











## Authors

Anja Gvozdanović, Mirjana Adamović,  
Sandra Antulić Majcen, Nikola Baketa, Ratko  
Đokić, Vlasta Ilišin and Dunja Potočnik

## 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 Croatia were surveyed along with youth in other Southeastern Europe and Central Eastern Europe countries.

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# Executive Summary

**This study examines the attitudes and behaviours of young people in contemporary Croatian society across various fields: education, employment, mobility, family, values, and politics. The key findings highlight ongoing challenges, including employment difficulties, underpayment and perceived widespread corruption. Global threats further exacerbate the feelings of insecurity and pessimism among the youth, driving an increasing desire to emigrate due to dissatisfaction with job opportunities, salaries, and the general economic situation in Croatia.**

Despite a prevailing distrust towards political institutions, there is a rise in informal political participation. Young people are engaging more and more in alternative political activities, indicating a growing interest to become actors in social change. At the same time, however, a significant affective polarization is seen, with many young people expressing antagonistic attitudes towards opposing political parties. Youth is deeply sceptical of societal and political institutions, many of which should, by their stated purpose, be addressing their problems. They have high expectations from national politics, particularly regarding social justice and a good life for all citizens. Corruption is recognized as a major liability in the Croatia's foreseeable future, while there are no fears that democracy as such might be weakening.

On the individual level, there is a notable shift away from traditionalist values, especially concerning marriage and children. While part of young people distance themselves from these norms, the long-term sustainability of this trend is uncertain.

Despite some liberal shifts, such as more tolerant views on abortion and homosexuality, non-democratic tendencies are quite present as well. A significant portion of the youth expresses only conditional support for democracy and is open to supporting an authoritarian leader under certain conditions. This support for authoritarianism stems from the perception of inefficient institutions failing to justify people's trust.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate the need for designing comprehensive policies and measures that would create the conditions for the full emancipation and realization of the personal and social potential of youth.

# Key Facts

- Most young people have parents with secondary education.
- Most respondents live in an urban area (56%).
- A linear increase in the material conditions of life correlates with an increase in the level of the parents' education.
- 13% of the respondents live in a poor household, whereas 18% live in a household without any financial concerns.
- Although the average assessment by the users themselves of the quality of the education system is shown to be relatively stable, in the last 12 years the share of young people who are rather satisfied with the education system has decreased in favour of those who are dissatisfied with it.
- The least satisfied with the quality of the education system are graduate and post-graduate doctoral students and young people outside of the education and training system.
- More than 90% of young people spend time on the internet every day, with more than 80% of them being active on social networks and accessing news portals. Girls spend a little more time on social networks than boys, whereas the latter spend more time reading news portals. With increasing age, the amount of time young people spend on social networks decreases, and there is a corresponding increase in the time spent on reading and accessing news portals.
- Comparing the two study cycles carried out six years apart, it is seen that the share of young people who mostly or completely agree that there are cases of corruption in institutions of higher education in Croatia jumped by 17% (from 48% in 2018 to 65% in 2024). At the same time, only 4.8% of them believe that this is never the case.
- The largest share of young people is employed on an indefinite full-time basis (26.8%), while the smallest proportion works on an indefinite, part-time basis (6%), which points to the conclusion that between 2018 and 2024 the number of young people in a precarious position has decreased.
- Young people aged 19 to 24 most often work in fixed-term jobs, which suggests their having a higher vulnerability in the labour market compared to other age groups. Their position in the labour market largely keeps them dependent on their parents, leaving their problem in securing housing unsolved.
- In more than two-fifths of the cases, young people work in jobs for a salary lower than the average, and only 3.8% of them work in jobs with a salary higher than 1,600 euros per month.
- A little more than a half of young people are employed in jobs that correspond to their level of education, while more than a quarter of them work in jobs requiring lower levels of education. In other words, these young people are overqualified for the jobs they currently perform.
- Most of the young people currently believe that the most important factor for getting a job in Croatia is expertise (59.6%), but at the same time more than a half of the respondents (54.6%) think that personal connections with people in positions of power are important in this regard.

- The desire among the young to leave Croatia has shot up since 2018.
- A higher standard of living remains the leading reason for moving abroad.
- Almost one fifth of young people have the experience of living abroad. Also, the number of young people who lived abroad for the purpose of education has increased since 2018.
- Between 2018 and 2024, the number of young people considering emigrating from Croatia within the next six months has gone down, but at the same time an increase is seen among those who are considering emigrating within two to ten years.
- The intention to move abroad is inversely proportional to the socioeconomic status, where on average young people who face the most severe financial difficulties think about it most often.
- The percentage of young people living alone has increased compared to 2018, but despite this, young people still rely to a great extent on family economic resources, and one half of them live with their parents, as it is the simplest and most comfortable solution given their economic dependence.
- Slightly more than a third of young people declare a readiness to become independent and leave their parents' home, if they had the financial means.
- The number of those who do not want to have children has significantly increased in the 2018–2024 time frame.
- In the future, young people plan to have an average of two children, expecting their first at age 26.
- The most important things for young people in choosing a partner are educational level, family approval and religious beliefs.
- Compared to 2018, there was a decrease in the share of young people expressing satisfaction with their lives, and an increase in the share of young people expressing pessimism regarding both their personal and social future.
- There was a slight liberalization of attitudes towards homosexuality and abortion; however, polarization remains in attitudes towards the right to of homosexual couples to marriage and parenthood.
- Orientation towards traditional values (desire to start a family and marriage) weakened compared to 2018, while the emancipatory one (desire for independence) continues to be a priority.
- Among the concerns and fears of young people, the most prevalent are those related to the existential issues, above all (un)employment and personal health.
- There has been a rise of fear of war and too many immigrants coming to Croatia.
- The increased interest in politics as well as participation in informal forms of participation is registered.
- On average, young people are placed slightly to the right on the ideological scale.
- No social and political institution enjoys the absolute trust of young people; a strong drop in trust in the media and a significant drop in trust in the police and the army were noted.
- Antagonistic attitude towards the supporters of political parties belonging to the opposite ideological spectrum.
- Corruption is recognized as Croatia's biggest issue in the future, but not the weakening of democracy.

# 1 ■ Introduction

Contemporary young people belong to the popularly called Generation Z, whose specific characteristics are recognized to the greatest extent in Western societies. This is the generation whose members are depicted as self-aware, persistent, pragmatic, innovative, liberal, hyper-connected, but at the same time very lonely, oriented towards postmodern values such as caring for one's own physical and mental health, as well as caring for the environment and climate (Milotay 2020). Of course, this is a simplified description of a generation growing up in very complex, demanding and dynamic times. This study report is based on data from a project carried out by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) *FES Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2024*, and is a contribution to sketching the social profile of today's young generation in Croatia.

Just like in other countries of the Western world, growing up in Croatia today is strongly shaped by rapid technological development. Moreover, most of the young generation born after 1995 do not know the world and life without the Internet and social networks. The way of construing one's own identity, patterns of communication, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, preferred ways of having fun, spending free time, and the general patterns of everyday life profoundly differ from the habits and behaviours of previous generations of young people (Brubaker 2022). Despite the significant role of digital technology, above all the social networks, in the contemporary socialization of the younger generation in almost all modern societies, social positioning and socio-cultural heritage continue to determine the experience of growing up. Young people in Croatia are faced with the phenomenon of *prolonged youth*, which is getting longer and longer (Ilišin 2019), and is the result of various socioeconomic transformations and crises that affected the Croatian society and produced an increase in insecurity in the field of employment, insufficient conditions for achieving economic independence, as well as increasing difficulty in solving the housing problem.

The way in which society enables young people to transition from youth to adulthood, that is, to provide social, economic and other prerequisites for assuming permanent social roles, resulting in the more or less successful social integration of young people. The process of assuming permanent social roles in different areas of life (for example family, professional, educational, public) is a demanding process, which is becoming longer and more difficult due to social and economic crises both at the global and national level. A series of global, European and then national crises that marked the beginning of the 21st century (from the 2008 financial crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine) further emphasized the socioeconomic and regional inequalities present in Croatia (World Bank 2020). Socioeconomic inequalities are often connected with other types of social inequalities, which are reflected in the increasing social stratification of young people.

**Bearing this in mind, it is important to note that previous studies of young people have shown that opportunities for advancement in Croatian society are often conditioned by the social position of their families.** The role of institutional and social support during the transition to adulthood is limited, so young people rely mostly on their family resources. This implies that opportunities for success and affirmation are not created by the individuals themselves, via their own potential and initiative, but are greatly constrained by the structural constraints of their social, economic and sociocultural status (Ilišin and Radin 2002; Ilišin 2007; Ilišin et al. 2013; Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš 2017; Gvozdanić et al. 2019).



Such social and economic circumstances, along with widespread corruption and a high perception of corruption (Eurobarometer 2022), which undermines institutional trust and the normative framework of the society, further pushes young people into the private sphere and discourages them from taking a more active role in the public domain, such as politics and public engagement in general (Ilišin et al. 2013; Gvozdanić et al. 2019). In other words, it is up to society to ensure at least some of the key preconditions for shifting the focus of young people from private and personal life to public and political one – specifically socioeconomic security at the individual level and a high degree of the rule of law at the social level.

The fourth chapter deals with plans related to private life and family, and the fifth chapter covers the different aspects of values – from personal values that speak mainly about the priorities of young people to socio-cultural ones such as religiosity and relations with minorities and the Other. Finally, the sixth chapter deals with political attitudes, values and behaviours, which provides an insight into young people's political culture as well as the social factors that shape it.

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**What young people want, what is important to them, how they see the social and political reality in Croatia are just some of the questions that this study sought to explore.** Along with the introduction and methodology, the report is structured into six thematic chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter describes the basic sociodemographic characteristics of the young respondents in the sample; the second chapter deals with some aspects of education as seen from the perspective of young people; the third chapter covers the topic of employment and mobility, providing some answers to the ever-present questions about the status of young people on the labour market as well as their migration potential.

# 2. Methodology

The main goal of this study has been to establish, describe and analyse the attitudes and behaviours of young people in modern Croatian society. Given that this is the third wave of research into young people undertaken jointly by FES and Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, this study also contains comparisons with the findings from 2012 and 2018 (Ilišin et al. 2013; Gvozdanić et al. 2018). In the course of 2024, this survey included, in addition to young Croats, also their peers from 11 other countries in South-Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece, Kosovo, Romania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey. Although this report is focused on Croatian data, some analyses include comparisons of Croatia with other countries of the region.

The study was carried out using an online survey questionnaire administered in the course of February and March 2024, as part of the IPSOS online panel by surveying via the Internet (CAWI method – Computer Assisted Web Interviews).

A quota sampling method was used, based on age, gender and region (NUTS2), and included 717 respondents aged 14 to 29. It is important to note that the last two waves of research carried out in 2012 and 2018 (Ilišin et al. 2013; Gvozdanić et al. 2019) used the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) or the *face-to-face* interviewing method on a representative sample of young people in Croatia. Therefore, when those data are compared with the new ones, obtained in 2024, some of the observed differences can be attributed to the differences in the methodology of data collection.

The study report contains analyses based on univariate (response distribution), bivariate (correlation, t-test, ANOVA, chi-square test) and multivariate analyses (factor analysis). Given the heterogeneity of the young population, in addition to the descriptive analysis, we also included those whose goal was to determine the fundamental differences between young people with regard to gender, age and the education of their fathers!. In some of the analyses, other variables were also included, such as the subjective assessment of socioeconomic status, etc. Correlations were interpreted as statistically significant at a level of less than 0.01.



# 3 Basic demographic characteristics and trends

The sample of 717 young people consists of 47% female and 53% male respondents. In terms of age groups, the smallest share is taken by the youngest cohort (14–18 years) amounting to 29%, while the middle age cohort (19–24 years) makes up the largest share with 38%. A third of the respondents (33%) are between 25 and 29 years old.

The data on the size of the settlements where the respondents live were obtained through the self-assessment of the residential status. 18.3% describe their place of residence as a village, 6.4% state that their place of residence is more of a rural than an urban settlement, making up close to a quarter of the respondents living in settlements that they consider rural. 18.5% see themselves as living in a settlement between the rural and the urban. The largest share of the respondents (55.8%) consider their place of living to be urban, and 13.8% of them consider their settlement more urban than a village, but still not quite an urban area. In this study, the regions are categorized according to the statistical classification of spatial units NUTS 2<sup>2</sup>, which consists of Pannonian Croatia<sup>3</sup> (26.7% of the respondents), Adriatic Croatia<sup>4</sup> (32.3% of the respondents), the City of Zagreb (19.9% of the respondents), and Northern Croatia<sup>5</sup> (21.1% of the respondents).



Young people whose parents have completed high school make up the largest share of respondents; in addition, parents more often completed vocational high school (mother – 38.9%; father – 47.1%) than a general high school (mother – 21%; father – 18.2%). About one quarter of the respondents have parents that completed college and higher education levels (mother – 28.6%; father – 25.2%). The smallest share (about 10%) has parents with a low education level, i.e. without completing elementary school (mother – 11.5%; father – 9.4%). The father's education is distributed differently depending on the region. Fathers of young people living in Zagreb are more likely to have a higher education than those of young people living in Northern and Pannonian Croatia ( $F=5.46$ ). The level of a parent's education is often shown to be a good indicator of the social status of young people, their material position, but also their cultural and social capital (Ilišin and Radin 2002; Ilišin et al. 2013; Ilišin and Spajčić Vrkaš 2017). It is also seen that the material standard of the household increases in parallel with the increase in the level of education of the father ( $r=0.21$ ) and the mother ( $r=0.22$ ).

With respect to the financial or material conditions of the household in which the respondents live, the majority (38.5%) estimate that they live in circumstances of moderate financial stability, considering that they have money for less expensive things but not for expensive things like a car or an apartment (Figure 1). About one quarter (24.6%) assess their own household as one that can meet the basic needs such as food and clothing, but not more expensive items such as refrigerators or televisions. Complete financial stability is expressed by 17.8% of the respondents, stating that their household can buy everything they need for a good standard of living. **At the opposite end of the social scale, 2.3% state that they live in extreme poverty since they do not have enough food and money to cover basic expenses, and 10.9% live in a household that, barely survives (they have enough money for basic expenses and food, but not for clothing and shoes).**

Fig. 1 **Financial situation in the households of youth in Croatia (in %)**

*Which of the following descriptions most adequately describes the financial situation in your household?*

	2024	2018
<b>We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating ...) and food</b>	2.3	0.7
<b>We have enough money for basic bills and food, but not enough for clothes and shoes</b>	10.9	0.8
<b>We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes, but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV, etc.)</b>	24.6	38.3
<b>We can afford to buy some more expensive things, but not as expensive as a car or an apartment, for example</b>	38.5	38.1
<b>We can afford to buy everything we need for a good standard of living</b>	17.8	16.5

In the last six years, we recorded a significant jump in the share of those living in material poverty – in 2018, it was 1.5 %, and in 2024 it was 13.2 %. At the same time, the share of those who had enough for basic needs such as utilities, food, clothing and shoes has noticeably decreased from 38.3 % in 2018 to 24.6 % in 2024. In short, **there has been an evident increase in material deprivation in households where young people live**. There are no significant differences in the financial situation of the respondents with regard to the (self-estimated) size of the settlement and region. From a regional perspective, it is interesting that, on average, young people in Croatia, right behind their peers in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, assess the financial situation of the household they live in.<sup>6</sup>

Slightly more than three fifths of the young people who participated in the research are included in the education system. Of the total sample, one half is in the formal education system: 28.7 % attend primary or secondary school, 14.1 % study at the undergraduate level and 8.3 % at the graduate or post-graduate levels.

Furthermore, 8 % of young people aged 14 to 29 are involved in some other form of education or training, whereas approximately one third (34.8 %) are not included in the education system, and 6.1 % did not declare their current educational status. Since 2018, the share of young people in the age group of 15 to 29 years included in the formal education and training system has been stable (42.8 % in 2018 vs. 44.1 % in 2023).<sup>7</sup> This figure is 6.2 % above the EU average (in 2023 it was 37.6 %).

## Main takeaways

- 1. Most young people have parents with secondary education.**
- 2. Most respondents live in an urban area (56 %).**
- 3. A linear increase in the material conditions of life correlates with an increase in the level of the parents' education.**
- 4. 13 % of the respondents live in a poor household, whereas 18 % live in a household without any financial concerns.**

# 4. Young people and education

Education is traditionally seen as an instrument for personal and professional development. Young people acquire knowledge, skills and qualifications that can open the door to better employment opportunities and a higher standard of living. In Croatian society, between the two national censuses<sup>8</sup> (2011 and 2021), an increase in the share of the population with higher education was seen – jumping from 16.4% to 24.1%. However, this increase in the number of highly educated people by no means implies a high quality education system. The availability of a good education system is crucial for short-term and long-term effects at the level of the individual, the community and the overall society. In the past period, much effort was invested to improve the quality of the education system, and a number of strategic documents were adopted at the governmental level (e.g. The National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030, the National Education System Development Plan for the period until 2027, 2023). In the ten-year period, the average budgetary expenditure for education was 4.9% of GDP.<sup>9</sup> This amount was even greater during the pandemic period (5.5% of the GDP in 2020 and 5.2% of the GDP in 2021). The latter led to significant changes in the education system (introduction of distance learning, computerization of the educational institutions, advances in the digital literacy of students, etc.).



In addition, investments in infrastructure projects have been increased with the goal of strengthening the scientific and educational system. These investments are largely absorbed from EU funds (e.g. the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026). An indicator predictive of the system's resistance to multiple crises and indicative of the successful implementation of reform processes in the past ten years is the satisfaction of students with the quality of the education system. In relation to the current educational status and demographic characteristics of young people, this chapter analyses the perception of the quality of the educational system, and the habits of young people in the online environment related to education and employment.

## Moderate satisfaction with the quality of education

The average assessment of the quality of the education system among young people from all countries that participated in this study is 2.7 (on a scale of 1 – not satisfied at all to 5 – very satisfied). Along with Slovenia, Croatia belongs to the group of countries whose young people express a greater degree of satisfaction with the quality of the education system compared to other countries that participated in the study. **In Croatia, young people estimate the quality of education with an average score of 3.1, with a slightly higher share of those who are satisfied or extremely satisfied with education (39%) than those being mostly or completely dissatisfied (29%).**<sup>10</sup> The highest quality of the education system is perceived by young people participating in some other form of training or vocational development, followed by undergraduate students and primary and secondary school students, while the least satisfied with the quality of the education system are graduate and postgraduate doctoral students, and those who are not in the education and training system (F=3.83). It is an alarming fact that those with the highest level of education and those who are already on the labour market, that is, young people who spent the longest time in the education system, also give it the lowest quality assessments.

Compared to the previous two study cycles, the share of young people who are somewhat satisfied has evidently decreased (by 6 % in each cycle) in favour of those who are dissatisfied with the quality of the education system. Accordingly, it can be concluded that despite numerous reforms of the system and policy initiatives in the twelve-year period, the quality of the education system has not improved. On the contrary, the

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**39 %** of respondents are satisfied with the quality of education in Croatia

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share of young people who are increasingly dissatisfied with the quality of education is continuously increasing. Similar trends are confirmed by objective indicators of the effectiveness of the educational systems. According to the results of the PISA study (Markočić Dekanić et al. 2023), Croatian students in the last four cycles of the study (2006–2022) continuously perform at or below OECD average, while a significant proportion, according to the survey from 2022, does not even reach basic proficiency in mathematics (around one third of students), reading (around a quarter of students) and scientific literacy (around one fifth of students). Despite this, the Croatian education system, in comparison with other countries, proved to be resilient in terms of ensuring the well-being of students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Markočić Dekanić et al. 2023), which partially explains the relatively stable share of young people who, in spite of everything, feel satisfied with the quality of the education (39.3 % in 2024 vs. 42 % in 2018 and 39.5 % in 2012) (Ilišin et al. 2013; Gvozdanić et al. 2019).

## High perception of corruption in education

The perception of corruption is an important determinant of quality when assessing the educational system. **A total of 65 % of young people mostly or completely agree that there are cases of buying grades and exams in the institutions of higher education in Croatia, while only 5 % do not believe that such occurrences happen.**

Compared to the previous study cycles (Ilišin et al. 2013; Gvozdanić et al. 2019), when about a half of young people believed that exams were bought at institutions of higher education in Croatia, in the observed six-year period this share jumped by 17 %, which is indicative of a decline in trust in educational institutions. Young people in the age group from 14 to 18 years are most prone to believe that there are cases of grade buying in higher education, followed by the age group between 25 to 29 years, while the belief in the existence of corruption is the smallest in the age group from 19 to 24 years ( $F=5.67$ ). The highest average assessment of the prevalence of corruption in higher education (at a five-point scale from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree) is given by primary and secondary school students (3.9), followed by undergraduate students (3.8), graduate and postgraduate doctoral students (3.7), and those engaged in other forms of professional training or vocational development (3.6). Young people outside the education system also believe to a significant extent that corruption in higher education is high (3.8). As the regional average of perceived corruption in education is 3.7, Croatia is listed among countries with a somewhat higher perception of corruption in education (3.8). The obtained results point to a need to invest additional efforts in the implementation of anti-corruption measures with the aim of ensuring a fair and high-quality education system.

## The online world for educational purposes

Young people in the online environment spend more and more time in various activities related to education or the work they do, but also in free time activities, especially browsing for information and activities on social networks. According to data at the EU level<sup>11</sup>, almost all young people between the ages of 16 and 29 use the internet daily (96 %), with social networks and information portals being the most frequently accessed (83.5 and 68.2 %, respectively). At the EU level, the trend of increased internet usage was observed in 2020 and 2021, as a consequence of changed working and schooling conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.



This study highlights the fact that over 90 % of young people, when they are online, spend time on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.). According to their own estimate, one fifth of young people spends one to two hours a day in this activity, while almost a third do so from two to five hours a day. Girls spend statistically significantly more time on social networks than boys ( $\chi^2=13.75$ ). Young people in the oldest age group spend significantly less time on social networks per day compared to the remaining age groups ( $\chi^2=32.26$ ), probably because by coming of age the structure of free time changes, and so do the habits of daily life. About 80 % of young people routinely get their information through news portals, with 62.8 % of them allocating up to an hour a day for this activity. The time spent in the online environment for the purpose of accessing information increases linearly with age, with boys spending slightly more time per day on this activity than girls.

As expected, the internet is more often used for work purposes by young people who are not part of the education system, with the average time spent on this activity being up to one hour per day. With increasing age, the time spent online due to work also increases ( $F=14.02$ ) for both boys and girls. Almost a third of young people who are not in the education system do not engage in any work-related activities in the online environment, while slightly more than 15 % of them spend more than five hours a day for this purpose. The time spent in the online environment for educational purposes ranges from an average of 15 minutes to two hours per day (45.3 %). Out of the total number of young people who are in the education system, activities related to education in the online environment are most represented in the group of undergraduate and graduate students, followed by primary and secondary school students, and to the smallest extent among young people who attend some other form of vocational training or professional development. It is interesting that slightly more than two fifths of young people who are not in the education system participate in activities in the online environment for educational purposes, which probably speaks of the popularity of informal lifelong education among young people who have completed their formal education.

## Main takeaways

**1.** Although the average assessment by the users themselves of the quality of the education system is shown to be relatively stable, in the last 12 years the share of young people who are rather satisfied with the education system has decreased in favour of those who are dissatisfied with it.

**2.** Those least satisfied with the quality of the education system are graduate and post-graduate doctoral students and young people outside of the education and training system.

**3.** Comparing the two study cycles carried out six years apart, it is seen that the share of young people who mostly or completely agree that there are cases of corruption in institutions of higher education in Croatia jumped by 17 % (from 48 % in 2018 to 65 % in 2024). At the same time, only 5 % of them believe that this is never the case.

**4.** More than 90 % of young people spend time on the internet every day, with more than 80 % of them being active on social networks and accessing news portals. Girls spend significantly more time on social networks than boys, whereas the latter spend more time reading news portals. With increasing age, the amount of time young people spend on social networks decreases, and there is a corresponding increase in the time spent on accessing and reading news portals.

# 5. Employment

The increasing flexibility of the labour market, the expansion of higher education possibilities, as reflected in the growth of the number of higher education institutions and the share of the population possessing degrees of higher education,<sup>12</sup> along with a limited number of jobs due mainly to structural unemployment,<sup>13</sup> make young people who are in the process of employment or are searching for a suitable job a vulnerable social group. To a greater extent than previous generations, young people are faced with frequent job changes, insufficiently paid jobs, short-term employment with minimal training, reduced prospects for employment for an indefinite period and, finally, lower wages (Matković et al., 2022).

**37.5 %** of employed youth work in jobs they are qualified for through their education.

As a result, it becomes more and more difficult for young people to become independent, and they are starting their own families later in life than they otherwise would.<sup>14</sup> In the long term, this impacts the poverty rate of young people, which is on the rise.<sup>15</sup>



In 2023, at the EU-27 level, the unemployment rate for young people in the age group of 15 to 29 years amounted to 11.2%, while in Croatia it was slightly higher and standing at 13%. In the age group of 20 to 29, the youth unemployment rate in Croatia was 11%, close to the EU-27 average (10.1%).<sup>16</sup> With respect to employment, the percentages differ significantly in a manner suggestive of a comparatively worse position of young people from Croatia compared to their peers from the EU. In Croatia, youth employment for the year 2023 in the age group of 15–29 years was 43%, while it was 49.7% at the EU level.<sup>17</sup> In the age group of 20–29 years, the employment rate for Croatia in 2023 was 59.2%, while at the EU level this number stood at 65.9%. Also, Eurostat data suggest that in Croatia there are slightly more young people between the ages of 18 and 29 outside of both the labour market and the education system (young people in NEET status) than at the EU level (14.1% and 13.4%, respectively).<sup>18</sup> Lower employment in Croatia compared to the EU probably indicates that a significant proportion of youth is not on the labour market, either due to lack of education, inactivity, temporary work, or having left the country. At the same time, the unemployment rate shows a similar proportion of those looking for a job but unable to find it as in the EU.

In the context of youth unemployment, there is widespread speculation of threats to the job market due to an increased number of immigrants arriving and settling in the country. However, the Eurostat data<sup>19</sup> refutes the basis for such a claim, considering that in 2023 only 1.1% of immigrants from non-EU countries aged 15–64 were registered in Croatia. One ought to mention that workers from third countries mainly work in low qualification jobs (e.g. auxiliary jobs in catering, construction, delivery and transport services), all of which are less paid, and potentially less attractive to the domestic population.



## Job security, structural opportunities and challenges

Previous studies of young people in Croatia show that young people in Croatia are in a disadvantageous position on the labour market. However, a comparison of the data obtained from the years 2018 and 2024 suggests that there was an increase in the number of young people employed full-time on an indefinite basis (22.6% in 2018 vs. 26.8% in 2024), while the share of young people who were actively looking for a job remained almost the same (11.2% in 2018 vs. 11.5% in 2024). In 2024, 11.9% of young people had a fixed-term and full-time employment contract, which is a decline compared to 2018, when this percentage stood at 18.2%. In 2024, 2.6% of young people worked only part-time, while 1.6% of young people had this status in 2018. At the same time, in the observed period the share of young people who neither have a job, nor are currently looking for one has almost halved (from 39.5% to 18.9%). This group is mostly made up of students and pupils. In other words, there has been a positive shift in the share of young people who have an employment contract of indefinite duration, or a part-time job (a jump from 0.9% to 6%), possibly indicating that the labour market has become more flexible, and that employers are more open to their employees who cannot or do not wish to work full time. A marginally higher percentage of self-employed young people is seen, but they account for only 4.8% in the sample. At the same time, in Slovenia this group occupies 4.7%, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina only 2.4% of the sample. The study showed that 1.5% of young people are in vocational training, which is only a slight increase compared to 0.6% in 2018. However, the number of young people who chose the *other employment* category (casual jobs, self-employment, on-the-job training) has grown dramatically with 9.9% declaring this status in 2024 compared to only 0.6% in 2018.

For the purpose of analysis, the categories of young people with indefinite contracts and those with fixed-term contracts were combined into one, with the residual category consisting of young people who work occasionally, are self-employed, are in a professional training and those who chose the option *other employment*. The analysis showed ( $\chi^2=194,43$ ) that the largest number of young people who are employed on an indefinite basis belongs to the age group of 25 to 29 years (57.4%), followed by the age group of 19 to 24 years (28.9%). The youngest subgroup was represented by 5.2% of the sample. **According to our data, the precariousness of the labour market mostly affects young people aged 19 to 24, as 22.1% of them have a fixed-term contract, while 14.7% of young people aged 25 to 29 and 3.9% of young people in the youngest group face the same situation.** The position of young people on the labour market who currently do not have a job, nor are currently looking for one, relative to their age, corresponds to expectations, as this answer was given by 46.7% of young people under 18 years of age, 11.8% of those aged 19 to 24 and 5.4% of those being in the oldest age group. In the same period 15.7% of young people under the age of 18 and 11.3% of those in the 19 to 24 age group, as well as 8.3% of the oldest age group of young people were out of work, but were actively looking for a job. 28.8% of school age youth, 26% of the middle age group and 14.2% of the oldest young people make up the *other employment* category.

A compatibility of the profession (acquired qualifications) with occupation (the work performed) is a highly desirable feature of a job, and generally a relative majority of employed young people (37.5%) employed young people work in jobs they are qualified for through their education.

The data show a barely noticeable shift between 2018 and 2024 regarding an increase in the numbers of young people who work in jobs in line with their acquired profession (36.9% and 37.5%, respectively). In the same time period, there was a slight decrease in the number of those working in jobs close to their formal profession (from 25.5% to 20.1%) with a parallel increase in the number of young people who do not work in their professions (from 35.6% to 36.7%). Furthermore, there is an increase in the number of young people who work in spite of not having a formal profession (from 2% to 5.7%). The analysis has shown no significant difference between young people working in their formal profession and those working outside of it.

A question similar to the previous one, but relative to the acquired level of qualifications, reveals that from 2018 to 2024, the number of young people working in jobs with lower qualifications has increased from 17.4% to 26.5%. The reasons for the increase of the number of those who work in low qualification jobs can be numerous, and one can safely be attributed to working in the tourist sector in which the majority of jobs does not require

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**26.5%** of respondents work in jobs with lower qualifications

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a higher qualification. Although the number of young people occupying jobs in accordance with their qualifications has decreased (from 79.8 to 57.3%), still the majority of employed youth work in jobs according to their qualifications. At the same time, the share of young people who stated that they perform jobs requiring higher qualifications than the ones they possess is practically unchanged compared to 2018 figures (11.9% and 11.7%, respectively). Here again, no statistically significant differences were seen with respect to the characteristics of the respondents.

**Although the young, as a rule, work in jobs in accordance with their knowledge and qualification, the average salary of a significant portion of this population is closer to the minimal wage bracket (677 EUR/month<sup>20</sup>), than to the national average wage of 1,326 EUR/month net<sup>21</sup>.** The salary figures show that 9.6% of young people work for 639 euro net or less per month, 16.2% work for amounts between 640 and 969 euros net, 18.1% work for 970 to 1,269 euros net, another 7% for 1,270 to 1,599 euros, while only 3.8% work for 1,600 or more euros per month. A total of 41.2% of young people did not know (or declined) to answer this question. This finding suggests that young people are still underpaid<sup>22</sup>, that is, the trend shown in previous youth study cycles has not changed. Taking into account the high prices of renting or buying an apartment and the price of a square meter of property, it is clear that the majority of young people, who work for an average salary, can hardly afford the independence, which implies in the first place leaving their parents' home. Further analysis ( $t=3.97$ ) shows that girls usually get paid the lowest salaries on average, while a significantly higher proportion of boys earn salaries in the higher income brackets. These findings are in line with Eurostat data, according to which gender differences in salaries in Croatia for 2022 accounted to a 12.5%<sup>23</sup> difference in favour of men.

## The importance of expertise and connections with people in power in finding a job

In contrast to the previous study cycle from 2018, in which as many as 79 % of young people believed that connections with people in positions of power are important or very important for finding a job, whereas 74 % saw expertise as the most important factor, in the 2024 study cycle, young people singled out the latter as the most important factor for successful employment with 59.6 % rating it either as *important* or *very important*. The expertise as an important factor for employment is significantly higher in girls than in boys ( $t=3.73$ ). **In spite of a downward trend compared to the previous cycle, more than a half of young people (54.6 %) still believe that personal connections with people in positions of power are important for successful employment.** A proportionately strong perception of the importance of informal connections for getting a job can be understood in the context of a generally high perception of the spread of corruption: as much as 50 % of citizens think that corruption is widespread in Croatia, compared to the EU average of 22 %, in assessing their own countries (Eurobarometer 2022). Compared to the previous study cycle, there was a drop in the perception of the importance of membership in political parties for finding a job (from 51 % to 42 %). Young people who attribute greater importance to membership in political parties also believe in the significance of personal connections with people in positions of power ( $r=0.67$ ) for finding a job. Also, lesser importance is given to experiences of studying or working abroad (51 % in 2018), with this factor being seen as important or very important for employment by approximately only a quarter of young people (24.2 %). We can speculate that the young have realized that experience of staying abroad is not crucial for finding a job locally. It could be that due to the accessibility and possibility of acquiring the experience of living abroad, particularly within the EU, many among the young do not see it as a crucial factor in their subsequent search for a job.

## Main takeaways

- 1.** The largest share of young people is employed on an indefinite full-time basis (26.8 %), and while the smallest proportion works on an indefinite, part-time basis (6 %), the conclusion is that between 2018 and 2024 the number of young people in a precarious employment position has decreased.
- 2.** Young people aged 19 to 24 most often work in fixed-term jobs, which suggests their higher vulnerability on the labour market compared to other age groups, that is, the fact that their position on the labour market does not allow them to become independent from their parents and solve their housing issue.
- 3.** In more than two-fifths of the cases, young people work in jobs for a salary lower than the average, and only 3.8 % of them work in jobs with a salary higher than 1,600 euros per month.
- 4.** A little more than a half of young people are employed in jobs that correspond to their level of education, while more than a quarter of them work in jobs requiring lower levels of education. In other words, these young people are overqualified for the jobs they currently perform.
- 5.** Most of the young people currently believe that the most important factor for getting a job in Croatia is expertise (59.6 %), but at the same time more than a half of the respondents (54.6 %) think that personal connections with people in positions of power are important in this regard.

# 6. Mobility

The emigration of young people into foreign countries has continuously been one of the key socio-political topics in the last two decades in Croatia. The figures support the general concern about the loss of vital human resources and the demographic devastation of entire regions in Croatia. According to the State Bureau of Statistics, 46,287 people emigrated from Croatia in 2022, 28 % of whom are young people in the age range between 15 and 29 (11,883). The previous wave of multi-country research showed that young people from Croatia are less prone to long-term emigration than their peers from other observed countries (Gvozdanić et al, 2019; Adamović and Potočnik, 2022). However, new data indicate an increase in the desire to emigrate. Dissatisfaction with employment and salary, a high perception of corruption and the inadequacy of the labour market are the main factors which motivate them to emigrate. In addition, the desire to emigrate is fuelled by economic downturn, poor job prospects and low wages. At the same time, better opportunities for earning and improving their material standards by working in other European countries act as attraction factors for the young. There is reason for concern primarily due to long-term migration, which is one of the topics this chapter will be dealing with.

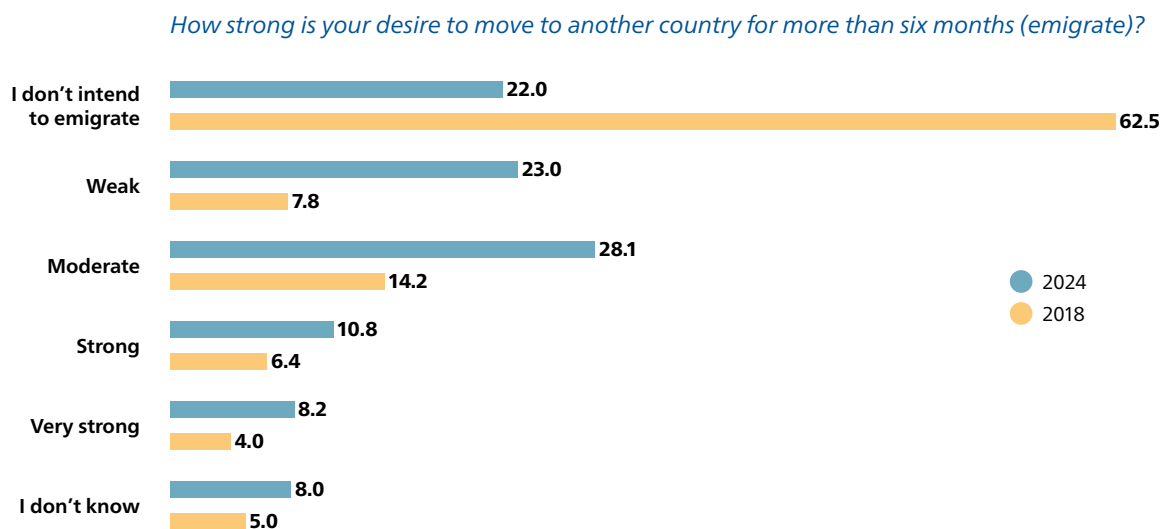
## More young people experience living abroad

Studying abroad offers young people the opportunity to gain valuable educational, working, and real-life experience, establish and build new friendships, and at the same time it lays a groundwork for a permanent stay abroad. Since Croatia's accession to the European Union in 2013, the legislative framework has facilitated emigration. From 2013 to 2022, a total of 91,987 people aged 15 to 29 at the time of emigration left Croatia in order to live abroad.<sup>24</sup> The smallest number of young people who emigrated in that period was evidenced in 2013 (2,640), while the record year for young people moving out was 2017 (13,118). In 2022 this number was 11,883.

18.9 % of young people have the experience of staying abroad for more than six months, which is three times more than in 2018, when this experience was reported by 5.2 % of this population segment. In the analysed period (between 2018 and 2024), the number of young people who stayed abroad for the purpose of higher education increased from 1.8 % to 7.1 %, and the same is true for those who already participated in educational high school programmes abroad (a jump from 2.3 % to 9.3 %). The number of young people who stayed abroad during their vocational training also increased significantly (from 0.7 % to 7.7 %) probably due to widening of opportunities offered in the EU but also in the UK, Australia, the US and Canada. We may conclude that, although the majority of young people in Croatia lack an international educational experience, the interest for studying abroad is very much alive, and there is no significant difference in this respect between young people relative to their socio-demographic characteristics.



Fig. 2 Intention to emigrate among youth in Croatia (in %)



## More young people want to emigrate

Recent data showing that the share of those who do not wish to emigrate decreased from 62.8% in 2018 to 22% in 2024 is most disturbing (Figure 2). In the given time period as the number of young people expressing only a weak desire to emigrate has increased threefold, a moderate desire to do so was expressed by twice as many young people as before, and there is a similar increase in the number of young people having a strong or very strong desire to emigrate (Figure 2). In other words, the emigration potential of young people, which indicates the willingness to migrate abroad, has increased considerably compared to 2018. **In all, 19% of young people in Croatia express a strong desire to emigrate, which places them in the lower end of the scale, along with Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia while the young people from non-EU countries: North Macedonia (39%), Albania (36%) and Turkey (34%) feature the highest level of emigration potential, as measured by a strong desire to emigrate.**

Prompted by data from rural settlements that face a demographic breakdown (Pokos and Turk, 2022), an attempt was made to uncover any significant differences in the desire to emigrate between rural and urban settlements. This study did not prove such significant differences, although the data seem to indicate that young people in more urban regions are more prone to emigration. These findings should be interpreted with caution because the number of respondents from urban areas prevailed in the sample over those from rural areas. Furthermore, the data indicate that most young people of school age have a strong desire to go abroad, but since this subgroup is in the formative phase of attitudes and values, it is possible that, as they mature, their current aspirations to leave the country may change. Gender-wise, a greater proportion of young men than women intend to emigrate from Croatia, which corresponds with the data from previous research in 2018.

In the second step of analysing the intensity of the desire to move abroad for a period longer than six months, the original options were divided into the categories *I intend to move out* and *I do not intend to move out*, whereby the variables of the region and the household financial status were used to detect the possible differences between young people.

There are no differences between the NUTS 2 regions, but a significant connection was established between the financial status of the household where the young person lives and the emigration potential ( $\chi^2=12.25$ ). Specifically, life in a household which is facing material deprivation correlates with a stronger desire to go abroad. In light of data from 2022–2024 that point to an increased number of young people at risk of poverty, we can assume that the trend of an outflow of young people to other countries will continue or even increase, which would result in an even greater lack of workforce, and innovation poten-

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**21%** of respondents have a strong and very strong desire to leave Croatia

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tial. The above findings indicate that an improvement of the socioeconomic position of Croatian families, especially families with children and young people, is crucial to reversing the negative emigration trends. **The intensity of the desire to emigrate out of Croatia is furthermore connected to life satisfaction scores in a counter proportionate manner. The outbound trends increase along with decreasing optimism with regard to Croatia's future ( $r=-0.16$  and  $r=-0.13$ ).** On the other hand, optimism with regard to one's own life path is unrelated to the desire to emigrate. It seems that the young people's desire to leave Croatia is motivated by a striving to improve the quality of life, but can also be seen as a protest against or distrust of the overall situation in Croatian society and its future.

One of the key questions in this study related to the migration aspirations of young people was when those who want to emigrate actually intended to do so. The findings indicate that there is a smaller number of young people who intend to emigrate in less than six months (10.6% compared to 13.5% from 2018), while the number of those who intend to emigrate within two years decreased from 30.2% in 2018 to 20.7% in 2024. In 2018, 33.9% wanted to emigrate within five years, whereas this number now stands at 36% of young people. In a ten-year perspective, 16.8% of young people saw themselves as candidates for emigration in 2018, and whereas to date this category has grown to 24.8% of young Croats.

There is a share of young people whose thoughts of possible emigration are placed far into the future, into a period longer than ten years. They represent 7.9% of the sample now, compared to 5.6% in 2018. **Lastly, 49.3% of young people in 2024 did not specify when they might like to move to another country, of whom 19.3% do not know, and 30% declined the answer.**

In the study, young people were also asked for how long they would like to stay abroad, and in this respect as well, changes were seen between 2018 and 2024. Thus, in 2018, 9.6% of young people who wanted to leave were planning this phase to last less than a year, whereas in 2024, this number increased to 12.5% of the respondents. A period of one to five years spent abroad was considered by 25.5% of young people in 2018, and this number remained practically the same, standing currently at 26.9%. Those planning to leave Croatia for a period of five to ten years were in the region of 20.2% of the sample in 2018, compared to the current 24%. Long-term emigration, i.e. for a ten-to-twenty-year period was considered by 14.6% of young people in 2018, whereas to date this number has fallen to 9.5%. A similar share of young population asserts readiness to leave forever (18.4% in 2024, compared to 19.2% in 2018). The data suggesting that almost one tenth of young people from Croatia are ready to emigrate are dramatic and the picture gets even gloomier when the other tenth is added to this number, that is, the proportion of those intending to move abroad for a period of ten to twenty years. This points to a continued loss of vital human resources for Croatia's development and demographic survival.

The intention to emigrate is convincing when concrete steps have been taken by a young person to initiate the emigration process. The percentage of young people contacting embassies of countries they plan to emigrate to has increased slightly, from 1.6% in 2018 to 4% in 2024. Additionally, 10.8% of young people contacted potential foreign employers in 2024, up from 6.1% in 2018.



Another 10.1% reached out to educational institutions, compared to 4.5% in 2018. Furthermore, 6.1% of young people secured scholarships abroad in 2024, a significant increase from just 1.8% in 2018. There is also a category of young people which relies on friends or relatives living abroad to help them with settling abroad. This category shows a downward trend, from 26.5% in 2018 to the current 16.2%. Relevant information is also gleaned from online portals and social networks, which often represents the source on available scholarships and other opportunities for living abroad.

**A higher standard of living seems firmly fixed as the main reason for emigration with 27.8% (in 2018 this figure was 28.7%). Higher wages as a reason for emigration increased in importance from 20.5% in 2018 to 27.5%.** Also, better employment opportunities are represented to a lesser extent now than before (9.8% vs. 24.1% in 2018). In the 2024 study cycle, another option was added as a motivating factor, that is corruption and clientelism in the homeland. The score here was 6.5%. The desire to experience a different culture has doubled in the same time period (from 2.1% to 4.2%), as has the desire to experience greater cultural diversity (from 1.1% to 2.3%). The search for better opportunities to start one's own business jumped from 2.3% to 4.8%. In the same time period, better educational opportunities as a motivating factor slightly decreased from 6.9% to 5.4%. Being close to loved ones gained in importance, too (from 1.6% to 3%), and escaping from unfavourable circumstances decreased more than twice (from 8.3% to 3.9%). Young people do not expect to find a much higher social and political stability abroad, as the number of those who state this as a reason for emigration decreased from 4.2% to 2.6%. The variety of reasons for emigration provides us with an insight into the spectrum of incentives motivating young people for emigration. All these processes, if steered correctly, do not necessarily have to be a losing game for Croatia, provided incentive measures are created within the country to provide young people with better perspectives of life, which would motivate young people to permanently return to Croatia.

Comparing data for Croatia with those from Slovenia (an EU member) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (candidate status since 2022), we see that the ranking of the reasons is similar. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, expectation of a better standard of living is the main drive for emigration (21.8%), while in Slovenia, the key motive is the desire for a higher salary (23.3%). 3.1% of young Slovenes indicated corruption and clientelism as a motive to go abroad, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina this reason was given by almost twice as many respondents – 6.9%. This distribution of responses in the three countries suggests that political stability and positive economic indicators are associated with lower emigration aspirations, whereas the perception of high corruption and clientelism levels in the country and fuels these trends.

## Main takeaways

- 1. The desire among the young to leave Croatia has shot up since 2018.**
- 2. A higher standard of living remains the leading reason for moving abroad.**
- 3. Almost one fifth of young people have the experience of staying abroad. Also, the number of young people who stayed abroad for the purpose of education has increased since 2018.**
- 4. Between 2018 and 2024, the number of young people considering emigrating from Croatia within the next six months has gone down, but at the same time an increase is seen among those who are considering to emigrate within two to ten years.**
- 5. The intention to move abroad is inversely proportional to the socioeconomic status, where on average young people who face the most severe financial difficulties think about it most often.**

# 7. Family and plans for the future

The family, in addition to being the natural shell in which the lives of young people are shaped and reared, is also responsible for setting the framework of values and behaviours through a process of socialization (Muddiman et al., 2018). Although the traditional family is very much in decline in the modern world (gender role conflicts, increased divorce rates and the appearance of new family forms), in reality these processes are not new and can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century. The postmodern family is founded on the voluntary relationship of its members, and is subject to redefinition and changes in accordance with the interests of parties in this relationship, which includes social, spatial and temporal reorganization of work and life in the household (Stacey, 1990: 8). Children are born out of wedlock more often, and informal unions and life partnerships are on the rise. Marriage as an institution is losing popularity, but in Croatian society, where traditional values are still deeply rooted, it continues to play a role, and is perceived as a stable pillar of social life and order. However, due to the process of depopulation and the emigration of young people, the number of new marriages is expected to fall.

## Living with parents

The majority of young people live in households with their mothers (58%), fathers (49%), and then relatives (41%). Compared to 2018, there is a decrease in the number of households where young people live with their mothers and fathers. In 2018, 77% of young people lived with their mothers and 69% with their fathers. Also, in 2018, 4% of young people lived independently, whereas by 2024 the share of independent households has risen, amounting to 11%. 19% of young people live with a partner, and this is an unchanged percentage compared to 2018. 9% of the respondents live with their children, which is a drop from 2018 when it was 12%.

Significantly more young people above the age of 19 live independently now, compared to previous years ( $\chi^2=32.02$ ). The youngest respondents (14–18 years old) most often live with their mothers ( $\chi^2=125.97$ ) and/or with their fathers ( $\chi^2=129.30$ ). As expected, young people in the oldest age cohort (37%) and from the middle age cohort (17%) live with a partner more often ( $\chi^2=93.68$ ), while respondents from the oldest age group more often live with their children ( $\chi^2=56.95$ ).

The reliance of young people on the economic, social and cultural capital of the family (Bourdieu, 1986) contributes not only to the achievement of their goals in educational and professional life, but also to the inheritance or acquisition of housing and other resources important for independence and social affirmation. In Croatia, as in other countries of the region, there is a trend towards individualization among the young, that is, of relying primarily on themselves and family resources in achieving existential goals, rather than on the wider community (Ilišin, Spajčić Vrkaš 2017). The position of young people in Croatian society in the last few decades was also impacted by the economic crisis, which pushed many families toward impoverishment and a depletion of family resources. Consequently, the options for leaving the family home have grown narrower for young people.

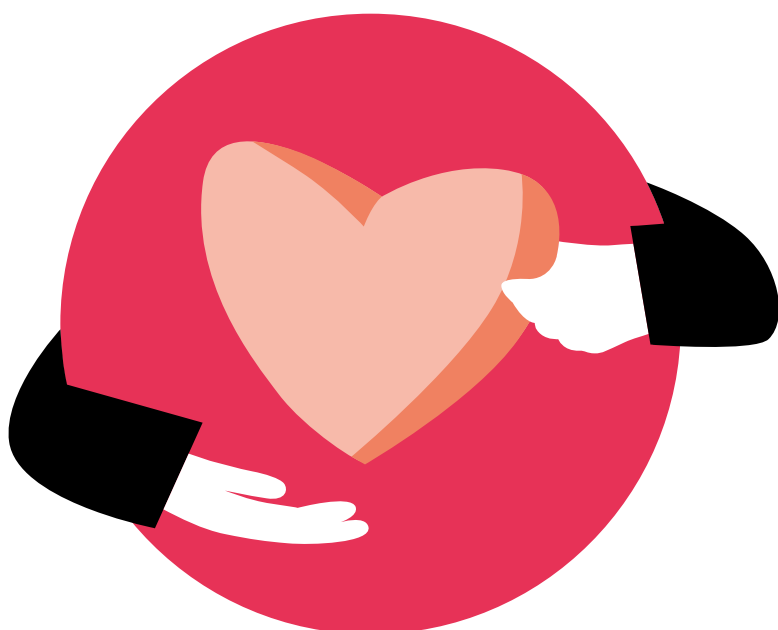
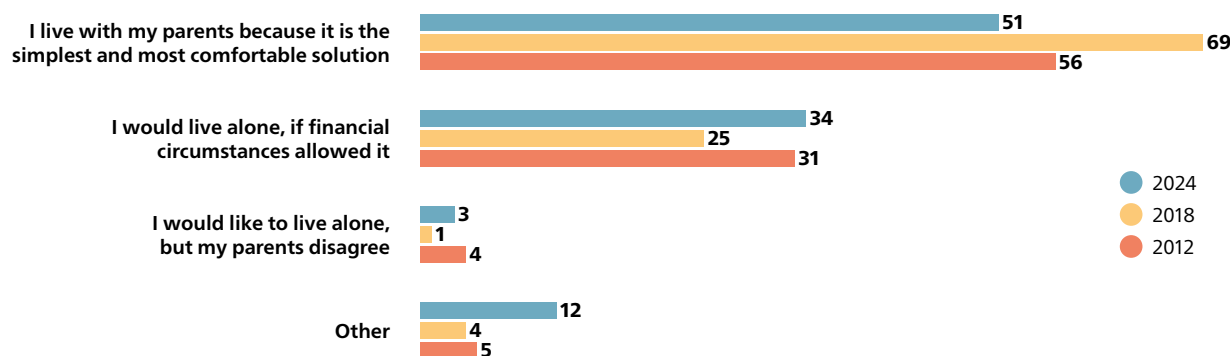




Fig. 3 Living circumstances for youth in Croatia (in %)

*Which of the following statements best describes your situation?*



Throughout the three study cycles carried out from 2012 to 2024, conformism as the reason for continued living with parents has been mentioned most often in the context of solving the housing issue. This item was stated as a factor in decision-making by half of the respondents in 2024 (Figure 3). The respondents in the age group of 19 to 24 years declare in a greater proportion that they would live independently if their financial situation allowed it, while the youngest groups of the respondents are prone to reconcile themselves to living with their parents as it is the simplest and most comfortable solution ( $\chi^2=60.34$ ).

With respect to the quality of the relationship with parents, the vast majority of the respondents (93 %) rate it as good: 52 % state that they get along with parents very well, while 41 % describe this relationship as good, in spite of differences in opinions. Only 7 % assess their relationship with their parents as conflictual and bad. Generally good relationships with parents are a stable occurrence, in terms that they do not deviate from previous research cycles from 2012 and 2018. Gender is related to the quality of the relationship with parents, so a good relationship is expressed more often by men, while getting along with parents, despite differences in opinion, is expressed more by women ( $\chi^2=13.12$ ).

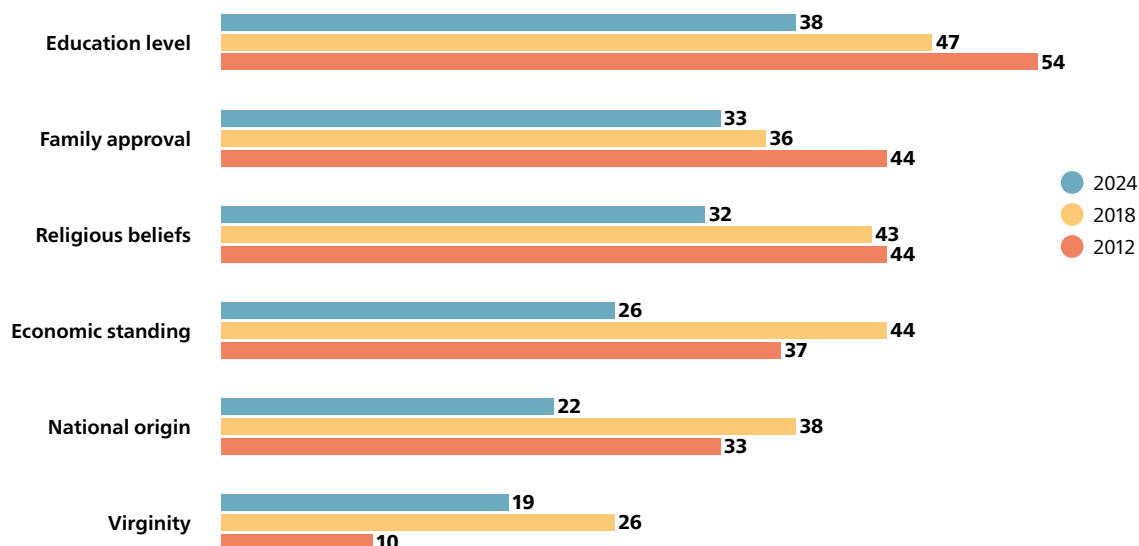
## Diminishing aspirations for parenthood

The majority of young people in the sample (62 %) are not in any kind of partnership and declare themselves as single. 21 % are in a relationship, 9 % are married, while 8 % of young people live in cohabitation.

In terms of planning a family life, young people intend to have an average of two children ( $M=2.3$ ), in line with the data from 2018 ( $M=2.2$ ). 23 % do not plan to have children, which is a major increase from 2018, when this figure stood at 6.4 % of the respondents. The respondents in the older age cohorts (19–24 and 25–29) mainly refrain from planning to have children. One child is most often planned by young people aged 25 to 29, while three children are planned more often by the age group of 19 to 24 years ( $\chi^2=77.59$ ). The average age at which young people plan to have their first child was 26 in the 2024 study cycle, a shift from 2018 when it was 28 years. A significant percentage of young people in 2024 (36 %) cannot determine at what age they would like to have children, while young people aged 19 to 24 would like to have their first child most often between the ages 21 to 25.

Fig. 4 Important factors among youth in Croatia for choosing a partner (in %)

How important are the following to you when choosing a partner?  
 'Important' and 'very important' responses combined



Respondents older than 25 approach reproduction more cautiously, so they are most frequently represented in the category of those who plan to have their first child after the age of 26 ( $\chi^2=66.91$ ). Generation Z in particular approaches reproduction planning as a complex decision. Possible explanations of behaviour leading to reduced ferti-

Nowadays it is usual that partners talk and negotiate and plan the reproduction, and the decision is often made in a long-term process of reflexion and discussion (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995). On the other hand, in view of the fact that partners reach a free decision, children become "a prized possession" which requires the acceptance of much larger responsibilities than before, while parents were still single. Likewise, modifications in the lifestyle occur. Many partners do not wish to have children until they have had enough enjoyment of a free life, including, among other, reaching educational and career goals, companionship with friends, going out and exotic travels (Rijken, Knijn 2009).

**51%** of young people live with their parents because it is the simplest solution

ity rates and the postponement of reproduction are changes in prevalent values in society. The decision to have children is made through the prism of costs and benefits or disadvantages and advantages in both financial, social and emotional sense (Ningish 2022). Apart from this, the reasons for delaying reproduction lie in an ever greater impact of the values of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1991), lifestyle (Giddens 1991), but also the choice of a partner who has a similar outlook on family planning (Rijken, Knijn 2009).

## The social profile of a partner

The importance of various personality characteristics that young people look for in a (potential) partner have basically gone down according to data from this survey, compared to 2018 (Figure 4).

In selecting a partner, young people attach importance to rational criteria, such as education, but also take into account the value element. Family confirmation and a shared cultural identity (religion) are still important. Gender turns out to be significant in terms of partner selection. The partner's economic standard ( $t=-5.01$ ) and educational level are more important for women ( $t=-2.87$ ), while virginity ( $t=4.24$ ) is more important for men, which reveals the presence of a patriarchal pattern.

Age is another important item in partner selection. Economic standard ( $F=5.24$ ) is more important to the youngest age group of the respondents, who in this respect differ from the oldest age cohort, where the importance of this factor is lesser. Family approval ( $F=5.74$ ) as well as virginity ( $F=13.98$ ) are more important to the youngest respondents in their partner assessment, and this again loses importance as we move toward older age groups. The level of education ( $F=9.29$ ) is more important for the age cohort of 19 to 24 years, whose members are still partially involved in the education process, than for the youngest, as well as for the oldest group of the respondents. The criterion of national origin in partner assessment ( $F=4.76$ ) carries the greatest importance for the youngest respondents.

It is obvious that older respondents are less interested in traditional values in choosing a partner compared to the other age cohorts, considering that they are already at the age when they have realized or are trying to realize more serious partner relationships. The connection between young people's attitudes and the father's education level is reflected in the expectations about the partner's educational status ( $F=8.94$ ). This means that the respondents from a higher social background, that is, those whose father possesses high education, have significantly higher expectations from their partners with respect to educational achievement.

## Main takeaways

**1.** The percentage of young people living alone has increased compared to 2018, but despite this, young people existentially still rely to a great extent on family economic resources, and one half of them live with their parents, as it is the simplest and most comfortable solution for them.

**5.** Slightly more than a third of young people declare a readiness to become independent and leave their parents' home, if they had the financial means.

**3.** The number of those who do not want to have children has significantly increased in the 2018–2024 time frame.

**4.** In the future, young people plan to have an average of two children, the first child expected at the age of 26.

**5.** The most important things for young people in choosing a partner are educational level, family approval and religious beliefs.

# 8 ■ General values, attitudes and perceptions

The maturing and growth of young people is accompanied by numerous challenges, as well as by risks that they are exposed to. These risks comprise a wider and more serious spectrum than the risks faced by earlier generations. These risks are often caused by the rapid pace of technological, social, and environmental changes and require new strategies and support systems to help young people navigate their development successfully. Forming an identity in such an environment is not a simple process and it largely depends on personal, social and cultural values. The value system of young people is a complex phenomenon determined by several key components (Ilišin 2011). There is the desirability related to human needs on the one hand, and social requirements on the other. Young people almost invariably strive to achieve desirable, fundamental and cognitively complex goals in certain domains of life. Next, values represent a stable category that “ensures the necessary continuity in the development of the individual and society”, as much as it enables the stability of behaviour (Ilišin 2011: 84). At the same time, however, values are subject to change, as they are influenced by the social environment, and this influence differs in various phases of the young people’s lives.

In modern, mostly Western democratic and affluent societies, there has been a shift from the basically materialistic orientation towards post-materialistic values such as individualism, ecological awareness, multiculturalism, self-actualization, etc. (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). In modern societies the changes in the value system are multi-pronged, combining modern and anti-modern elements (Beck 2001). So it happens that young people show openness to accepting liberal values, and also undemocratic and authoritarian ones at the same time (Burić 2024; Gvozdanović et al. 2019). Gender conservatism is weakening in the working domain and work relationships, but not in the domain of family life (Tomić-Koludrović 2015). In conclusion, values reflect social and cultural heritage, but are also subject to change, reflecting primarily the economic circumstances of life and exposure of the society as a whole to different crises (Inglehart, Baker 2000).

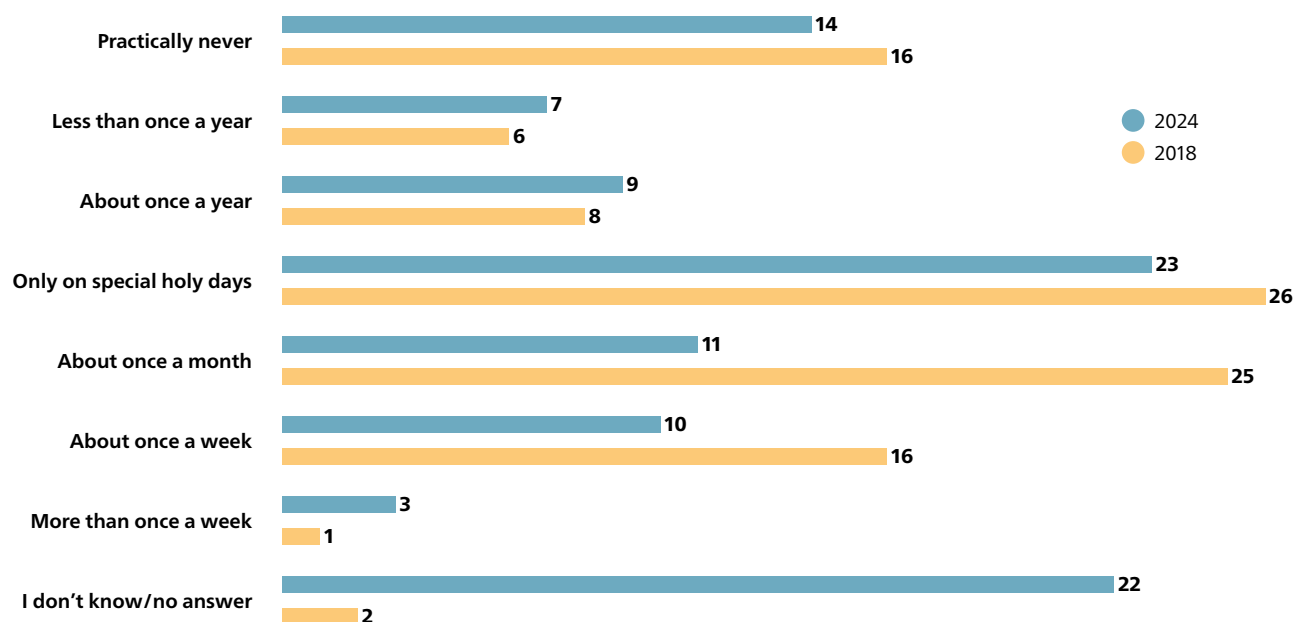
## Religious affiliation as a cultural identity

A series of empirical studies point to a decline in religiosity in favour of secularization at the individual level, a process also affecting the transition countries that experienced a surge in religiosity at the beginning of the early transition (Nikodem and Zrinščak 2019). In Croatia, the increase in religiosity that followed the gaining of national independence in 1991 was also accompanied by the concept of *cultural defence* and the *connectivity of nation, politics and religion* (Nikodem and Zrinščak 2019: 372). Right now, although following the mainstream, Croatia nevertheless exhibits certain specific features within the secularization trend. In contemporary societies, the decline or a rise of religiosity should be seen in a broader context which includes global social processes (modernization, political, ideological processes, etc.) and religious pluralization, revitalization and secularization.



Fig. 5 **Attendance of religious services among youth in Croatia (in %)**

*In the year before the COVID-19 crisis, apart from weddings and funerals, about how often did you attend religious services?*



In the prelude to the two waves of research, the percentage of young people who declared themselves as Roman Catholics was stable – in 2012 it was 88.8% and in 2018 it was 89.8%. In 2024, noticeably fewer respondents (64%) declared belonging to the Roman Catholic religion. Simultaneously, compared to 2018, many more declared themselves as not belonging to any religion – a surge from 7% to 16%, whereas *other religions* is also a growing category, starting from 0 in 2018 and reaching 8% in 2024. For comparison, the census from 2021 shows that 79% of the population declare themselves as Roman Catholic, which is a 7% drop in relation to the census of 2011. 5% of the general population declare themselves as non-believers or atheists (State Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In view of the census data, the share of Catholics in our sample does not overlap with the trends in the general population. We acknowledge that these differences are difficult to comment as the collection of data did not follow the same methodology.

Church religiosity is measured by data on attendance of religious ceremonies, with the exclusion of weddings and funerals (Figure 5). By this measure, young people can be deemed religious on average ( $M=3.7$ ), whereas a fifth of them attend religious services mostly at the eve of holidays. Around 10% of the respondents visit the church once a month, whereas 14% never go to church at all. Women and men do not differ in terms of religious participation. The differences are significant with respect to age, with the oldest cohort of the respondents attending religious ceremonies less often ( $\chi^2=32.49$ ). This age difference has probably more to do with the fact that going to the church is a part of the Sunday school, attended by the majority of pupils in schools. Significantly more young people who are city residents are not affiliated with any religious community compared to young people from the countryside or in a mixed rural-urban setting ( $\chi^2=60.57$ ).

## Increase in experiencing different types of discrimination

An increased percentage of the respondents experienced *frequent* discrimination in 2024, and the percentage of those who experienced this prejudice *sometimes* was also on the rise (Figure 6)<sup>25</sup>. **Gender-based discrimination jumped dramatically from 1 % in 2018 to 11 % in 2024.**<sup>26</sup> This increase is probably due in part to the *I didn't ask for it* movement, which had a significant media impact in Croatia as well as in the countries of the region and resulted in a greater awareness of the public, including young women, about the more often and various manifestations of gender-based violence. As expected, differences by gender are significant – women in both answer categories (occasionally/frequently) have more frequent experiences of discrimination ( $\chi^2=18.88$ ). Most often targeted are women between the ages of 19 and 24 ( $\chi^2=21.26$ ).

What led to such a high jump in the occurrences of discrimination compared to indicators from earlier years? The study shows that Croatian citizens are increasingly aware of what discrimina-

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**16 %** report discrimination based on sexual orientation which is the least reported type of discrimination.

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tion is, as well as which mechanisms they can use in case they are discriminated against. It seems that the number of people discriminated against has also increased based on the 2022 Ombudsman's survey, which is confirmed by our results. In general, citizens experience discrimination mostly in the domain of work and employment, and young people, more often than other age categories, are reluctant to report it if they witness it done to another. It is interesting, however, that most respondents are not aware that discrimination is prohibited by law (Ombudsman, 2022).

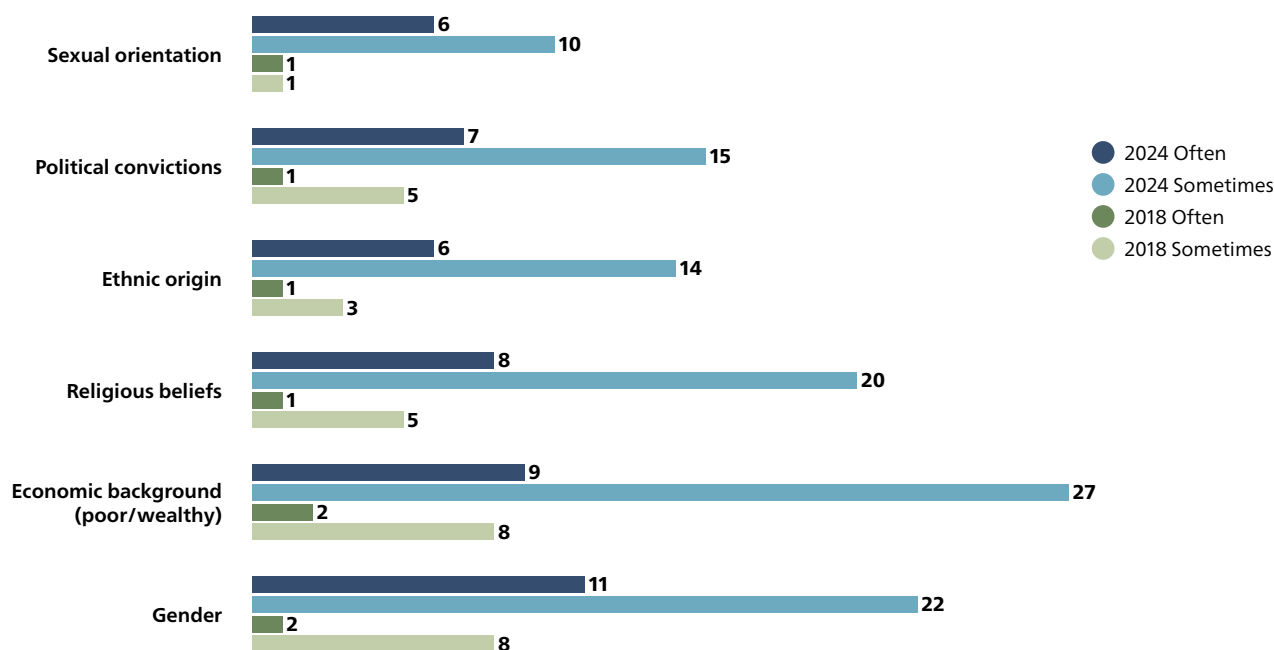
Very close in numbers to gender discrimination is discrimination based on economic background and religious beliefs. Discrimination happening *sometimes* on grounds of economic status (poor/rich) is recognized by close to a third of the respondents. Another third report occasional or frequent discrimination based on religious beliefs. Discrimination on grounds of political beliefs and on the basis of ethnicity are recognized in equal measure by one fifth of the respondents. In terms of frequency, these forms of discrimination were noted to occur *often* or *sometimes*. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is the least recognized by the respondents – it was *often* or *sometimes* experienced by 16 % of the respondents.

Age carries significance in the recognition of all the mentioned types of discrimination, except that based on political beliefs (gender  $F=10.49$ ; economic  $F=5.80$ ; religious beliefs  $F=5.48$ ; ethnic beliefs  $F=5.24$ ; sexual orientation  $F=4.67$ ; use of language  $F=5.25$ ). According to all analysed categories of discrimination, the middle age cohort (19–24) reports the highest number of instances of discrimination. We can assume that a part of young people at that age is still in the process of education, so their attitudes are probably influenced by acquired knowledge and comparison with peers. Alternatively, they may have entered the labour market, and as a result of encountering new circumstances, they also engage in comparing their social status (economic, educational) with others, likewise, check whether their beliefs are (in)compatible with the beliefs of others.

Women and men report significantly different levels of discrimination based on gender ( $t=3.90$ ), ethnic origin ( $t=2.83$ ), and political beliefs ( $t=3.32$ ). As already mentioned, women have more often experienced gender discrimination<sup>27</sup>, whereas men more frequently experienced discrimination based on ethnic origin and political beliefs.

Fig. 6 Experience of discrimination among youth in Croatia (in %)

*Have you ever experienced discrimination for any of the following reasons?*



## A nuanced approach to the values of human rights

In the last five years, a major shift has occurred on the level of awareness about the rights of different minority groups (women, ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the poor, young people) (Figure 7).

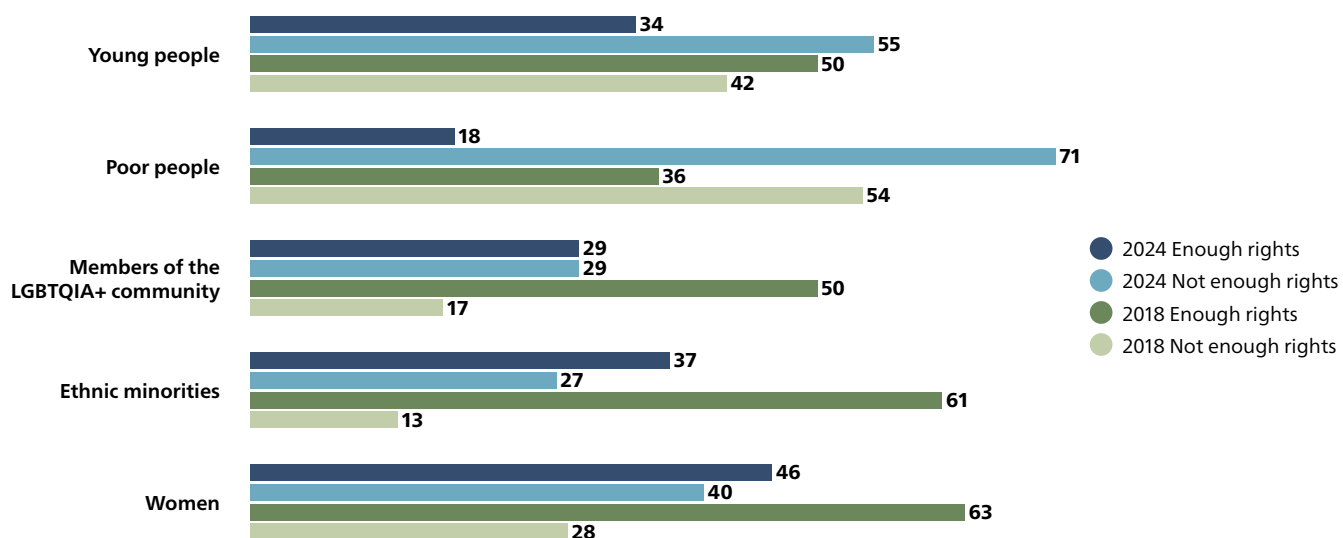
Compared to 2018, there is an increased awareness that poor people do not have enough legal rights (by 17%). The majority of young people consider the group to which they belong deprived of certain rights, and this perception is shared by more than half of the respondents in 2024, a rise of 13% compared to 2018. Such a finding points to generational solidarity and possibly to the perception of insufficiently realized goals in relation to social expectations.

The next group in terms of percentages with insufficient rights are women, with significantly more young people being sensitized to women's rights in 2024, than was the case before. At the same time, it is intriguing that a high proportion (46%) of the respondents believe that women today have sufficient rights. A similar situation is seen with the perception of the rights of national minorities, the perception being that the relative majority does not show sensitivity towards the rights of ethnic minorities. The percentage of those who exhibit this kind of sensitivity stands at 27% compared to 2018. With respect to minority rights, an increased proportion of Croatian citizens recognize the unenviable position of minorities in the country (14%).



Fig. 7 Views on minority rights among youth in Croatia (in %)

Please say whether, in your view, the following groups have enough or not enough rights in Croatia?



When assessing the achievement of the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, there is a noticeable polarization between those who are not sensitized to the social issues and position of this group and those who are. In the case of national minorities, the share of those who believe that greater rights should be given to this group has increased, indicating a more inclusive attitude of young people towards these groups.

Age differences among young people did not prove to be significant in the (non)acceptance of the rights of individual groups, except in the case of the rights of national minorities, where young people aged 19 to 24 are more inclined to the view that minorities do not have enough rights, while the oldest age cohort stands out with the view that their rights are too many ( $\chi^2=18.72$ ). Gender differences are significant when it comes to women's rights, which was expected considering that women recognize discrimination more.

The view appears to dominate that women do not have sufficient rights. On the other hand, men have the opposite attitude and believe that women have sufficient or too many rights ( $\chi^2=57.27$ ). A similar division by gender also exists in the recognition of the rights of national minorities and the rights of the LGBTQIA+ communities, whereby women in a greater measure hold that national minorities ( $\chi^2=11.72$ ) and LGBTQIA+ communities ( $\chi^2=46.89$ ) do not have enough rights, whereas men are more prone to think that they have sufficient or too many rights. With regard to the rights of poor people, men stand out from women in their views that the poor have enough or too many rights ( $\chi^2=9.90$ ). With regard to the rights of young people, a similar view is held by male respondents ( $\chi^2=8.88$ ). The results clearly point to gender polarization in terms of valuing the rights of certain groups, with women showing a higher level of empathy and social sensitivity. Research studies point to the importance of the socialization process in assuming gender roles. This process shows differences between men and women in terms of interpersonal and family relationships, career paths, and health.



There are some who see a problem in the values on which male gender roles are based, often supporting sexism and the violation of human rights, including violent behaviour, homophobia, bullying, racial and ethnic intolerance, and dysfunctional relationships toward women, men and children (O'Neil 2008).

The father's educational status was shown to be significantly related only to the variable of the assessment of youth rights ( $\chi^2=29.24$ ), whereby the respondents from a higher social background (parent with higher education) are less sensitive to the rights of young people, believing that young people have too many rights.

On the scale of attitudes regarding the (non)acceptance of the value of human and minority rights, it is interesting to take a glance at those who are the least accepted by society, in view of still strong patriarchal attitudes connected to sexism, racism, anti-Semitism and cultural nationalism (Figure 8).

**A closer look at patriarchal attitudes reveals that three fifths of young people disagree with the idea that men should have an advantage over women in securing jobs during times of scarcity. Additionally, about half do not believe that men make better political leaders than women.** The result is not in agreement in relation to the current political situation, because in the new government from 2024, the men headed sixteen ministries, while only two ministries are headed by women. Analysis by age shows that young people in the 19 to 24 age group think that men are better leaders than women. This view gets less pronounced as we move towards other age groups. The same age group is also predominant among the undecided ( $\chi^2=17.61$ ). Also, men agree significantly more with the statement that men are better leaders than women, and they prevail among the undecided, while a greater proportion of women, by contrast to men are against this attitude ( $\chi^2=97.00$ ).

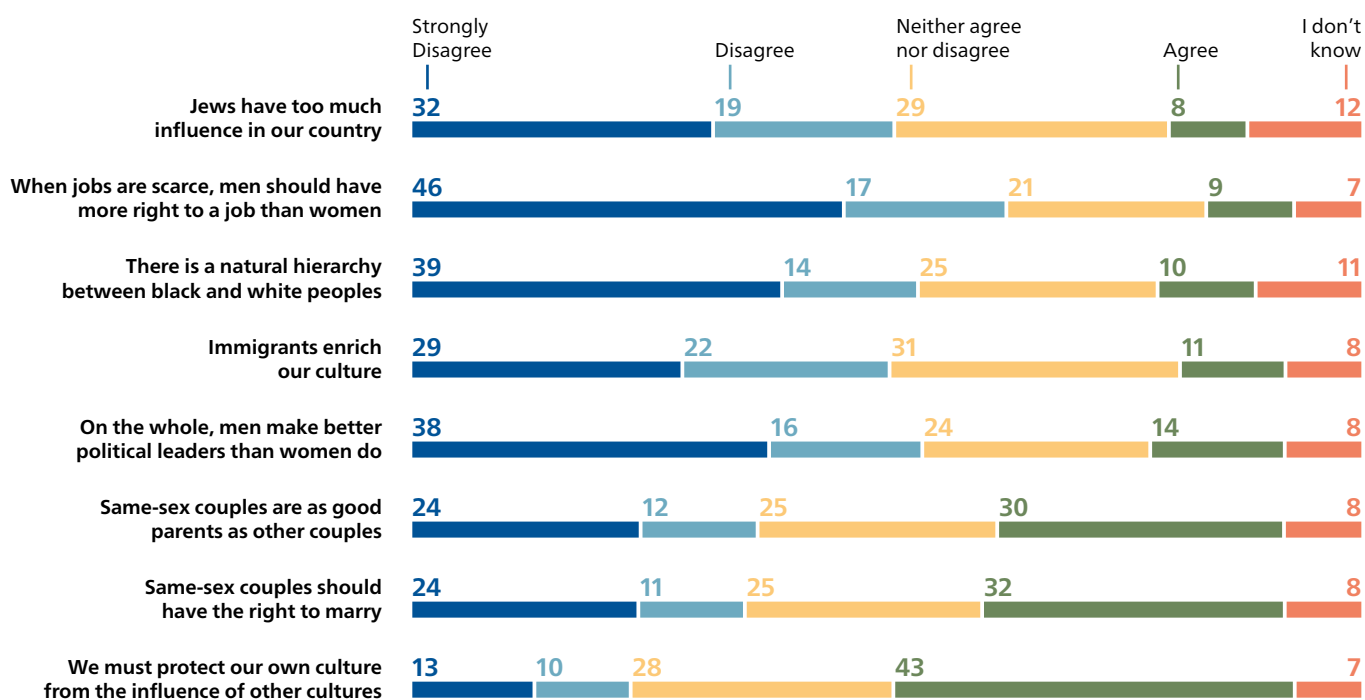
We have a similar distribution of attitudes with regard to the claim about the scarcity of jobs ( $\chi^2=56.81$ ). The age cohort 19 to 24 is the mostly represented one in believing that during the scarcity of jobs it is more important for men to be employed, then women ( $\chi^2=16.49$ ).

On the question of the rights of homosexual couples to enter legal marriage and their right to parenthood, the distribution of answers points to the polarization of young people towards these topics. Age differences are not significant, while the analysis of gender differences shows that women are significantly more supportive of the rights of homosexual couples to marriage ( $\chi^2=31.60$ ), as well as to successful parenthood ( $\chi^2=38.27$ ), while men are more negatively oriented towards these issues, or indecisive. The rights of homosexual couples in terms of marriage are mostly rejected by men who predominate in the option *neither agree nor disagree* ( $\chi^2=28.72$ ). Regarding parenthood, gender differences are significant, with men predominating among those who are unsure about this issue, and at the same time disagree with the approval of parenthood for homosexual couples ( $\chi^2=37.31$ ).

The recent trend of foreign workers becoming part of Croatian society has highlighted politically and socially sensitive issues, such as employment, housing, and the absence of comprehensive immigration policies that would support their integration. These issues, however, are indicative of broader structural deficiencies that have been overlooked by the state, rather than the result of the presence of immigrants. Only 11% of respondents said that immigrants enrich Croatian culture. In view of certain projections by the end of this decade as many as half a million foreign workers could be employed in Croatia, and bearing in mind the expressed attitudes of young people, we can foresee problems ahead at an unprecedented scale for Croatia. It is apparent that the country lacks appropriate policies in this regard. Age and gender differences with regard to migrant workers in Croatia are not proving as significant.

Fig. 8 Opinions and attitudes among young people in Croatia (in %)

How strongly do you agree with the following statements?



On the issue of the preservation of national culture in relation to other cultures, one-fifth of the respondents disagree with this attitude, whereas two-fifths of the respondents believe that the Croatian culture should be protected from the influence of other cultures. Another two fifths of the respondents do not have a formed opinion in this regard. Age groups who believe that the national culture should be protected from the influence of other cultures are those comprising the youngest age group and the one in the age range 19 to 24 ( $\chi^2=15.36$ ).

On the issue whether Jews have too much influence in Croatia, about 50 % of the respondents reject such an idea, while almost a third of the respondents do not have a clear position on the matter.

About 8% of the respondents believe that Jews have too much influence in Croatia. To put these results into perspective, it should be noted that only 410 members of the Jewish minority live in Croatia, and have residence in only a couple counties (Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2024). Presumably, those young people who are undecided or ascribe too much influence in Croatia to Jews fall under the influence of anti-Semitism, which is often woven into different conspiracy theories. It must be stated, however, that anti-Semitism in Croatia is lower than in other countries of the region. Measured on a scale from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 4 (I agree), the average score for Croatia is 2.1, compared to the score in the region, which is 2.3. The age factor with respect to the attitude towards Jews is not significant, but gender is, in the sense that women oppose the anti-Semitic attitude more than men. In other words, a greater proportion of men than women either believe that the influence of Jews in Croatia is too strong, or are undecided on this matter ( $\chi^2=18.52$ ).

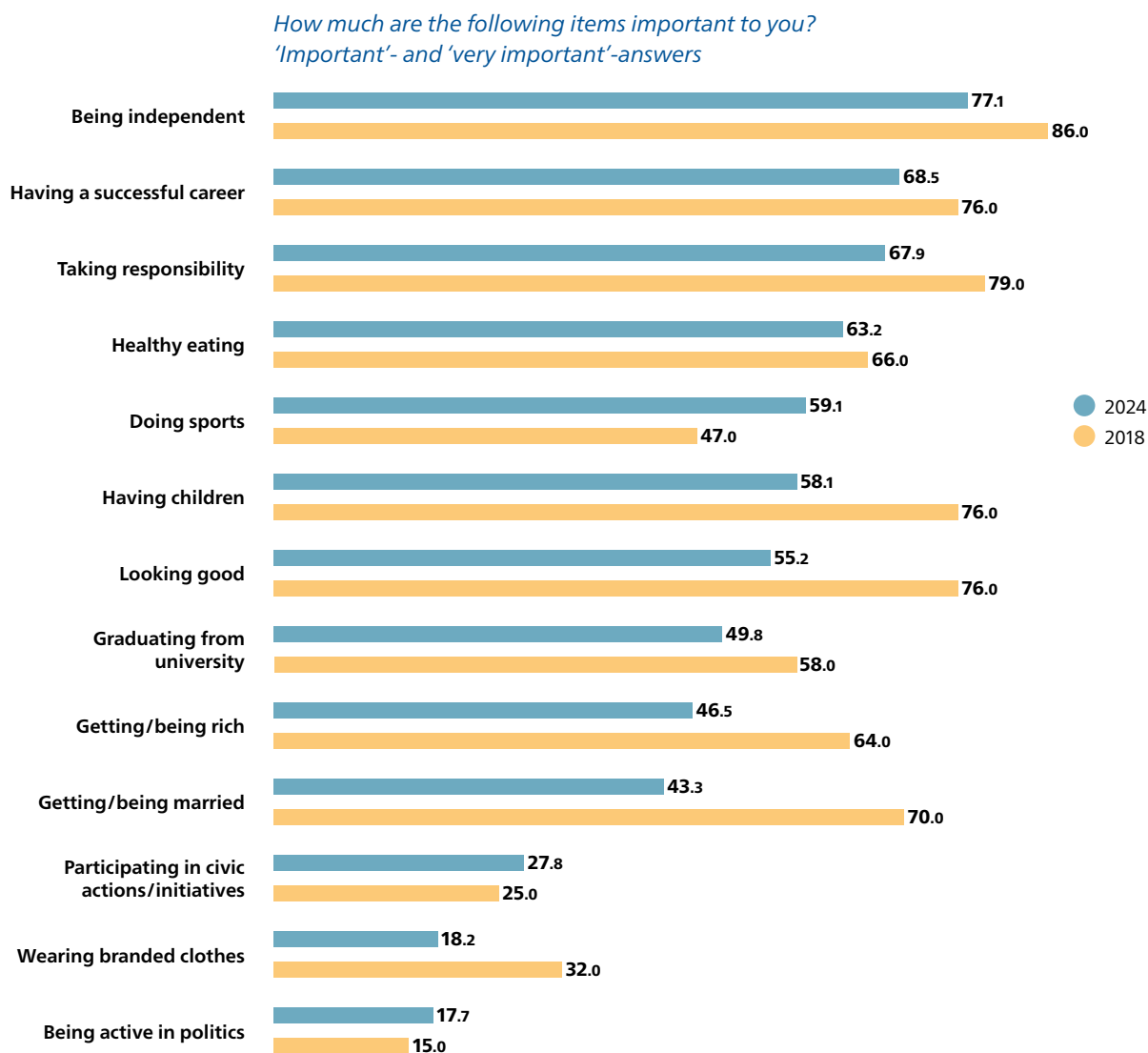
Racism expressed in the presumption that there is a *natural hierarchy* between black and white people is shared by around 12% of young people, 25% are undecided, while 53% reject the racist presumption. No difference between the respondents was seen according to age, whereas in terms of gender it is seen that men accept the *natural hierarchy* presumption more often, or are to a greater extent undecided about it. Women in a significantly greater measure reject racism ( $\chi^2=12.80$ ). In the regional context, young people in Croatia are in the lower part of the scale of rejection of racism, along with young people from Serbia, Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Young people in all of the above countries can be said to reject the racist presumption vigorously.

## Personal emancipation as the most important value

Independence, career and taking responsibility, that is, cherishing the value of personal emancipation, are at the top of the pyramid of personal values of young people today, as was the case in 2018 (Figure 9). For most respondents in the sample, it is important to eat healthily and practice sports. Moreover, playing sports experienced a significant upswing compared to 2018, which in a way aligns with the ever-greater accent given by young people to a healthy lifestyle. Compared to the 2018 study, there is a significant drop in the share of those who prioritize having children, getting married, wearing branded clothes and looking good. This may indicate a shift from materialistic and traditionalist values, at least when it comes to prioritization of values at the personal level. Participation in society through politics or within civil society is traditionally at the bottom of the hierarchy of personal values of young people, and this item is unchanged from 2018. The proportion of young people who attach importance to social and political engagement lies between 18 and 28%.

Personal life values consist of four independent determinants – emancipation<sup>28</sup>, materialistic values<sup>29</sup>, social engagement<sup>30</sup> and traditionalist values<sup>31</sup>, whose average values are measured on a scale of five degrees (1-strong disagreement to 5-strong agreement). The mean value of the importance of emancipation is 3.9, which means that on average the young agree with this value, though a significant difference is seen here in favour of women ( $t=-4.17$ ). On the scale measuring the internalization of traditionalist values the average response was 3.4, which indicates a moderate tendency of young people towards a traditional way of life, primarily in terms of valuing marriage and starting a family. It is interesting that the respondents from the oldest age cohort ( $F=6.82$ ) are the least inclined toward the traditionalist pattern compared to the two younger age groups. These data do not allow firm conclusion as to whether the relatively feeble inclination of the oldest respondents towards the family and the traditionalist value pattern is an indicator of the permanent abandonment of the family lifestyle concept, or whether it only indicates a possible postponement of that step in life. The youngest respondents are most inclined to materialist values ( $F=11.18$ ), with an average response value of 3, signifying a moderate acceptance of materialistic values among young people. The values of political and social engagement have the lowest rating, as seen in the lowest score obtained for this value pattern – 2.5. It is not excluded that some value patterns correlate with ideological orientation – for example, the materialistic and traditionalist pattern ( $r_1=0.22$ ;  $r_2=0.29$ ) is seen more in respondents who lean towards the right ideological spectrum. **Another significant correlation is seen between the inclination to the right-wing political ideology and the positive valuing of political engagement ( $r=0.13$ ), which may be a consequence of predominantly right-wing alignment of those young people who are prepared to get politically engaged.**

Fig. 9 Personal values among youth in Croatia (in %)



Attitudes towards minority groups are often measured through social distance or readiness to establish contact with members of such minorities. It is known that prejudices against certain minority groups, determine the degree of closeness we are ready to have with the members of these groups. In this context, strong distancing is seen among the young<sup>32</sup> towards addicts (M=2.1), and somewhat more moderately towards the Roma (M=2.7) and LGBTQIA+ persons (M=2.9). Muslims (M=3.2), Jews (M=3.3), and especially Christians (M=3.9), are the groups towards which only mild social distancing may manifest.

Female respondents are significantly more tolerant towards Jews, Muslims and the LGBTQIA+ community ( $t_1=-7.55$ ;  $t_2=-4.59$ ;  $t_3=-2.66$ ). Respondents from more urban areas are more willing to accept the latter as their neighbours ( $r=0.12$ ), which is understandable given the multiplicity and diversity of social and cultural identities in urban settlements.

Fig. 10 Acceptance of behaviours/orientations among youth in Croatia

Please indicate whether, in your opinion, the following behaviors/orientations can always be justified, never, or something in between?



To what extent are liberal attitudes among young people widespread and accepted? In response to this question, research often examines the value position towards abortion and homosexuality (Figure 10), i.e., towards topics which are often the topic of public debate and controversy. Against both of these phenomena, young people in Croatia position themselves in the middle of the ten-point scale, which again, compared to the data from 2018, indicates a slight liberalization of attitudes. In particular, there is a lesser number of those who would never justify abortion. **Compared to 2018, the percentage of convinced opponents of abortion has been almost halved – from 15.2% to 8.2%, as recorded in the 2024 survey.** A similar trend of mild liberalization of attitudes about homosexuality and abortion was detected in the general population in the period between 2008 and 2018, while at the same time the political authoritarianism strengthened, especially among the young people (Nikodem 2019 according to Burić 2024). The authors accept the explanation given to these opposing value tendencies by Sekulić (2014), who asserted that those values that were outside the direct influence of the ideological space moved in the direction of modernization (Burić 2024).

Going back to the data from the current study, we see a confirmation of the gender dimension of liberal views – namely, women are significantly more liberal when it comes to the justification of abortion and homosexuality, as well as in relation to minority rights ( $t=-3.31$ ;  $t=-5.20$ ).

On the question of resorting to, or condoning informal practices that bypass institutional rules in order to (more efficiently) achieve a goal or solve a problem, young people have become somewhat wary of the idea of using personal connections, but they are still inclined to justify such behaviour, particularly in the context of tax evasion or receiving/giving bribes. Men, as well as the respondents in the middle age category (19–24), are significantly more inclined to justify corruption ( $t_1=3.67$ ;  $t_2=8.38$ ) and tax fraud ( $t_1=4.06$ ;  $t_2=9.29$ ). Young people whose fathers have a vocational education are significantly less inclined to justify phenomena such as giving/receiving bribes, evading taxes and using personal connections, compared to the respondents whose fathers have a higher education ( $F_1=14.06$ ;  $F_2=7.28$ ;  $F_3=3.98$ ). It might be that families with higher social status often have more resources and connections, allowing them to navigate and benefit from informal networks. This can make them more tolerant of, or even reliant on, informal practices such as using personal connections to achieve goals or resolve problems more efficiently.

## Life satisfaction, attitude towards the future and concerns

The majority of the respondents are generally satisfied with their life: the average score on a scale from 1 – *very dissatisfied* to 10 – *very satisfied* was 6.9. Thus, almost two-thirds of young people, i.e. 64 %, selected a score of 7 or higher, against the 14.5 % who positioned themselves at the lower end of the scale, with estimates equal to 4 or lower (Figure 11).

The survey on life satisfaction (expressed on a scale from 1 – *I am completely dissatisfied* to 5 – *I am completely satisfied*) shows that since 2018 there has been a decrease in the share of the respondents expressing life satisfaction – back then 78 % expressed satisfaction with their life (grades 4 and 5 on the scale; Gvozdanović et al. 2019: 69; this percentage was 66 % in 2012; Ilišin and Gvozdanović 2017: 368). Life satisfaction also decreases with increasing age of the respondents (Figure 11). While the two older age groups (19–24 and 25–29 years old) achieved the same average value of around 6.7, the youngest respondents (14–18 years old) rated their life satisfaction with a statistical-

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**Since 2018 there has been a decrease in the share of the respondents expressing life satisfaction.**

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ly significantly higher average of 7.5 ( $F=10.5$ ). A similar trend was also observed in previous studies (e.g. Bouillet 2007; Ilišin and Gvozdanović 2017) and can be explained by the interaction of different factors. For instance, younger adolescents still have limited and clearly defined responsibilities in their family and school environments, along with stronger systems of (emotional, social, and financial) support and protection.

On the other hand, the older respondents have already faced the challenges (and disappointments) of young adulthood, which is marked by the end of schooling and the transition to the world of labour, the necessity of securing a livelihood, the need for social affirmation, and the efforts to start one's own family.

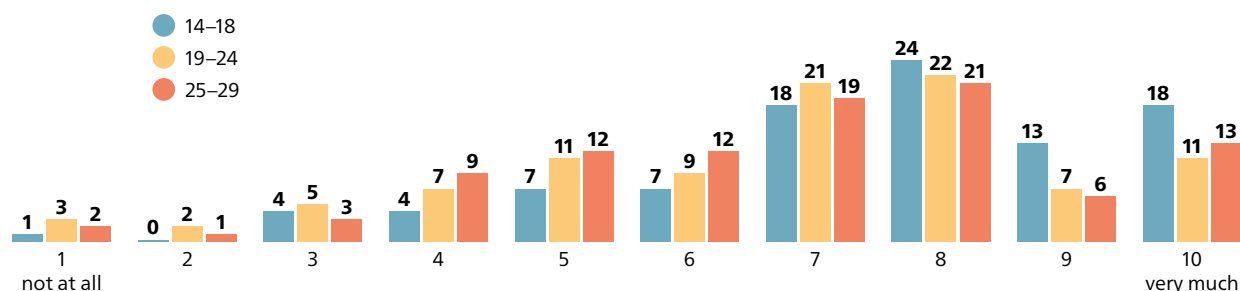
In accordance with the assessment of life satisfaction, 68 % of young people are optimistic and see their future as better than their present. The distribution of the remaining responses was approximately equal: 9.6 % of the respondents perceived their future as worse, 12.5 % perceived it as the same as the present, while 9.8 % did not know or declined to answer the question.

Compared to previous waves of research, the proportion of those who are personally optimistic has remained stable (64 % in 2018 and 68 % in 2024). However, there appears to be a growing trend of personal pessimism among young people in Croatia. This trend was previously evident in the increasing share of individuals who believed their future would not differ significantly from the present, rising from 14 % in 2012 to 25 % in 2018. By 2024, however, this share dropped to 12.5 %, while an increase in those who are “explicitly” pessimistic was observed. Specifically, in 2018, only 2 % of young people thought their future would be much worse or just a little worse than the present (on the then-used scale from 1 to 5; Gvozdanović et al., 2019: 35). By 2024, this percentage of pessimistic individuals has increased by more than seven percent, reaching 9.6 %.

In contrast to their own future, young people see the future of the Croatian society in general as much worse. Additionally, compared to 2018 (Gvozdanović et al. 2019: 69), a complete reversal is visible: while at that time 45 % of young people expressed optimistic expectations, today this is shared by only about a quarter of the respondents (23.7 %). The share of neutrals also fell from 36 % in 2018 to 25 % in 2024. On the other hand, the share of pessimists quadrupled: from one tenth in 2018 to 40.8 % in 2024.

Fig. 11 Life satisfaction with regards to age group among youth in Croatia (in %)

To what extent are you satisfied with your life in general?  
On a scale from '1 – not at all' to '10 – very much' by ages



Compared to young people from the other 11 countries in the survey, the average life satisfaction of young people in Croatia does not differ from the regional average. This can be considered a relative success bearing in mind that **young people in Croatia occupy places in the lower third of the ranking with respect to personal and social optimism (in the first case, the ninth place, ahead of Romania, Greece and Turkey; in the case of social optimism, only young people in Turkey and Greece are behind young people in Croatia).**

Among the fears and worries, those related to existential issues dominate among the young. More than 40 % of young people express strong concern regarding situations or social phenomena such as unemployment, poor health care system, low pension and the possibility of serious illness (Figure 12). These most pronounced concerns were compounded by those from the outbreak of the war, probably under the impression of the current conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. On the other hand, it seems that the memories of the COVID-19 pandemic have already faded, judging by the position of the newly introduced indicator – the fear of a global pandemic, which acts as a disturbing factor for 28.7 % of the respondents, and as such is at the bottom of the ranking, along with fears of robbery and domestic violence.

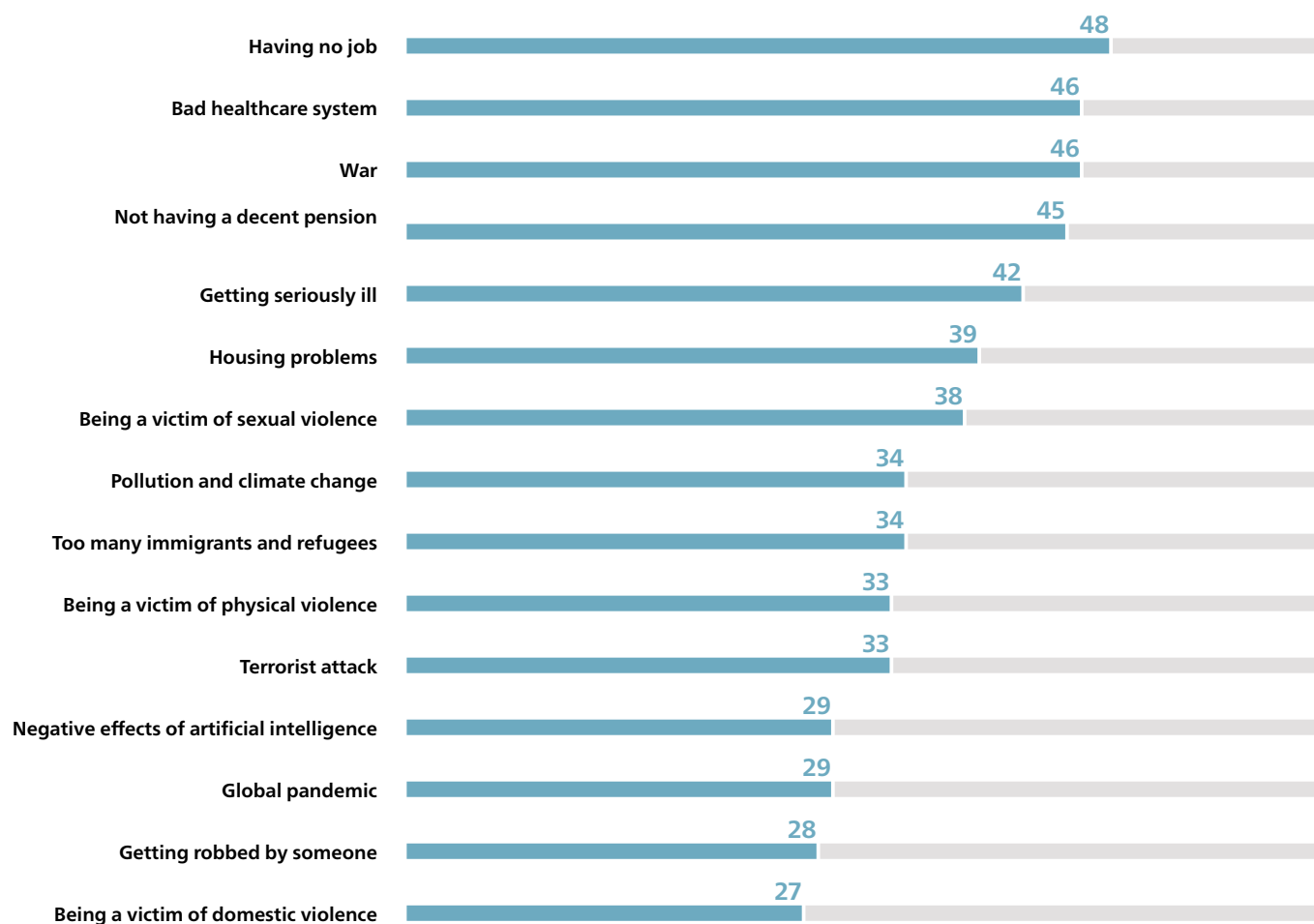
These results are partly similar to those from 2018 – in 2018 the two most expressed concerns among the young were unemployment and serious impairment of health. However, at that time, among the five variables that most young people marked as highly worrisome, three pertained to issues impacting society as a whole – increase in poverty in society, social injustices, and pollution and climate change. Of all the indicators measured in the previous wave of research, the fear of war saw the largest increase in the amount of 15 %: from 31 % in 2018 to the current 45.5 %.<sup>33</sup> The second largest jump of 8 % is the fear of too many immigrants and refugees, which might be ascribed to the recent politicization of the issue of (illegal) migrations, overlooking the fact that immigration is becoming necessary for the Croatian economy's functioning and the sustainability of its pension and social systems.

The 15 variables in the above table form two latent dimensions. Similarly to the previous wave of research, the first dimension is primarily determined by *the fear of different types of violence* (family, sexual, physical, robbery, terrorism and war – now with the addition of the newly emerged fear of a global pandemic).



Fig. 12 Fears and concerns among youth in Croatia (in %)

To what extent are you frightened or concerned in relation to the following things? Shares of 'a lot'-answers



Again, very much in line with 2018, the second dimension may be called the *fear of socio-economic decline*, and this dimension is made up of the following pieces: too many immigrants and refugees, negative effects of artificial intelligence, low pensions, a poor health care system, unemployment, housing problems, getting seriously ill, pollution and climate change. Judging by the average values expressed on a scale from 1 – *doesn't concern/frighten me at all* to 3 – *concerns/frightens me a lot*, the respondents are somewhat burdened by concerns that make up both the first (M=2.0) and the second dimension (M=2.2). Both dimensions of fear are significantly more pronounced in women than in men ( $t_1=7.09$ ;  $t_2=5.06$ ).

## Approach to the issues of climate change and environmental protection

Previous youth studies have shown that values related to the environment are less important to young people compared to issues such as employment, education, housing insurance, etc. (Ilišin et al. 2013; Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš 2017; Gvozdanović et al. 2019).



In this study also, pollution and climate change are not phenomena causing a high degree of fear among young people, and in the chapter related to politics, it is evident that young people do not rank climate change among the top five problems that Croatia will face in the next ten years. This should not be seen as a sign of waning awareness of climate change and the importance of preserving natural resources, but may be indicative of young people seeing Croatia as only a tiny player on the global scene, unable to impact major processes, such as the preservation of natural resources and the fight against climate change.

It is fair to say that young people do not have a clear position on the extent to which the state should take upon itself the responsibility for environmental protection. Thus, on the question whether the state, in order to protect the environment, should ban old cars revealed that 10.6% of respondents have no opinion on this matter, with 30.7% disagreeing, 28.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 30.2% supporting the idea of state intervention in this matter. Also, young people are relatively homogeneous in attitudes towards state intervention in the matters of environmental protection.

As to how, in principle, the environment could be better protected, the majority of the respondents (66.4%) trust solutions based on nature, that is, they believe that in the first place green areas and forests should be better protected.

The majority (64.1%) also supports the policy of better management of waste separation in order to protect the climate and the environment. Every second respondent believes that the climate and the environment should be protected by banning the use of plastic products (52.7%). Female respondents show significantly greater support for a better management of waste separation ( $\chi^2=12.63$ ), as well as the ban on plastic products ( $\chi^2=9.34$ ). However, most young people do not recognize the introduction of changes in public transport, such as enabling more lanes for cycling and more public transport, as important moves to improve environmental protection (by 38% and by 26%, respectively).

The relationship between support for state policy in preserving the climate and the environment and the way in which the environment can be preserved is interesting – those respondents who support state intervention in environmental issues more often recognize the ban on the production of plastic products as a good environmental protection measure ( $\chi^2=24.46$ ), as well as better protection of green areas and forests ( $\chi^2=10.61$ ). In other words, it can be presumed that those who favour state intervention in environmental protection accept these measures to be within the state's jurisdiction.

## Main takeaways

**1.** Compared to 2018, there was a decrease in the share of young people expressing satisfaction with their lives, and an increase in the share of young people expressing pessimism regarding both their personal and social future.

**2.** There was a slight liberalization of attitudes towards homosexuality and abortion; however, the polarization remains in attitudes towards homosexuals' right to marry and parenthood.

**3.** The traditional value orientation (desire to start a family and marriage) weakened compared to 2018, while the emancipatory one (desire for independence) continues to be a priority.

**4.** Among the concerns and fears of young people, the most prevalent are those related to the existential issues, above all (un)employment and personal health.

**5.** There has been a rise of fear of war and too many immigrants coming to Croatia.

# 9 Political attitudes and participation

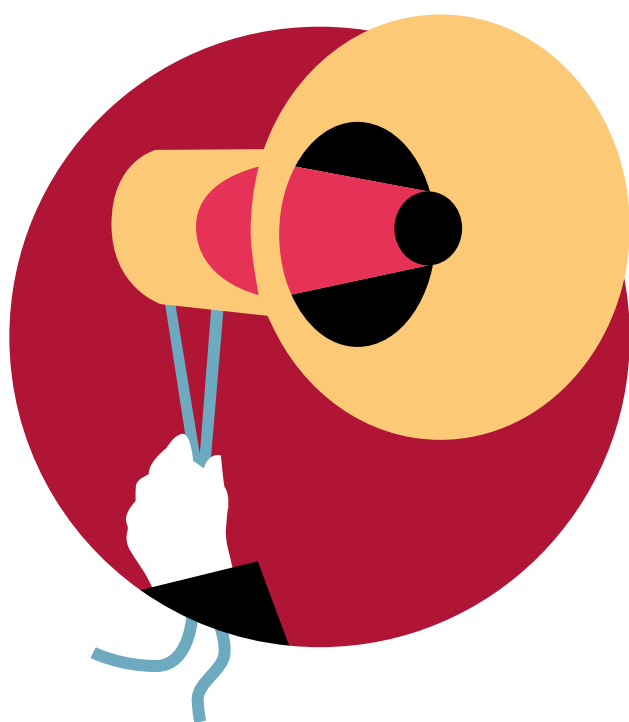
A broad consideration of the relationship between young people and politics as an initial theoretical standpoint implies a level of political culture as defined by Almond and Verba (2000). This approach includes different orientations of individuals towards the political system, the demands placed upon the political system and the results of political actions. This further includes an affective orientation, that is, a feeling towards the political system, a cognitive one, that is, knowledge about the system, and an evaluative one, which includes an assessment of the functioning of the political system. At the same time, social and historical trends influence the shaping of political culture, and for this reason its development in a particular society should be understood as contextual (Esser and De Vreese 2007; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Sloam 2012).

Recent discussions related to young people and politics are mainly focused on the issue of their (non)participation in various political processes and their lack of interest in politics. It is noticeable that the participation of young people is decreasing compared to both older and previous generations (Furlong and Cartmel 2012; Sloam 2013; Grasso 2016).

So, the question that arises more and more often is whether there is a crisis in the political engagement of young people or whether it is just the way young people act, which is changing. Young people are more and more inclined to choose alternative ways of participation, while moving away from institutions which they see as responding inadequately to their interests and needs. It should be emphasized that participating in elections still remains the dominant way young people participate in politics in politics, but at the same time there is a shift to *issue-based* activism oriented towards specific problems such as climate change or fast fashion, which is not necessarily represented through formal political institutions (Barret and Pachi, 2019).

## The political interest is growing

Young people's interest in politics is continuously low in all surveys of the population after 1990, with occasional oscillations that do not change the basic picture: the absence of interest is regularly four to five times higher than the presence of the same (Ilišin 2017). **A comparison of data from 2018 and 2024 shows that a recent shift has occurred towards increasing interest in politics (from 12% to 18.8%), whereas the absence of any interest has fallen (from 62% to 55%).** The same trend of growing political interest among young people was also found in the other eleven countries in the recent survey. We cannot be certain at this point whether this is the announcement of a new, more permanent trend or if it is merely a reflection of the young people's concern about current global disasters such as climate change, the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, the search for reasons for the persistently low political interest of young people remains in the focus of researchers. A comparison of the selected characteristics of the respondents showed that interest in politics does not vary significantly with respect to gender, age cohort and the father's level of education.



The perception of generational status in the political sphere certainly offers part of the answer to the question why young people are continuously disinterested in politics. It was found that 59 % of the respondents believe that the interests of young people are not sufficiently represented in national politics, 28 % say they are moderately represented, and 8 % that they are well represented (while 5 % cannot assess).<sup>34</sup>

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**59 %** of the respondents believe that the interests of young people are not sufficiently represented in national politics

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A similar perception among young people exists in other countries, giving rise to a kind of collective picture of young people as if they live in a social backwater, regardless of whether their homeland is a member of the EU, or is on the road to becoming one. The feeling and perception of social and political unimportance of the whole generation certainly does not contribute to developing an interest in politics among young people. At the same time, it can be assumed that a smaller part of young people, precisely because of generational neglect, expresses a more acute interest in politics while waiting for the decision-makers to deal with their problems.

The lack of interest in politics is also reflected in the reluctance of young people to assume political functions. Only about a fifth of them would be ready for such a move, while about the same number do not know, while 57.1 % are sure that they are not willing to take up political positions. In this matter, no difference is seen with regard to age, gender and the education of the father. The lack of desire to take over political functions can be understood as a feeling of insufficient competence to assume such a role, but also as a lack of encouragement from social and political actors who are not doing much to empower the younger generation. For example, there is still no systematic and good civic education in place, nor do the political parties generally nominate young candidates for parliamentary elections, the voice of young people is neglected and so on.

Nevertheless, in this context, it is interesting that young people self-assess their personal political knowledge as significantly greater than is their expressed interest in assuming political roles. This knowledge is self-assessed as greater now than in 2018, and a similar situation is observed in other countries participating in the study. Thus, in Croatia, 38.1 % of young people assess their own knowledge of politics as non-existent or weak, 36.7 % as average, and 24.1 % as very good or excellent. The main gap proceeds from the comparison of self-assessed political ignorance and political apathy, the latter being almost a third higher than the former. It follows that a large share of young people remains indifferent to politics even when they understand what is happening and how it happens – moreover, perhaps it is just due to their insight into the working of politics, that they decide to ignore events in the political sphere.

As might have been expected, self-declared greater knowledge about politics increases linearly with the age of the respondents ( $F=9.48$ ). It seems that – despite a low personal interest in politics young people are nevertheless exposed to political information over the years, which results in the accumulation of a degree of knowledge about politics. In view of the traditional chasm between the young and the old, it should be expected that knowledge and interest in politics among youth will continue to grow over time.

## Democracy yes, but ...

Political knowledge is an important dimension of democratic political culture, just like the encouragement of democratic values. The study shows that support for the democratic concept of governing among the young is not equivocal (Figure 13). Although close to a half of respondents believe that democracy is a good form of government in general, and 44 % consider it an unconditionally desirable political system, there is nevertheless a large share of 42 % of the respondents who believe that democracy is the best form of government provided it guarantees economic security.

This implies that support for a democratic political system is conditional, and also that a significant segment of this population associate democracy with economic well-being. Between 25 and 30 % of the respondents express readiness to a *trade-off* between their civil liberties and protection against terrorism, or a better standard of life. The surveyed population seems rather polarized on this issue, as the shares of positive, neutral and negative attitudes are almost equally distributed.

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**47 %** believe that democracy is a good form of government in general

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On average, young people in Croatia are less inclined to give conditional support to democracy than their peers in other countries of the region.<sup>35</sup> The idea of political authoritarianism and a strong political leader who does not bother with elections and parliament is supported by almost a third of the respondents, but even in this case there is no clear preponderance in the acceptance or rejection of such an idea. A stable share of 18 % of the respondents, just as in 2018, would be prepared, under certain circumstances to support a dictatorship. In addition to this population segment, which sees dictatorship as potentially acceptable, one must give attention to the decreasing share of those who believe that young people should be given more political and public space (a drop from 73 % to 53 %), as well as a drop in the belief that democracy is generally a good form of government (from 64 % to 47 %).<sup>36</sup>

In general, respondents are more inclined toward a democratic orientation<sup>37</sup> (the average agreement on a scale from 1 to 5 is 3.4), than to a non-democratic one<sup>38</sup> (the average is 2.7). The segment of young people that supports democratic attitudes is homogeneous, whereas in the group leaning towards the non-democratic orientation, there is significant difference by gender, with significantly lesser number of women supporting this orientation than men ( $t=4.35$ ). We also checked whether there is a connection between ideological orientation and these two scales, and the significance was confirmed in the case of the non-democratic orientation. Those who lean towards the right-wing political spectrum are significantly more inclined to uphold this orientation ( $r=0.17$ ).

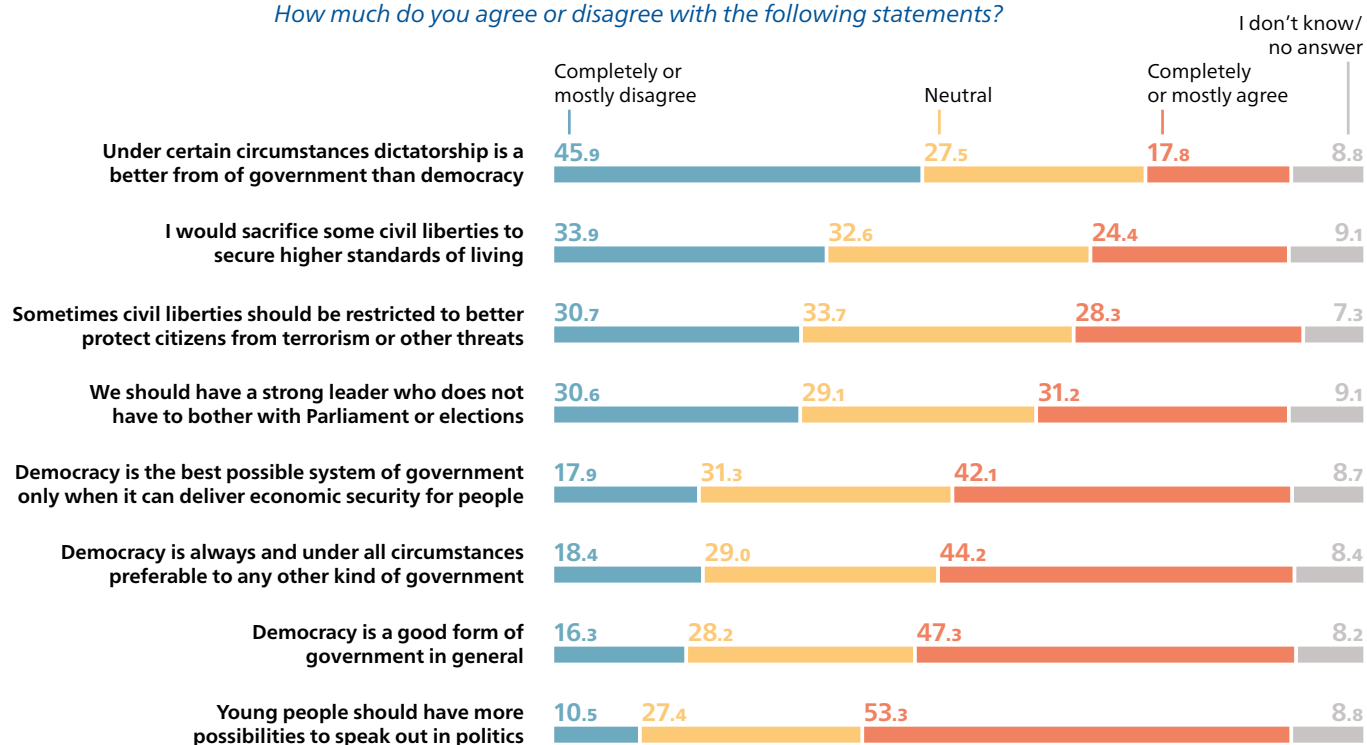
In order to gain an insight into the hierarchy of social values of young people, out of the nine offered values, the respondents<sup>39</sup> marked those three that are personally the most important to them. The majority of young people included human rights in the first three most important values (60.6 %), followed by security (55.9 %), and employment (47.1 %). For less than a third of the respondents (29.9 %), economic well-being ranks among the first three values, along with individual freedoms (28.6 %). For approximately one quarter of respondents (26.4 %), social equality is one of the three social priorities. A smaller proportion of the respondents see the rule of law, gender equality and democracy as priority social values (14.2 %; 16.3 %; 16.8 %). Human rights, security and employment, representing three fundamental values, point to the fact that young people desire to see them represented in a greater measure in society. It is known that these factors particularly gain importance in materially deprived societies and/or in times of crisis and various threats, especially in the domain of personal security and (un)employment (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). The respondents rate the status of human rights<sup>40</sup> in the European Union (3.32) better than that in Croatia (2.92). Young people in Croatia give the status of the value of employment in the European Union a solid three (3.42), while in Croatia they rate it much worse (2.36). On the other hand, young people in Croatia perceive the status of security in Croatia (3.48) as slightly better than in the European Union (3.2).

## Tuning in to the media coverage of politic is in crisis

A prerequisite for the development of democratic attitudes and the acquisition of political knowledge is to be informed about political and everyday events. However, it is evident from the obtained data that young people are rarely informed on a weekly basis about political and current events (Figure 14).

Fig. 13 Democratic attitudes of young people in Croatia (in %)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Between 8.6 % and 14.5 % of young people follow some of the offered media for more than an hour a week with the aim of informing themselves about political and current events. On the other hand, between one and two thirds of the respondents do not follow certain media at all.

If we observe the information obtainable through these media through an index where an individual respondent could follow between zero and five media, regardless of the time spent, we see that age (F=12.01) is the only characteristic which is related to the consumption of these media. The respondents from the youngest age group (14–18) are less often informed than the respondents from the other two age groups. **Regardless of the variety of types of media available, catering to their differing audiences, it is evident that young people are not inclined to consume the content they offer.** Young people are increasingly informed through social networks, and this has become their dominant daily source of information, while they consume traditional media, especially printed media, much less often (Baketa, Bovan and Matić-Bojić, 2021).

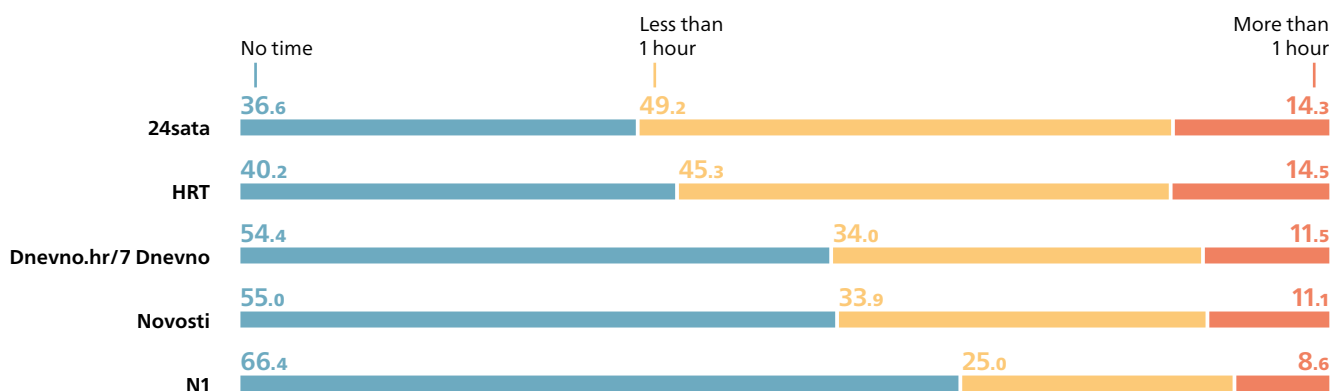
Such behaviour is a signal to publishers of traditional media that they must adapt the communication channels and the way of presenting their content in order to attract younger generations and ensure that they are informed about political events.

## Continued decline in trust in social and political institutions

The attitude of young people towards politics is certainly connected with their (dis)trust in social and political institutions. As shown by the data in Figure 15, young people are reserved regarding their trust in the observed institutions. In other words, none of the institutions enjoys the trust of the majority.<sup>41</sup> The highest trust is enjoyed by the army (36 %), followed by the police with 25 %.

Fig. 14 Follow-up on political and current events among youth in Croatia (in %)

On average, how much time per week do you spend following politics or current events in the following media (include also watching/reading online contents produced by a given media)?



The changes that took place during the observed period indicate a systematic degradation of the political trust of young people, and this tendency affects all the observed institutions. **This erosion of trust is particularly seen in relation to domestic media, trade unions and religious institutions, but even the army, police and the European Union, though occupying the top of the scale, also lost a part of the trust they previously enjoyed.** At the first glance, the results for political institutions at the bottom of the scale appear stable, but this is only because the trust they gained is so miserable that they can hardly drop lower. At the same time, in the past six years, it seems that the remaining space for the increase of distrust was used up, making the overall results for 2024 worse than before.

In fact, in a recent survey, the majority of the respondents expressed mistrust towards as many as seven institutions. Bearing in mind the permanent weakening of political trust, it seems that the longer the experience of living in a nominally liberal-democratic system, the more dissatisfied and critical young people become. In the context of (dis)trust, it is significant that, despite the dominant mistrust of young people in government institutions, they did not honour the work of the media in exposing corruption and the activities of politically networked interest groups to the detriment of public interests.

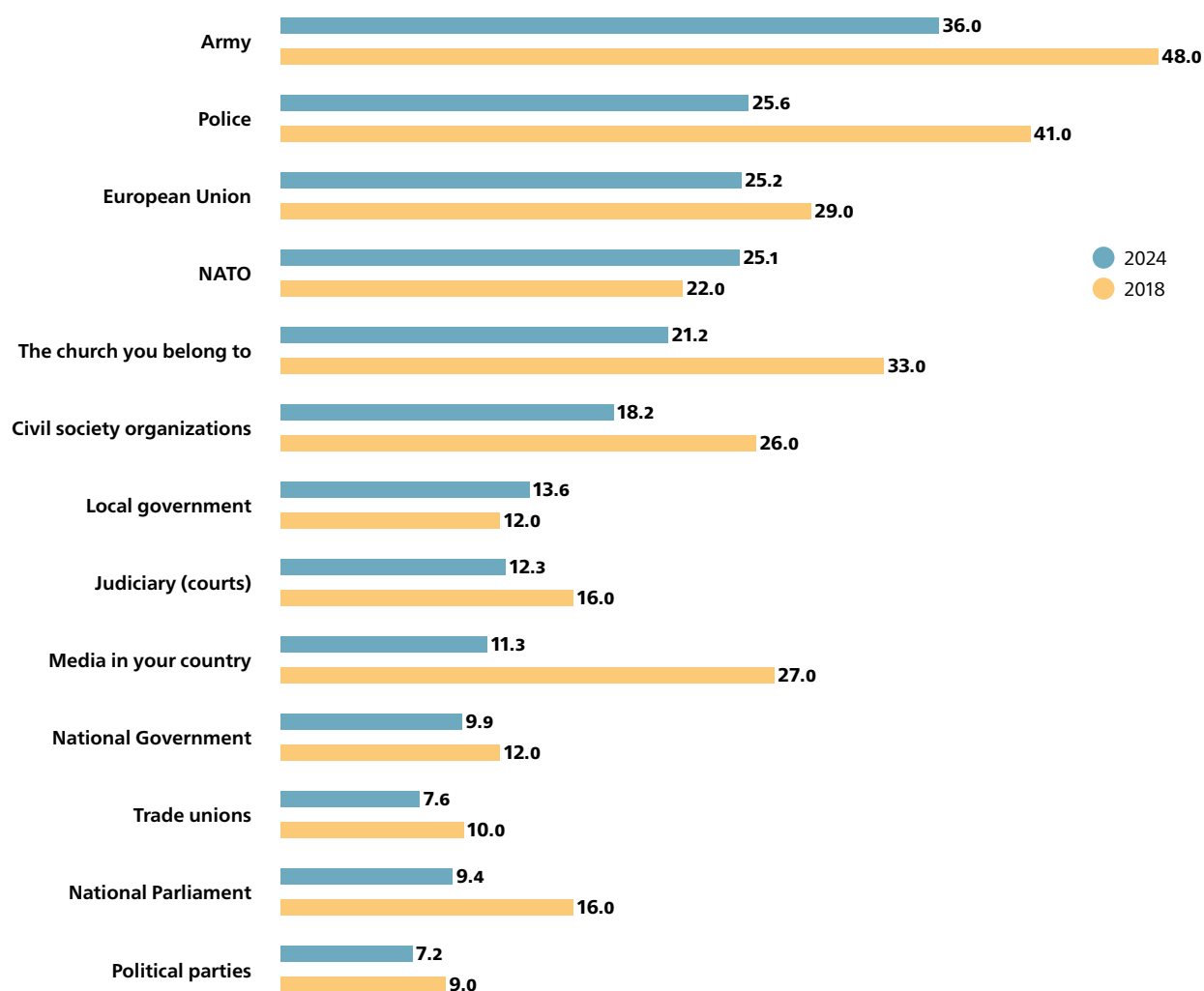
It is possible that the slow or lack of judicial sanctioning of detected criminal acts is leading young people to suspect that the media are raising a false alarm. And it is possible that, although they do not follow the media, they register how some citizens, especially politicians, blame the media for contributing to the deepening of social issues and divisions through their actions. Similarly, trust in trade unions has declined significantly despite some successes in the fight for better wages for certain groups of employees.

By factor analysis, the examined institutions were grouped into two categories: the first dimension includes all institutions in the lower part of the presented trust ranking and the second dimension includes the first five institutions (army, police, EU, NATO and church).<sup>42</sup> Only one statistically significant difference was found, and that was on the second dimension with regard to the age of the respondents ( $F=8.78$ ). It has been shown that as the age of the respondents increases, their trust in the mentioned international and domestic security institutions decreases. It could be assumed that with life experience, awareness grows that the modern world is networked with numerous sources of insecurity, which cannot be tackled effectively even by the institutions whose task is to ensure peace, order and stability.



Fig. 15 Trust in institutions among youth in Croatia (in %)

*On the whole, how far do you trust the entities listed below?*



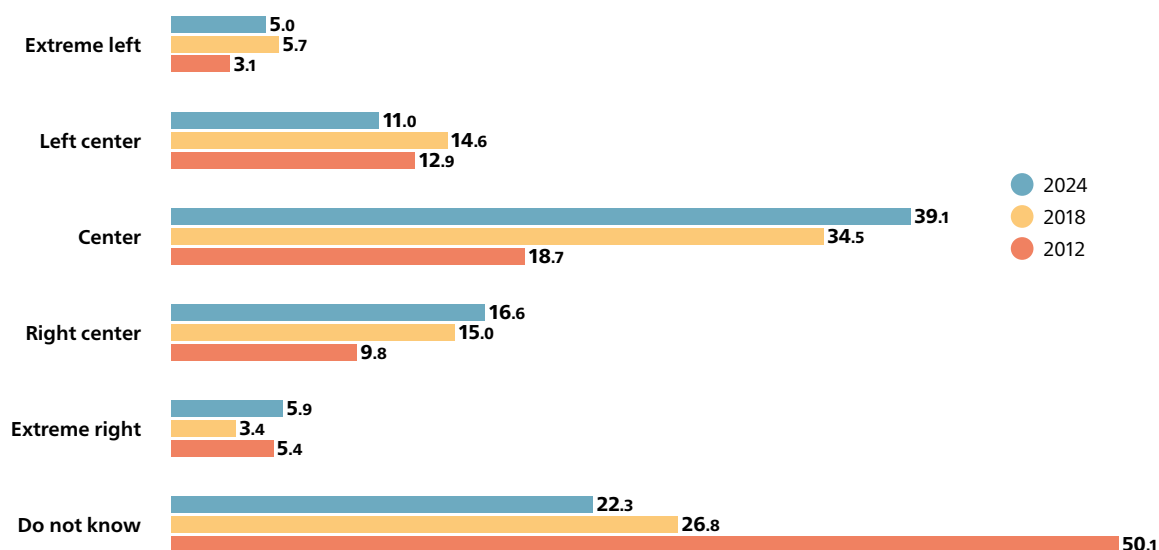
The trust in religious institutions has steadily weakened since the initial transition years, which is why they ended up roughly in the middle of the trust scale in this study. If one adds the important role of the Catholic Church in Croatian society and the fact that the majority of young people (as well as the elderly) declare themselves as being religious, it was necessary to examine whether young people consider the Church to be politically influential.

Thus, 16 % of young people believe that religious institutions have too little power, 35 % believe that they have as much power as they should, 45 % think that they have too much power, and only 4 % cannot assess. The share of those who perceive too much social power of the Church is quite high when compared to an average share of religious young people. This indicates that also a part of the religious respondents do not support the religious organizations' practice of partial non-compliance with the rules of their agency within a secular society.



Fig. 16 Ideological self-identification of young people in Croatia (in %)

*When people talk about their political beliefs, they mostly speak about left-wing and right-wing. How would you place your views on this scale?*



## Political self-identification and increased participation

Ideological self-identification was examined on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 indicates an extreme left orientation and 10 an extreme right orientation), and for the sake of clarity, the data were combined into five categories, each of which includes two degrees from the indicated scale (Figure 16). It is visible that the largest number of the respondents are classified in the centre, but there is also a slight inclination to the right. In addition, male respondents on average ( $t=4.13$ ) position themselves more to the right compared to females. Furthermore, while in 2018 there was a slight decline in moderate or extreme right-wing orientation compared to 2012 (from  $M=5.6$  to  $M=5.4$ ), in 2024 there was a growth again and the average is now at 5.7, which is more right-oriented compared to 2012.

However, in the context of the region, young people in Croatia do not deviate from the regional average of 5.67. It should also be noted that slightly more than a fifth of the respondents (22.3%) did not self-position themselves, which means that they chose the option *I don't know*. Compared to previous studies, a further decline of those who do not want or do not know how to ideologically position themselves – 52% in 2012, and 27% in 2018.

Formal political participation, i.e. going to the polls, is a frequently discussed issue in the context of young people, and their passivity is questioned. However, the data show that as many as 56.1% of the respondents indicated that they had voted in the previous elections, while 36.8% did not vote even though they had the right to vote, and 7.2% because they did not have the right to vote. When comparing those who voted and those who did not, but had the right to vote, there are no statically significant differences according to gender or education of the father of the respondents.

Ideological self-identification, which showed mild right-wing tendencies, is also evident in the matter of choosing the parties that young people voted for and those they intend to vote for in future elections. Among those (N=231) who went to the parliamentary elections in 2020, the largest percentage voted for HDZ<sup>43</sup> (26.5%), followed by Most<sup>44</sup> (13.8%), Domovinski pokret<sup>45</sup> (8.5%) and the Zeleno-lijeva lista<sup>46</sup> (8.2%), while 4.1% voted for Restart koalicija<sup>47</sup>. However, the largest share, 27% of young people, do not know who they voted for in the elections four years ago. Those who did not participate in the elections, but had the right to vote (N=151), state that nothing would have changed even if they had participated (26.5%). A total of 17.9% states that they were prevented either by illness, travel or some other

**22.3%** do not know how to ideologically position themselves

reason, while 14.6% say that there was no party for which they would vote, and 12% are completely uninterested in politics, while 9% point out that they were not informed enough to make a decision for whom to vote. When the reasons are considered, it becomes evident that the dominant reasons young people do not participate are a lack of empowerment and a dearth of information.<sup>48</sup>

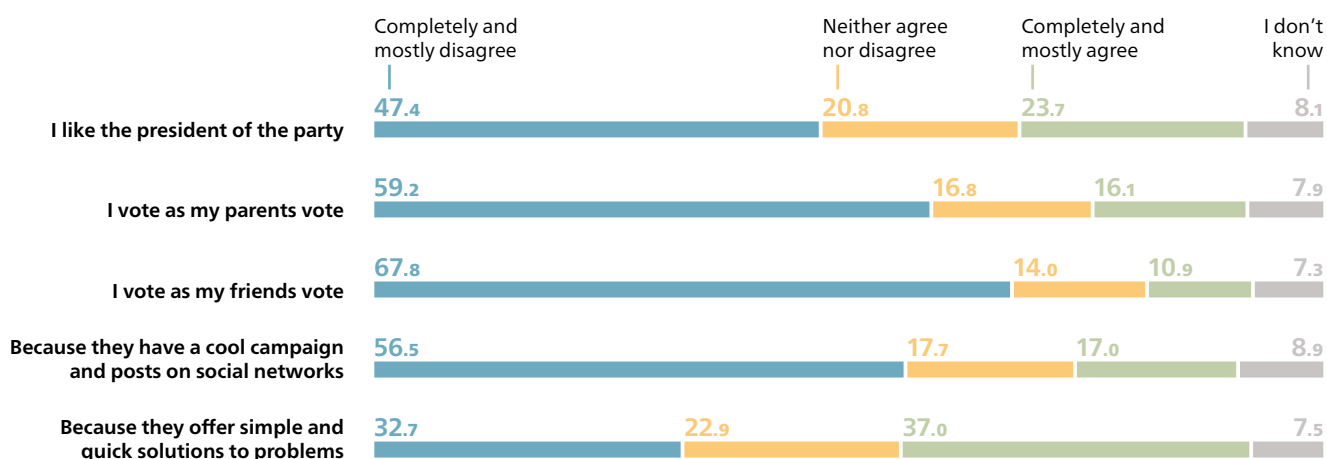
The ranking of support for parties among young people when it comes to the intention to vote in future elections is similar to the ranking of support in previous elections, that is, the statement for which party they voted for. HDZ enjoys the greatest support among the respondents, and 11.3% of the respondents would vote for that party in future elections, followed by Most and Možemo!<sup>49</sup>, for which 7.8% and 7.3% of the respondents would vote, respectively. These results are followed by Domovinski pokret – 5.1% of the respondents would vote or them, and SDP<sup>50</sup> as a party for which 3% of the respondents would vote. It is necessary to point out is that there is a large percentage of those who do not know who they would vote for, and this group includes almost half of the respondents – 48.6%.

Among those who know who they would vote for in future elections and those who do not know, there are no differences by gender, but the respondents with more educated fathers ( $\chi^2=11.77$ ) and respondents belonging to the two older age groups 19 to 24 and 25 to 29 ( $\chi^2=35.36$ ) more often know who they would vote for in future elections than the respondents with less educated fathers and respondents under 18 years of age. These differences are expected, especially in terms of age, because those under the age of 18 do not yet have the right to vote, they follow less often political events and think less about political choices. Information about party preferences, those expressed in the previous elections and those about the intention to vote in future ones, is in line with the tendency of young people to ideologically position themselves somewhat more to the right.

When examining the motivation for going to the polls and voting for a certain party, the respondents were offered six options, and only those who are 18 or older are included in the results (Figure 17). The two options that young people say to be the least motivating for them to go to the polls are voting according to the preferences of their parents and friends. On the other hand, slightly more than a third of young people emphasize the importance of simple and quick solutions that have been offered, and almost a quarter of them sympathize with the president of the party. These results show that part of the youth still think about the political issues around them, but also that they emphasize features as fast, simple and appealing, which can potentially be an area of manipulation by populist options. In addition, the male respondents on average agree more with the statements that their motivation for going to the elections and voting for a certain party is because they like the president of that party ( $t=2.76$ ) and vote in accordance with the preferences of their friends ( $t=2.77$ ).

Fig. 17 Motivation for voting among youth in Croatia (in %)

*What motivates you to go to the polls and vote for a certain party?*



The attitude towards the selected political parties in Croatia was examined on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 indicating the most negative and 10 the most positive attitude). At least a quarter of the respondents rated each of the six offered parties (HDZ, Domovinski pokret, Most, Možemo, Radnička fronta<sup>51</sup> and SDP) the most negatively (estimation 1). In addition, male respondents on average have a more positive attitude towards Domovinski pokret ( $t=3.89$ ), HDZ ( $t=2.63$ ) and Most ( $t=3.49$ ).

For a better understanding of the attitude towards the parties, three extremely negative assessments (assessments 1, 2 and 3) were combined, and it is evident that all parties have a negative assessment from at least half of the young respondents, except for Možemo!, which is very close to that limit (49.7%); the largest share of young people has a negative attitude towards HDZ, 59.4%. As follows, when the three extremely negative evaluations are taken into account, it is evident that a third of the respondents negatively evaluate all six offered parties, and only 13.6% do not give a negative evaluation to any party. The data indicate that a large number of young people have a negative perception of all the parties involved in the study, regardless of the ideological position of those parties, which can also be connected to the strong mistrust of young people towards political parties.

How do young people perceive the possibility of close friendship with people who support political parties that they previously assessed as the most negative? How close are they to the idea of having friends among sympathizers of ideologically distant or opposite parties – that was the question asked on a scale from 1 to 4 (1 – *not comfortable at all*, and 4 – *extremely comfortable*). The average values for potential friends among supporters of all five mentioned parties, range between 1.81 and 1.97, with the lowest average in the case of Radnička fronta, and the highest in the case of the SDP. It should also be emphasized that the share of those who marked the option *I don't know* is between 17.3 and 20.4%. **These data indicate a significant social distance of young people towards supporters of political parties that are not ideologically close to them, and can be considered as another indicator of the negative perception of politics and political parties among young people.** In other words, this negative perception is so great that even voting for a certain political party is a criterion based on which they are ready to limit friendly relations in their social environment.

Fig. 18 **Informal political participation of youth in Croatia (in %)**

*There are different ways to show political engagement.  
Have you done or would you do any of the following?*

	No	Haven't done yet, but I would	Yes
Stopped buying things for political or environmental reasons	46.0	31.6	22.4
Signed a list of political demands/ supported an online petition	42.8	37.6	19.6
Participated in the activities of civil society organizations or volunteer groups	39.0	41.1	19.9
Participated in a protest	44.8	39.3	15.9
Participated in political activities on the Internet/social networks	60.6	27.5	11.9
Worked in a political party or political group	67.9	25.8	6.3

Data on the participation of young people in various forms of informal participation (Figure 18) show that a smaller proportion of young people participated in these activities than in the previous elections. About a fifth participated in three forms that have a certain activist feature, such as product boycotts, signing petitions, and civil society movements. On the other hand, the smallest number of them engaged in the work of political parties or other online political activities. Compared to 2018, there was a significant increase in all the activities, with the smallest increase recorded in signing political requests and online petitions, where the percentage of those who did so, increased from 17.9 % to 19.6 %. The number of those who claim to have participated in the activities of civil society organizations or volunteer groups has increased significantly (from 1 % in 2018 to almost 20 % in 2024), which is potentially the result of the activation of the population, including young people, during the post-earthquake period and the coronavirus pandemic.

This second phenomenon is also a potential explanation for the greater engagement among the respondents of this cycle of research in the case of protest activities, political activities on the Internet and social networks (12 %) compared to 2018 (6 %), because these discussions dominated the online world. The increase in the share of the respondents who decided to boycott products (from 7 % in 2018 to 22 % in 2024) can be understood in the context of stronger environmental awareness among the young population and the strengthening of movements like *Fridays for Future* in the last few years.

It is interesting to consider how many activities the respondents participated in. As many as 51.1 % did not participate in any of the six surveyed activities. In other words, half of the respondents do not participate at all in any form of informal participation offered in this study. 22.4 % participated in one, 13.8 % in two, and 12.7 % participated in three or more activities.

Regarding different forms of political participation, the analysis of variance showed that age ( $F=22.41$ ) and the level of the father's education ( $F=7.70$ ) are characteristics that are significantly related to the intensity of participation. In the case of age, respondents from the youngest age group (14–18) participate less often than respondents from the other two age groups, which include older respondents (19–24 and 25–29). Furthermore, those respondents whose fathers are highly educated participate more often than those whose fathers have completed secondary vocational school and those whose fathers have completed high school education.

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**51 %** did not participate in any form of informal activities

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Low levels of engagement are also shown by data related to trade union membership. Only 5 % of those questioned are union members, 11.6 % are not members, but would be interested in becoming one, while 83.4 % are not members. The latest available data on the membership at the national level indicate that less than 25 % of employees are union members and that this percentage has been mostly stable in the last ten years (Bagić and Ostojić 2023), while the data for 2009 indicate that the share of young people from 18 to 29 who are union members is below the general average level (Bagić 2010; Jeknić 2023).

## Great expectations from the state policy and future social challenges

In accordance with the growth of mistrust in authorities, young people's expectations of the state are slightly decreasing, although they still remain relatively high (Figure 19). Such a trend is also common among young people in all the observed countries, which means that most of them still support the survival of the welfare state despite the growing pressure of the neoliberal environment.

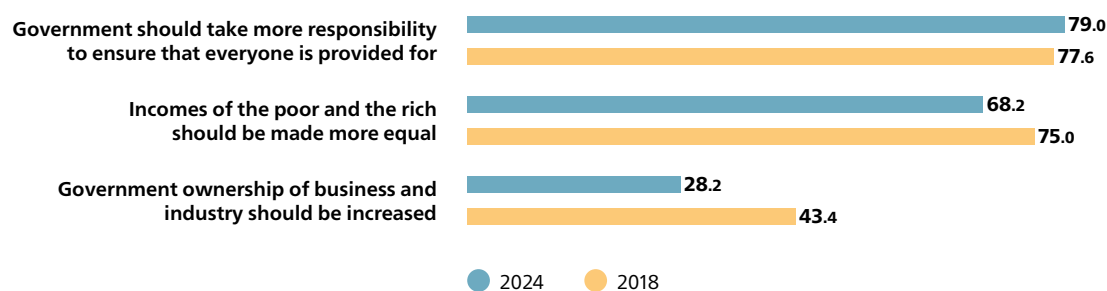
Following the results, four fifths of young people believe that the state should take responsibility for ensuring that everyone meets their basic needs, and 68 % believe that the incomes of the poor and the rich should be more equal. Significantly fewer (28 %) support the growth of state ownership, with 32 % of those who are explicitly against it and 30 % of young people who waver between acceptance and rejection (with 10 % of those who do not know). In other words, **the majority of young people are neither for, nor against state ownership, but two-thirds to four-fifths of them plead for a stronger role of the state in controlling growing social inequalities and ensuring an adequate quality of life for all citizens.** Such thoughts of young people reflect their social sensitivity, which at the same time points to possible causes of growing distrust in government institutions that fail to slow down social stratification or the spread of poverty in conditions of high inflation and relatively low incomes.

When it comes to reducing the difference between the incomes of the poor and the rich, those who plead more for it are young women ( $F=13.72$ ) and young people whose fathers have a vocational education ( $F=5.73$ ). This is another indicator of the more left-wing political orientation of girls, while the children of workers and craftsmen are probably more exposed to social deprivation. This is also indicated by the following result of the study: the higher the father's level of education, the less his descendants express a desire to reduce the differences in the income gap between the poor and the rich.

The influence of age is registered when accepting the position that the government should ensure that everyone meets basic needs: young people from the oldest age cohort (25–29) support this position the most, while the respondents from the middle age cohort are on the opposite side ( $F=9.01$ ). Regarding this age difference, it seems that those young people who have begun their socioeconomic independence to a greater extent know more how insufficient income makes it difficult to secure everything that is necessary for a good standard of living.

Fig. 19 Attitudes about the role of the state among youth in Croatia (in %)

Share of 'agree'- and 'completely agree'-answers combined



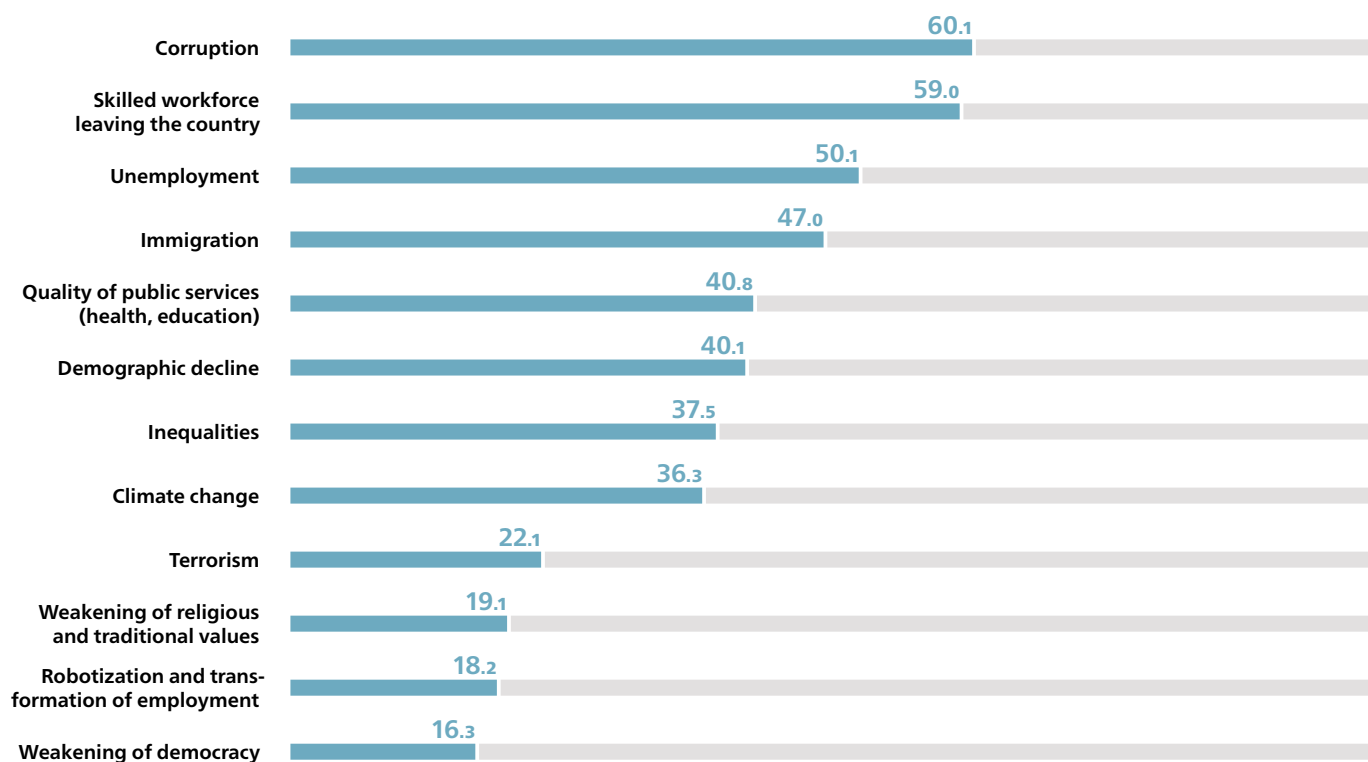
Given the relatively low trust established in institutions, the question arises of how to efficiently solve a number of social problems faced by young people and Croatian society. But what social problems in Croatian society do young people expect in the next decade? A significant proportion of young people are pessimistic about the future of the society as stressed in the previous chapter. The majority of young people, about 60 %, believe that the Croatian society will face the problem of corruption and the emigration of the working-age population in the coming period (Figure 20).

Everyone else thinks that the utmost issue will be unemployment but also immigration. Interestingly, immigration is seen as a problem almost to the same extent as the labour shortage. **In other words, it can be concluded that immigrants are not seen as a possible solution to an important social, demographic and economic problem, but primarily as a social problem.** The challenge of maintaining a certain level of public services is recognized by a significant proportion of young people (40 %), which is most certainly connected with the demographic decline also recognized by almost the same number of young people. It is interesting that the weakening of democracy remains the least recognized potential problem in the future of Croatia, which is especially important considering the already existing process of democratic backsliding both regionally (Bieber 2020) and globally (Norris and Inglehart 2019).

The present study revealed that 9 % of the respondents do not feel they are Croats, among 14 % this feeling is moderate, while 74 % feel they are Croats to a great extent or completely. Simultaneously, 25 % do not feel they are Europeans, 28 % feel as such but moderately, and 44 % report that they are completely Europeans. It is not surprising that young people predominantly feel that they belong to the country they live in, but it is quite unfortunate that at the same time they do not feel European to a greater extent.<sup>52</sup> These are identities that should not be mutually exclusive or competitive, regardless of the EU membership, Croatia inherently belongs to Europe. There is a lot of shared history and experiences, similarities in lifestyle and cultural patterns, and other mutual links that obviously did not overcome the specificities that the continent also abounds in. Each country has some of its peculiarities, which is an undoubted asset, but in times of disunity, it is also an aggravating circumstance for building a common European identity. Its strengthening can certainly be contributed to by the existing association in the Union – of course, if efforts are made jointly and persistently towards the benefit of all European citizens. In the experience of Croatianism and Europeanism, young people do not statistically differ from each other.

Fig. 20 Views on the biggest issues in the next decade among youth in Croatia (in %)

Which of the following do you think will be the biggest issues facing your country in the next decade?



The majority of young people are proud to be citizens of Croatia (63%), and in general, most are not inclined to support the nationalist attitudes of *blood and soil*. Around quarter of respondents, 25.6% believe that only real Croats are those who are of Croatian blood, and 20.8% of young people believe that it would be best if only real Croats lived in Croatia. A significant part of young people (43.8%) nevertheless supports the idea of cultural assimilation, given that they agree with the statement that non-Croats living in Croatia should adopt Croatian customs and values. The majority do not support the idea of increasing the number of immigrants, considering that only 14.8% agree that Croatia should receive more immigrants. Young people are mostly homogeneous when it comes to nationalism<sup>53</sup> except when it comes to gender.

As it is the case with the acceptance of non-democratic orientation, nationalism is significantly more accepted by young men ( $t=5.55$ ). At the same time, those who support nationalist ideas are more inclined to undemocratic attitudes ( $r=0.31$ ) and are more often placed on the right wing of the ideological scale ( $r=0.31$ ).

## Still a positive attitude towards the European Union

It has already been shown that young people in Croatia trust the EU more (25%) than their government (10%), and the same tendency was registered in other surveyed countries. That is why it is desirable to see how they see the eventual exit of Croatia from the European Union. The results are mostly expected: 21% believe that the country should leave the European Union, 60% that it should not, and 19% do not know.



It is obvious that despite the turbulent times of Croatia's relatively long-delayed entry into the EU and its adaptation to the new association, as well as the disruptions caused by migration waves and the COVID-19 pandemic – with which the EU has not always coped well – young people in Croatia have remained attached to the Union at least to such an extent that the majority does not advocate the exit of Croatia from the EU.<sup>54</sup> Here, however, it should be mentioned that since 2018, support for the country's remaining in the EU has weakened in Croatia, just like in two other surveyed EU member states (Bulgaria and Romania), while it has remained at the same level in Slovenia. These trends are certainly not the result of chance, because it is a well-known fact that according to the largest number of development indicators, those three Eurosceptic countries are at the bottom of the EU member states, in contrast to Slovenia, which is much better positioned according to the same indicators.

A certain disagreement among the respondents was found only with regard to the level of education of the father ( $\chi^2=31.7$ ). The children of those fathers with the lowest and high school education, above average support the eventual exit of Croatia from the EU, and in contrast to them are the descendants of workers and craftsmen who, at the same time, most often do not know which side to take. The children of academically educated fathers are the most in favour of Croatia remaining in the Union, and the least are the descendants of high school-educated fathers. Obviously, the most consistent attitude is held by the children of fathers with high school education who clearly do not feel that they are the winners of Croatia's European integration. This most likely stems from parents who are *stuck* in relatively poorly paid clerical jobs, with no prospect of further monetizing their professional knowledge or advancing in their jobs. In short, their professions are not in deficit like those of the workers and craftsmen who have easier access to the European labour market and higher earnings.

## Main takeaways

- 1.** The increased interest in politics as well as participation in informal forms of participation is registered.
- 2.** On average, young people are placed slightly to the right on the ideological scale.
- 3.** No social and political institution enjoys the absolute trust of young people; a strong drop in trust in the media and a significant drop in trust in the police and the army were noted.
- 4.** Antagonistic attitude towards the supporters of political parties belonging to the opposite ideological spectrum exists.
- 5.** Corruption is recognized as Croatia's biggest issue in the future, but not the weakening of democracy.

# Conclusion and policy recommendations

This study showed that growing up in contemporary Croatian society is marked by elements of continuity and discontinuity in the experiences, attitudes and behaviours of young people. Young people continue to face challenges in employment, underpayment, long-term living with their parents, and continue to express relative dissatisfaction with the education system and consider corruption widespread in the society. All this may indicate the deepening of socioeconomic challenges that young people face every day. Along these lines, their social position continues to be burdened by socioeconomic challenges, which are joined by global threats that further deepen the ever-present feeling of insecurity and growing pessimism.

Perhaps the most interesting discontinuity is observed in the slight distancing from the traditionalist matrix of values at the individual level, with regard to plans related to marriage and children. However, the durability of this distance, taking into account that the values are less subject to change, needs to be confirmed in some future studies.

**Positive change is also visible in the political culture, at least when it comes to informal participation – social and global unfavourable circumstances have certainly contributed to the stepping out of some young people from the private sphere and made them interested in contributing to social change through participation in various forms of alternative political activity.** This is a prime opportunity for civil society organizations to engage potential volunteers and for political parties to appeal to young people. With a generation increasingly interested in politics, it is very important to provide systematic civic and political education to sustain Croatian democracy. Providing comprehensive education on the value of democratic governance would empower the younger generation to participate in democracy, thereby fostering a more informed and engaged citizenship.

**The retreat of traditionalism in the face of the pressures of modernist currents is also reflected in the abandoning of nationalism, the slight liberalization of relations with minority groups, but also with regard to certain value issues such as the right to abortion.** Although it is difficult to predict the direction of change, it is possible that under the direct *influence of the political redefinition* on the ideological space that resulted in the strengthening of political authoritarianism in Croatian society (Sekulić 2014; Nikodem 2019 according to Burić 2024), a more conservative orientation towards the right to abortion, but also against the increasingly present immigration, might strengthen. There are conservative tendencies in the increase in fear of immigrants, and non-democratic tendencies in the non-negligible share of young people sceptical of democracy as a political system, and the significant support they show for political authoritarianism. The reduction of non-democratic tendencies could be achieved through the strengthening of the rule of law and the enhancement of institutional efficiency, particularly by increasing the transparency of political and public institutions.



This can be accomplished through open communication with the public, as well as by implementing measures and policies that promote institutional accountability to citizens and transparency in decision-making processes.

One of the sources of support for political authoritarianism is found in inefficient institutions that, in the eyes of young people, fail to justify trust. They are deeply sceptical of social and political institutions, many of which should participate in solving the problems of young people. Distrust is especially evident in the case of political institutions. Despite this, **young people expect a lot from national politics, especially in terms of ensuring social justice and a high standard of living for all citizens.** To build institutional trust among young people, the effectiveness and accountability of public institutions should be strengthened. Ensuring that these institutions are responsive to the needs and concerns of youth, especially in areas such as social justice and equitable development, will foster greater engagement and confidence in democratic governance. Given that young people perceive corruption as the biggest social problem in Croatia, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy that would enhance the transparency of the government and public sector, strengthen anti-corruption institutions and rule of law.

Trust in the media, which young people generally consume very little and rarely to follow political events, has experienced a significant decline, which can be worrying, considering that, among other problems, journalists in Croatia are exposed to legal pressures that prevent them from doing their work (Liberties' Rule of Law Report Croatia 2024). Youth, already ignoring the media, are mostly unaware of these unfavourable circumstances, and are therefore unwilling to fight for their right to reliable and verified information.

In addition to the problem of low institutional trust, new concerns have emerged on a global level that have contributed to the growth of pessimistic views both on their own future and on the future of Croatian society. The young foresee that Croatian society in the future will be eroded by corruption, which is seen as the greatest social problem. In addition, one of the prominent social problems from the perspective of young people is immigration. A significant part of young people perceive immigrants to Croatia partly as a threat to the preservation of cultural identity, so a significant part of them advocates assimilation. Given that there is still no concrete signal from Croatian politics that would be directed towards the implementation of appropriate policies for the integration of foreigners into Croatian society, agreeing to the assimilation approach is not an unusual phenomenon. Therefore, it is essential to design and systematically implement integration policies that ensure the full participation of immigrants in Croatian society, as well as promote cultural understanding and mutual respect between the native population and those seeking to make Croatia their new home. Such an approach would contribute not only to the preservation of cultural identities but also to the overall reduction of fears and social prejudices, ultimately fostering a more inclusive society.

The results of this research point to the need to design comprehensive policies and measures that would create conditions for the full emancipation of young people and the realization of their individual and social potential. Accelerated technological development and increasingly intense global connectivity are increasingly shaping young people's expectations of a society that is more dynamic than ever before. This is precisely why it is necessary to provide social conditions for the voice of young people to be heard more loudly. These voices must not only be heard but also heeded. With a serious approach to solving the problems, needs and interests of young people, Croatian society could use their potential to initiate social changes in the direction of building a more inclusive and democratic society.

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# Endnotes

- 1 Usually, a variable on respondents' educational level is included in the basic set of independent sociodemographic variables. However, due to certain problems in the programming of the questionnaire, such a variable is unfortunately not included in the analyses. Despite the variable of current educational status being present, it is not an adequate independent variable because it is not sufficiently differentiated considering that primary and secondary school pupils are included in one category.
- 2 Analyses that use the division into NUTS 2 regions are less sensitive to socio-cultural and socio-economic differences that undoubtedly exist in the Croatian society.
- 3 Virovitica-Podravina County, Požega-Slavonia County, Brod-Posavina County, Osijek-Baranja County, Vukovar-Srijem County, Karlovac County and Sisak-Moslavina County.
- 4 Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, Lika-Senj County, Zadar County, Šibenik-Knin County, Split-Dalmatia County, Istria County and Dubrovnik-Neretva County.
- 5 Koprivnica-Križevci County, Međimurje County, Varaždin County, Krapina-Zagorje County and Zagreb County.
- 6 On a scale from 1 (We do not have enough money for basic bills and food) to 5 (We can afford to buy everything that we need for a good standard of living) the average score of young people in Croatia is 3.62, in Bosnia and Herzegovina 3.71 and in Montenegro 3.77. Young people in Greece (3.02) and Romania (3.22) rate their material standard the worst.
- 7 Eurostat: [edat\_lfse\_19]
- 8 Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Population Census 2021 (Državni zavod za statistiku, Popis stanovništva 2021.).
- 9 Eurostat: [gov\_10a\_exp]
- 10 Besides being dissatisfied and satisfied, 31 % are neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied with the quality of education, which is a significant share, whereas 3 % do not know.
- 11 Eurostat: [isoc\_ci\_ac\_i]
- 12 The share of highly educated population aged 25–34 in Croatia increased in the period 2012–2023 from 23.6 % to 38.7 % (Eurostat: edat\_lfse\_03).
- 13 Structural unemployment occurs when there is a mismatch between the supply and demand for labour. This discrepancy often arises because the demand for a specific type of job is lower than the available supply. This imbalance is primarily a result of shifts in the economic structure, market demand, and technological advancements in production.
- 14 Eurostat data [ilc\_lvps08] show that young people in Croatia aged 18–34 far exceed the EU average when it comes to staying in their parents' household after coming of age (76.9 % in Croatia versus 49.6 % in the EU in 2023).
- 15 In Croatia, the risk of poverty for young people aged 15–29 was 12.7 % in 2022, and 13.9 % in 2023 (Eurostat: ilc\_li02).
- 16 Eurostat [yth\_empl\_100].
- 17 Eurostat [yth\_empl\_020].
- 18 Eurostat [edat\_lfse\_28].
- 19 Eurostat [lfst\_rimgpnga]
- 20 → [mrosp.gov.hr/vijesti/sjednica-vlade-rh-minimalna-placa-od-1-sijecnja-2024-godine-840-eura-bruto/13201](https://mrosp.gov.hr/vijesti/sjednica-vlade-rh-minimalna-placa-od-1-sijecnja-2024-godine-840-eura-bruto/13201)
- 21 → [dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/prosjecna-neto-placa-uzujku-2024-iznosila-1-326-eura/1900](https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/prosjecna-neto-placa-uzujku-2024-iznosila-1-326-eura/1900)
- 22 According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the average monthly net salary in March 2024 was 1,326 euros.
- 23 Eurostat [sdg\_05\_20].
- 24 State Bureau of Statistics, Press release: Migration of the population of the Republic of Croatia (from 2013 to 2022).



- 25 Linguistic discrimination was not included in the table on discrimination values because we did not have comparative data. In the answers of the often category, 7% of the respondents noticed it, and 15% noticed it sometimes. 73% of the respondents claim that they are not discriminated against.
- 26 For comparison, this dimension in 2012 was also at a low 2% level. In the 2012 study, a different answer scale was used, so the offered answers were often/very often, and in 2018 and 2024 only often, so the presented percentage is the sum of the answers often/very often.
- 27 Women in Croatia often encounter discrimination in key areas such as right to abortion, gender-based violence and expression of sexual preferences (Walby 2004). For instance, in Croatia for more than a year now, there has been an ongoing campaign of Church associations against abortion. This protest takes place every month at the city squares. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women (sexual and physical) is on the increase.
- 28 To be independent, to take responsibility
- 29 Get rich, look good, wear branded clothes
- 30 Be active in politics, participate in civic initiatives
- 31 Be married, have children
- 32 The following question was posed: How would you feel if one from the following families or persons moved into your neighbourhood? (1 – very bad, 2 – bad, 3 – neither good nor bad, 4 – good, 5 – very good).
- 33 If the answers *It disturbs me a lot* and *It disturbs me to some extent* are added together, the fear of war comes out to the first place of the most represented fears.
- 34 In a survey of young people in Croatia in 2013, as many as 73% of the respondents estimated that political actors are insufficiently interested in the interests of young people (Ilišin 2017: 223), which could indicate a decrease in youth dissatisfaction. However, in this case too, we do not know whether it is a new trend, especially when it is known that in recent years the National Youth Programme has not even been adopted (for the first time since 2002), which at least on a declarative level sends a message that government institutions recognize specific problems of young people and strive to create appropriate public policies to solve them. In addition, the representation of young people in government bodies, especially in the Croatian Parliament, is permanently at a minimum level: only in a few earlier convocations of the parliament, there were 1 to 2% of the representatives under the age of 30, while they have not been on the parliamentary benches for a long time, and not even since April 2024, when the current, 11<sup>th</sup> convocation of the Croatian Parliament was elected.
- 35 The arithmetic average agreement (1 – *do not agree at all* to 5 – *completely agree*) with the statement *I would sacrifice some civil liberties in order to ensure a higher standard of living* is 2.95 at the regional level and 2 in Croatia. Also, the average agreement with the statement *Sometimes civil freedoms should be limited in order to better protect citizens from terrorism or other threats* amounts to 3.12 at the level of the region and to 2.89 in Croatia.
- 36 Young people in Croatia support both statements less than young people in the countries of the region. The arithmetic average of agreement (1 – *totally disagree* to 5 – *totally agree*) with the statement *Democracy is generally a good form of government* is 3.64 at the regional level and 3.41 in Croatia, followed by young people in Bulgaria (3.25), Bosnia and Herzegovina (3.22) and Serbia (3.13). Also, on average, the agreement with the statement *Young people should have more opportunities for political participation* is 3.89 at the level of the region and 3.66 in Croatia, followed by young people in Bulgaria (3.56).

- 37 The democratic orientation scale consists of two statements: *Democracy is generally a good form of government* and *Democracy is always, and in all circumstances preferable to any other type of government*.
- 38 The scale of non-democratic orientation consists of two statements: *We need a strong leader who should not bother with elections or Parliament* and *Under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy*.
- 39 Gender equality, democracy, social equality, rule of law, personal freedom, employment, economic well-being of citizens, security, human rights.
- 40 Evaluation of the status of these values in Croatia and the EU was offered to those respondents who marked these values as the three most important of the nine offered. It was possible to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=very bad to 5=very good).
- 41 It is indicative that as far back as 2004, the majority of young people (54 %) in Croatia believed in at least one institution, namely the church, or religious institutions (Ilišin 2017: 201). Since that first examination of the political (dis)trust of young people, all subsequent surveys have recorded a decline in trust and an increase in distrust in all institutions, so that none of them enjoyed any majority trust anymore.
- 42 Civil society organizations were omitted from further analysis; they were distributed in both obtained factors by factor analysis.
- 43 Croatian Democratic Union
- 44 Brigde
- 45 Homeland Movement
- 46 Green-Left List
- 47 Restart Coalition
- 48 Given that the respondents were asked about their participation in the previous parliamentary elections, all respondents between the ages of 14 and 21 were excluded from this analysis, and the rest were divided into two age groups, 22 to 25 years old and 26 to 29 years old. At the same time, among the 22-year-old respondents, there were potentially those who did not have the right to vote in the 2020 parliamentary elections.
- 49 We Can!
- 50 Social Democratic Party
- 51 Workers' Front
- 52 This is indirectly evidenced by the infamous Croatian record, compared to other EU members, for the lowest turnout (21 %) in the elections for the European Parliament in June 2024. At the same time, it is puzzling that despite the fact that they trust the EU noticeably more than the national government and parliament, and that the majority believes that Croatia should remain in the Union, the young people – as well as the older generations – did not go to the polls in greater numbers to elect their representatives for whom they believe could best represent the interests of Croatian citizens in the common European political space.
- 53 The scale of nationalism is composed of three statements: *A real Croat is only one who is of Croatian blood, It is best that only real Croats live in Croatia, Non-Croats living in Croatia should adopt Croatian customs and values*, and the average agreement on the scale from 1 (not at all agree) to 5 (completely agree) is 2.7, which indicates that respondents tend to reject nationalist attitudes.
- 54 Let's say that a fifth of dissatisfied respondents was expected, because even in the times of zealous monitoring of Croatia's progress in approaching the EU, the attitude towards that association was not in unison. For example, in 2004, 13 % of young people did not support the country's future entry into the EU and 14 % had a negative image of that association (Ilišin, Mendeš 2007: 214). In 2013, 29 % of young people had a negative image of the EU, while both positive and negative expectations of joining grew together (Ilišin 2017: 237–240). It seems that life in the EU has not confirmed all the fears of young people about the possible negative consequences of integration, and this is also confirmed by the findings of the assessment of the circumstances in the EU and in Croatia, where it turned out that the EU is perceived to be more successful in all segments (from employment to the rule of law) except in the field of security (Gvozdanović et al. 2019: 50).

# Figures

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# About the authors

**Anja Gvozdanović** PhD, senior research associate in the field of sociology, employed at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb. Co-author and co-editor of six books, and author, independently or in co-authorship, of more than twenty scientific papers, book chapters and professional articles focusing on political culture, social capital, youth values and social trust, reconciliation and peace-building in Croatia and the Western Balkans. Anja has participated in 15 research projects, leading and co-leading three national and three international research projects. Since 2023, she has been serving as vice-president of the Croatian Sociological Association.

**Mirjana Adamović** PhD, senior scientist in the field of sociology, employed at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb since 2005. She is also a teaching associate at the postgraduate university study *Humanities and Social Sciences* at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split. As single author or co-author she published five books and seventy scientific and professional articles covering topics such as sociology of gender, youth sociology, sociology of migrations, and spatial sociology. She acquired her research and professional expertise cooperating with national and international scientific institutions. In this capacity, she is the co-principal investigator of the international CERV project that deals with gender-based cyber violence among children and young people.

**Sandra Antulić Majcen** PhD, employed at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb since 2023, in the role of a senior research assistant at the *YO-VID 22 project: Youth Wellbeing and Support Structures before, during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic* (CSF). She was elected to the rank of assistant professor and scientific associate in the interdisciplinary area educational science. She participated in different national and international projects in the educational field, specifically in topics such as self-evaluation, and the quality of the educational system. She participates in research of children and young people, especially those belonging to vulnerable social groups.

**Nikola Baketa** PhD, has been working as a research associate in the field of political science at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb since 2016. His work focuses on youth civic competence, educational policies and youth work. He is the author and co-author of more than twenty scientific papers and several other papers and publications. Baketa was a research associate in several research projects, including those financed by Horizon Europe, the European Social Fund, Erasmus+ and the Croatian Science Foundation. He collaborates with numerous civil society organizations, and is a member of the Executive Board of the Croatian Political Science Association.

**Ratko Đokić** PhD, assistant professor and research associate in psychology, has been employed at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb since 2021. Prior to this period, he worked at the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo lecturing subjects such as psychological methodologies and statistics, as well as cognitive psychology. He authored and co-authored two university manuals in statistics and methodology, and scientific works in cognitive, social, and educational psychology, psychology of personality and sociology of housing. He also led or participated in a series of social, market and media research projects and public policy studies.

**Vlasta Ilišin** PhD, senior scientist in the field of political science and in sociology, employed at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb from 1986 to 2019, and its director from 2007 to 2011. In 2020, she was elected to the position of emeritus scientist. Her fields of research are young people, specifically their political culture, values, free time and media literacy, the European integration process and Croatian political elites. She participated in 22 scientific research projects (of which she led 12), and currently participates in three research projects. She published around 160 scientific and professional papers, and contributed to 20 scientific monographs, either as author or editor, or both.

**Dunja Potočnik** PhD, a senior research associate in the field in sociology, has been employed at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb since 2003. She is the co-author of ten and co-editor of six books and scientific papers on young people, specifically the topics of employment, education, migration and social inclusion. She collaborated with a number of national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and is a member of the Pool of the European Youth Researchers Advisory Group and two professional groups on science and technology under the auspices of the European Commission.

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Zagreb  
Tel.: +385 1 480 79 70  
croatia.fes.de

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FES Democracy of the Future – Vienna  
Director: Johanna Lutz  
Lead Researcher: Elena Avramovska  
Editing coordinator and Communication  
Europe: Margarete Lengger  
Project Management: Krisztina Stefán,  
FES South-East Europe – Sarajevo  
Project management: Saša Vasić  
Communication SOE: Ema Džejna Smolo-Zukan

### **Youth Study Croatia 2024**

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### **Orders/Contact**

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