. This means that **the importance of values related to material welfare, such as job or money, has been declining in recent years. The attention is refocusing on self-actualisation, a life of harmony, family, and friendship as well as the environment and health.**

In his works, Inglehart fleshes out the distinction to material and post-material values. He refers to a generation value change accompanying the socio-economic stabilisation of the society (2007). He claims that the economic stability after WW2 led the young generation in Western Europe to emphasise values such as environmental protection, the right to express oneself, freedom of expression, gender equality and quality of life, which is also related to family and friendship (Richins & Dawson 1990). However, in Central Europe, a phase displacement related to economic transformation after the fall of the Communist regime can be observed. Material values, such as job, safety and social assurance played an important role in the system of values of older and young generations alike. Thus, the shift towards post-material values occurred later. Data from our survey confirm this trend in Slovakia. Shortly after Slovakia declared its independence at the beginning of the 1990s as well as shortly after Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004, the top concerns of young people were unemployment, crime and a decrease in living standard. Only now, after more than seventeen years of membership in the club of the most developed countries (EU), which has also brought about a stabilisation of the economic situation and decline in unemployment, can we also see changes in the attitudes of young people and rising importance of topics such as environmental protection.

"It is a very important topic, especially these days, with global warming and climate change, it is terrible. People should realise it and talk more about it. And, especially, take some steps in order to generate less waste, and the government should also talk about it."

(FG1, 15–18 yrs)

In 2021, the concerns about climate change and health protection moved up in the rank, above the fear of unemployment (see Table 7.1.). While concerns about the worsening environment and health also occurred in the preceding period, it had lower priority and currently, this concern is relevant to young Slovaks also in regional comparison. Out of V4 and Baltic countries, only young people in Czechia felt concerns about the climate change more significantly than their Slovak peers (38 per cent in the Czech Republic vs 34 per cent in the Slovak Republic); in other countries, the percentage of those who found it a problem ranged from 20 to 29 per cent. The rise of concerns about health can, in our opinion, be related to the pandemic situation in the past two years, which has brought diseases and death as a result of the disease closer also to young people.

"What have I gained from COVID? I don't know. Maybe self-awareness how important health is ... maybe regarding values, how important family is when one is worried about them ... Maybe even less conscious people – it could have made them realise what the real priorities in life are that they are nothing material."

(ID1, 19 yrs)

Climate change and environmental protection, however, are some of the topics that young people started to pay attention to even before the pandemic. Various global initiatives, such as "Fridays for future" have been increasingly raising awareness even in Slovakia. In 2021, social injustice ranked third among the concerns of young people. It should be pointed out that, in the context of Slovakia, it is not possible to interpret this fear only by socio-economic indicators. Since the spring of 2018, after the death of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé Martina, the Slovak society started to push for political change that resulted in a new government after the 2020 elections composed of different parties. Parliamentary elections have also brought about several fiercely observed and discussed lawsuits that uncovered interconnections among high-ranking politicians, businesspeople, government officials, top police and prosecution officers and judges. Investigations demonstrated the existence of networks that enabled impunity to selected individuals. The social debate in the past four years has created a framework for perceiving social injustice as well as

inequality before the law as criticism of the system in which people are equal, but some people are more equal (with the right connections). Therefore, this concern can also be perceived through the prism of a protection of the rule of law. This contributes to the indicated shift towards post-material values. The same attention is paid to corruption, which is perceived more sensitively by the Slovak youth than by their peers in other V4 countries and in the Baltic states.

A positive trend in the shift of young people in Slovakia to post-material values is that they have started to perceive problems that have an impact on society as a whole to a much larger extent than in the past. When referencing the individualistic value orientation of the young generation, we expressed concerns about the effects on the society in the future, post-material values young people focus on, also indicate potentially altruistically orientated goals. It is the initiatives orientated towards a solution of those problems that can serve as tools for engaging young people in social and political activities and building their respect and trust in the political system (if it reflects the needs of young people).

TABLE 7.1. CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE

1994	2004	2021
1. Unemployment	1. Unemployment	1. Pollution and climate change
2. Crime	2. Decline in living standard	2. Becoming seriously ill
3. Decline in living standard	3. Crime	3. Social injustice
...	...	4. No job
7. Pollution and climate change	8. Pollution and climate change	... 9. Crime

Source: FES Youth Studies 2021; Juventa 2013; Statistical Office 1994.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Marriage and family are important social values for young people in Slovakia, and most young people see their future in a marriage and with children. Yet we can observe delaying the process of starting a family. Factors that contribute to starting a family later in life are along with economic problems, the shift in the system of values towards individualism, secularisation and post-material values.
- When discussing economic reasons for starting a family later in life, it is necessary to stress a high percentage of young people who live in one household with their parents, known as the “hotel mum” effect. The later age at which young people start living on their own in Slovakia is related to their lack of economic independence as well as inaccessibility of housing for young people.
- Even though the inclination to individualism and post-material values can have, from the long-term viewpoint, negative effects on the society (e.g. reduced birth rate and related population ageing), our survey also documents a positive trend. Namely, the attention of young people is moving towards issues such climate change and social injustice, which can attract young people to become interested and participate in solutions to social problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In a country like Slovakia, where an ageing population is a real problem, it is necessary to establish conditions that will make it easier for young people to start a family from an early age. As the value of marriage and family is recognised among young people, the government should focus on policies improving material welfare for starting family life. Therefore, it should support, above all, affordable rented accommodation and an active employment policy for young people.
- In the social and political debate, it is necessary to pay sufficient attention to topics that are considered by young people as problematic and the ones with impact on society as a whole (such as combating the climate crisis) and use those topics to build bridges to young people that will provide them with more room to engage in political activities in the country, which will enhance their civic competence.

GENERAL ATTITUDES AND VALUES OF YOUNG PEOPLE: INCLINATION TOWARDS INDIVIDUALISM

Studying values and attitudes plays an important role in analysing the society and times we are living in. Values and attitudes are among factors that motivate our actions and, for the young generation, help us indicate generation gaps or intervene in the case of undesired trends. Opinions of young people about what is important in life, what should be paid attention to by society or attitudes to values, such as extent of tolerance, indicate how young people perceive the situation in the country. Therefore, they were also the focus in this survey.

A MORE TOLERANT GENERATION?

Social crises, during which the fear about the future grows, can contribute to an increase of individuals' subjective feelings of loss of control and outlooks. In certain cases, they can even lead to increased feelings of anxiety. Consequently, due to such impacts on the mental state

of people, crisis situations serve as the ground for increasing intolerance, nationalism, xenophobia and extremism in the society (cf. Koronaiou et al. 2015, Kaunert et al. 2020). At the time of the pandemic crisis, which causes feelings of anxiety among young people (Korte et al. 2021, Hajdúk et al. 2020), we wanted to find out what lead to the development of the extent of tolerance, xenophobia, and nationalism of present-day youth.

In the FES Youth Study 2021 survey, we asked young people questions that were related to attitudes to their own country as well as questions that uncover the openness/restraint to other cultures and nations. Their combination can indicate the level of nationalism or, on the contrary, openness to multicultural effects (plurality attitudes). Based on our findings, **Slovak youth is rather inclined to nationalistic attitudes**. A comparison to other V4 countries suggests that young people in Czechia have similar attitudes while Hungarian and, in particular, Polish youth maintain a bit more pluralistic attitudes (for more, see Table 8.1).

TABLE 8.1: NATIONALISTIC ATTITUDES*

	Slovakia (I agree: something in between: I disagree)	Czech Republic (I agree: something in between: I disagree)	Poland (I agree: something in between: I disagree)	Hungary (I agree: something in between: I disagree)
I am a proud citizen of (country).	51 : 29: 18	51 : 27: 19	39 : 30: 27	40 : 30: 25
(Country) should accept more migrants.	11: 25: 58	11: 21: 62	22: 29: 39	12: 17: 63
It would be best if (country) were inhabited only by genuine (nationality).	23 : 30: 42	21 : 24: 52	20 : 23: 50	30 : 27: 36
Those, who are not (nationality) and live in (country) should accept habits and values of (country).	50 : 28: 19	51 : 28: 18	27 : 30: 35	35 : 30: 28

*Responses indicating inclination to nationalism are highlighted in the table.
Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

This finding is, moreover, intensified by the **feeling of social distance of young people to ethnically different groups**. We measured it by means of feelings young people had if a family or persons belonging to a certain group were to move into their neighbourhood⁸. For Slovak youth, the social distance to Romas amounted to 43 per cent and, from Muslims⁹ it reached 31 per cent. Again, a comparable extent of social distance from such groups of population was measured in the Czech Republic and Hungary. Polish youth had equally bad feelings concerning Roma and Muslim neighbours at a level of 23 per cent.

If we compare the youth's perceptions of social differentiation between selected groups among the general population of Slovakia, we can see a higher degree of tolerance by young people. Especially when it comes to different ethnic groups. Of the total population in 2017, up to 79 per cent would mind having a Roma family live nearby and 73 per cent would mind having a Muslim family as their neighbour (IVO 2017). Various studies show a rising trend in these indicators and scholars attribute this growing tendency to a radicalisation of political discourse, an overall low level of empathy and lack of acceptance towards diversity within Slovak society (Gallo Kriglerová et al. 2021, Gyárfášová & Mesežnikov 2016).

The discovery of an inclination within the Slovak youth towards nationalistic attitudes confirms an even longer-term tendency. Results of exit polls have repeatedly indicated an ever-increasing rise in popularity regarding nationalistic policies, represented above all, by the Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (People's Party Our Slovakia, ĽSNS). This is much more prevalent among first-time voters than among the overall population in the past two election periods¹⁰. One possible reason for this inclination towards nationalistic or even more extreme political attitudes among the youth of Slovakia is their low interest in political affairs (43 per cent are not interested in politics) and low level of trust in traditional media (52 per cent do not trust them). Political messages that "find" young people thus need to use specific channels (especially shared content on the Internet) and specific content (controversial, non-traditional opinions or attitudes pushed to the extreme), which has a bigger chance to draw virtual attention and get shared. Especially younger respondents (14–18 years of age), who find themselves as people with a very low awareness of political situation, and do not consider participation in political activities to

be valuable, have the tendency to follow (inconsistently) attitudes and opinions, which get to them most frequently (IPSOS 2021). As there is a very active network of alternative media on the Internet that gives a platform to extremist opinions to a larger extent (Baboš et al. 2021). Thus, it provides impetus for non-critical acceptance of opinions, which, unless subsequently confronted with counterarguments, can build foundations for nationalistic political attitudes among young people (Tóthová 2018). The example of Slovakia and support to ĽSNS can be a suitable illustration of how public discussion can influence acceptance of extremist political parties by young people. After the 2016 elections, a public debate started about extremist and fascist orientation of ĽSNS and several of its representatives subsequently faced court proceedings for spreading extremist opinions, the support to ĽSNS started to become less acceptable also among young people and first-time voters. Even though it was still above the average compared to the total population in the 2020 elections, the highest number of first-time voters supported the anti-corruption movement Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, OĽaNO). The reflexion of ideological direction of ĽSNS and traps related to spreading extremist opinions became possible for young people only after the information "oversaturated" the media and social space. Thus, the work with youth requires higher intensity and variability of information sources than for the overall population.

Along with tolerance to other races or ethnic groups, the attention of social discussions has recently also focused on tolerance to sexual "otherness". In Slovak society, this discussion is driven by activation of sexual minorities and their battle for equality for the LGBTQIA+ community. Also, young people in our survey reflected this fact. Based on qualitative interviews, our findings point out that the young generation considers itself as a much more tolerant towards to the LGBTQIA+ community.

"In my opinion, we young people are more open also to a non-traditional family and thus to same-sex relationships. This is not the case with the older generation, and that is the cause of problem."

(FG1, 15 - 18 yrs)

Several participants, either in focus groups or in semi-structured interviews, perceived a hostile attitude to LGBTQIA+ people as one of the urgent issues of the Slovak society and referred to it as an expression of intolerance and felt the need for change.

“Concerning those gays, people should be more tolerant... it is terribly bad here.”

(ID5, 27 yrs)

Young people view their generation as being the torchbearers of change, who will improve the level of tolerance in the future.

“Be more relaxed, not so stressed, outdated in judging who wears what and why homosexuals hold each other’s hand. What other people do in their private lives is their business. This is how I can also motivate others to behave this way.”

(ID7, 25 yrs)

Representative quantitative data shows that it is rather a reflection of a desired state than the actual situation. In our survey, 27 per cent of young people indicated that the behaviour of homosexual people is not acceptable (the sum of the replies “never and almost never” to the statement that such behaviour is unacceptable). Some 21 per cent held the opinion that it is rather unacceptable thus, cumulatively making up 48 per cent. The opposite **opinion saying that homosexual behaviour would be always or almost always acceptable was held by a total of 38 per cent of young people.** When we compare such data to comparable data for the overall adult population, we notice only a small difference in favour of tolerance of young people. Based on findings of Eurobarometer (No. 493) in 2019, 29 per cent of the Slovak population said they could see nothing bad in a sexual relationship between same sex people and almost the same part of the population (28 per cent) would feel comfortable with expressions of homosexual behaviour in the public. On the contrary, 61 per cent did not agree with the statement that sexual relations between same-sex persons are in order, while 56 per cent would not feel comfortable if exposed to public expressions of emotions by such couples. If we look at the trend, acceptance of such behaviour in 2015 was only at 5 per cent (Eurobarometer 493).

A significant **shift towards a higher level of tolerance is thus a trend also in the total population.** Based on OECD findings, the level of tolerance to LGBTQIA+ people in Slovakia is identical with the average of OECD countries, while this level is lower in other countries of Central Europe (OECD 2019). The young generation is thus just a bit more positively inclined to the LGBTQIA+ community (38 vs 29 per cent) and, particularly, in case of certain requirements, such as granting equal rights to LGBTQIA+ couples, it shares a similarity with the negative attitudes prevalent among the general Slovak population¹¹.

However, if we looked at the social distance felt by young people to representatives of “otherness”, people with different sexual orientation do not make a group that young people need to keep at a distance. Only 18 per cent of respondents would have very bad or bad feelings if a homosexual couple moved into their neighbourhood, whereas, in the case of Romas or Muslims, such negative feelings were present at almost double level, as stated above. As indicated by data from qualitative interviews, a lower level of social distance from LGBTQIA+ community can also be related to the fact that young people get in contact with LGBTQIA+ people more often and, based on their personal experience, they modify prejudices acquired in the society.

WHAT MATTERS IN LIFE: ONE’S OWN PROGRESS

The view of young people in Slovakia of what matters in life indicates **inclination of young people to individualistic values that are related to one’s own progress.** In our survey, young Slovak men and women most frequently declared their personal independence (45 per cent)¹², assuming responsibility for one’s own life (41 per cent), and a successful career (38 per cent) as things they find most important in life. Activities in the list of questionnaire options that were related to the development of the society, such as participation in civic initiatives or politics ranked last. Only 5 per cent of young people (only 3 per cent for taking part in politics) considered participation in active civic life very important. Among priorities in the perception of the importance are activities such as sports (33 per cent) or healthy nutrition (39 per

cent), i.e. things related to individual development. Thus, on one hand, there are young people who feel they are underrepresented in politics as stated above and, on the other hand, they personally do not find it important to participate in politics in their lives. This disharmony would deserve deeper analysis. We pay more attention to political attitudes of young people in Slovakia in chapter nine (Political Attitudes and Participation). One possible explanation for what was perceived as important in the political decision-making process, is what instruments young people find effective in formulating and achieving political objectives. The preceding comparative survey in V4 found out that while young people in Poland and Hungary considered political activities of the civil society an important instrument in political participation, young people from Slovakia and Czechia considered accession to a political party to be an effective instrument (MINEDU 2012). Discussions in our survey indicate that such perception of young people to get involved in politics continues.

“They can become members of political parties, but it is the least ideal alternative because they would only be distributing leaflets.”

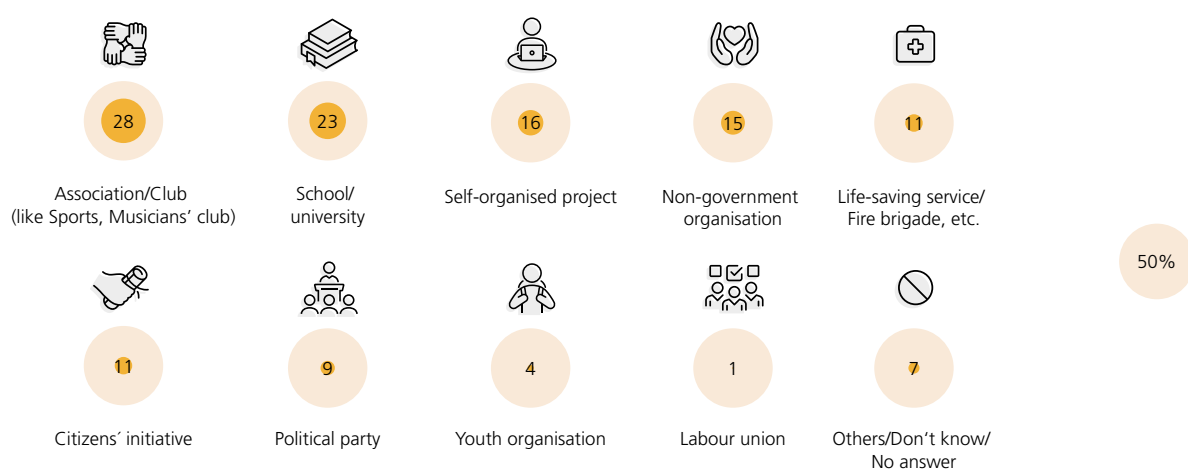
(ID1, 19 yrs).

Participation in political life through the structure of political parties can be perceived by young people as an inaccessible goal and an obstacle as several relevant

political parties in Slovakia are highly centralised (Dolný & Malová 2017). As indicated by various our participants, their perception of politics is that it is based on connections, *“unless you know someone, you cannot get in there”*. The low personal interest in participation in political life thus obviously partially reflects the complexity of the possible personal commitment. Focusing on things a young person can influence to large extent as a way of spending leisure time or one’s own lifestyle thus represent a natural choice.

In a similar way, the Slovak youth’s self-centredness and lack of social conscience are also reflected in the level of enthusiasm for community service projects, volunteering or rather a lack thereof. Unlike political participation, volunteering withing the community offers a wider spectrum of opportunities for young people to get involved in various types of activities. However, despite the long-term emphasis on the value of volunteering (e.g. European Commission 2011) and financial support for volunteering, from either the European Union or Slovak government (e.g. Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic 2021), volunteering among young people in Slovakia does not play an important role. In the case of Slovakia, almost three-quarters of young people (74 per cent) said they had not volunteered in the last year. In the other countries of the Visegrad region and the Baltics, most young people did not volunteer either, but the share was lower (ranging from 58 per cent in Lithuania up to 68 per cent in Hungary). Of all the organisations in which the Slovak

DIAGRAM 8.1: ORGANISATIONS IN WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE VOLUNTEERED (LAST 12 MONTHS)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

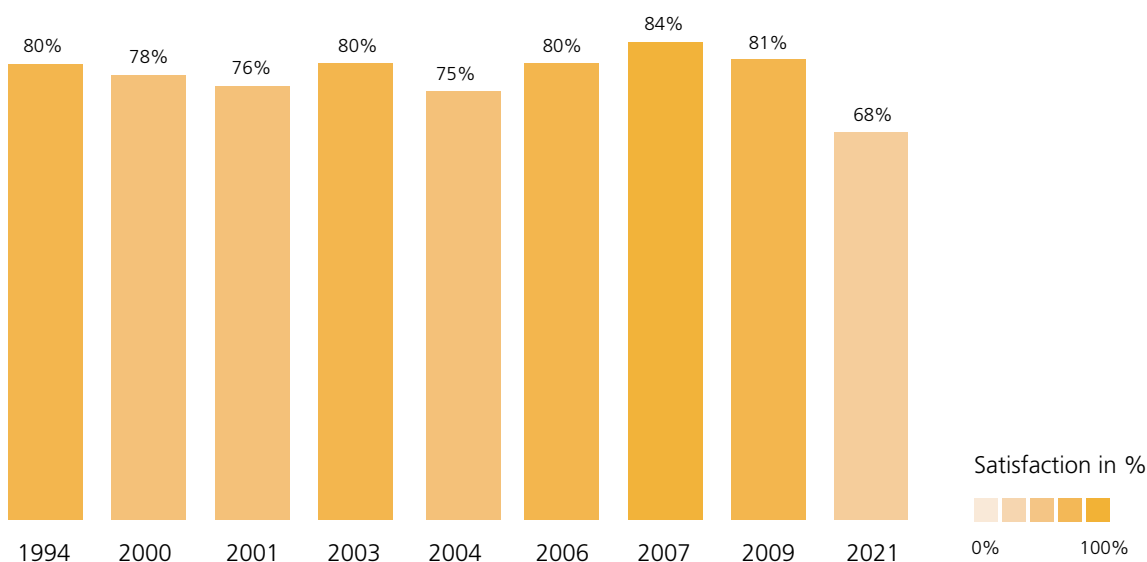
youth performed community service and volunteering, associations, schools and also their own volunteer projects dominated ((see Diagram 8.1).

Excessive individualism and focusing on one's own needs and priorities can, in the long run, be a challenge for the society. Several authors point out at the importance of mutual relations between individuals in society (social capital building mutual bonds) from the viewpoint of democracy as well as economic development of the country (Putman 1992, Dasgupta & Serageldin 2000, Widmalm 2006). The low level of sociotropic orientation of young people is thus an indicator we should pay increased attention too. It indicates that education regarding citizenship and orientation on strengthening mutual interactions among young people is necessary and increased attention should also be paid to activities that engage young people in the life of greater society to a larger extent.

DECLINE IN SATISFACTION WITH ONE'S OWN LIFE: POST-PANDEMIC TRAUMA?

An interesting finding of the survey is the comparison of satisfaction of young people with their lives. Slovakia is one of countries with the highest rate of satisfaction of young people with their lives in general (68 per cent) in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. A similar rate of satisfaction of young people can also be observed in Estonia and Latvia. However, when we look at the satisfaction rate changing over time, we can conclude that **the satisfaction of young people in Slovakia has significantly declined compared to the preceding period.** The overall long-term trend points out a relatively stable and high level of satisfaction, with usually more than three-fourths of the youth population declared an overall satisfaction with their lives (see Diagram 8.2). The current rate of 68 per cent of young people who are satisfied with their lives thus represents a statistically significant decline. Based on our findings, the least satisfied people were those aged 15–18 years, i.e. young people who are still studying and have not started living on their own.

DIAGRAM 8.2: SATISFACTION WITH LIFE



Source: FES Youth Studies 2021; Juventa 2013; Statistical Office 1994.
Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

This significant decline can be influenced, especially, by effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people. At the time of survey (summer 2021), the impact of the second wave of the pandemic was still present, during which studying young people were “locked” in their parents’ flats and had been studying online for seven months. Qualitative survey on this topic pointed out the feelings of frustration and the tendency to apathy, especially among participants who were students.

“R1: I became completely lazy. I did not go anywhere, didn’t socialise. I also miss my friends and normal life terribly.

R2: I wanted to attend school from home my whole life, but I am disappointed with less socialisation, and that we can meet fewer friends.”

(FG1, 14 - 18 yrs)

Anti-pandemic measures which, with the exception of the “summer break” (June–September 2020), have been in place in Slovakia since March 2020, with significantly limited social contacts and leisure time activities of young people. A part of young people found it difficult to cope with those restrictions, and forecasts of future development of the pandemic did not provide many reasons for optimism (for more on the topic of experiencing the pandemic period, see Baboš & Világi 2021).

Another structural factor that could contribute to a higher level of overall disappointment with life among young people in Slovakia was the perception of (under)representation of young people in political life of the country¹³. As many as one-half of respondents thought that young people are not represented at all or they are insufficiently represented at the political level, whereas the majority (64 per cent) held the opinion that the young generation should have a stronger voice in politics. Only 20 per cent of respondents think that Slovakia will be better off in the future than it is now. Data uncovered by the qualitative survey shows that when young people spoke about the future of Slovakia, their perception of its political direction was primarily what they spontaneously referred to. Their low level of satisfaction and concerns about the future were related to perceived insufficient progress at the political level.

“R1: Every 4 years, someone else comes in to government, then the direction changes. We are slowly getting there, but it will still take a long time. Every such direction does something good and something bad.

R2: All of us always have hope, and it ends the same. We are lagging behind as a country compared to others and I am sorry, and I do not know what is the cause that we are not moving forward.”

(FG2, 19 – 24 yrs)

Individualistic values and attitudes are typical for most young people, as they tend to see their own future much more positively overall than the future of the country where they live. As many as three-quarters of young people expect improvement of their personal future within a time frame of 10 years. This expectation can be related to the fact that as individuals, they themselves can decide on issues such as education, career or their personal life, based on the current economic outlook and to a large extent take the steps needed to improve them. This expectation is in sharp contrast to their evaluation of Slovakia’s potential future development, whereas only one-fifth of respondents expected an improvement of the current overall look.

Even despite the fact that **young people in Slovakia have the most pessimistic perception of the future out of the V4 countries, Slovakia is one of the countries with the lowest numbers of young people who expressed a strong desire to emigrate**. Findings of our qualitative survey point to strong family and friendship bonds that participants referred to as an important factor when considering or ruling out the possibility of long-term emigration, even despite their unfavourable perception of the future for Slovakia.

“I don’t feel the need to leave Bratislava. I am used to it, and I am conservative. I don’t want to have to leave and start building new relationships. ... For me personally, my family is the most important thing. Blood is thicker than water, and we have to help each other in the family, even if I hated them.”

(ID3, 29 yrs)

Especially in those segments of the young generation where family and national identity play an important role (abandoned traditionalists, conservative nationalists), these reasons may also outweigh the potential economic benefits (especially for traditionalists).

“I lived in England for a while, but I didn’t want to live there permanently. I have a family and a home in Slovakia. I wouldn’t leave the country. The money is not worth it.”

(ID5, 27 yrs)

On the contrary, the role of the family bond and domestic background will probably be weakest for the segment of youth that we called left-wing internationalists. They are very open to the international setting, and this is reflected by the fact that up to 20 percent of this segment feel a strong desire to emigrate.

Even though we have observed a statistically relevant decline in satisfaction among young people with their lives, it is still possible to talk about a majority (68%), who are satisfied with their lives. Findings of the qualitative survey point out that young people who expressed satisfaction with their lives referred to a specific period of their youth during which they enjoyed trouble-free lives. They are aware that, in the future, they can expect, along with a possibly better material standing, also more worries and stress. Such attitudes were presented especially by participants who still do not have their own families and who are in the early stage of building their professional career. The currently experienced feeling of carelessness by our participants contributed to the overall satisfaction with their own lives and their current outlooks.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Young people in Slovakia are rather inclined to individual than to sociotropic attitudes and values. Activism focused on the society is one of activities young people care about least.
- The youth in Slovakia shows inclination to nationalistic attitudes that is, in the V4 region, comparable especially to the situation in Czechia.

- Compared to the situation twenty or ten years ago, today, there are fewer young people in Slovakia who are satisfied with their lives. It can be related to impacts of the current pandemic crisis (2020–21), which is, after the migration crisis (2015–16), the second in a row that the current young generation must face. The decline of satisfaction can be related to the fact that its direct affects on everyday life were much more distinct compared to preceding crises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The low level of sociotropic orientation of young people can have negative impact on democratic development in the future, therefore, we recommend cultivating the perception of the need to focus young people not only on themselves and individual success or satisfaction. Education about citizenship and orientation on strengthening mutual interactions of society members is necessary among young people in Slovakia and increased attention should also be paid to activities that engage young people in society to a larger extent.
- The inclination of young people to nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes in Slovakia requires continuing the work with the topic of extremism, nationalism and to build awareness for their negative effects and, on the contrary, support pluralistic attitudes and mutual tolerance in the society.
- With similar threats and crises, the society is facing at present, we recommend approaching needs of the youth in a sensitive and responsible manner, just as governing elites do in the case of the economically active population. The effort to limit general closure of education and leisure time institutions for youth is a step in the right direction.

9

POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND PARTICIPATION

The quality of democracy and of governance depends on various aspects. However, informed citizens interested in politics constitute one of the important components, without which, there is a threat of decline in the quality of democracy (Dahl 1989, Diamond and Morlino 2004). Additionally, for this reason, political attitudes and opinions of young people are relevant as they can indicate the development of a society in the near future when generations of young people are fully grown adults. Moreover, insufficient political participation at the formative age is also expressed in the low political mobilisation at the adult age (Hooghe, Stolle, Stouthuysen 2004).

Older surveys of youth in Slovakia show that, at the time when the country was accessing to the European Union, around one-quarter of young people were interested in politics (Macháček 2005). When we compare it to results of various surveys of the entire population from recent years, the level of interest in politics is significantly higher, however, stable, in the society as general (e.g., 44% according to the 2018 European survey of values). That only confirms the fact observed in the long-term that the transition to the labour market and starting one's own family is also accompanied by an increased interest in political and social activities. Data from the FES Youth Study show that the interest of the Slovak youth in politics in 2021 remained at the level of 25 per cent, which indicates stability, compared to previous studies.

On this occasion, let us, however, draw your attention to the fact that any conclusions can be drawn only about youth living in Slovakia, whereas there is a non-negligible number of young people who live abroad, short-term or long-term. There is a reason to assume that they are people who are more likely to be more educated, with better language skills and those who have enjoyed above-average benefit from membership in the European Union. For this reason, it is possible that political attitudes and opinions would be slightly different, when reflecting those youth living abroad temporarily.

LEFT-RIGHT DIVISION AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Ideological self-identification of young people on the left-right scale is, to a large extent, similar to the overall adult population. When comparing results

of young people to the European Social Survey (2018), it is obvious that most people see themselves as centre oriented. However, the division between the left and the right in Slovakia is almost symmetric in both the young and the total population.

However, at the aggregate level, self-identification with the centre of the right-left scale is not reflected in attitudes to results of economic policies, in particular, regarding the redistribution of resources. More than one-half of young Slovaks expressed their consent with the statement that the incomes of the poor and of the rich should be more balanced (rather agree and strongly agree 53%). **In other words, it is possible to see rather an inclination to the traditionally left-wing than centric role of the state.**

In terms of international comparison, Slovak youth is average from the viewpoint of self-identification with the left and the right, and it does not deviate from the regional comparison. In the Visegrad region, it is rather Hungary, and, out of the Baltic states, it is Latvia, where the youth as well as the adult population are slightly more inclined towards the right.

A similarly strong support among the youth was given to the statement that the government should make sure that everybody is provided for. In Slovakia, 71% of respondents said that they rather or strongly identify with this statement. In each of the surveyed countries, this statement received the majority support, even though, in the Czech Republic, it was "only" 51%.

However, regarding the question that reflects the division into the left and the right to a particular economic policy (in this case, ownership of enterprises and industrial companies) young people in Slovakia were inclined to a rather right-wing solution and only a small part of people supported state ownership (22%), equally as in other states. It indicates that, **in eyes of young people, the role of state to ensure economic justice and equality is separated from the ownership of means of production.** In Central and Eastern Europe, this could be a result of long-term dominant social discourse in which government were presented as inefficient ownership of enterprises with the tendency towards corruptive behaviour. There is also a possibility of mental connection to the regime that existed before 1989 with no private ownership (of enterprises)

and, moreover, expropriation which they often consider to be one of the biggest failures. Young people can easily conclude that it is undesirable at present.

One of attitudes measured towards social and economic policies is the concept of a universal basic income and whether it can be put into practice. Young people in Slovakia are strongly divided in their opinions on this public policy instrument. More than one-third of them agree with it (35%), and just a bit more of them are against (38%). Similarly, the youth is divided in other countries, whereas none of the opinion groups has a clear majority in any of the countries. It is necessary to be especially careful when interpreting results because the very concept of universal income is considerably complex and the purposefulness of its measurement also in the adult population is disputable (see Roosma and van Oorschot 2020).

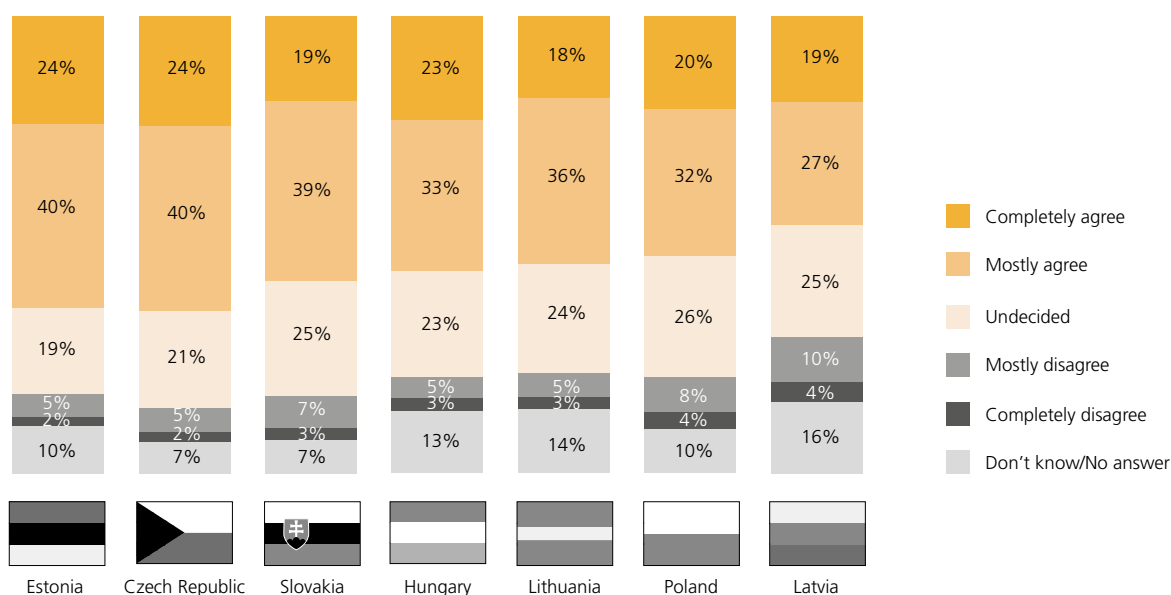
From an analytical viewpoint, it seems that the division between the left and the right among young people does not have any consistent sense, which could be equally reflected also in attitudes to public policies. Self-identification on the right-left scale is thus not a reliable predictor of what solutions in economic or social policy will be approved by young people.

ATTITUDES TO DEMOCRACY

Attitudes of young people to democracy and democratic processes got into attention of social scientists especially after the 2016 Elections. It was when Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko [Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia] made it to the Parliament; many authors refer to it to as a right-wing extreme (Nociar 2012) or even neo-Nazi party (Filipec 2019, Voda, Kluknavská and Spáč 2021) and its leader was sentenced in 2020 (not with final effect) for supporting and promoting a movement aiming at suppression of fundamental rights and freedoms. After the 2016 Elections, a narrative spread that the party was elected to the Parliament especially by young voters (Gyarfášová 2018).

Our data (FES Youth Study 2021) show that both, political preferences of young people in Slovakia and their attitudes to democracy are comparable to the average of the V4 region or Baltic states and do not show any strong inclination to authoritarianism. Majority of the youth in all countries, except for Latvia, agree with the claim that democracy is a good form of government. In Slovakia, it is 58% and direct disapproval with it was expressed by 10% of young people.

DIAGRAM 9.1: DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT THAT DEMOCRACY IS A GOOD FORM OF GOVERNMENT



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

We also asked young people if, under certain circumstances, a dictatorship would be a better form of government than democracy. In all seven countries, more young people refused this idea than agreed with it. However, only in Slovakia and Czechia, it was refused by the majority of youth (52% in Slovakia, 59% in the Czech Republic). On the contrary, 18% of young people in Slovakia agreed with it. There are no statistically relevant differences among different age groups. Thus, it means that these attitudes do not change in the formative period and remain, on average, the same between the age of 15 and 29.

Thanks to relatively extensive international research focused on democracy, we can compare opinions of young people also to the adult population. Based on data from the European Value Study of 2017/2018, there is a similar trend also in adult populations in Central and Eastern Europe. Slovakia and Czechia show an above-the-average refusal of a strong leader. Concerning questions evaluating the democratic form of the government, the adult population of Slovakia is rather positive, and, in the surveyed region, it is certainly not extraordinarily negative.

At the end, we looked at what parties received votes from young people in 2020 and what their political preferences were in the summer of 2021. Its purpose is to verify if the data still show an increased inclination of youth towards extremist political forces. The FES Youth Study offers a clear answer to that. Both, the previous choice, and preferences at the time of the survey, clearly point out that **majority of young people were inclined to progressive political forces or forces that declared a replacement of existing government administration before 2020. The proportion of young people preferring extreme right-wing political entities was smaller than it is usual in public opinion surveys in the total adult population.** Even though FES data do not make it possible to precisely define causes of changes in the political preferences of young people, there is a reason to assume that it was supported by both, stigmatising the Kotleba – ĽSNS party as well as education of several state and NGO stakeholders focused on young people.

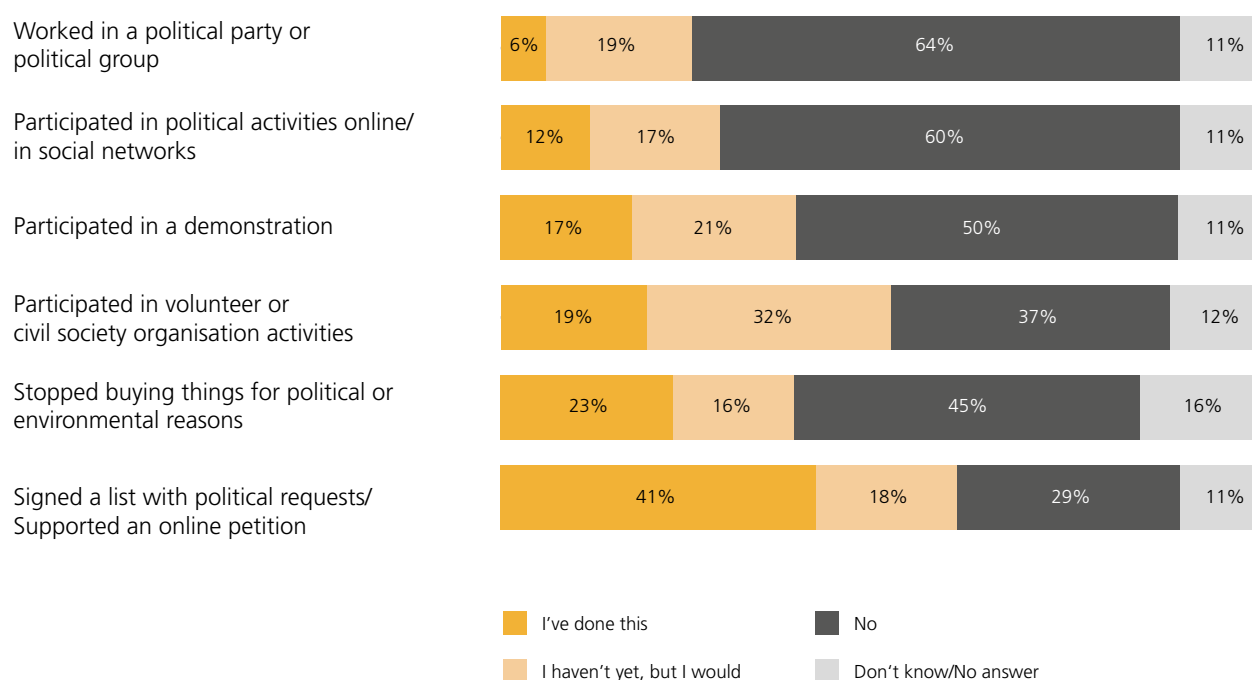
POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

As for political preferences of young people, we also cast a look at another interesting fact: the proportion of those who have or have no political representation in parliament. **Even though the majority of Slovak youth expressed their preference parties that were elected to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, it is “only” 55%. An additional 21% of young people would rather vote for a party that currently does not have its representatives and 22% of young people would not vote for any of existing parties.**

Fragmentation of the party scene and a high number of votes for parties that did not make it into parliament can be one of the reasons for the prevailing opinion of the youth that it is absolutely not (8%) or just poorly represented (42%) in politics. On the contrary, only 8% of people felt they were well or very well represented in politics. This result is also the worst one from among monitored countries, if we accept the assumption that a higher political representation also means a higher quality of democracy.

The willingness to actively participate in the political life is, however, also relatively low. Out of measured activities, the most acceptable one for young people is to a petition or support it on the Internet. According to our survey, 41% of them have already done so in the past and an additional 18% would be inclined to do so (see Diagram 9.2.). The second participative activity positively perceived by more than one half of people is volunteering or NGO activities (51%). For many other forms of political participation (e.g. participation in a demonstration or boycotting purchases of things due to political reasons), the share of people who find them positive is lower and negative responses prevail. **The least accepted form of participation is working for a political party or group, which is refused by almost two-thirds of young people.**

DIAGRAM 9.2: EXPERIENCE AND WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

Around two-thirds of young Slovaks wish they had more opportunities to express their political ideas. In this respect, the Slovak youth is comparable to other countries in our survey and differences between countries are negligible. Equally, small differences among countries are also how many people would accept or refuse a political position. 13% of people in Slovakia would accept it with pleasure and 33% of people would strongly refuse it. A higher share of refusing a political function was only in Poland as well as in Hungary.

The overall view of the interest of young people in social activities or willingness to get engaged is completed by the fact that only a small number of young people discuss politics with their friends. 19% of young people do it often or very often. At the same time, it is true that this number is not significantly lower than in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Compared to the adult population, the scope of discussions about politics among young people is naturally lower. It can be, to a large extent, also caused by the fact that young people are not much interested in politics.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND IDENTITY

Young people are usually referred to as a group of people can most benefit from the Slovak membership in the European Union. The opportunity to study abroad under the same terms as domestic students or possibilities of the open labour market are, hypothetically, benefits that can be utilised more by young people than by the older generation. Their real use is reflected in the high number of Slovaks living, both permanently and temporarily, in other EU Member States (see also Chapter 6 Mobility and employment of young people in Slovakia). Based on the report of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization: "in the past 15 years, as many as 300,000 Slovaks have left Slovakia, most commonly university educated young people under 30". (MIRRI 2021, p. 13). The percentage of university students studying abroad is, based on OECD data, almost 20%, whereby the EU average has been at 2% in the long-term (Hall et al. 2019).

Paradoxically, out of the surveyed countries, Slovakia has the lowest percentage of young people who expressed their opinion that European integration has provided the country with economic benefits (48%). Together with Lithuania, Slovakia is one of the only two countries in which less than half of young people are convinced of that. A clearly negative effect of the European Union on the country's economy is perceived by 17% of young Slovaks and around one-third can see either no effect or cannot assess it.

Regarding the impact on the political system, young people in Slovakia consider the influence of the **membership in the EU more negatively than positively (26% vs 24%), while it is the only one out of seven surveyed countries with a predominantly negative assessment.** All remaining countries have a mostly positive assessment of the influence of the European Union on the political system of the country, including Hungary.

A relatively negative perception of the European Union is also reflected in the lack of trust people express in the EU. Slovakia has the highest percentage of young people who have absolutely no trust in the EU (17%), and, equally, Slovakia has the highest portion of young people who would vote for country's exit from the EU (also 17%).

The negative mindset of Slovak youth reflects, to a large extent, attitudes of the adult population and, in many aspects, the adult population in Slovakia is also most negative out of V4 countries and Baltic states. According to Eurobarometer of spring 2021 (Volume 94.3, European Union 2021), the population was, in general, more inclined to distrust the European Union: 47% compared to the 43% rate of the trust than our nearest EU state culturally, geographically, and historically, the Czech Republic, has a more favourable ratio of people with trust in the EU: 49% of people trusted the EU and 47% did not trust it. Just for comparison, Latvia was the most positive country out of the region surveyed. Its breakdown in the adult population was 69% to 31%. Of its young people, 50% expressed their trust and 15% had either strong or less intensive mistrust.

There is another interesting fact that requires consideration. **When assessing one's own country and the European Union, the EU is perceived more positively in almost all values. Whether it is economic matters**

(employment, general welfare), quality of the government (rule of law, democracy), or position of people in the society (values of equality as well as individual freedom), the European Union is assessed more positively in all above attributes. Therefore, it is likely that considerably negative attitudes to the EU are not based on the rational assessment or comparison of various aspects of life but on irrational perception that can result from emotions, identity or current social discourse. This is where the EU is often depicted as a political force which has negative consequences on the culture and traditions in Slovakia, and it also limits the sovereignty of a country in political and economic matters.

ATTITUDES ACROSS YOUTH SEGMENTS

The picture of political attitudes and preferences of young people would not be comprehensive without looking at how different segments of the youth differ from each other. Unlike other values and attitudes such as the desire to emigrate or build a career, it is the political preferences or attitudes to the EU that differ significantly.

POLITICAL RADICALISATION OF SELECTED GROUPS?

When we wrote that no radicalisation of political preferences could be confirmed, it is true at the aggregate level. However, more distinct preferences to political entities such as *Progresívne Slovensko* [Progressive Slovakia] and *Sloboda a solidarita* [Freedom and solidarity] are supported, especially, by young people from the segment left-wing internationalists, and, to a larger extent, by the new liberals. On the contrary, **LSNS has above-average support in the group of artisans in despair (11 per cent) and conservative nationalists (12 per cent).** In the latter segment, there is equally above-average support for the *Republika* movement, which originated when several members of parliament and other members left LSNS.

It is also interesting that these two groups of young people do not see themselves as strongly right-wing oriented. In response to the question on self-identification on the right-left scale, such conservative nationalists (together

with traditionalists) are inclined, most significantly, to the extreme left. In terms of the voters' turnout, it is worth mentioning that one-half of traditionalists would not get to vote at all (the total average is 18 per cent).

CONSERVATIVE AND EQUALITARIAN

The strong belief that income differences between the poor and the rich should be more in balance was the strongest in the group of traditionalists (75 per cent agreed with it) and, with slight lag, was followed by the group of conservative nationalists (59 per cent). Naturally, the least identified with it were new liberals, however, even among them, there was a relatively high number of people who agreed with it (40 per cent). Even the opinion that the government should take care of people was most common among traditionalists (87 per cent of them agree) and conservative nationalists (80 per cent).

Thus, the data show that even despite the fact that both groups of young people (traditionalists and conservative nationalists) have conservative attitudes in many aspects, in the field of social policies, they are the most eager advocates of a big state and redistribution of resources. The fact that this feature is typical for rather left-wing thinking people indicates that young people in Slovakia do not have consistent and ideologically coined value orientations that are consistently expressed in attitudes to public policies.

POLARISING EUROPEAN UNION

The differences between individual segments of young people expressed most significantly in attitudes to European integration of Slovakia. On one side of the opinion spectrum, there are, by rule, left internationalists and new liberals, on the opposing side, there are conservative nationalists and traditionalists, however, not under all circumstances.

Regarding the influence of the country's membership in the EU on the economy, the majority of left-wing internationalists (76 per cent) as well as new liberals (75 per cent) assess the influence of the EU positively. However, it does not mean that the remaining one-quarter is negative in its

assessment, such people make up only a small group (4 per cent). The others assess it either neutrally or cannot assess its influence. On the contrary, conservative nationalists are more inclined to a negative assessment (48 per cent), only 29 per cent perceive the positive impact of the membership on the Slovak economy.

The situation is similar also in assessing the influence on the political system, with as many as 72% conservative nationalists perceiving the impact as negative and only 3% seeing it positively. On the other hand, two-thirds of left-wing internationalists assess the influence of the EU on the political system positively (along with the impact on the economy) and only 4% in that group of young people held a clearly negatively stance.

A significant polarisation among the segments of young people has been present also in the question concerning one's own country remaining or leaving the EU. Out of conservative traditionalists, as many as 72 per cent would vote for an exit in a referendum. Only 19 per cent would be against it. On the contrary, strong support for remaining in the European Union was expressed by new liberals (90 per cent) and left-wing internationalists, out of whom, 97 per cent expressed their support for remaining. In this respect, there is an interesting group of disoriented people, who typically provided rather neutral replies or lack of willingness or abilities to assess the situation. However, in a hypothetical referendum of a Slovak exit from the EU, only 3 per cent would vote for the exit and 77 per cent would vote for remaining.

HETEROGENEITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Just as in the adult population, young people believe that politics and social and political issues in general have the potential to divide people in their opinions. Which in other areas of attitudes, they are not always visible at the first sight, in political attitudes, it is obvious that young people do not form a single, homogenous group of people sharing an opinion. It seems that attitudes to the EU are some of the most polarising topics.

It also seems that many young people do not have consistently formed attitudes the way we could expect based on standard theoretical and academic approaches. Left-wing

or right-wing opinions on the family or life attitudes are consistently reflected into attitudes to public policies or redistribution of resources, and they are not in line with self-identification on the left-right axis. These are strong indications that these terms are not strongly rooted among young people and do not serve as the ideological basis for forming social and political attitudes.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Young people in Slovakia are not strongly ideologically rooted. From the viewpoint of the left-right division, they rather tend to the centre. Moreover, the left-right self-identification does not even have influence on many issues of the public policy concerning redistribution of funds. The data indicates that a specific solution of a particular issue is more important than self-identification on the left-right scale, and that will serve as the basis for young people to choose the political party also in the future.
- Neither the inclination of young people to right-wing extremist political forces due to prevailing discourse after the 2016 elections has been confirmed. Preferences of young people in Slovakia are currently more inclined to liberal and progressive political forces. The number of young people who would vote for a right-wing extreme in the summer of 2021 is even slightly lower than presented in public opinion surveys of the adult population.
- From the viewpoint of political participation, Slovak youth is comparable to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The highest rate of willingness to participate relates to the support for online petitions in contrary fashion as the young people are least willing to work for a political party.
- Probably the most alarming news from the long-term development viewpoint is strongly negative attitudes of young people to the European Union. The youth in Slovakia is the most negative in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, which applies to both, the mistrust in the EU and possible vote on leaving the Union and assessment of the influence of the membership on the Slovak economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend various undertakings aimed at enhancing participation in social and political life. Even though the interest in politics and political participation cannot be changed quickly, its support is necessary just like prevention against long-term decline.
- Attitudes of young people to the European Union are rather alarming, also in the context of surrounding countries. Therefore, we recommend systemic work of relevant stakeholders in the public space that will lead to a better understanding of the benefits of Slovak membership in the EU.

10

CONCLUSION



In the past thirty years, i.e. since the date of origin of an independent Slovakia, there has been a significant decline in the number of young people in the society observed there. Whereas, at the beginning of the millennium, young people under 30 made up more than 44 per cent of the population, in 2020, it was only 32 per cent and forecasts project a continuation in this trend. The overall trend of population ageing is also accompanied by young people delaying leaving their parent's home and starting one's own family. These tendencies are present even though the overall attitude of young people towards marriage and family is highly positive and matrimony as well as family are part of the future plans among most of the young people. The positive perception of family as a value can also stem from personal experience of young people in Slovakia with good relationships in their families. Our findings indicate that most families in Slovakia are relatively liberal as young people have a relatively high level of autonomy or are equally involved in the process of taking family decisions. Thus, on one hand, we can see that family and traditional matrimony retain prestige in the value system of the young people, in general. However, on the other hand, individualistic strategies of present-day youth delay the marriage as well as starting families at a young age. Young single people today focus, to larger extent, on self-actualisation and achieving success at work, they try to "enjoy life" before they get married and start a family.

From the viewpoint of values, it can be noticed that young people in Slovakia tend towards individualism and post-materialistic values. Traditional concerns of young people about unemployment, rising crime rates or worsening of their life situation have been replaced by current concerns about climate change, serious diseases or social injustice. The inclination to post-materialistic values has been expressed, to certain extent, also in expectations of the labour market. Even though the most important expectation from a job position is income which pays for one's bills, there were, to a large extent, non-material aspects of work present such as, personal development, happiness, satisfaction, fair conditions, equal treatment, etc.

In political attitudes, it is possible to deduce three main conclusions. First, from the viewpoint of their interest in politics and willingness to participate in political life, Slovak youth is almost the same as young people in other V4 countries or Baltic states. Second, unlike concerns about radicalisation of young people after 2016, this survey shows that the inclination to right-wing extremism is lower than in the adult population, and the dominant choice is rather in favour of liberal-progressive political forces. The social attitudes and orientation of young people, especially due to xenophobic tendencies and nationalistic attitudes shows, however, that a significant part of young people still has the potential for evermore support of political forces that will actively promote political goals reflecting such attitudes. The currently lower support for the extreme right can also be related to an intensive campaign after the 2016 elections that focused on young people and explanation of incompatibility of the extreme right and democratic values. Stigmatising, in particular, representatives of the extreme right—*Ludová strana Naše Slovensko* [People's Party Our Slovakia] could thus contribute to a decline in the support of young people for this party. To make a shift from xenophobic and nationalistic attitudes, it is still necessary to continue working with the youth on these topics (either as a part of the education system or in social discourse). The third area includes attitudes to the EU and assessment of the country's membership in the EU, which are slightly alarming, and where the Slovak youth ranked most negatively from among seven surveyed countries, which, again, testifies that it is necessary to work with the youth on these topics, too.

11

FOOTNOTES



- 1 Only 12 per cent of respondents were married and 22 more per cent lived in household with a partner, without being married.
- 2 It should be noted here that according to Roman Catholic Church rules (the most frequent denomination in Slovakia), attendance at the service is required at least once a week and voluntary absence is considered a sin. The non-participation of young people in religious services therefore means a violation of church commandments.
- 3 Roman-Catholic, Evangelical and Greek-Catholic churches.
- 4 E.g. in the USA, see more Thornton & Young- DeMarco (2001).
- 5 Those respondents lived in households either alone, with friends, with “other people” (not family) or refused to reply.
- 6 According to analysts of the currency, statistics and research unit at the National bank of Slovakia, the average price for housing in 2020 was by almost 190 EUR/m² higher than in 2019, which amounts to 11.9% growth. (Analysts of the CSRU 2021)
- 7 Based on recent analysis of the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic (SAO 2018), the share of rental housing in EU countries varies from 19% to 62% of the total housing stock, whereas the access to rental housing in Slovakia is only at 6%.
- 8 Even though the social distance has started to apply massively at the time of COVID-19 pandemic, especially to identify the need for physical distance between people, the expression of social distance has been used as a sociology term in the long run. Jackson (2010) refers to the expression social distance as used in sociology to describe the relation between individuals and groups in the society and covers **various relations of difference** based on the race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. as well as the fact that such groups can be located in spatial proximity. However, there are no interactions between them. Empirically, it is often measured using inquiring about the level of comfort respondents felt in interaction with persons from a different race, ethnic origin, etc. (Bogardus 1925).
- 9 Even though, for Muslims, it is in fact rather religious “difference”, we provide this information to illustrate the social distance to other ethnical groups. The reason is that people in Slovakia identify Muslims with migrants coming from the Middle East and maintain ethnical and racial prejudices to them (Lenč 2017, Letavayová 2007).
- 10 In 2016, LSNS received 22.7 per cent of votes of first-time voters, while the election result of the party was 8.8 per cent and, in 2020, LSNS received, based on findings of exit poll, 10.6 per cent of first-time voters, whereby the official result of the party was 7.97 per cent. The support for LSNS would be even more distinctive if data from exit poll made it possible to count in not only first-time voters but also voters of that party aged 22 - 30, as the most populous group of voters of LSNS is the category of 22 - 39 years (46.8 per cent of party voters). (Gyarfášová & Slosiarik 2020)
- 11 59 per cent of the population disagreed with the statement that LGBTQIA+ people should have equal rights as heterosexual people, i.e. most out of all EU countries (the EU average was 20 percent). (Eurobarometer 493)
- 12 We only provide the percentage of responses that considered the item very important.
- 13 Regression analysis demonstrated that overall perception of the satisfaction with one's life by young people in Slovakia is related to perceived insufficient representation of young people in the political life of the country as well as negative perception of the standing of the Slovak society in the future.

12

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ABOUT FES YOUTH STUDIES

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

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The data that form the basis of this publication were collected in the course of online individual in-depth interviews (n=10 à 60 minutes in average) with young people aged 14–29 years. Various questioning techniques and methods were used in the interviews to specifically address the psychological consequences of Covid-19 for young people. The online interviews were conducted by experienced moderators from the polling agency and research institute Ipsos and local partners. Ipsos Germany, Janine Freudenberg and Laura Wolfs, coordinated the study both in terms of content and organisation.

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