

Romania

*Opinions, Fears, and Aspirations
of Youth in a Romania of Social
Inequalities*

2024



Edited by

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About FES Youth Studies

What are young people afraid of or hopeful about? In a rapidly changing world that is challenged by the climate crisis and inequalities, and in many parts aging societies and democratic decline, **FES Youth Studies** investigate how young generations perceive the development of their societies and their personal future. Our aim is to foster informed debate about young people's views on politics and democracy against the background of their life circumstances and values. This includes key issues such as education, employment and mobility, family and friends, and their overall attitudes and perceptions. We focus on young people aged 14 to 29 to understand their perspectives on these critical topics.

FES has conducted numerous youth studies around the world since 2009. In 2024, young people in Romania were surveyed along with youth in other Southeastern European and Central Eastern European countries.

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Executive Summary

This study describes and analyses the attitudes and behaviour of young people living in Romania, providing insights into various youth-related matters, including their perspectives on society and politics. The analysis of this heterogeneous and dynamic group also offers a deeper understanding of Romanian society and its potential for change.

The research is based on data obtained from a survey conducted by the polling company IPSOS in February–March 2024 on a representative sample of young people aged 14–29 in Romania. This study is part of extensive comparative research that includes 12 countries in South-Eastern Europe, an under-researched region with poor data and a lack of systematic analysis: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, and Romania.

The analysis focuses on Romania, described in comparison with other countries in the region, as well as with data from a 2018 survey of young people in Romania and nine other countries in the region. The data are structured according to six broad thematic categories: demographic attributes and trends; education; work and mobility; family and plans for the future; values, attitudes, and general perceptions; and political attitudes and involvement.

The study helps to explain a seemingly paradoxical situation: on one hand, Romania's economic development over the past two decades has been among the best in Europe, according to various common development indicators; on the other hand, a significant number of young people find themselves in an unusually precarious situation compared with the overall level of development, with modest prospects for improvement unless new public policies and actions are implemented to support them.

1 ■ Introduction

Understanding young people in Romania is important for several reasons. First, young people are a social group with **specific problems** compared with the rest of the population. They are often politically underrepresented, which diminishes their influence on the policies that affect them. Understanding what motivates or discourages young people from participating in civic activities can therefore help in designing initiatives that encourage their involvement and foster more active citizenship. Additionally, young people are far from homogeneous. Among other things, differences in attitudes and behaviours based on factors such as gender, residential background, income and family status are noticeable and sometimes take on an upward trend.

Second, by better understanding today's young people we can anticipate some of their likely life courses and, by summing up, that of society as a whole in the future. Today's young people are **tomorrow's citizens**, and some of them are future politicians, experts, opinion leaders and decision-makers.

Third, children and young people tend to **adapt faster** than the rest of the population when external conditions change. Phenomena such as economic crises, technological developments, wars, the Covid crisis, rapid climate changes and so on can have profound and lasting effects on young people. It is therefore important that negative effects are quickly identified and mitigated.

Fourth, **young people are agents of change**. Understanding their attitudes can provide insights into emerging social issues and society's potential for transformation. Historically, young people have been at the forefront of social movements and innovation. Young people around the world are increasingly connected to and aware of global issues.

Examining their attitudes can provide a global perspective on key issues such as climate change, human rights and globalisation. At the same time, measurements of pro-democratic orientations show a global downward trend in recent years, including in Eastern Europe, with more pronounced negative shifts among young people.

Fifth, society faces significant democratic risks. Low civic participation and the emergence of extremist political actors are two of the most visible. Moreover, young people in Romania have poor civic skills even compared with less developed countries in Europe. According to the FES survey conducted in 2019,¹ the proportion of young Romanians interested in politics, engaging in civic and political activities, preferring democratic regimes, and exhibiting high levels of social tolerance are among the lowest on the continent (Bădescu, Sandu, Angi, Greab 2019). More recently, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2024) showed that Romanian eighth graders perform modestly in the assessment of civic knowledge and thinking, with an average score substantially lower than the average of all participating countries, placing Romania sixteenth out of 20.² At the same time, the recent local and European Parliament elections have shown that young people have strong potential to get involved politically. Turnout among 18–35 year-olds increased by a third to 45% compared with the elections held four years ago.³ Despite this increase, however, their turnout was still below that of the general population, at 52%. Notably, there are significant age-related differences: 18–19 year-olds had a turnout of 51% in the Euro Parliament elections, 7% higher than the turnout of 25–35 year-olds.

Finally, in Romania, poverty and inequality are more prevalent among young people than among the general population. Specifically, the number of young people who are 'not in education, employment, or training' (NEET) indicates that young Romanians tend to experience one of the most difficult transitions from education to the workforce of all EU Member States. In 2023, the proportion of NEETs aged 15–29 was 19%, by far the EU's highest, almost double the average. With the highest proportion of NEETs among young people with a low educational attainment (32%), Romania also turned out to have the largest gender gap among young people aged 20–24 (13% for women), and the largest difference between NEET rates reported in urban and in rural areas (20%). Moreover, Romania is among the EU countries that has shown the lowest level of improvement over the past 10 years.⁴ At the same time, young people's living standards, expressed by the social deprivation index,⁵ put Romania at the bottom place in the EU in 2022 (the most recent year for which data are available), with 25% of the population aged 16–29 having a low living standard, compared with 6% in the EU as a whole.⁶

This situation seems paradoxical, considering that Romania's economic development over the past two decades has been among the best in Europe, surpassing the expectations of experts at the time of EU accession.

Thus, in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), growth over both the past 15 years (when it more than doubled) and the past 20 years (it grew by four and a half times) place Romania in first place among EU Member States. Furthermore, when Romania joined the EU it ranked second last in terms of this indicator (after Bulgaria), whereas currently it lies above Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia and Croatia, on a par with Poland and with values close to those of Estonia, Lithuania and Portugal.⁷ The actual individual consumption rate (AIC) places Romania above 13 other EU Member States, including Portugal, Spain and Slovenia.⁸

What might explain the unusually precarious situation of young people compared with the general level of development in Romania? Several phenomena within Romanian society could help to supply some answers.

The indicators mentioned provide only a partial view of development in Romania

On one hand, in the Romanian context, the rise in average values has almost always been accompanied by widening gaps between different social categories. Thus, the ratio between the upper and lower quintiles (S80/S20) is one of the highest in the EU, at 5.83; only Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania have reported higher values. On the other hand, on two of the most important indicators of social development – infant mortality and life expectancy at birth – Romania ranks last in the EU.⁹

Demographic dynamics

The population has a peculiar demographic structure, marked by an unusually low proportion of young people, as a consequence of a 1966 law that banned abortion, which doubled the number of newborns over several years in a row, followed by a low birth rate and a high emigration rate after 1990. As a result, according to the 2021 census, the number of 15–19 year-olds is only 60% of the number of 50–54 year-olds.¹⁰ A cohort with only a small proportion of the total population can lead to a low level of political representation, reflected in policies that overlook this segment of society.

Young voter turnout

This tends to be lower than that of other age groups, exacerbating the demographic disadvantage.

Low social solidarity

Comparative studies assessing citizens' levels of solidarity and empathy toward vulnerable groups in their societies show modest values for Romania (Quandt and Lomazzi 2023). As a result, youth policies are often viewed as less important by most members of other population groups.

We aim through this study to try to understand the attitudes and behaviour of young people in Romania in order to try to grasp the difficulties they face and to propose solutions for improvement. Additionally, analysis of this highly heterogeneous and dynamic group of citizens provides a better understanding of Romanian society as a whole and of its prospects for change

The research is based on data collected from a survey conducted by IPSOS on a representative sample of young persons aged 14–29 who live in Romania. The survey is part of an extensive comparative research project that includes 12 countries in South-Eastern Europe, an under-researched region with poor data and lacking systematic analysis: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey.

The analysis focuses on Romania, described in comparison with other countries in the region, as well as with data from a 2018 survey of young people in Romania and nine other countries in the region. The data are structured according to six broad thematic categories: (i) demographic attributes and trends; (ii) education; (iii) work and mobility; (iv) family and plans for the future; (v) values, attitudes, and general perceptions; and (vi) political attitudes and involvement.

2. Methodology

The study is based on data obtained from a survey conducted in 12 countries by the polling company IPSOS, commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. The target population was residents aged 14–29 years of age in the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Greece, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey, another requirement was that the target group had internet access. In these eight countries, the survey was conducted using computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI). For the CAWI module, the target audience was restricted to persons registered in an online access panel, who were resident in one of the Member States and who had access to online services on a digital input device at the time of the survey.

The use of online panels for CAWI is a widely accepted research methodology, increasingly used by survey organisations.

The survey covered 8,943 respondents, including 1,150 in Romania. Data collection occurred from 9 February to 25 March 2024.

The analysis in the study is based on survey data from Romania. For some of the most important indicators, the study presents comparisons between Romania and other countries, as well as with a study conducted by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in 2018, which covered ten countries, including Romania. Additionally, the analysis incorporates statistical data from the last Romanian census in 2021, Eurostat and OECD.



3 Basic Demographic attributes and trends

According to data from the last census in 2021, 15–29 year olds make up 14.2% of the total population of Romania. Their proportion is higher in rural areas (16.9%) than in with urban areas (14.2%) and varies across development regions: the North-East region has the highest proportion, at 16.8%, while South-Muntenia has the lowest, at 14.8% (Table 1). It is also worth noting that the proportion of people aged 0–14 exceeds that of those aged 15–29 in the general population, suggesting that the **proportion of young people will not decrease over the next 5–10 years**. In rural areas, the trend is going down slightly, while internal migration is expected to amplify the trend.

Proportion of young people with voting rights

The share of 18–29 year-olds eligible to vote constitutes just 9% of all eligible Romanian voters, which is less than half the proportion of those over 65 (21%). This difference, amplified by the higher voter turnout rates among older individuals, partially accounts for the underrepresentation of young people in politics.



Level of education

In the realm of education, we include some key indicators for which data are available: school dropout rates, the proportion of young people with tertiary education, and standardised test scores from comparative studies.

1. The school dropout rate is the highest in the EU, at 16%,¹¹ rising between 2019 and 2023 (the latest year for which we have data). The EU average is 9.5% and on a downward trend.¹² The differences between urban and rural are huge: in 2021 (the most recent year for which data is available), the dropout rate was 31% in rural areas compared with 5% in urban areas. This phenomenon is significant on its own, but it also impacts the interpretation of educational indicators derived from school-based testing: the higher the drop-out rate at the age of testing, the greater the overestimation of the test result when used to describe the whole population of that age.

2. The proportion of young people with tertiary education is the lowest in the EU and on a downward trend. The value for Romania, at 22%, is about half the EU average (42%), and in recent years it has decreased by almost 4%, while the EU average has increased by 7% (Table 2). The proportion of young people in Romania with tertiary education is lower than the proportions in non-EU European countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Serbia and, by some distance, Turkey.

Fig. 1 Young people among the Romanian population by age group, regions and residential environment (in %)

On 1 December 2021

	0–14 Years	15–29 Years	30–65 Years	> 65 Years
Urban	15.6	14.2	50.4	19.7
North-West	15.5	15.4	50.8	18.4
Centre	15.3	14.1	49.3	21.3
North-East	18.3	14.9	47.4	19.4
South-East	15.0	13.1	50.3	21.5
South Muntenia	15.0	13.6	50.9	20.5
Bucharest-Ilfov	15.8	13.8	51.9	18.4
South-West Oltenia	15.2	14.4	52.4	18.1
West	14.3	14.3	50.5	21.0
Rural	16.7	16.9	47.1	19.4
North-West	17.3	17.2	47.3	18.2
Centre	18.6	17.4	46.5	17.5
North-East	18.5	18.7	45.2	17.7
South-East	16.3	16.7	47.1	20.0
South Muntenia	15.1	16.0	47.6	21.3
Bucharest-Ilfov	18.0	15.4	52.5	14.1
South-West Oltenia	13.6	15.8	47.3	23.3
West	16.2	15.9	48.6	19.3
Total	16.1	15.5	48.8	19.6

Fig. 2 Proportion of 25–29 year olds with higher education across EU countries (in %)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
EU 27	35.3	35.5	35.8	36.7	37.9	38.7	40.0	41.0	41.1	42.2
Belgium	44.7	43.6	43.1	45.6	47.2	47.0	49.2	51.9	49.5	49.7
Bulgaria	31.7	31.6	31.7	34.1	34.4	33.0	32.7	34.8	34.7	37.0
Czech Republic	31.7	32.0	32.4	33.4	32.9	29.8	30.8	33.0	32.3	32.4
Denmark	39.7	40.7	42.7	43.0	43.3	45.1	44.6	45.9	45.9	45.4
Germany	25.4	26.9	27.9	28.6	29.6	30.8	33.8	34.5	34.2	35.5
Estonia	38.1	34.5	35.2	36.3	37.5	36.7	38.4	43.3	41.5	38.1
Ireland	51.8	54.3	53.8	55.0	56.0	55.5	58.7	61.9	63.5	61.6
Greece	40.5	39.6	38.9	41.0	41.0	41.6	43.4	44.1	45.7	43.8
Spain	40.5	41.0	42.1	44.3	46.4	48.5	50.2	51.0	51.9	53.5
France	45.0	44.5	44.7	44.7	47.9	48.9	50.2	51.1	51.7	52.3
Croatia	31.7	30.8	36.6	37.1	36.9	38.1	38.6	38.1	37.0	38.4
Italy	24.4	25.0	24.9	26.8	27.7	28.1	29.5	29.8	31.2	32.1
Cyprus	55.3	55.0	58.9	58.2	59.8	61.8	55.9	55.1	55.7	57.1
Latvia	39.0	38.5	41.3	39.3	40.5	41.6	38.0	42.6	46.2	41.9
Lithuania	51.8	51.8	50.4	52.8	53.0	51.7	51.5	53.2	53.6	53.6
Luxembourg	53.2	48.1	48.5	49.7	51.2	56.0	58.9	62.7	59.0	58.3
Hungary	29.9	29.9	27.8	28.2	27.5	27.9	28.2	30.3	29.2	26.3
Malta	34.0	34.6	36.7	36.3	45.0	42.2	40.2	41.0	42.2	49.7
The Netherlands	43.8	43.9	44.8	45.4	45.9	47.0	50.6	57.8	56.8	54.7
Austria	36.8	38.5	39.2	39.8	40.3	40.8	41.2	41.8	42.1	42.9
Poland	43.2	43.0	42.2	41.1	41.1	41.8	39.1	36.1	34.6	42.7
Portugal	31.6	34.5	35.4	34.7	36.8	38.6	43.5	48.9	43.9	42.6
Romania	25.8	25.4	24.0	24.8	25.2	25.2	22.8	21.4	22.6	22.0
Slovenia	34.7	37.7	41.5	42.3	38.4	43.1	43.7	46.2	45.4	41.6
Slovakia	33.0	34.4	35.4	35.9	36.7	38.2	38.3	38.7	38.9	38.1
Finland	35.1	34.5	35.1	35.9	36.5	36.8	38.1	35.3	34.2	34.9
Sweden	42.3	43.1	43.9	43.9	43.7	44.5	46.2	46.6	48.9	49.5
Iceland	34.8	33.2	38.3	41.9	42.7	42.1	37.6	37.8	34.2	35.8
Norway	48.2	47.2	48.3	47.6	46.4	47.6	50.3	54.4	55.2	56.1
Switzerland	41.1	43.6	46.4	47.3	47.2	49.0	49.2	48.9	48.7	48.5
UK	43.9	46.0	46.1	46.2	47.5	48.8	–	–	–	–
Bosnia and Herzegovina	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	25.3	24.1	24.9
Montenegro	37.1	32.8	34.7	36.8	36.0	41.7	42.2	–	–	–
North Macedonia	31.2	32.6	35.5	35.5	34.0	35.9	35.6	–	–	–
Serbia	27.0	30.8	33.0	33.0	32.8	33.3	32.1	32.2	31.4	30.9
Türkiye	26.1	29.4	32.4	33.8	35.6	36.9	39.4	41.8	42.7	43.6

3. Romanian students' results in the latest comparative study PISA (2022) are extremely modest. In Romania, 51% of students attained at least level 2 (out of 6) of proficiency in mathematics, which is significantly lower than the OECD average (69%). At the same time, the **differences in mathematics performance caused by economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) are among the largest among PISA countries and economies** (49 PISA points, ranking 5/79; 2022).

Romania has one of the largest differences in mathematics performance between students from the top and bottom quartiles of the economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) index (132 PISA score, ranking 2/79; 2022).

All these education-related indicators show that the current growth model is not sustainable. Comparative analyses of Eastern Europe show two distinct development models: a model that emphasises low costs and the use of foreign technologies, and a model that emphasises institutions, knowledge, innovation, quality of education, and productivity. Studies show that transitioning from the first to the second model is difficult, and most societies remain caught in the so-called 'middle income trap'. According to the data, Romania clearly belongs to the first model.

Main takeaways

- 1.** The proportion of young people aged 18–29 who are eligible to vote is only 9% of all eligible Romanian voters, which is less than half the proportion of those aged over 65.
- 2.** The school dropout rate in Romania is the highest in the EU, at 16%, and increased from 2019 to 2023. There is a huge disparity between urban and rural areas: 31% in rural areas and 5% in urban areas.
- 3.** The proportion of young people with tertiary education is the lowest in the EU and on a downward trend. This proportion is low even compared with non-EU countries.
- 4.** Romanian students' results in the PISA comparative study, including the latest edition (2022), are extremely modest. Moreover, the disparities in results based on family socio-economic status are among the highest of all participating countries and economies covered by PISA.

4. Education and use of time

Some 60 % of young people were enrolled in education at the time of the survey, a significant increase on the proportion found in the 2019 survey (43 %). About 27 % of the total sample attend secondary education, 15 % university and 10 % other forms of education and training. Another 10 % are in postgraduate education (with an overrepresentation of men), and 35 % are not in any form of education (more common among women).

Parental education is a significant predictor of young people's educational attainment, even taking into account that many young people have not yet completed their education. The fathers of 27 % and the mothers of 30 % of respondents have a university first degree or higher, while 29 % of fathers and 24 % of mothers of those surveyed have completed a vocational school or less. In association with the social development gap, **the level of parental education is higher among young people in urban areas**, where 38 % of mothers and 28 % of fathers have a university degree, compared with 21 % and 19 %, respectively, in rural areas.



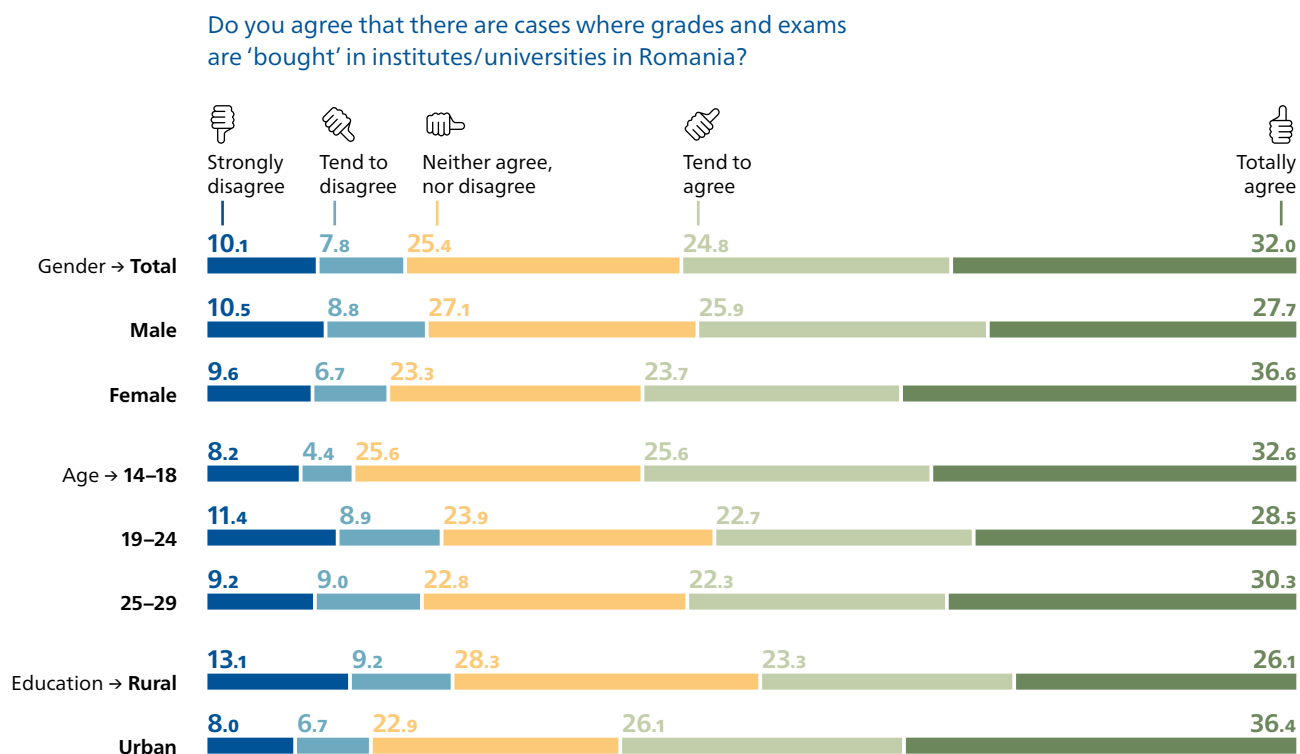
Quality and equity in education

The quality of education in Romania is rated rather negatively. Two out of five young people say they are totally (19 %) or very dissatisfied (22 %) with the quality of education. This which is encountered more frequently among students 19 years old or younger, while 41 % of them report an average level of satisfaction. Only 18 % of young people are satisfied with the quality of education (including only 3 % who are fully satisfied), which is lower than the average for the region (26 %), well below the level in Slovenia or Croatia (54 and 39 %, respectively), but also below Bulgaria or Serbia (22 and 26 %, respectively).

Unsurprisingly, **satisfaction with education is positively correlated with perceptions of corruption within the education system**. While 57 % of respondents rather agree than disagree or agree totally that there is corruption in the education system, **only 10 % believe that passing grades are not 'bought'**, while a further 8 % of young people tend not to agree that corruption exists.

Some 32 % of respondents believe strongly that pass grades can be bought, which is a significant increase on 2019, when 26 % of respondents agreed strongly that the education system was flawed. The perception of young Romanians that there is corruption in education tends to be shared by other young people in the region. It is lower than in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia, where 48 and 42 %, respectively, of young people are absolutely convinced that pass grades are traded for money; but higher than in Kosovo or Slovenia, where only 16 and 18 %, respectively, of young people share this opinion.

Fig. 3 Views on corruption in the education system among youth in Romania (in %)



Young people studying in high school and college are more likely to believe that pass grades can be bought; those in postgraduate education, by contrast, report less corruption. This suggests either that informal payments are concentrated mainly at the secondary level, or that those pursuing longer educational pathways did not have to resort to means, or attended better managed educational institutions.

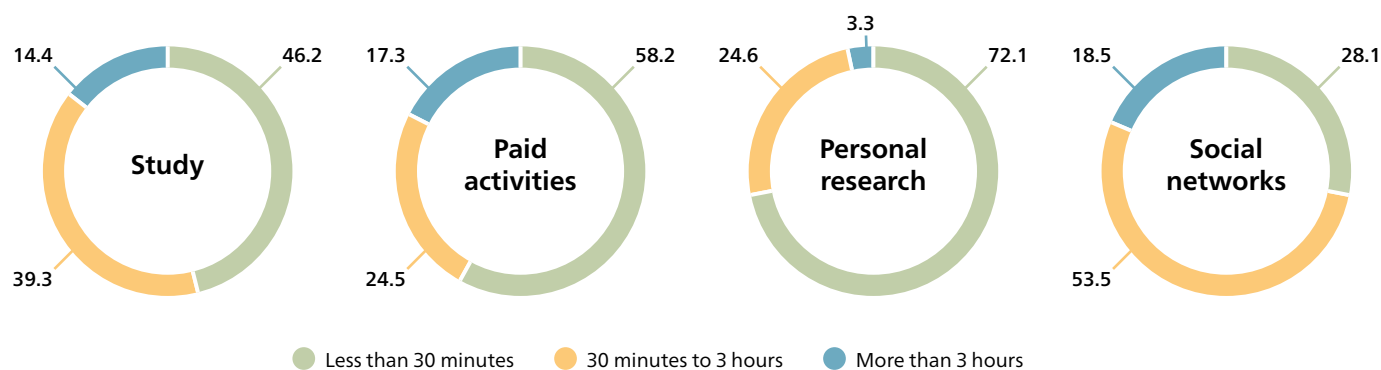
Urban young people tend to believe that there is more corruption in education: 36 % of them strongly convinced of it compared with 26 % of rural young people. The difference can be explained by both the more intense educational competition among urban youngsters to obtain high or pass grades, and the perverse incentives arising from the lower purchasing power of teachers, who have to cope with the cost of living in urban areas.

Use of time

Young people in high school and university spend the most time in learning activities: 25 % of them spend more than three hours a day on it, while 44 % of high school and university students spend less than one hour. Study time decreases at postgraduate level at which only 15 % spend more than three hours studying, probably because of the occupational activities to which they dedicate more hours than people in other forms of education. Confirming the scenario of competition and educational investment, which is more intense in urban areas, urban students spend slightly more time studying than their rural counterparts, but also dedicate more hours to paid jobs, especially those living in Bucharest. Time spent reading the press or searching for information on the internet is the shortest of the four areas under scrutiny, with 73 % of respondents spending less than 30 minutes and only 8 % spending more than two hours doing online research.

Fig. 4 How youth in Romania spend their time online (in %)

Time spent on online activities on an average working day



Some 28 % of young people spend less than 30 minutes on social networks (especially those involved in postgraduate studies, at 38 %). Around 35 % of young people spend more than two hours on social networks, especially undergraduates (44 %), while 31 % of postgraduate students spend time on social networks. In addition to the differences among the cohorts of digital natives, young people start from relative proficiency in using social networks before they reach adulthood, which improves during their student and/or working years as they meet new people with whom they can interact both on- and offline. Social networks are used less after the age of 25, as young people move on to postgraduate specialisations and jobs, all the more so as this generation came of age before the digital platforms started expanding (for example, the TikTok boom in 2017–2019).

Urban young people spend more time on virtual socialising than rural young people, which is possibly explained by the larger extent of the personal sphere in cities, but also by preferences for face-to-face interaction or ease of interaction in rural areas. Also, the **wider social sphere and the facilities offered by digital socialising may explain a significant gender difference**, with 40 % of women admitting they spend more than two hours on social networks, compared with 31 % of men. The latter may spend more time engaged in other digital activities, however, such as computer games or streaming.

Main takeaways

1. Young people's educational attainment is strongly and positively correlated with the educational attainment of their parents.
2. Nearly half of young people are dissatisfied with the quality of education in Romania, and this dissatisfaction is linked to the belief that grades can be bought. Perceptions of corruption in the education system are higher among urban and female respondents, but lower among young postgraduate students.
3. The amount of time spent studying is relatively equal between secondary and university levels, but decreases for postgraduate students, who allocate more of their time to paid work.
4. The time spent on social media and social networks is comparable to the time spent on educational and work activities, and significantly surpasses the time dedicated to gathering information from online sources.
5. Virtual socialising is more common among urban women and young people, indicating that men and young people in rural areas either engage in more in-person interactions or use their time in other activities.
6. Personal effort and perceptions of education suggest there is more intensive social competition in urban than in rural areas.

5. Employment and mobility

Some **48 % of young people have paid jobs**, which is a significant increase on the 2019 survey. Most are employed on indefinite full-time contracts (31%). The proportion is significantly higher

48 % of the young people in Romania have paid jobs

than the average in the other countries in the survey (22 %) and is the second highest in the region, after young

Bulgarians with 32%. Young Kosovars are at the other end of the classification, on only 8%. The high level of indefinite full-time employment is especially characteristic of young people living in urban areas, particularly in Bucharest.

The high employment trend can also be seen from the small proportion of young Romanians (only 12%) who are neither employed nor looking for a job (especially in Moldova), which is significantly lower than the figures found in the 2019 study, according to which 25 % of young people were in this situation. As a likely effect of more intense demand on the labour market, which also showed itself in higher (by 15 %) average salaries in 2024 compared with the previous year,¹³ Romania has now the lowest percentage of inactive young people of all the studied countries, where the average is 21 %, with very high values reported in Kosovo (42 %) and Montenegro (35 %).

Rural young people are overrepresented among those with part-time contracts (8 % of the respondents). Some 19 % of young people are looking for work, mainly young people from rural areas and Moldova, women and those aged 20–24. Around 8 % of young people take vocational courses, which is significantly higher than the average found in the other countries (5 %), most of them living in the central region and Bucharest.

Young Romanians' jobs are remarkably in tune with their professional and educational backgrounds.

Some 38 % of young workers have jobs that are in line with their education, 23 % have jobs in a related field, while 32 % have a job that is unrelated to their education. Romania ranks third in the region in terms of the proportion of young people working in their own occupation, following Turkey at 50 %, and Montenegro at 40 %, and it ranks first in terms of young people holding jobs in line with their education, compared with a regional average of 18 %. Young people in urban areas tend to find jobs for which they are qualified more frequently than their rural counterparts: 65 % of young people are in positions corresponding to their education (the highest percentage in the region, where the average is 55 %), especially women. Men are slightly overrepresented among the 14 % who work in positions requiring a higher education, but also among the 19 % who have a higher educational attainment than the job requires.

Employment and unionisation

The most important factors perceived to influence job finding are, almost equally, occupational skills and personal relationships, with scores of 2.97 and 3.01, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 5. Both are seen as slightly more important by urban young people who face a more competitive labour market than those in rural areas. The importance attached to working abroad (as an experience) and to political relations is significantly lower, with average scores of 2.59 and 2.26, respectively.



Men give moderately but recurrently higher scores than women when assessing the importance of all factors, due either to higher competition in male-dominated sectors or overestimation of its intensity. Young people under 19 are slightly more likely to rate both personal and political connections as important, a possible effect of the public representations of clientelism, although this tends to be reduced by personal experiences in the workplace.

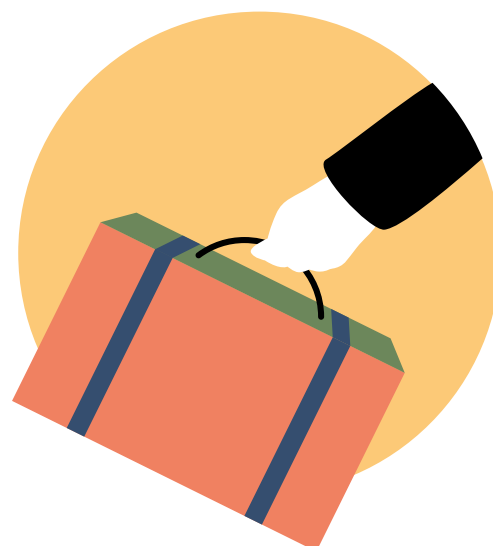
Nearly 8 % of young people in Romania are trade union members. This is among the highest percentages in the region, along with young people in Turkey, Montenegro and Bulgaria, compared with 2 and 3 % of young people, respectively, in Albania and Kosovo.

The percentage of young Romanians who are union members is higher in mixed rural-urban localities (with unionisation rates between 15 % and 20 %) than in rural or large urban areas (3 % and 6 %, respectively), and the same trend is observed when it comes to their intention to join a trade union. Rural areas are dominated by agriculture and related industries, where unionisation is very low, while in the cities unions tend to be rare in the service and small business sectors. Manufacturing, by contrast, is located in areas in which the rural and the urban coexist. Unionisation increases with age, is slightly higher among men than women, and is highest among those working under fixed-term and part-time permanent contracts.

External mobility

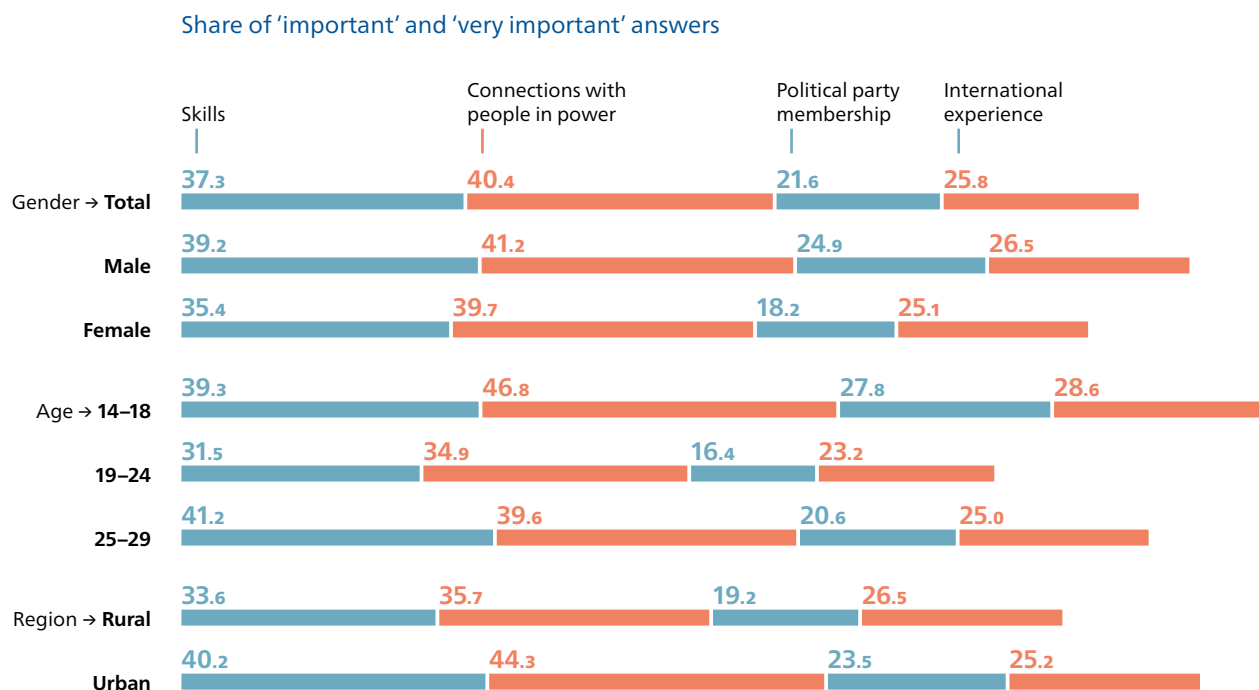
Some 27 % of young people have lived abroad for more than six months, more commonly for men and – especially – for rural young people, and the experience of circular migration increases with the age of the respondent. Trends are also maintained in the case of outbound travelling for education or training purposes. Some 10 % of young people have taken university courses, and a similar number have travelled to take vocational training courses; in both cases men outnumbered women nearly two to one. Rural young people are over-represented among the 8 % of respondents who are graduates of secondary education and vocational training courses.

Urban young people have gone abroad for studies less often and either plan to do so in the future (33 % compared with 25 % in rural areas) or have no plans to migrate for education (40 % compared with 31 % in rural areas). Educational opportunities in Romania may be relatively more attractive in cities compared with the alternative of going abroad, considering the quality of education, but also the living conditions that students experience during their studies. The economic migration of parents from rural areas could also lead to the relocation of children, in other words, they could enrol in secondary schools or take vocational training courses abroad, followed by either the return of the entire family or long-term settlement in another country.



The most common situation for women is a lack of both experience and a desire to travel for educational purposes. This characterises 43 % of young women compared with 30 % of young men. The intention to study abroad decreases with age (from 35 % reported for persons aged 19 to 21 % found in persons aged 25 or more). Higher risk tolerance may enable men to expose themselves to more experiences and develop a stronger desire to study abroad than women. Another possible explanation lies in men's life strategies; they try to accumulate as much cultural capital as possible, on which their performance in the labour market and their attractiveness in the marriage market will ultimately depend.

Fig. 5 Views on important factors for finding a job among youth in Romania (in %)



Some 33% of young people in Romania report a moderate desire to emigrate (move abroad for more than six months), while one in five would like to leave Romania a lot (11%) or very much (8%). Their intention to emigrate is among the lowest in the region. The level is relatively similar to that of young people in Bulgaria and Croatia, and is well below the values reported in Albania and North Macedonia, where around 40% of young people wish to emigrate strongly or very strongly. About half (48%) of young Romanians do not intend to leave (27%) or have little desire

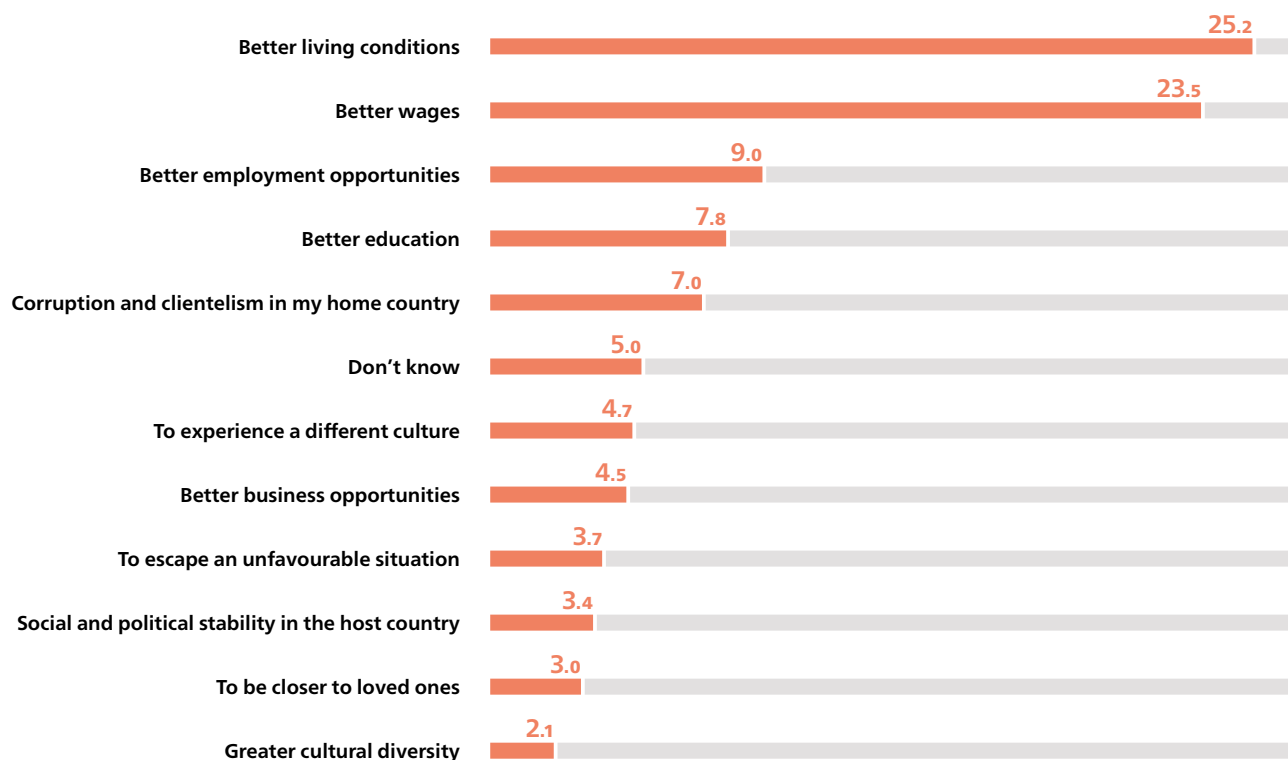
33% of young people in Romania want to leave the country

to leave (21%). Some 25% of those who have some desire to leave do not know when they will leave, and a similar proportion do not know how much time they would spend abroad.

Most young people who plan to leave the country expect to do so within the next two years (17%) or five years (26%). **Only 8% of young people plan to emigrate within the next six months, slightly higher among men living in rural areas**, while women and respondents in urban areas are more likely to say they do not know when they will leave. Urban young people also more frequently talk about their plans to emigrate in the next ten years or later, which could be explained by both the aforementioned plans to complete their studies in the country or possibly a vaguer representation of migration as a possibility which they contemplate for the more distant future.

A desire to emigrate permanently is expressed by 15% of young people, somewhat more among young women and young people in urban areas, while 10% of young people would like to spend at least 10 years abroad. Some 49% of young people plan to spend ten years or less abroad, and are relatively evenly distributed between other estimated durations (<1 year, 1-5 years, 5-10 years).

Fig. 6 Reasons to emigrate for young people in Romania (in %)



Temporary migration prospects are more common among males and young people from rural areas, suggesting a strategy to accumulate financial and social resources during the migration years, and then return home to Romania. This assumption is also supported by the concrete actions taken by those with migration plans.

Rural young people and males appear more often in the two relatively equal sub-groups (around 15 % of the sample) of young people who have contacted potential employers, contacted educational institutions or obtained scholarships abroad. By comparison, **women and urban young people are more likely to be among those who have not done anything about going abroad**, either because their interest in this life option is lower or because they project the possibility of emigrating into the more distant future. The most common action, taken by one in five young people, is to contact friends who live abroad; those over 25 are more likely to have contacts abroad.

The main reasons reported for emigration are economic, and are invoked by young people living in urban areas slightly more than those living in rural areas, who tend to have more varied reasons. Some 25 % of the sub-sample of those planning to leave want to improve their living standards; 24 % are motivated by the higher salaries they expect to earn abroad; while 10 % are looking for a labour market with more job offers. Educational opportunities are especially appealing to young people under 19. Men cite significantly more reasons than women for wanting to emigrate because of unfavourable living conditions, ranging from personal circumstances to social and political instability, and corruption in Romania.

Internal mobility

Some 31 % of young people say it is likely (22 %) or almost certain (9 %) that they will move to another place in Romania within the next year. Around twice as many young people do not intend to relocate and are more certain that they will remain in their home communities, while 10 % of respondents do not know what they will do. There are no significant gender differences, but there is a growing trend of those intending to migrate within the country as people grew older.

Young people under 19 are more likely to say they definitely won't leave, as they are often still living with their families and are anchored in the education system, but among 19–24 year-olds the percentage of those intending to move to another location is significantly higher, as they are exploring educational and professional opportunities in urban centres. The intention of those aged 25 and over to migrate continues to grow, but to a somewhat lesser extent, which can be explained by their graduation from university and postgraduate educational cycles, which are clustered in the cities, and the transition to the labour market.

Rural young people are more likely to say that they will relocate to another locality, indicating continuing population flows, fuelling urbanisation. The intention to migrate internally is higher in Northern Transylvania, with 38 % of young people saying that they will definitely or probably leave, possibly encouraged by the development of Cluj Napoca and other cities in the area. Internal mobility intentions are lower in Bucharest and the West, but these are two urbanised, affluent and fast-growing economic areas, where almost 70 % of young people say they will definitely or probably stay where they currently live.

Main takeaways

- 1.** About half of young people have paid jobs, most of them under full-time contracts signed indefinitely. Women, rural young people, as well as those in Romania's North-East and South-West regions are more often unemployed, but in search of work.
- 2.** Professional skills and personal relationships, in the respondents' perception, are the most important factors in finding a job. Young people under 18 years of age tend to value political or personal relationships more, while young adults attach greater importance to all the factors under consideration.
- 3.** Fewer than one in ten young people are members of a trade union, and they are more likely to be employed on fixed-term contracts, to be slightly older and to live in mixed rural/urban areas.
- 4.** More than 25 % of young respondents have lived abroad for more than six months, mainly men and rural young people.
- 5.** About half of young people express a desire to emigrate; for 20 % of young people, this is strong or very strong. The intention to emigrate is among the lowest in the region.
- 6.** The predominant motivation for emigration is economic.
- 7.** One-third of young people have plans to relocate within Romania, mainly those from rural areas, with a significantly lower percentage among those living in economically developed regions.

6 Family and plans for the future

Some 10 % of young people live alone. Males are five times more likely to be living alone than females, and there is also a higher percentage among 19–24 year olds studying at university or starting their careers, but before starting a family. The gender distribution may be explained by women's lower financial possibilities or by cultural and social considerations that make it more attractive or affordable for males to live alone (such as safety or a preference for independence).

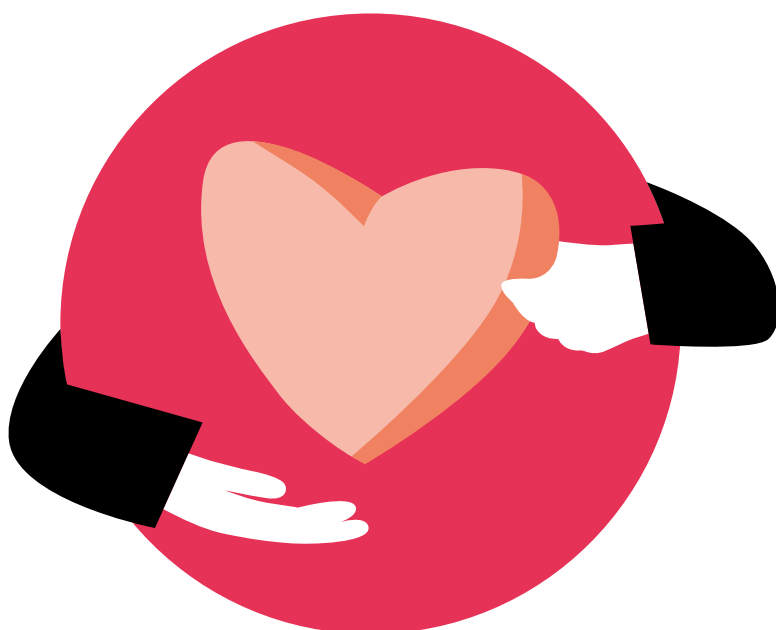
A total of 47 % of young people live with their mothers and 41 % live with their fathers. **Fewer women live with their mothers**, one possible explanation for which is that many mothers are working abroad while one of their daughters takes over her domestic role. The same explanation based on external migration can be given for the slightly lower percentage of rural young men living with their fathers, although another explanation may be the higher male mortality rate.

Some 55 % of the young people who live with their parents say they do so because it is the most convenient solution, but 34 % say they would leave if they could afford it. Convenience is more often mentioned by urban young people, while financial constraints are more often invoked in rural areas, reflecting the high gap in living standards dividing the two environments.

This is confirmed by the assessment of the relationship with parents, which is twice as likely to be reported as conflictual in rural areas (8 %) than in urban areas. A total of 25 % of young people live in a household with their siblings, especially in rural areas, where families are larger and more extended, and a larger number of young people still live with their grandparents (8 %). **Young men in particular would leave their parents' home if they could afford to do so**, which correlates with the abovementioned intention to live independently as a phase of socio-economic fulfilment. In accordance with the previous explanations, **men more frequently report a poor relationship with their parents than women do. Similarly, those in the 19–24 age group** who report more problems with their parents than those aged under 19 and over 25. Only 3 % of young people say that their parents refuse to allow them to leave home, especially in the case of women, whose parents are more likely to fear what might happen to them and that they need more protection than men do.

Starting a family: present and future

Many respondents have already started a family: 38 % of young people live with their partners, which is the highest rate in the region (average of 26 %), while 20 % live with their own children, which is again 40 % above the regional average (14 %). There is a very wide gender gap: 48 % of women live with their partner, which is almost double the percentage of men (27 %). Asymmetry is also to be seen in marital status: 33 % of young women are married, while 27 % live with their children, while the corresponding percentages for men are 17 and 14 %, respectively. Romania ranks second after Turkey in terms of the percentage of young married people (25 % compared with an average of 17 %).



The differences are linked to the younger age at which women tend to start a family. This is also reflected in the 15 % of women who live with their partner without being married, compared with only 10 % of men in the same situation. Men are slightly more likely to be in a non-cohabiting relationship, especially in urban areas, where we also find more young people living with friends, especially those aged 19–24. The percentage of those divorced or widowed is very low (1.3 and 0.3 %, respectively).

Romania has by far the highest percentage of young people in the region planning to have only one child (28 % compared with an average of 16 %, while Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks second with 19 %). More women (32 %) than men (24 %) plan to have only one child, and this option is more common in urban areas (31 %) than in rural areas (23 %). More men (57 %) than women (49 %) expect to have two children, and the variability in men’s responses is greater, confirming gender asymmetric reproductive strategies (Buss 1999). Some 25 % of young people did not mention the number of children they expected during their lifetime, while 20 % said they were likely to have no children, twice as many as in the 2019 survey. There is a difference between genders, with more men (24 %) than women (17 %) believing they will not have any children.

Gender differences can also be observed in the expected number of children, as well as different trends between urban and rural. The **proportion of rural young people who expect to have three or more children is almost double the proportion of their urban counterparts** (24 versus 13 %), and the average number of children expected by rural young people is 2.2, significantly higher than the urban average (1.8).

The average number of children expected by women in the total sample is 1.95, which is below the fertility rate necessary for natural replacement and does not include young women who do not expect to have any children. **The data thus confirm the trend of demographic decline in the Romanian population, which is aggravated by the very high preference for one-child families, especially among women.**

The low predicted fertility rate is also correlated with the advanced age that spouses have when they first start considering having children, especially in urban areas where the estimated age reported by young people when their first child is born is 15 months higher than in rural areas.

Fig. 7 **Estimated number of children and average age of first-time parents among youth in Romania (in %)**

	Total	Rural	Urban	Male	Female
None	20.6	21.7	19.5	23.7	13.7
1 Child	16.5	14.0	17.9	14.5	18.3
2 Children	30.7	28.9	31.6	33.1	28.5
3 Children	7.4	8.8	6.0	7.0	7.7
4 or more Children	3.2	5.3	1.6	3.0	3.2
Don't know	21.5	20.5	21.4	22.7	20.4
Average age of first-time parents (unplanned or planned)	25 years, 10 months	25 years, 1 month	26 years, 6 months	26 years, 3 months	25 years, 7 months

Women reported that they want to have their first child nine months earlier than men, which can be explained by a narrower reproductive window and higher biological costs associated with pregnancy and childcare.

Representations of the future

Young people are much more optimistic about their own medium-term prospects than with the future of Romanian society in general, although pessimism and optimism about their own lives are closely correlated with opinions about the general state of the country. Some 69% of young people believe that they will have a better personal life in ten years' time, especially urban young people (73% compared with 61% of rural young people) and those aged 19–24 (76% compared with 65% of those under 19, but also of those over 25). Around 18% of respondents, especially rural young people or those over 25, believe that ten years from now the future will not be different from the present, while 25% of the latter see no change in the future. Young people under 19 are more pessimistic about their personal trajectory, as 20% of them think they will be worse off in ten years' time, while only 9% of young people over 20 see a negative development in their own lives. Young Romanians are slightly more pessimistic than their average counterparts in the region about their personal future and that of their home society.

More than 40% of respondents are pessimistic about Romania's future, while only 27% believe things will get better. Young people living in rural areas are more inclined than those in urban areas to think that things will get better in Romania (35 versus 29%), while young people living in urban areas are more confident that the country's outlook will get better (29% compared with 23% in rural areas). Social pessimism is more pronounced among young people under 19 years (48% think it will be worse compared with 36–40% of older people), while optimism is more characteristic of young people aged 20–24: 33% of them believe that the future of society will be better compared with only 24% of young people under 19 and over 25 who believe the same. It also shows that the percentage of young people who expect no change increases with age.

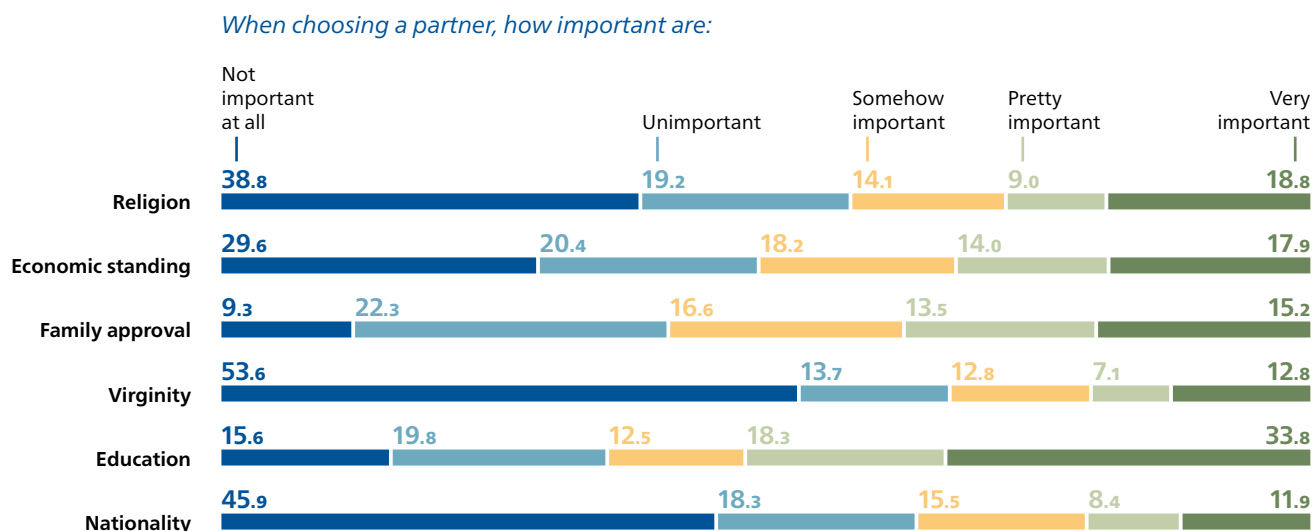
Urban young people are more optimistic than others about both their own future and the development of society overall, while rural young people are more likely to foresee stagnation or particularly negative developments in society, although 61% believe that their personal lives will improve over the next ten years. A possible explanation could be their strategy of migrating to areas where living standards are higher (in urban communities or abroad) or the view that they are in a good position to improve their lives even if things stay the same or get worse.

Teenagers are noticeably pessimistic about their own lives and social changes in contrast to the optimism of persons aged 20–24 or the scepticism of those over 25. As one matures one is likely to encounter greater hardships (objective or subjective) during the teenage years, but also favourable opportunities as young people enter the labour market or start their tertiary education. At this time, opinions stabilise and become less diverse, as life experience mitigates both the unjustified fears and the unrealistic hopes about oneself, and the dynamics of society change.

Criteria for choosing a partner

The criteria for choosing a partner among genders, ages and residential environments (urban/rural) indicate a number of significant differences. **The stereotypical opinion that rural inhabitants are more conservative when it comes to their openness to cultural differences does not seem to be confirmed by the data, and there is even a tendency among the urban young people to attach slightly more importance to religious, nationality and family approval** (plus 0.2–0.3 points compared with rural areas on a scale of 1 to 5). The religious criterion is more often mentioned in the North of Romania and in Bucharest, while the financial and nationality criteria are more often mentioned in the central region and Bucharest. Moreover, urban young people, on average, attach higher importance to potential partners' financial status and education, which indicates that the **marriage market in urban areas is a more competitive and selective than in rural areas.**

Fig. 8 Views on important factors for choosing a partner among youth in Romania (in %)



Financial resources and education are significantly more relevant to females when choosing a partner, while males in Romania are relatively more interested in their partner’s virginity. This asymmetry would appear to confirm the evolutionary psychology models describing the adaptive preferences of the two genders regarding parental investment and the certainty of biological parentage (Buss 1999), reflected in similar trends observed in the 2019 survey. Older respondents present lower scores for all tested criteria, suggesting either a shift (or relaxation) in criteria as time passes by, or an over-reporting of personal selectivity by younger people in order to conform to social expectations.

Main takeaways

1. A high proportion of young people live with their families of origin because it is more convenient and relations with parents are predominantly good. The desire for independence is stronger among males and rural young people, but constrained by limited financial resources.

2. Rural young people live in families that are extended intra- and intergenerationally. At the same time, they report more conflict situations than their urban counterparts and want to have more children and sooner.

3. Urban young people’s preferences when it comes to choosing partners indicate a higher level of selectivity based on religion, nationality or family consent, pointing to a more competitive marriage market, if not a higher social conservatism than in rural areas. This runs counter to cultural stereotypes.

4. Women are more interested than men in their partners’ education and financial status, while Romanian men are more concerned about the virginity of potential partners.

5. Romania has by far the highest percentage of young people in the region who expect to have only one child.

6. Prospects for the future in young people’s personal lives are regarded with more optimism than the progress of society overall, and are influenced by current conditions. Rural young people feel more discouraged than their urban counterparts, believing that their lives and the situation in Romania will not change or will get worse.

7 General values, attitudes and perceptions

General orientation

The individual priorities of young respondents revolve around their professional aspirations and self-assertion, in the sense of natural desires in relation to respondents' life cycles. **Specifically, taking responsibility and the desire to become independent are the top priorities of 69 % of young respondents, followed by their desire to have a successful career (65 %) and to eat healthily (62 %). Graduating from college (57 %), playing sports (57 %), starting a family and wanting to have children were also among the top priorities for most respondents, mentioned by 54 % of those surveyed.**

At the opposite pole are political activity and an interest in designer clothes, both of which are considered unimportant or less important by more than 50 % of respondents, while civic activism is important for only a third of respondents, neither important nor unimportant for a third, and unimportant for the other third of the sample.

Overall, young Romanian respondents do not differ significantly from their counterparts in the other countries covered by the study.

There are also several individual differences related to gender, residential background and age. Young women are more likely to consider it important or very important to take responsibility, be independent, finish university, pursue a career, get married, and have children, while for young men sports and getting rich are more important. For all these questions gender differences are statistically significant, with young women tend to be more future-oriented.¹⁴ In terms of age, there are statistically significant differences ($p > 0.000$) between young persons aged 14–18 and those aged 24–29: the former are more focused on long-term goals such as a career and marriage, and more willing to be independent and take responsibilities. Most likely, those aged 25 or over already have a life plan under way, and its central goals are no longer priorities. More specifically, people are self-evidently no longer concerned with acquiring degrees or getting married if they have already done so. This explains why different age groups have different priorities.

It is noteworthy that the **priorities of the young people included in the sample indicate an orientation towards post-materialist values**, such as autonomy and independence, professional development, health and healthy eating, while starting a family and having children are relevant for only half of those interviewed. However, interest in political and civic activities is rather limited in Romania compared with other countries, with no statistically significant differences by age or gender.

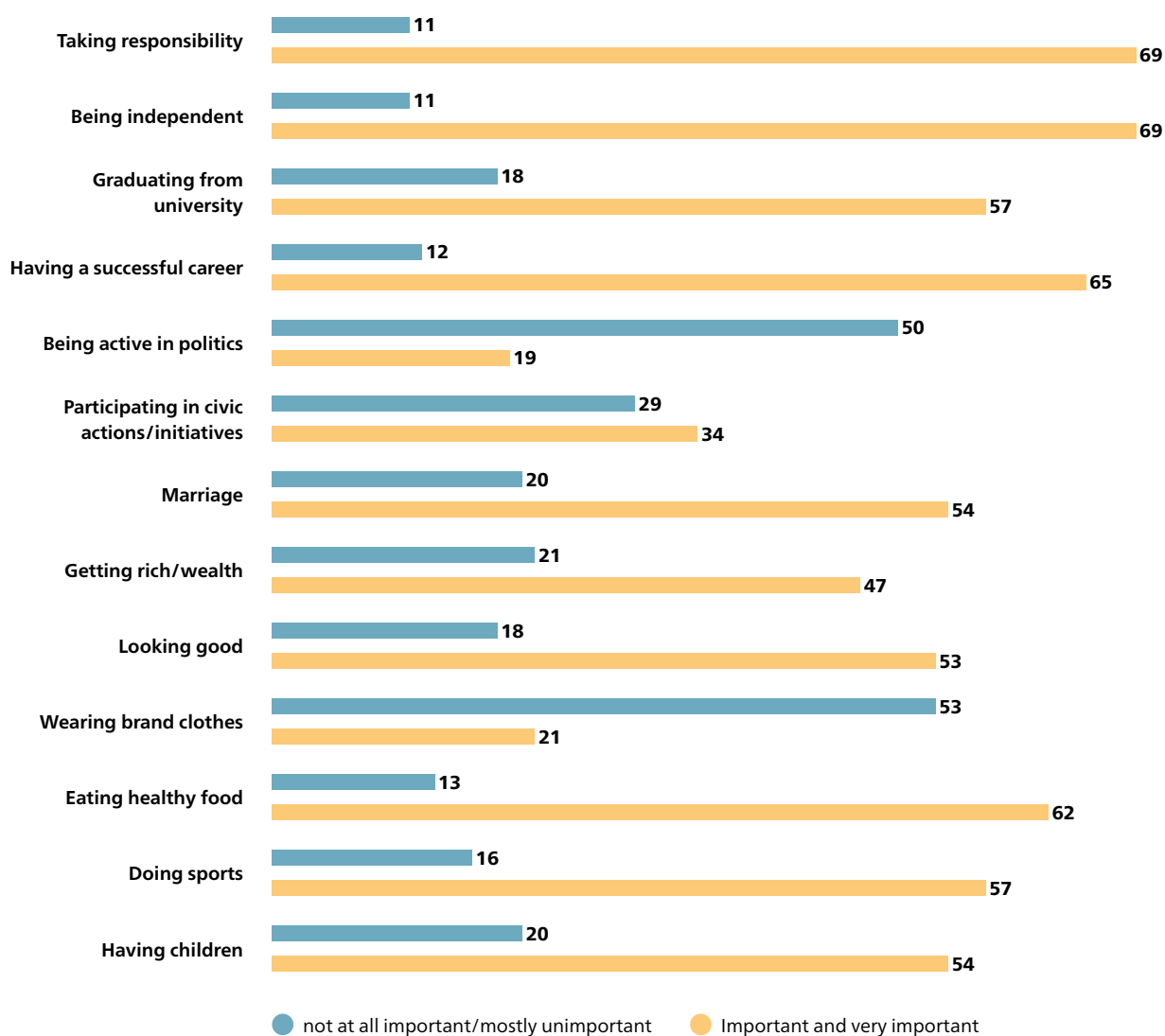
Fears and concerns

The main fears expressed by more than half of the respondents are related to issues that may jeopardise their survival, such as war, the poor quality of health care (mentioned by 59 % of respondents), unemployment (a concern for 57 %), and serious illness (relevant for 53 %). A number of other issues which also represent existential risks were mentioned by almost 50 % of interviewees.



Fig. 9 **Personal priorities for youth in Romania (in %)**

By shares of 'not at all important' and 'mostly unimportant', and 'important' and 'very important'

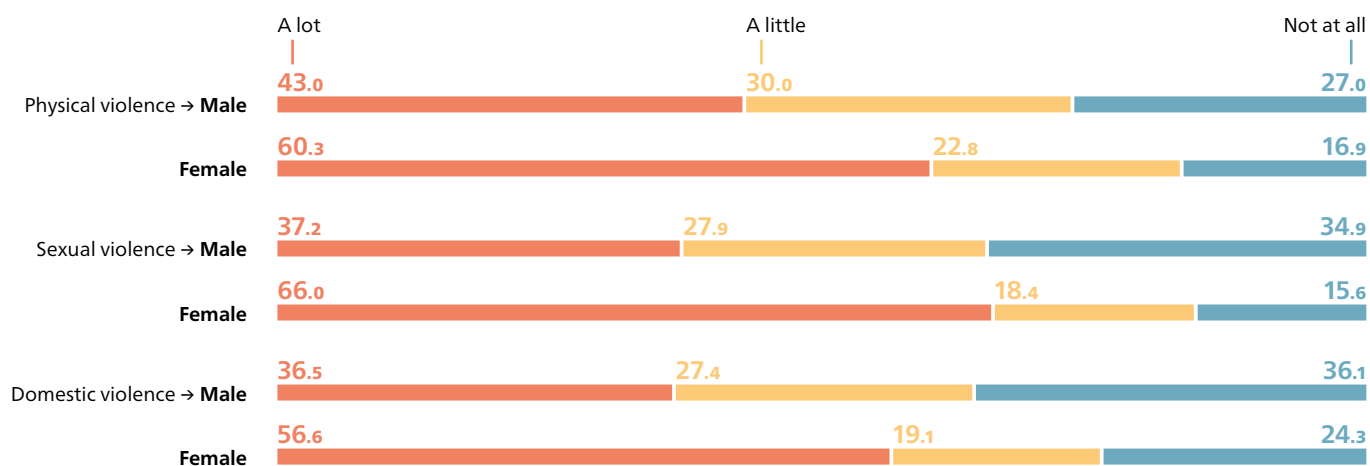


This category includes climate change, terrorist attacks, pension worries, worries about becoming a victim of violence (physical, sexual, domestic), the outbreak of a pandemic or being robbed. These are all matters of concern for 40 to 50 % of the sample. Less than one-third of the young respondents were concerned about the development of so-called 'AI' and increases in the numbers of immigrants or refugees.

Within the population groups we analysed, female respondents are significantly more fearful or concerned than male respondents about all the abovementioned situations, with the exception of the overly large number of immigrants and refugees. The biggest differences are observed, as expected, with regard to their possibility of becoming victims of sexual, domestic or physical violence: the percentage of young women who fear these things is about 50 % higher than that of counterpart men (see Fig. 10).

Fig. 10 **Reasons to fear or worry by gender among youth in Romania (in %)**

To what extent are you frightened or concerned in relation to the following?



These data suggest not only that Romanian women are more likely to try to internalise fear under social pressure, but also that disproportionately more women than men are victims of domestic, sexual and physical violence in Romania.¹⁵

The young respondents' answers showed that their fears and concerns are defined according to the threats or risks they have experienced in each of the 15 situations. Using factor analysis, their fears and concerns are grouped along two dimensions. The first dimension includes the fear of becoming a victim of violence (physical, sexual, domestic), fear of being robbed, and fear of a global pandemic or terrorist attack.

These are threats to the respondents' physical integrity. The second dimension covers the other types of events (serious illness, poor health-care services, unemployment, lack of a proper retirement pension, housing problems, climate change, war, immigrants and refugees, negative effects of 'AI') and seems to be more connected to possible future threats. The two dimensions are strongly interrelated, but the first provides a better explanation of how young Romanians relate to these possible problems.

From a comparative perspective, young Romanians appear to be among the most worried of all young people in the countries surveyed about different kinds of violence. Romania is among the top three countries in terms of fear of physical violence, which is shared by 48 % of respondents compared with 43 % of the total sample; fear of sexual violence is mentioned by 49 % compared with 43 % of the total sample; and fear of domestic violence is shared by 44 % of young Romanians compared with only 34 % of the total group surveyed. Romania is almost on a par with Bosnia and Herzegovina (46 %) and Turkey (44 %) in terms of fear of domestic violence, while these two countries are 6 and 8 %, respectively, ahead of Romania in terms of physical and sexual violence.

Although, according to this survey and compared with the other surveyed countries, violence is not the main concern of young Romanians, their fear of violence is among the highest. The number of young Romanians fearing war is also one of the highest: 56 % fear war, exceeded only by respondents from Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina (both over 60 %).

Attitudes towards abortion and homosexuality

In terms of young people's shared moral values, the results reveal a much higher acceptance of behavioural diversity in the case of homosexuality. More specifically, the average of the responses with regard to acceptance of abortion is 5.87 on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'never justified' and 10 is 'always justified'. The average for homosexuality on a similar scale is 5.31. The analysis of the respondents' socio-demographic profiles shows that young people in urban areas are more accepting of abortion and homosexuality. **There are no significant differences between male and female young people in their acceptance of abortion and homosexuality.** In contrast, 14- to 18-year-olds are more likely to reject deviations from moral norms than those over 25.

Analysing the responses of young people from countries in the region, we observe a higher tolerance in Romania for all the social norms being investigated compared with the sample averages. **Romanian young people are among the most tolerant towards abortion and homosexuality**, with only Slovenia and Greece showing higher levels of tolerance, while Albania and Kosovo have the lowest levels.

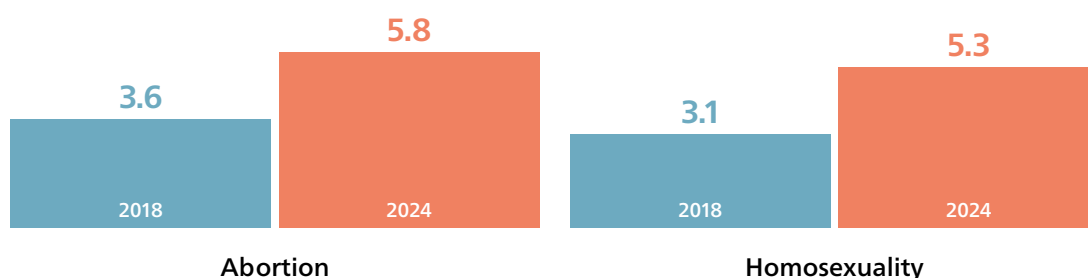
There has been a significant change among young Romanians in the dynamics of their attitudes towards abortion and homosexuality. In 2018, the mean of the responses regarding the justification of abortion was 3.6, while the mean of the responses regarding homosexuality was 3.1 on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'never justified' and 10 is 'always justified'. In 2024, the means of both variables were 2.2 points higher for both dimensions. In the five-year period between the two surveys, there has been a significant shift in the tolerance of young people in Romania regarding these two dimensions, indicating an important liberalisation of attitudes towards private life.

Attitudes towards corruption and drug use

In terms of the regulations on bribery, tax evasion and nepotism, young people in Romania are again among the most tolerant of violations, being surpassed only by Greece with regard to tax evasion and bribery. The average score on a 10-point scale measuring acceptance of tax evasion is 4.7 for Greece and 4.4 for Romania, compared with 3.5 for the overall sample. The average score for bribery is 4.3 in Greece and 4.2 in Romania, compared with a sample average of 3.4.

Fig. 11 **Dynamics of attitudes towards abortion and homosexuality among youth in Romania**

Mean values on a scale of '1 – never justified' to '10 – always justified', for 2018 and 2024



The answers to the questions included in the scale of moral values are clustered into two dimensions: one covers the spectrum of civic morality and is related to the answers to questions on bribery, tax evasion and fixers; the other, regarding private morality, is associated with the

> 50 % of young people in Romania reject gender stereotypes

answers to the questions on abortion and homosexuality. An analysis of the respondents' socio-demographic profile reveals that young men, rural residents and those with lower levels of education have a higher tolerance for bribery, tax evasion and 'fixers' (corruption). In contrast, age is associated with a rejection of deviations from moral norms; for example, respondents aged 14–18 are more likely to accept deviations from moral norms than those over 25.

The legalisation of cannabis consumption is a topic on which there is no clear majority opinion. Half of the respondents reject the idea, while those who 'strongly agreed' and those 'strongly disagreed' combined account for 50 %. The remaining 50 % of the responses are distributed between the 20 % who are neutral and 30 % who agree with legalising cannabis. Young women are also more likely to be against legalisation (56 %) than young men (46 %).

Minorities: stereotypes and tolerance

Stereotypes about minorities differ depending on the group. Most of the respondents tend to reject gender stereotypes according to which men are better political leaders than women, as well as the statement 'when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women'.

Stereotypes about same-sex couples are rather controversial, with 40 % rejecting the statements 'same-sex couples should have the right to marry' and 'same-sex couples are just as good parents as other couples', while 28 % neither agree nor disagree and only 20 % agree.

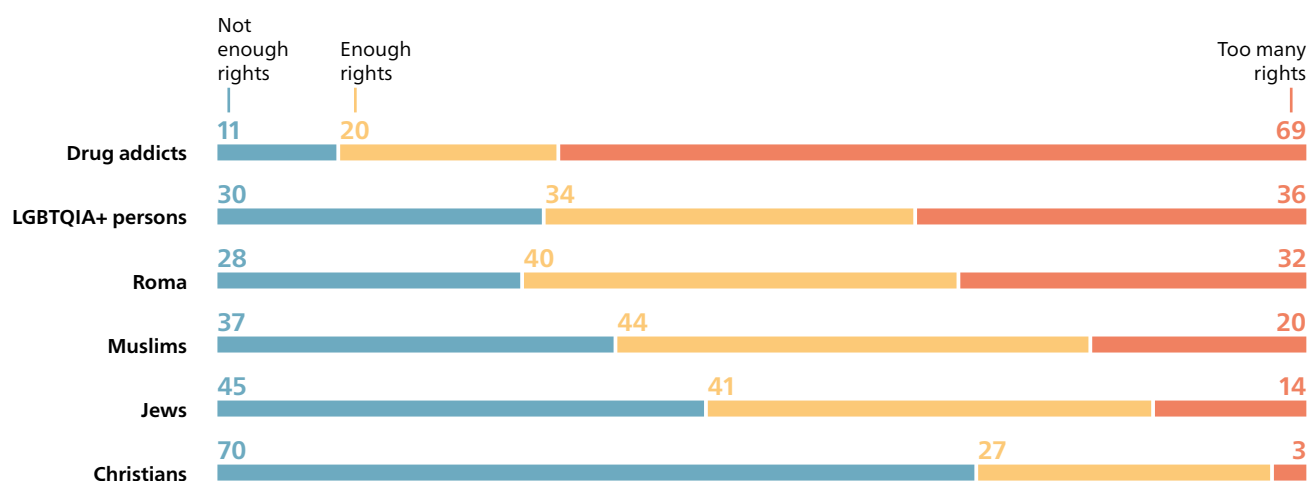
The situation is even more nuanced with regard to ethnic and racial stereotypes: 40 % of respondents reject them, while only 13 % accept them, but a significant percentage of the respondents do not have a clear opinion about the following statements: 'there is a natural hierarchy between black and white peoples', and 'Jews have too much influence in our country'. The first statement received 40 % neutral responses (27 % neither agreed nor disagreed, while 13 % did not know/did not answer); for the second statement, 44 % were neutral (27 % neither agreed nor disagreed, while 17 % did not know/did not answer).

Stereotypes about immigrants are another topic of social controversy: 40 % of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, or did not know/did not answer, while only 18 % agreed with the statement 'immigrants enrich our culture' and 30 % reject the idea that 'we must protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures'.

The responses to the questions on stereotypes about minorities are grouped into two dimensions that can be called 'rejection of minorities' and 'openness towards minorities'. An analysis of the socio-demographic profile of those with these attitudes shows a significant link to gender, young men being more likely to reject minority groups, whereas young women are notably more open-minded about the rights of these groups.

Fig. 12 Views on the rights of minority groups among young people in Romania (in %)

Please say whether, in your view, the following groups have: not enough, enough, or too many rights in your country?



Rural young people are also more likely to have negative attitudes towards minorities, while respondents aged 14–18 are more likely to reject them.

In the literature, a standard method for assessing the level of tolerance towards certain groups in society and the willingness to interact with ‘different’ people is to ask respondents how they would feel if individuals from various categories moved into their neighbourhood (see Fig. 12).

Young people’s responses to these questions reflect a situation similar to the one observed five years ago in 2019.¹⁶ The strongest rejection is expressed towards drug addicts (with 69% expressing rejection). Sexual minorities are in second

place, rejected by 36% of young people, while 30% accept them and 34% remain neutral. Roma are in third place, with similar percentages: 32% of young Romanians reject them, 40% treat them neutrally, and only 28% accept them. With regard to other groups (Muslims, Jews, Christians), the answers reflect a high degree of acceptance (more than 80% of respondents have a low or medium distance from these issues).

Of the differences associated with social and economic characteristics, the following should be highlighted: **women are more likely to reject drug addicts** (73% compared with 65% among men), while **men are more likely to reject LGBTQIA+ people** (42% compared with 30% among women). Respondents under 18 are more likely than the rest to reject drug addicts, Roma and LGBTQIA+ people. Respondents with higher levels of education, whether personal or parental, are less accepting of Roma and drug addicts. Living in urban areas is associated with a stronger rejection of Roma. Young people from wealthier families are more likely to reject drug addicts.

Although the data was not so different in 2019 compared with a 2010 survey of secondary school students,¹⁷ the situation today is much better – rejection of certain social groups has fallen significantly. Some 15 years ago, Roma were rejected by 68% of students and LGBTQIA+ people were rejected by 75%. By comparison, nowadays the corresponding percentages are 41% for Roma and 43% for LGBTQIA+. Similar lower results have been found with regard to Muslims and Jews.

18% of the youngsters in Romania believe that immigrants enrich their national culture

place, rejected by 36% of young people, while 30% accept them and 34% remain neutral. Roma are in third place, with similar percentages: 32% of young Romanians reject them, 40% treat them neutrally, and only 28% accept them. With regard to other groups (Muslims, Jews, Christians), the answers reflect a high degree of acceptance (more than 80% of respondents have a low or medium distance from these issues).

Compared with the responses of young people living in the other countries in the region, young Romanians are more tolerant of LGBTQIA+ communities, with over 13 % of respondents saying they are very comfortable having LGBTQIA+ neighbours, compared with 10 % of the total sample. However, Romania is behind Slovenia and Greece, whose answers were similar (20 % and 16 %, respectively), while in Kosovo and Turkey only 3 % chose the same answer. Romania is also one of the countries in the region with the highest level of tolerance towards Jews, with 42 % of respondents saying they are very comfortable or comfortable having Jewish neighbours. This is topped only by Greece with 45 %, while in Turkey only 13 % share this opinion.

The results indicate that stereotypes about minority groups exist, but affect the perception and acceptance of these groups to varying degrees. Gender stereotypes are the least commonly held by respondents, and stereotypes about same-sex couples are accepted by only a minority, too. Ethnic and religious groups are more likely to be the subject of social controversy, with no mainstream opinion. Noteworthy are the neutral attitudes and the high proportion of non-responses regarding these issues. Also notable is the predominantly negative attitude towards drug users, with a large majority not wanting them as neighbours.

Identity and nationalism

In terms of national identity, 54 % of responses refer to a definition of nationhood in civic rather than ethnic terms. Thus, 33.7 % consider anyone with Romanian citizenship to be Romanian, 13.4 % link identity to respect for Romanian customs and traditions, and 6.4 % to knowledge of the Romanian language, all of which are subsumed under the idea that anyone who is a citizen, respects Romanian culture or speaks the language can be considered Romanian. Only 41 % of the respondents chose a response that refers to the idea that national identity is acquired by birth (having Romanian parents) or is linked to religious identity (being an Orthodox Christian). Detailed analyses do not suggest any significant associations with age, gender or background.

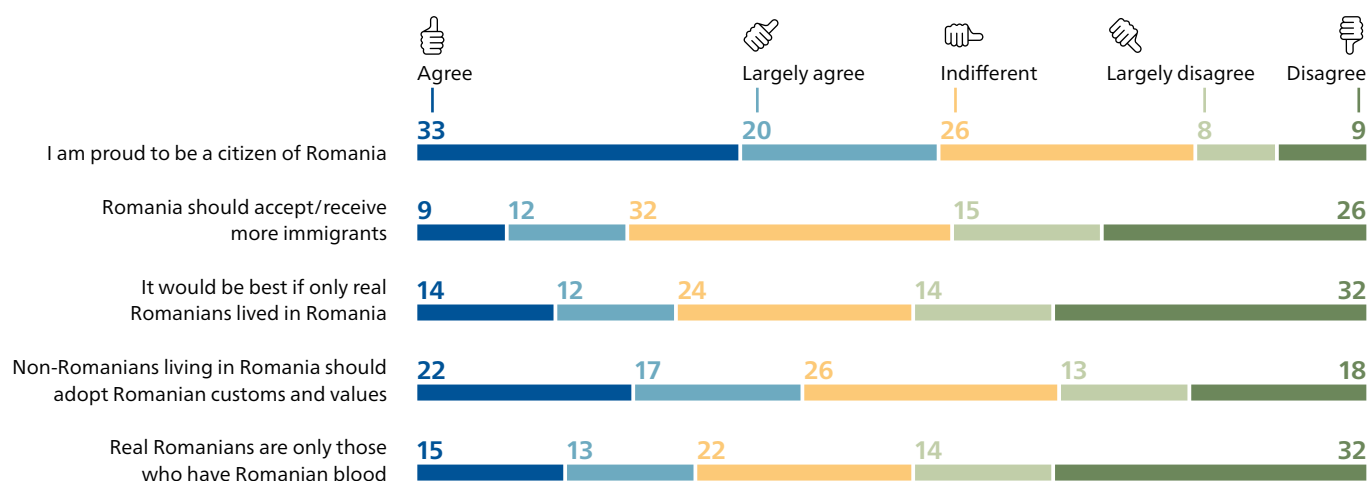
In terms of identification with a political and territorial entity, national identity is more clearly defined than a European identity, with 74 % of respondents declaring themselves 'very much' or 'totally' Romanian citizens, while only 41 % consider themselves 'very much' or 'completely' European citizens. Also, only 11 % of young people consider themselves 'very little' or 'not at all' Romanian, compared with 28 % who responded similarly with regard to European identity. It should also be mentioned here that there is a positive correlation between the two types of identity, in the sense that those considering themselves Romanian citizens also consider themselves European citizens (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.283, $p > 0.000$).

The data analysis reveals significant differences¹⁸ with regard to identity by gender and residence. Thus, young women are more likely to declare themselves 'fully' European citizens, while young men are more likely to choose the 'very little' option in the case of national identity. Similarly, respondents living in urban areas rather declare themselves 'very' or 'very much' European, totalling 47 % of the answers, compared with 35 % in rural areas.

More than half of respondents (53 %) are 'very' and 'somewhat proud' to be Romanians, while 26 % are neutral ('so-so'). It is important to note that there is no majority opinion on accepting a larger number of immigrants, or accepting only Romanians within the country, or defining Romanian people in terms of 'Romanian blood.' All of these topics are fairly controversial, and the responses are divided between adoption, rejection and neutral attitudes. Analysis of the nationalist attitudes scale indicates higher support for nationalist attitudes among males than among females, as well as among young people aged 14–18 compared with those aged 25–29. Support for nationalism is significantly higher among rural young people and among those who are active in the labour market.

Fig. 13 Nationalist attitudes among young people in Romania (in %)

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?



The majority of those interviewed stated that they would not support Romania’s exit from the European Union, with 63% against and only 19% in favour. It is worth noting the high proportion of those who answered ‘Don’t know’, accounting for 16% of the sample. In terms of support for leaving the EU, there are also statistically significant differences¹⁹ by gender, age and urban/rural residence. Young men are more likely to favour exiting the EU, while young women are more likely to choose the answer ‘Don’t know’. Similarly, 14–18 year olds are significantly more likely to answer ‘Don’t know’, while 19–25 year olds are significantly more likely to reject the statement. When it comes to residential environments, those living in rural areas are more likely to answer ‘Don’t know’, while those living in urban areas are more likely to oppose Romania’s exit from the EU.

From a comparative perspective, the **share of young Romanians who say they are proud to be citizens of their home country is among the lowest in the entire sample**: only 30% agree with this statement compared with 43% in the total sample. A lower percentage of similar responses (26%) is to be seen only in North Macedonia, while Slovenia and Greece are closer to Romania – in both countries 31% of respondents are proud of their citizenship.

The highest proportion of young people who say they are proud to be citizens of their home country was found in Kosovo (65%). Also, **young Romanians exhibit the lowest level of rejection of the European Union**, with only 19% favouring Romania’s exit from the EU, compared with 31% in Bulgaria.

Religious affiliation and practice

The data on religious affiliation and practice suggest a major change in the analysed sample of young people: 14% say they belong to no religion, 5.6% did not answer the question, while 62% said they are Christian Orthodox. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census data, 1.1% of the population declare that they have no religious affiliation, while 72% declare themselves Orthodox Christians. For 15% of the population, there is no information. The data collected in FES’s 2018 survey suggest that 1.8% of young people have no religious affiliation, while 87.8% of the sample declared themselves to be Orthodox Christians.

Compared with both the census and the previous survey, the share of those with no declared religious affiliation exceeds 20 % (the figure was calculated by summing the shares of those who declared no religious affiliation and those who did not answer the question).

53 % of young people in Romania felt discrimination based on economic reasons

The share of those who say they go to church at least once a month is 20 % in FES's 2024 survey sample, compared with 29 % of all respondents covered by FES's previous survey in 2018.²⁰ Also, compared with the 2018 survey results, the percentage of those who never go to church has increased from 9 % in 2018 to 15 % in 2024. The analysis shows a statistically significant difference²¹ in religious practice by age, with 20 % of 14–18 year olds saying they never go to church, compared with 14 % of 19–24 year olds and 11 % of 25–29 year olds. In addition, 19 % of respondents 18 years of age or under go to church at least once a month, compared with 26 % of all the other age groups. Gender, residential environment and education are not significantly associated with religious practice.

Overall, the data indicate **a trend toward secularisation among young people**, as evidenced by a higher level of non-affiliation with religion compared with the general population and the results of the 2018 FES survey, and a decline in religious practice, particularly pronounced among those aged 14 to 18. Young Romanians do not differ significantly in terms of religious affiliation or practice from their counterparts in the other countries covered by the study.

Discrimination

A significant proportion of respondents (over 60 %) say they have never felt discriminated against based on gender, ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, language spoken, or sexual orientation.

By contrast, 53 % of respondents report feeling discriminated against sometimes or often due to their economic situation. Moreover, young Romanians are more likely to feel discriminated against on the basis of their economic situation compared with their peers in other countries included in the study, with 39 % of the whole sample saying they sometimes or often feel discriminated against because of their financial situation. Albania is at the opposite extreme with 18 % of respondents reporting perceived discrimination on financial grounds.

A number of social and demographic characteristics are significantly linked with perceived discrimination. Young people aged 14 to 18 are much more likely to say they have never experienced discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, political opinion, language or sexual orientation – over 75 % say they have never experienced discrimination, compared with 60 % for other age groups. The only question for which there are no statistically significant differences between age groups concerns financial discrimination, which is reported evenly by young people of all ages.

There are significant differences between young people living in rural and urban areas, with rural areas being associated with more reported discrimination of various kinds, while urban respondents are much less likely to report discrimination. There are also differences in gender-based discrimination, with 24 % of young women reporting that they sometimes feel discriminated against because of their gender, compared with 16 % of young men.

Apart from the gender and financial dimensions, young women are significantly more likely (70 to 84 %) to say that they have never been discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, language or sexual orientation. The analysis shows no significant gender differences in perceptions of discrimination on financial grounds.²²

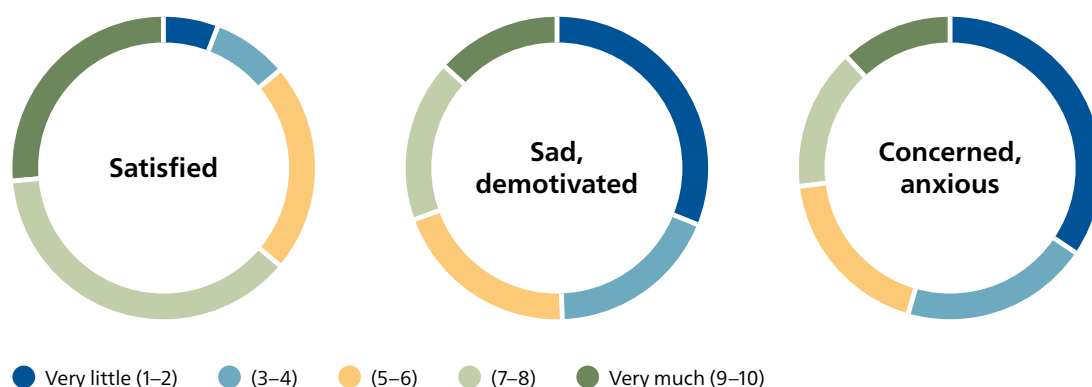
Perceived quality of life

The subjective assessment of life quality captures several aspects. The survey covers the assessment of household incomes, general emotional state and life satisfaction. The responses on subjective income estimation follow a normal distribution: 14 % chose 'we have enough money for basic bills and food, but not for clothes and shoes'; 34 % of respondents said 'we have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV set, etc.)', while 30 % opted for 'We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car or a flat, for instance', indicating that the majority of respondents can cover their basic needs and possibly some extra expenses.

When analysing income data, we should also consider a certain selection effect in the sampling due to the method of data collection, which required access to the internet. This diminished the likelihood of responses from young people in families with limited financial resources. From a comparative perspective, however, young people in Romania are significantly more likely than their peers in the survey to report that **their income is insufficient** to cover even the basic necessities, with 8 % choosing this option, compared with 5 % of the total sample. Only young people in Greece feel similarly deprived, again with 8 % choosing this response. The lowest levels of deprivation were found in Albania and Montenegro, where less than 2 % of the sample chose this option.

Fig. 14 **Life satisfaction and emotional state of young people in Romania**

To what extent are you satisfied with your life in general?



The responses concerning both emotional state and overall life satisfaction suggest a positive assessment of personal situation and low levels of anxiety and depression. From a subjective perspective, **young Romanians' quality of life is predominantly positive**, with around 65% of the respondents rating their own level of depression as 5 or less on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest and 10 the highest. Similarly, 64% indicated an anxiety level of 5 or less on a scale of 1 to 10.

Furthermore, 76% of respondents rated their satisfaction with their living standards as 6 or more, measured on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 10 is very satisfied. It is noteworthy

76% of young people are satisfied with their lives

that there are no statistically significant associations between the level of life satisfaction and socio-demographic

variables, such as age and residence. However, when comparing life satisfaction levels between age groups, the 14–18 age group seems to be more satisfied than the under 18 age group, with the former averaging 7.2 compared with a 6.8 average for the latter.²³ In terms of educational attainment, only those with a doctoral degree are significantly more satisfied than those who have a secondary education and a degree at the end of their studies.²⁴

Main takeaways

1. Taking responsibility and wanting to be independent are important priorities for two-thirds of young people, while civic activism is important for only a third.

2. Overall, the data point to an orientation towards post-materialist values, such as autonomy and independence, professional development, health and healthy eating.

3. More than half of young people report fears about issues that could threaten their survival, such as war, inadequate health care, unemployment, and serious illness.

4. Compared with young people in the other countries surveyed, young people in Romania seem to be among the most worried about violence of all kinds.

5. Comparing responses from young people across the region, Romania shows a higher level of tolerance for all the social norms investigated compared with the average for the 12 countries. Thus, young Romanians are among the most tolerant of abortion and homosexuality, but also of norms related to bribery, tax evasion, and nepotism. When asked about their acceptance of certain categories of people as neighbours, two-thirds of young Romanians were categorically opposed to drug users. At the same time, the data show levels of tolerance towards LGBTQIA+ people and Jews that are higher than the regional averages.

6. Young people in Romania report the lowest level of rejection of the European Union among the countries surveyed.

7. Overall, comparing the data from this study with that from FES 2018 reveals a trend toward secularisation among young people. Young Romanians show no significant differences in religious affiliation or practice compared with their peers in the other countries studied.

8. Young people in Romania are significantly more likely than their peers in the survey to report that their income is insufficient to cover even the bare necessities.

8 Political attitudes and participation

Rights of minority groups

Participants in our study were asked to indicate whether they believe that members of five selected groups have too many rights or not enough. In theory, responses to these questions should align with the answers about social distance from various groups, and the results indeed show exactly this (see Figure 12). The most notable are opinions on the rights of LGBTQIA+ and ethnic minorities, which only 31% of respondents think are insufficient.

Half of young people (50%) believe that LGBTQIA+ people have either enough rights, or too many, while for ethnic minorities the percentage of those who believe they have enough or too many rights is even higher at 57%. Added to this is a significant percentage of respondents who did not wish to answer these questions. For the other three minorities, the order of responses is very clear: poor people are considered the group with the fewest rights (61%), followed by young people (51%) and women (38%).

Comparison with 2019 data reveals that, over the past five years, the issue of minority rights has become more polarised in relation to women's, ethnic minority, and LGBTQIA+ rights, while no significant changes have been observed for the rights of young people and the poor. For the first three groups, however, the proportion of respondents who believe these groups have sufficient rights has fallen over the last five years, from 34 to 23% for LGBTQIA+ people, from 42 to 37% for ethnic minorities, and from 56 to 44% for women. At the same time, the decrease in respondents taking this view has been accompanied by an increase in the percentage of people who believe these minorities do not have sufficient rights.

Thus, it can be argued that the polarisation observed in these results reflects either a reaction to the deterioration of minority rights in Romania over the past five years or an increased awareness among young people of how the rights of these minorities are respected in Romania.

An analysis of the differences by respondents' socio-economic characteristics reveals another interesting aspect: for all five groups, **a significantly higher percentage of young women believe they do not have sufficient rights compared with young men.**

The biggest difference is in terms of women's rights: while 29% of men believe that women don't have enough rights in Romania, the corresponding percentage for women is almost double: 56%. For LGBTQIA+ members the gap is 21%, and for young people, poor people and ethnic minorities the gap varies between 13 and 17%. These results are similar to those found over the past decade in other Western societies, where young women appear to be becoming more liberal than young men (Edsall, 2024).

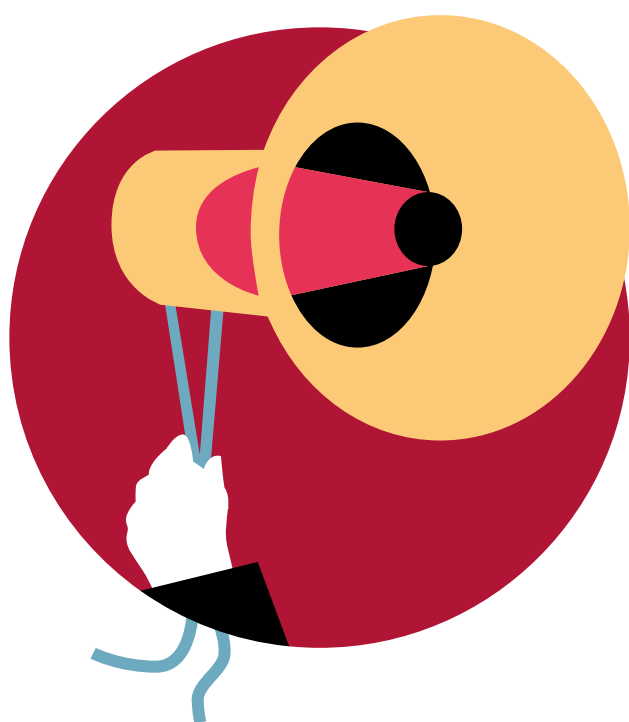
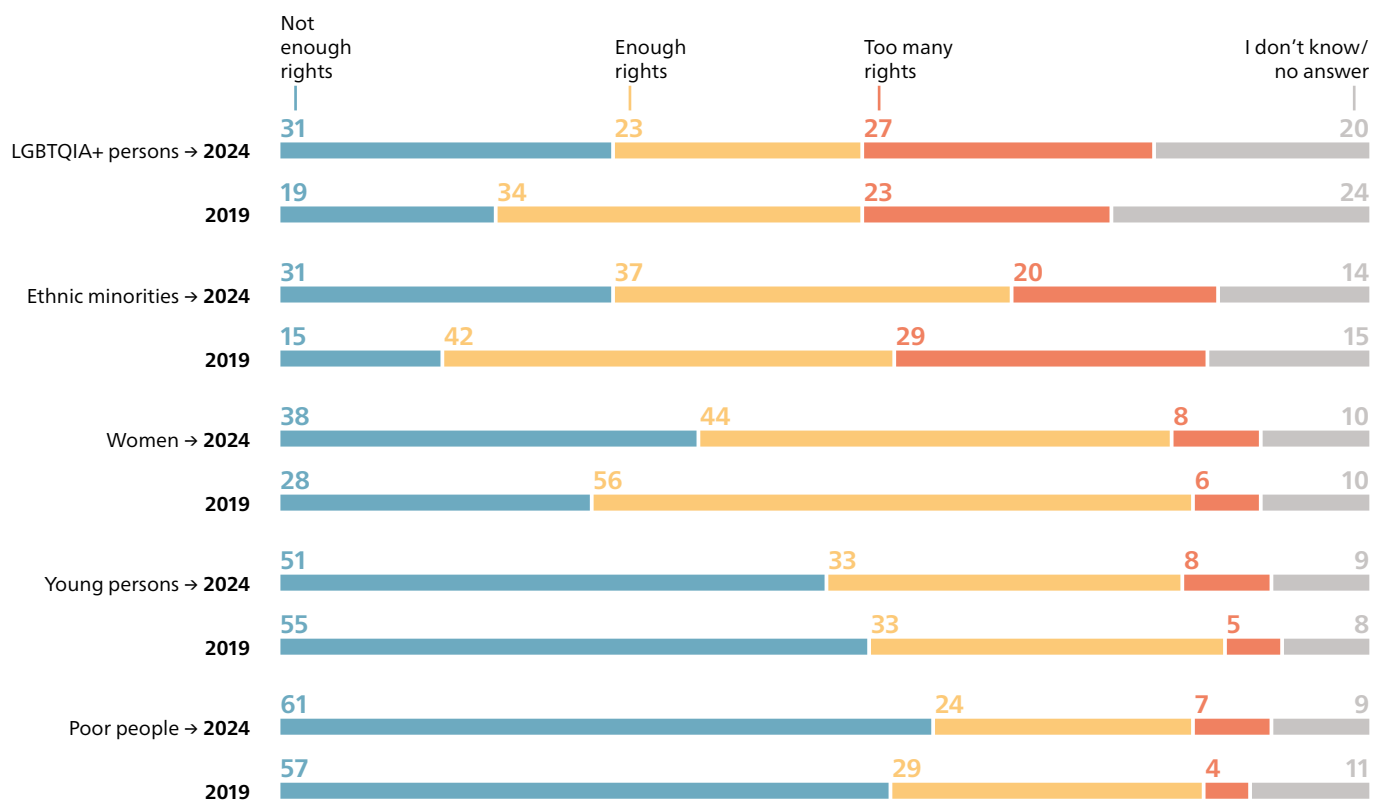


Fig. 15 **Comparative evolution of opinions regarding the rights of minority groups among youth in Romania between 2019 and 2024 (in %)**

Please tell us whether, in your opinion, the following groups have not enough rights, enough rights, or too many rights in your country:



Compared with the other countries included in the survey, Romania does not differ much when it comes to views on the rights of poor people and young people: in all countries these are the

Environmental protection

Young Romanians expressed their preference for government intervention in the national economy to protect nature: only 25% said they disagreed with such intervention, 31% said they were neutral on the issue, and the remaining 44% expressed support for such intervention.

44% of youngsters support government intervention in the economy in order to protect the environment

two main minority groups that citizens say do not have enough rights. **Turkish and Greek citizens are much more open towards LGBTQIA+ people than the rest of the countries in the region. They are followed by Romania. The percentage of respondents in all three countries who say that this minority does not have enough rights is higher than that of people saying that, on the contrary, they have too many.** In all other countries, aggregate opinion is rather unfavourable to LGBTQIA+ people.

This finding is also supported by the conclusions of a survey published by FES in May, which shows that 18–29 year olds are significantly more likely than those aged 30 and over to believe that environmental issues should be a priority for Romanian politicians (Bucată, 2024: 5).

Among those favouring government intervention to protect the environment, women account for a significantly higher proportion (49% compared with only 39% of men), along with highly educated respondents (50% compared with 36% of those with low education), and those living in urban areas (46% compared with 38% in rural areas). It should be noted, however, that some of these differences may be influenced by the example given to clarify the question, which suggested that the government could ban old cars that pollute the environment. If respondents reacted to this example rather than the more general case, it is possible that their answers may have been different if a different example had been given.

Interest in politics

Active political involvement cannot occur without an interest in politics, which is essential for every citizen. Therefore, we will begin the analysis of the research section dedicated to political behaviour by presenting the results on young people's interest in politics and their self-assessments of their knowledge of the political world.

45% of youngsters in Romania are not interested in politics

A first observation worth making is that young people's interest in politics appears to have increased slightly compared with five years ago: while in 2019, more than three-quarters of young people (76%) reported no interest in politics, and only 9% expressed interest, by 2024, the percentage of those not interested had dropped to 45%, and the percentage of those interested had nearly doubled to 18%.

This is quite an encouraging development, although the percentage of young people who are not interested in politics remains very high. Young people were found to take a higher interest in politics than in Romania in just two of the 12 surveyed countries: Greece, where only 27% of young people say they are not interested in politics, and Turkey, where the corresponding figure is 28%. In Romania, 45% of young respondents were not interested in politics, which is lower than in the other nine countries.

Gender and education are the only social and economic characteristics significantly related to an interest in politics: young people with more education (25%) or who come from families with higher educational backgrounds (22%) take more interest in politics than those with less formal or family education (15%). In terms of gender, while 20% of men say they are interested in politics, only 15% of female respondents take any interest in politics.

The responses also show a significant relationship with self-positioning on the left–right axis, suggesting that those who are more aware of their own ideological position tend to take more interest in politics than others. Thus, 65% of those who are unable to place themselves on the left–right scale declare they are not interested in politics, and only 8% say they are interested. If we consider those who have chosen a central position on the left–right axis (values 5 or 6 on the scale) as a benchmark, then the percentage of those not interested in politics falls to 43%, while the percentage of those interested rises to 14%. Finally, the highest percentage of young people who are interested in politics is found among those who have a well-established political identity, either on the left (25%) or on the right (28%).

Knowledge of politics is distributed somewhat similarly to an interest in politics: 40% say they do not know much about politics, 34% say they have average knowledge, and just over a quarter, 26%, say they know a lot about politics. If we relate the two variables – interest in and knowledge about politics – we can see that they are strongly connected: 63% of respondents have a level of knowledge that corresponds to their level of interest in politics. The group of respondents who take more interest in politics than they have knowledge about it is around 14%, and at the opposite pole are the 23% of young people who have more knowledge than interest in politics. **Only one in eight respondents (12.5%) fall in the category of 'model citizens', in other words, those who are not only interested in politics, but also have a lot of knowledge about it.**

As with the previous variable, knowledge about politics is associated with educational attainment: the percentage of respondents who do not know much about politics plummets from 51 % among those with low education to 25 % of the highly educated. Similarly, the percentage of those who know a lot about politics ranges from 20 % among those with low education to 29 % among the highly educated. It is also worth mentioning here that men are more likely (30 %) than women (22 %) to report having a lot of knowledge about politics.

Interest in politics can also be linked to **how respondents consider that young people's interests are represented in politics**. The data show that respondents are rather critical of this: 55 % consider that young people's interests are not very well represented in politics; 30 % rate their representation as average; while only 15 % consider that young people's interests are proper-

55 % of youth in Romania consider that young people's interests are not well represented in politics

ly represented in politics (in Romania). Women (59 %, compared with 51 % for men), underage respondents (61 %), highly educated respondents (59 %), and respondents living in urban areas (57 %, compared with 50 % in rural areas) are more critical of the representation of young people's interests in politics. Even though young Romanians are rather critical of how politics represent their interests, the 15 % of young people who consider that their interests are adequately represented is enough to rank Romania second in the region in this respect. Only young Turks (19 %) have a better opinion on this issue. **Considering the percentage of those who are dissatisfied, 55 %, it is clear that the poor representation of young people's interests in politics is not a problem only in Romania, but in other countries of the region as well.**

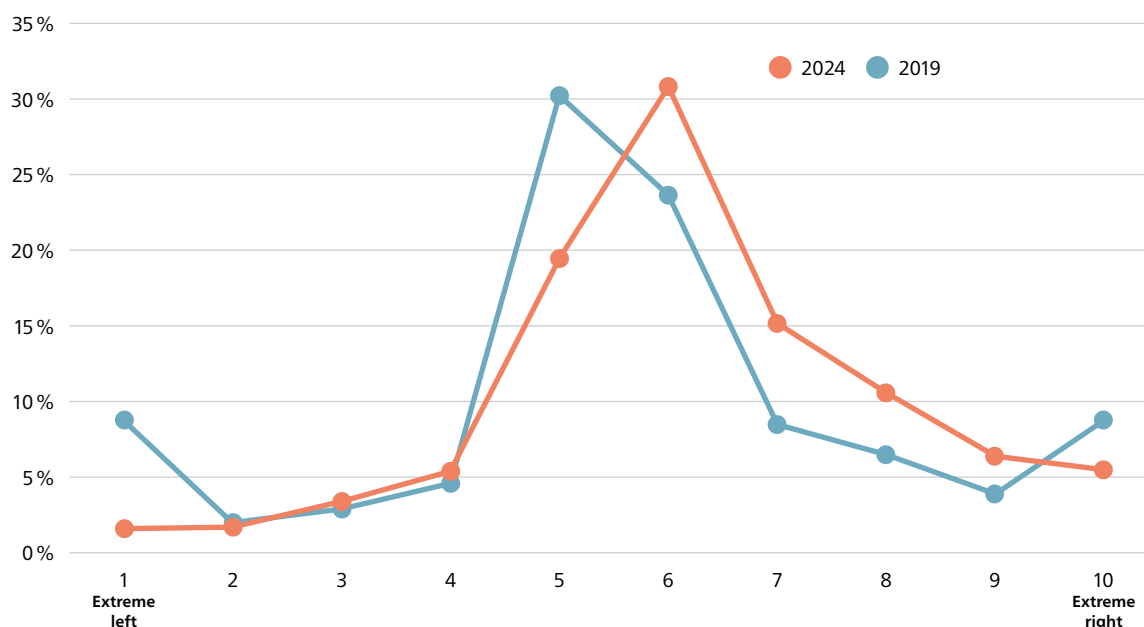
Left-right dimension

Positioning on the left-right axis is a tool we use to describe the ideological stances of citizens and political parties. Here, we focus solely on how young Romanians position themselves on this axis (see Fig. 13). A first observation here is that only about three-quarters of respondents (77 %) can position themselves on this axis – the remaining **23 % state that they do not know where to place themselves or do not want to indicate their position on the axis. From this standpoint, Romania is in the middle; more specifically, the percentage of those who do not know how to position themselves varies from 12 % in the case of Turkey to 39 % in the case of Northern Macedonia.**

It is worth noting that reporting on the left-right axis differs by gender: women are much more likely to say that they do not know where they stand on this axis (28 %), compared with only 18 % of male respondents. The 10 % difference is distributed across the entire scale, with a slightly higher concentration towards the right-hand side, values 8 and 9, where slightly more male respondents placed themselves. However, the differences between the responses given by young men and women living in Romania are minor compared with the whole scale.

Figure 13 reflects only the positions of the 77 % of respondents who provided a valid answer to this question. The picture is a standard one for this question in the context of Romanian society: most respondents place themselves in the middle of the scale (50 % chose the values 5 or 6), while the right and far right positions attract about three times as many respondents (38 %) than the left and far left positions (12 %).

Fig. 16 Ideological self-placement of youth in Romania on the left–right axis



The way in which young respondents placed themselves on the left–right scale was influenced by their level of interest in politics, which we discussed in the previous section. There are two important aspects of the relationship between the two variables. First of all, the level of interest taken in politics strongly influences young people’s ability to place themselves on the left–right scale: the percentage of those who do not know how to place themselves is 33% among those not interested in politics, 16% among those taking an average interest in politics, and only 10% among those who say they are very interested in politics. Secondly, the data show that young respondents who say they are interested and very interested in politics tend to be located more on the right-hand side of the scale. Thus, while those taking no interest in politics are distributed 10% to the left, 56% to the centre and 34% to the right, the distribution is different among those who are very interested in politics: 14% of them are to the left, 33% in the centre, and 52% to the right. The reason why young Romanians who are interested in politics are so massively located on the right side of the scale remains an open question.

Compared with 2019, a shift in the population towards the right side of the scale can be observed: while in 2019 the distribution was nearly balanced between the left (49%) and the right (51%), by 2024, only five years later, only 31% of respondents identify with the left, while 69% of the young people align with the right.

Does this mean that young Romanians have moved significantly to the right? The discussion here must be nuanced, as self-placement on the left–right axis is just one indicator of ideology. Studies suggest that a second dimension, based on socio-cultural themes, could be combined with the left–right axis to create a two-dimensional framework that more accurately explains the ideological positions of citizens and political parties. Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Marks (2024) even argue that this dimension has become more important in shaping citizens’ political decisions, overshadowing the traditional left–right axis.

Unfortunately, there are no questions in our questionnaire that enable us to analyse this second dimension, but we can use other values and attitudes expressed by respondents to estimate their position. As shown in other sections of the report, the social distance taken towards minority groups has decreased, the proportion of respondents who believe that certain groups do not have sufficient rights has increased, and young Romanians seem to be concerned about issues such as environmental protection. All of these topics suggest that a large proportion of the young Romanians do not find any of their own values in Romanian politics, which emphasises mainly left-right topics rather than topics that are of interest to them and which would fit better in the second dimension of the political field. Moreover, the increase in the percentage of those who believe that young people's interests are not well represented in Romanian politics is a consequence of the fact that Romanian parties do not discuss the social and identity issues that concern young people very much.

12% of youth in Romania identify as left or centre-left, and 38% as right or centre-right

From this perspective, we can say that although the answers to this question suggest a rightwards political movement among young Romanians, other data from the questionnaire suggest that this has been accompanied by a movement away from the traditionalist, authoritarian, nationalist components of the second dimension and towards the green, alternative, libertarian components.

However, comparisons with other countries included in the report clearly show that Romania has the lowest percentage of young people who self-identify as left or centre-left (values 1–4 on the scale): only 12% choose this position, while the percentage of those identifying as right or centre-right (values 7–10 on the scale) is more than three times higher at 38%.

By comparison, in countries such as Albania, Montenegro or North Macedonia, the percentage of those who place themselves on the left is higher than those who identify with the right, while in the rest of the countries the ratio of those self-placed on the right to those placed on the left is no more than 1.8 to 1 (in the case of Slovenia), which is significantly lower than the 3 to 1 ratio observed in Romania.

Values associated with the left-right dimension

In this section, we focus more closely on values to which, traditionally, people relate differently, depending on their own ideology. These values concern the role of the church in society, and the role of the state in the economy.

When asked about the influence of church and religious organisations, and whether they have too little or too much power, **more than half of young Romanians (53%) believe that churches have too much power**, while 34% believe they have as much power as they should, and 13% believe they have too little power. The percentage of those who believe that the churches have too little power in Romania is negatively associated with level of education (21% of those with a low level of education believe this, falling to 14% among those with medium education and to only 8% among those with higher education), and with interest in politics (18% of those not interested in politics say that the churches do not have enough power, which drops to 9% among those interested in politics).

Surprisingly, this is also a result that needs to be further analysed, as the relationship of this variable with self-placement on the left–right scale is the opposite of what we might expect. Thus, 27% of those who consider themselves to be on the left consider the church to have too little power, 30% position themselves in the middle, and 43% consider the church to have too much power. By comparison, among those who consider themselves on the right, only 8% believe that the church has too little power, 36% position themselves in the middle, and 56% believe the church has too much power. Traditionally, the right is associated with pro-clerical positions, while the left is associated with a somewhat greater scepticism towards the church, but the data show that this relationship is reversed among young Romanians.

An additional set of three questions asked about the role played by the state in the economy. Young people were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: 'incomes of the poor and the rich should be made more equal', 'Government ownership of business and industry should be increased', and 'Government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for'. Agreement with these statements would be associated with a left-wing position, while disagreement would be associated with a right-wing position.

The results reveal that young people overwhelmingly support these statements: 55% agree that incomes should be more equal, 57% agree that the state should have a greater role in business and industry, and 73% agree it is the government's responsibility to assist people. Also, in relation to these variables we observe an inconsistency between the values accepted by young Romanians and their self-positioning on the left–right axis. Specifically, although 73% of young people place themselves on the right side of the left–right scale (values 6 to 10), the majority actually support values traditionally associated with the left, rather than the political right. When recalculating agreement with these values among those who identify as right-leaning, we find that more than half of this group still supports them (50, 56 and 64%, respectively).

This inconsistency warrants further investigation, but one possible explanation is that some people who self-position on the left–right axis simply may not fully understand what the two terms mean.

Voting turnout

Given that our study focuses on young people and that the most recent elections before data collection were in 2020, respondents who were under 18 at the time of the 2020 elections have not yet had an opportunity to vote. We can thus estimate that about half of the sample, those aged 21–22 at most in 2024, will vote for the first time in 2024.

The most recent elections, held on 6 December 2020, were for the Romanian Parliament. When asked about their participation in these elections, 50% of respondents said that they had voted, 17% said that they had not vote, despite having the right to, and 33% stated they did not have the right to vote in 2020. It is well known in the specialist literature that in post-election surveys the voter turnout rate is overreported, for a number of reasons.²⁵

Based on this observation, we calculated the actual voter turnout rate using turnout data collected during the 2020 parliamentary elections (available at: → prezenta.roaep.ro/parlamentare06122020) and data describing Romania's resident population aged 18–29 on 1 January 2021 (available at: → insse.ro/cms). Based on these data, the **2020 turnout rate of 18–29 year olds was 32.5%**, and so significantly lower than the self-reported turnout rate of 50% in our study. Bearing this observation in mind, the results in this section related to youth voter turnout should be interpreted with caution.

Our respondents who provided a valid answer reported the following for the 2020 elections: 38 % voted for the National Liberal Party (PNL), 23 % voted for the Social Democratic Party (PSD), 18 % voted for the Save Romania Union (USR), 10 % voted for the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) and 11 % voted for other parties. As expected, results differ from the official ones because some people's memories fade (the question was asked more than three years after the elections), or because people talk about other elections (perhaps the presidential elections), or because they compare young people's vote with the results of the national vote. The biggest differences are observed in the case of votes for the PNL – 38 % reported versus 25 % officially – and the votes for the PSD (23 % reported versus 29 % officially). For the smaller parties, USR and AUR, the reported percentages are closer to the official ones.

Relating the 2020 vote to social and economic characteristics, it can be seen that voting for PSD is negatively associated with the respondent's level of education: 35 % of the low educated, 24 % of the medium educated and 17 % of the highly educated voted PSD. Those surveyed in urban areas also reported voting for the PSD at a lower rate (19 %) than those surveyed in rural areas (28 %). Voting for USR is positively associated with education level: only 7 % of respondents with lower education voted for this party, while among the highly educated the corresponding percentage was 27 %. USR also attracted more votes from urban voters (22 % compared with 13 % in rural areas) and from voters with better financial status (22 % compared with 13 % of the have-nots). It can therefore be seen that, although turnout is overreported, the relationships between voting and socio-economic characteristics that we know from previous studies are also apparent in how young people in our sample report their voting.

In terms of voting intentions for the next elections, young Romanians indicated the following preferences: 26 % indicated that they would vote for PNL, 21 % for PSD, 19 % for USR, 18 % for AUR and 16 % for other parties. The next elections after data collection took place on 9 June, including the elections for the European Parliament and local authorities.

The results of the European Parliament elections show that 46 % of Romanians voted for the PSD-PNL Electoral Alliance, 14 % for the AUR Alliance, 8 % for the United Right Alliance (which included USR), 5 % cancelled their votes and the remaining 27 % voted for other parties. **The differences between young people's reported intention to vote and the results of the European Parliament elections are small and related largely to the USR party. However, the difference can easily be explained by the fact that USR is known to have a mainly young electorate, as well as by the fact that USR performed very poorly in this round of elections.**

Links to the respondents' socio-economic characteristics are as expected. AUR attracts more men, while USR attracts more women. Respondents with higher education are significantly less attracted to PSD and PNL, and feel more attracted to USR. Last but not least, respondents with above average financial resources indicated a significantly higher preference for USR and a significantly lower preference for AUR.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their favourite political party. As expected, their preference for a certain political party is also largely reflected in their voting intention, although 10–18 % of those who prefer one political party say they will vote for another political party. PNL manages to turn 90 % of its supporters into voters, the remainder planning to vote AUR (5 %), PSD (3 %) or other parties (2 %). Some 85 % of those who prefer PSD say they will vote PSD, the remainder planning to vote for PNL (8 %), AUR (3 %) or other parties (4 %).

USR keeps 88 % of its supporters as voters, the remainder planning to vote for PSD, PNL and AUR (2 % each) or other parties (6 %). Finally, AUR, the newest parliamentary party, keeps 82 % of its supporters as voters, and the remainder plan to vote PNL (5 %), PSD (4 %), USR (4 %) or other parties (5 %).

Civic and political participation

Voting is only one form of political participation, and young people are known to be one of the most civically and politically active age groups. Bearing this in mind, we also looked at young people's involvement in other forms of civic and political participation: **signing online petitions (29 %); participating in rallies (20 %); volunteering in NGOs (32 %); working for a political party or political group (10 %); boycotting products for political or environmental reasons (21 %); or participating in online political activities (17 %)**. In order to simplify the analysis of these data, we aggregated the number of activities in which young Romanians participated, and focused on people who did not engage in any kind of civic or political activity (43 % of young people) and, at the other extreme, on those who participated in at least three of the abovementioned types of activity (18 %).

The data show that civic and political involvement is influenced by level of education: 51 % of those with low education are inactive, compared with 33 % of those with a higher education. Participation is higher in urban areas than in rural ones, which was expected, given that rural areas do not offer many opportunities for civic or political involvement. Interest in politics is also associated with higher levels of participation: only 19 % of those interested in politics have never been involved in any form of civic or political activity, while 43 % of those involved in three or more activities have never been involved in any form of civic or political activity.

Institutional trust

Trust in political institutions is a necessary element of a functioning democracy, especially in new democracies such as Romania. The percentage of young Romanians who say they trust various political institutions a great deal or very much is shown in Figure 14.

The data confirm what we know about institutional trust in Romania: **EU and NATO enjoy a high level of trust**, and the military is the only national institution that comes close to these supranational institutions in terms of trust. A second group of institutions, trusted by 22–31 % of respondents, includes institutions that have a high profile at the local level: the church, the police, NGOs, the municipality, the courts. The institutions with the lowest level of trust are exactly the key institutions of the political system: the parliament, the government and the political parties. They are trusted by less than 20 % of young people. Respondents' socio-economic characteristics do not generate significant differences in their answers, but it is noticeable that young people who declare themselves to be on the right generally have more trust in institutions than those on the left (four times more trust in the case of political parties, and twice as much trust in the case of the government).

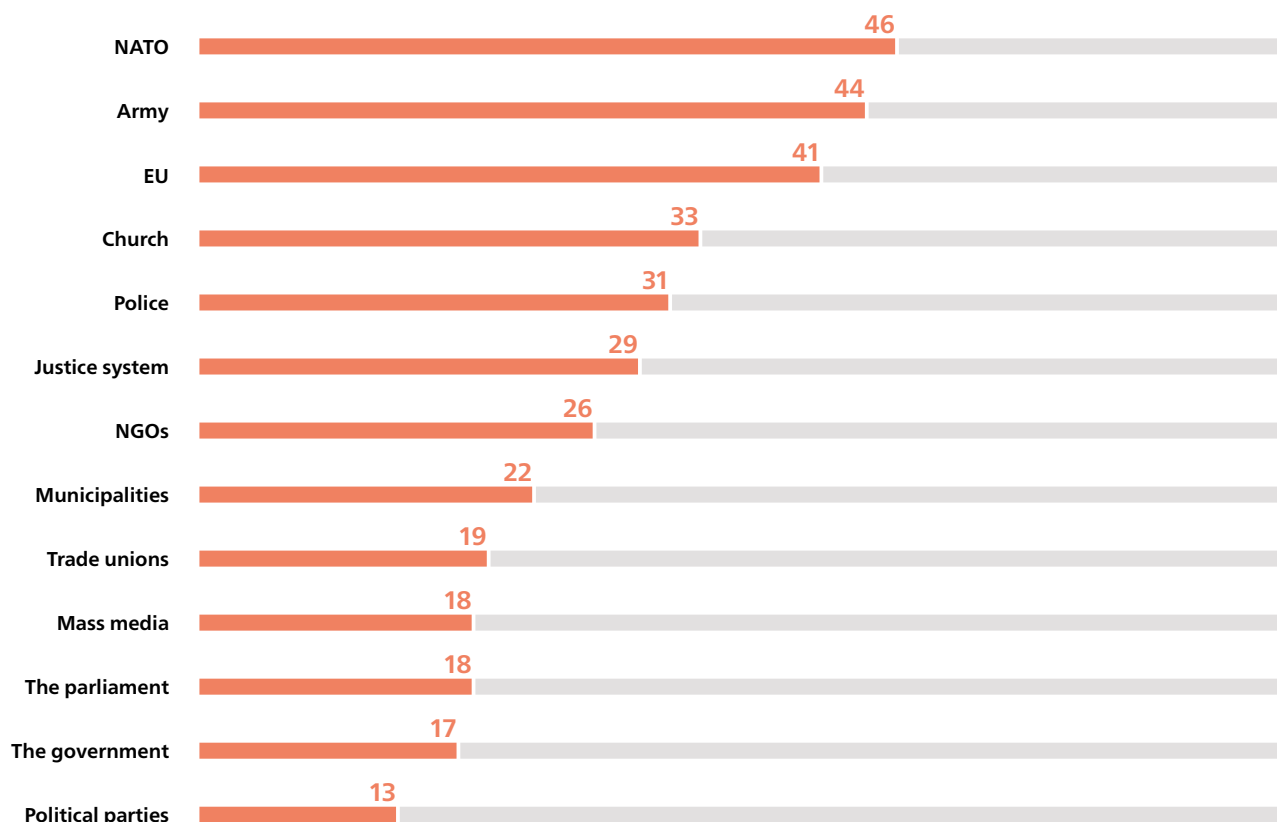
In comparison with the data on the whole population of Romania, the ranking of institutions is largely similar, but the level of trust is significantly lower among young people than in the entire population (for a database of trust indicators in Romania and European countries from 1980 to 2023, see Tufiş, Ghica and Radu, 2023).

Trusted political figures

The questionnaire included an open-ended question asking respondents to indicate the political figure they trusted the most. Since this was an open-ended question, answers ranged from straightforward replies to the downright sarcastic. After recoding the answers, it emerged that 25 % of respondents did not wish to answer the question, while 26 % answered that they did not trust any political figure in Romania.

Fig. 17 Trust in institutions among youth in Romania (in %)

Share of 'fully' and 'a lot' answers



The remaining half (49%) who provided a valid answer responded as follows: **George Simion, Klaus Iohannis, and Diana Șoșoacă hold the top three places with about 10% of the answers** (58 for Simion, 57 for Iohannis and 53 for Șoșoacă). Two parties and one politician, each mentioned by 8% of respondents (45 mentions each) hold the fourth, fifth and sixth positions: PSD, PNL and Mircea Geoană. Next come Marcel Ciolacu, mentioned by 6% of respondents and AUR, mentioned by 5%. The last three places are held by Cătălin Drulă, mentioned by 14 respondents, USR, mentioned by 13 respondents and Dacian Cioloș, also mentioned by 13 respondents. Other nominations accounted for 28% of the names mentioned by the respondents.

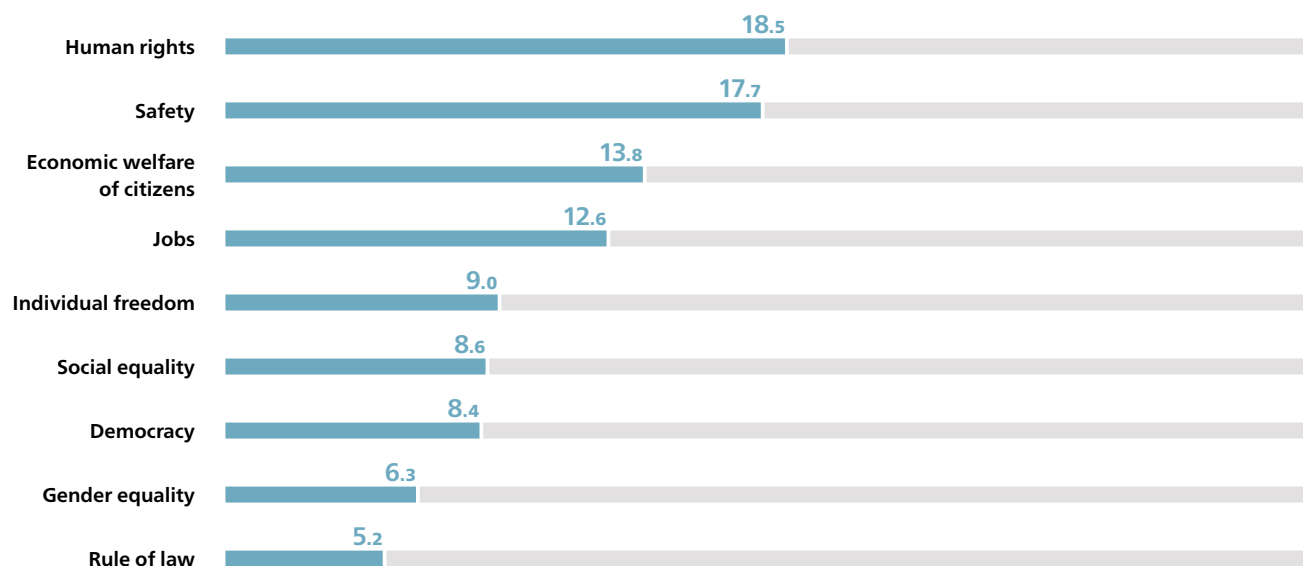
Values associated with political regimes

In this section we analyse young Romanians' views on the values associated with political regimes and their assessment of the state of these values in Romania and within the EU.

Young people were given a list of nine values usually associated with political regimes and were asked to name the top three in order of importance. The resulting ranking is shown in Figure 18.

Fig. 18 Values associated with the political regime among youth in Romania (in %)

Share of respondents who ranked the following values among the top 3



As can be seen, top place in the ranking is held by one of the core values of democracy, human rights. The next three can be considered indicators of the performance of the political regime rather than characteristics of democracy: security, economic welfare and jobs. These three can be very well ensured even by an authoritarian regime (and in some cases even better because authoritarian regimes do not have to worry about individual rights and freedoms).

In terms of respondents' socio-economic characteristics, most of the differences are minor and do not significantly alter the value ranking. However, the following points are worth mentioning:

- more men than women chose democracy and the rule of law, while more women chose security and human rights;
- young people of 18 years of age or less chose democracy and the rule of law to a greater extent than the remaining respondents, while fewer young respondents of 18 or below chose social equality and gender equality;

→ educational attainment is positively associated with a preference for democracy, individual freedom and economic welfare, but negatively associated with a preference for social equality and jobs.

Young people were also asked to rate how good or bad the situation was with regard to these values in Romania and the EU, on a 5-point scale, from 1 – very bad to 5 – very good (see Fig. 19).

These data show that the situation in Romania is considered deficient mainly in two respects related to economic performance and the state of the economy, rather than to the characteristics of the political system. For both elements, the difference between the assessments of Romania and the EU exceeds 1 point on a 5-point scale. Gender equality, social equality and human rights are the next three values for which performance in Romania is considered significantly worse than in the European Union: the difference between the average scores for each of the three is about two-thirds of a point on the 5-point scale. For the remaining values, the situation in the EU is also considered to be better than the situation in Romania, but the maximum difference is half a point on the 5-point scale.

It should be noted, with regard to these results, that the situation in the European Union is not very good either, according to respondents' assessments: the average EU score is above the middle of the scale (score 3, neither bad nor good) for only three values: jobs, economic welfare and gender equality.

Democracy/ authoritarianism

An additional package included questions capturing respondents' stance on democracy and authoritarian alternatives to it. The responses are summarised in Figure 20. The data show that at least half of young Romanians agree that democracy is a good form of government (55%), that it is preferable to any other form of government (50%), or that it is the best system of government if it can provide people with financial security (50%). On the other hand, the percentage of young people who disagree that democracy is good varies, depending on the question, between 14 and 19%.

It is worrying that 25% of young people agreed that dictatorship can be a better form of government than democracy in certain situations, with less than half (47%) rejecting this idea. Of equal concern is the fact that 33% of young people would give up some of their civil liberties for a better life, while 40% would give up some of these liberties for a more secure life. A similar share (41%) believe it would be good for Romania to have a strong leader who does not care much about the parliament and elections.

It is worth mentioning here that these values are also associated with a position on the left-right axis and interest in politics. **Noticeably, those on the right and those who say they are very interested in politics are slightly more likely to agree with authoritarian perspectives.**

Romania's main challenges for the next decade

The last section of the report looks at how young people perceive the issues likely to affect Romania in the next decade. These issues are lined up in the table in accordance with the responses of young Romanians, but Figure 21 also includes the responses of young people from the other countries in the region.

As can be seen, corruption remains the main problem facing Romania in the next decade for 72% of respondents. Problems related to corruption rank second and third: emigration of skilled workers (57%) and quality of public services (54%). The remaining problems are mentioned by less than half of the respondents. The problems least mentioned by Romanian respondents are terrorism (18%), the weakening of religious and traditional values (19%), and the weakening of democracy (21%).

Comparing Romania to the other nations in the region reveals the following similarities and differences: corruption is one of the top three problems mentioned in all countries; unemployment is one of the top three problems in all countries except Romania; emigration and quality of public services are among the top three problems mentioned in seven of the 12 countries covered by the research.

Fig. 19 Values associated with the political regime in Romania and the EU among youth in Romania

Mean values on a scale from '1 – very bad' to '5 – very good'

	Average score Romania	Average score EU	Difference EU–Romania
Jobs	2.16	3.39	1.23
Economic welfare	2.12	3.26	1.14
Gender equality	2.39	3.05	0.66
Social equality	2.30	2.92	0.62
Human rights	2.70	3.30	0.60
Rule of law	2.45	2.96	0.51
Democracy	2.70	3.17	0.48
Safety	2.74	3.13	0.39
Individual freedom	3.04	3.27	0.23

Fig. 20 Democracy vs. authoritarianism among youth in Romania (in %)

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Democracy is, in general, a good form of government	14	31	55
Democracy will also always and under any circumstances be preferable to any other sort of government	19	31	50
Democracy is the best possible government system only when it can ensure the economic security of the people	17	32	50
We should have a strong leader who does not care much about the parliament and elections	31	29	41
Sometimes, civil liberties should be limited in order to better protect citizens against terrorism and other threats	28	33	40
I would sacrifice some of my civil liberties in order to secure better living standards	35	32	33
In certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy	47	28	25
Young people should have more opportunities to speak out in politics	13	24	63

Fig. 21 **Main challenges for SEE countries over the next decade, according to youth in the region (in %)**

Top three issues in red, issues of medium importance in orange, least important issues in green

	Romania	Bulgaria	Slovenia	Croatia	Greece	Türkiye	Albania	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Montenegro	Serbia
Corruption	72	68	50	60	51	55	66	70	53	62	46	60
Skilled labour leaving the country	57	44	40	60	39	52	59	71	44	55	59	61
Quality of public services	54	48	54	42	52	39	35	62	40	51	46	57
Unemployment	44	62	50	51	66	65	60	69	69	51	55	57
Inequality	39	39	40	39	45	55	50	40	39	39	38	45
Climate change	36	36	42	38	50	44	32	30	26	21	29	34
Immigration	32	47	53	47	50	55	56	45	50	40	31	38
Demographic decline	29	41	22	40	36	23	35	28	19	22	26	29
Automation of jobs	27	26	31	18	26	22	25	17	20	16	19	23
Weaker democracy	21	18	27	16	32	44	25	23	20	17	21	21
Weaker religious and traditional values	19	27	19	19	27	33	22	33	26	22	26	33
Terrorism	18	22	23	22	31	45	22	17	19	18	13	19

Main takeaways

1. Comparison with 2019 data reveals that, over the past five years, opinions on the rights of women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQIA+ people have become more polarised, while no significant changes have been observed for young people and the poor.

2. Young Romanians expressed a preference for state intervention in the national economy to protect the environment.

3. Only one in eight young people are interested in politics and consider themselves to have a deep knowledge of politics. On the other hand, young people's interest in politics has increased compared with five years ago.

4. Most young people feel that their interests are not protected in politics. Women, young minors and those living in urban areas are more likely to have a critical view of how their interests are represented.

5. About three-quarters of young respondents can self-position themselves on a left-right axis. Compared with FES's 2018 survey, there has been a shift to the right. Currently, the proportion of those who place themselves on the right is double that of those on the left.

6. The differences between young people's voting intentions and the results of the June 2024 European Parliament elections are minor, except for the USR (Save Romania Union) political party, which has a higher share in the poll.

7. For almost three-quarters of young Romanians, corruption remains the main problem facing Romania in the next decade. Emigration of skilled workers and quality of public services hold second and third places.

8. It is noticeable that individuals to the right of the political spectrum and those who report a high level of interest in politics tend to support authoritarian perspectives at slightly higher rates.

Conclusions

The study provides essential information about young people in Romania. Overall, the data reveal that young people are significantly impacted by poverty and inequality, more so than might be expected given the country's overall level of social development. Thus, they are more likely than their counterparts in other similarly or less developed countries to report that their income is insufficient to cover even the bare necessities. At the same time, their views on the education system contribute to a better understanding of the modest results and unfavourable trends in terms of school dropout rates, the different opportunities for educational success according to family finances and urban/rural environment, and the low proportion of university graduates. **Given these observations, it's not surprising that the proportion of young people considering emigration remains high, albeit among the lowest in the region.**

In the context of declining democratic trends in many countries worldwide, including in the region, data on young people's political attitudes and behaviours are important. The study reveals a low interest in politics among young people and indicates that the majority believe their interests are not represented by politicians.

Approximately three-quarters of young people can place themselves on a left–right axis, with a shift to the right compared with five years ago. It's concerning that those who are very interested in politics tend to endorse authoritarian perspectives more frequently. At the same time, young Romanians exhibit the lowest level of rejection of the European Union among the countries surveyed.

Furthermore, the data indicate a focus on post-materialist values such as autonomy, professional development, good health and healthy food. A new trend among young people in Romania is secularisation. It's also worth noting that, compared with their peers in the region, young people in Romania are among the most tolerant of abortion, homosexuality, but also of bribery, tax evasion and nepotism. However, corruption remains the primary concern for nearly three-quarters of young people. But even though perceptions of institutions are very negative, hopes for the future are remarkably optimistic when it comes to their personal life. Beyond that, the study also highlights gender differences found in many developed societies. For instance, young women are more critical of the quality of political representation and tend to be more progressive than young men.

Overall, the study argues that understanding what motivates or hinders young people with regard to participating in civic activities, as well as their attitudes towards society and politics, is essential for designing initiatives that promote more active citizenship and a key aspect for developing youth-friendly policies.



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- 10 National Statistics Institute
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- 16 For the 2019 results, see Bădescu et al (2019).
- 17 See Bădescu et al (2010).
- 18 Adjusted standard residual ratio ≥ -1.96 for cells with significant association.
- 19 Adjusted standard residual ratio ≥ -1.96 for cells with a significant association.
- 20 The study is available here:
→ library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/15294.pdf
- 21 Adjusted standard residual ratio ≥ -1.96 for cells with a significant association.
- 22 Adjusted standard residual ratio ≥ -1.96 for cells with a significant association.
- 23 Differences between groups were tested with One-way ANOVA, F test=3.536, p=0.05; Bonferroni's test for multiple comparison is significant for p=0.05.
- 24 Differences between groups were tested with One-way ANOVA, F test = 1.758, p=0.10; Tahmane's test for multiple comparison is significant for p=0.05.
- 25 For a detailed discussion adapted to the Romanian context, see Comşa, 2004 or Comşa and Postelnicu, 2013.

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