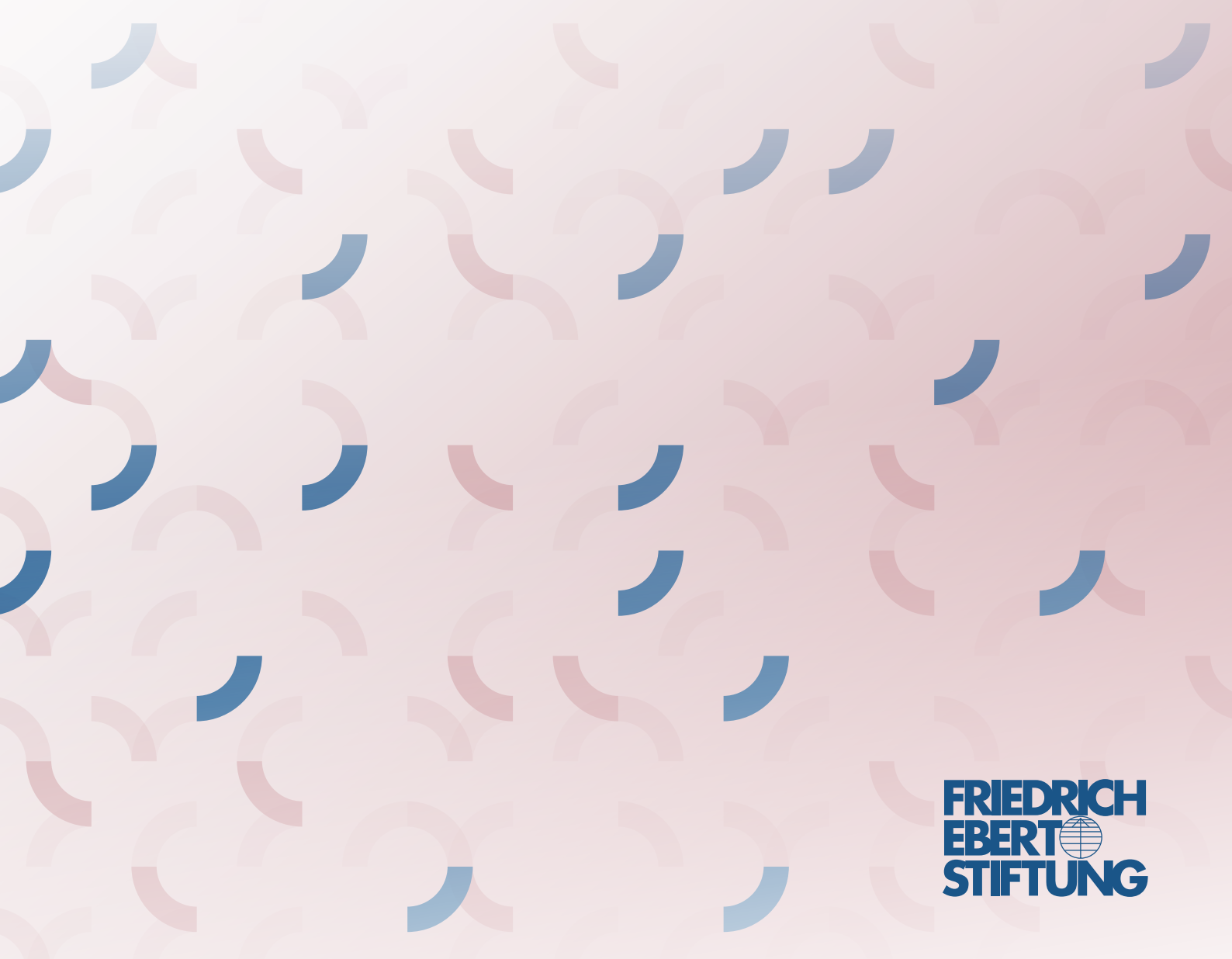




2020 / 2021

YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLAND

BETWEEN DISAPPOINTMENT
WITH THE STATE AND HOPE
FOR A BETTER LIFE



IMPRINT

Publisher:

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V.
Godesberger Allee 149
53175 Bonn (Germany)
Email: info@fes.de

Register no.: VR2392

Bonn Register of Associations
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Design concept: GOLDLAND MEDIA GmbH

ISBN: 978-3-98628-116-8

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1

INTRODUCTION



The study comprises the final report of research on youth in Poland, which is part of a broader study on international youth from Central Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia). Although the analysis focuses mainly on young Poles (15-29 years of age), comparisons to youth from other countries have been included. Moreover, the findings are presented in a broader perspective and refer to previous research on Polish youth.

The study had been planned long before the COVID-19 outbreak but was fully conducted in the context of the pandemic in 2021. The prospects of all generations have been affected by the pandemic, but it has been especially challenging and disruptive to youth during their transition to adulthood. Additionally, the research took place a few months after the massive women's strikes in Poland during the autumn of 2020, in response to the strict anti-abortion laws in Poland. Based on the qualitative interviews conducted within the framework of the study, it seems to have established a significant context for young individuals' perceptions of politics and political involvement.

This report aims at presenting insights into young people's family housing, educational and labour conditions, values, and opinions. What can be said about people who grew up during the 1990s and 2000s? What are their opinions on their own lives, society, politics or economics? How satisfied are they with their lives in Poland?

2

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The target population in Poland consisted of all citizens of Poland aged 15 to 29 who had access to the Internet and were able to speak Polish. The sample of 1,500 respondents was drawn from the Ipsos Online Access Panel. It was quota sampled according to age, gender and region to achieve a group reflective of the target population. These central socio-demographics were pre-defined so the respondents could be targeted directly via email.

Data collection took place between June and July of 2021. The interviews were conducted online by Ipsos. The questionnaire was provided by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in English and translated into Polish by Ipsos. Although the sample was carefully constructed to meet the population strata of age, gender and region, some minor incongruities nevertheless occurred. By weighting, the structure of the unweighted sample was adjusted to the official data regarding age, gender and region.

Although the report is based primarily on a quantitative survey, qualitative fieldwork was conducted in the form of ten in-depth interviews and three focus-group interviews. The focus groups were recruited according to informants' ages to best represent the relevant living circumstances, such as the following:

- 15–18 years old: school education, graduation, and first decision-making processes regarding choice of future education and profession
- 19–24 years old: voting age, first steps to becoming independent by moving out of the family home
- 25–29 years old: university graduation, entering the job market, and starting family planning

During sampling, a mix of gender, living situation, and education/work status were considered. Young people were recruited from three regions – the capital (Warszawa), Skarżysko, and Wrocław and its surrounding areas, which are representative of a smaller and poorer region. For the focus groups, local partners advised focussing on one location per age group to represent regional differences.

Qualitative fieldwork took place between March and April 2021. All interviews and focus groups were conducted online via the MS Teams platform.

3

BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTER- ISTICS AND TRENDS

In the FES Youth Study 2021 (hereinafter FYS 2021), the CATI survey covered a group of 1,500 respondents aged 15–29. The mean age (hereinafter M) was 22.5. The sample was comprised of 51.5 per cent men and 48.5 per cent women. 22.4 per cent of those interviewed were 15–18 years old, 37.8 per cent were 19–24 years old, and 39.8 per cent represented the oldest group (25–29). Female participants dominated the youngest group (at 61 per cent), whilst males were overrepresented in the oldest group (61.6 per cent). In the general population, the proportions did not change across the age groups studied, and amount to 51 per cent men and 49 per cent women (GUS 2021a). The imbalance of men and women in the respective age groups needs to be considered when interpreting the results for the youngest cohort.

The majority of respondents (57.7 per cent) indicated that they lived in urban (or more urban than rural) places, 27.7 per cent in rural (or more rural than urban) places, and 15 per cent in places defined as “between” (neither urban nor rural).

As regards their social background, as measured by their parents’ education, 42 per cent of respondents reportedly had at least one parent with tertiary education. 35.8 per cent of the respondents’ mothers had university degrees; 25.9 per cent of young people affirmed the same regarding their fathers¹. There was a moderately high correlation between parents in terms of education ($\rho=0.514$, $p<0.001$). 71 per cent of parents were married to a person with a similar level of education. Similar findings on the “homogamy” of marriages can be found in earlier studies (Domański 2015).

When asked about the financial situation of their households, the majority of the respondents (40 per cent) reported having a rather good situation (“they could afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car or a flat”), or a fair situation (29 per cent), meaning that they had “enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things”. Based on a subjective assessment, the majority of the research participants placed themselves somewhere in the middle. Still, only 15 per cent felt they had enough money for everything they needed, and a similar percentage reported not having enough money for clothes or shoes. Satisfaction with one’s household financial situation increased with education level. People representing older age groups more often described their financial situations as poor; this group more often lived independently of their parents and managed their own budgets.

MAIN FINDINGS

The majority of respondents lived in urban areas, and over 40 per cent came from families in which at least one of the parents held a tertiary degree. Whilst the larger share of informants reported rather good or fair financial situations in their households, 15 per cent of them felt that they did not have enough money for clothes or shoes. The survey confirmed the persistence of certain inequities among Polish youth relating to gender, education (including that of their parents), and socio-economic backgrounds.

¹ The mother’s educational level was unknown to 7.3 per cent of respondents, and 10.6 per cent could not state the educational levels of their fathers.

4

YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

In (postulated) knowledge-based societies, there are growing cultural expectations that young people should study longer (and continuously), as technological changes demand new skill sets of employees. Emphasis is placed on life-long learning. Meritocratic ideologies, which assumed that individual efforts, merits, and skills lead to higher social positions, contributed to a boom in tertiary education in Poland and other “post-socialist” countries in the 1990s (Szafraniec et al. 2017: 104). Between 1990 and 2005, the number of students in Poland increased from around 400,000 to 2 million, subsequently declining to just above 1.2 million in 2020/21 (GUS 2021b). The drop in student numbers in the last decade is due to demographic changes and a gradual “cooling off” process in education-related aspirations among young people (Szafraniec et al. 2017: 116), resulting in part from incongruencies between schooling and jobs performed (Jasiecki 2013: 353–355).

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

The educational experience of young adults in Poland is lengthy due to the high numbers of those enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programmes. In the Polish sample, 60.1 of respondents were in the process of gaining formal or continued education, including 25.2 per cent who were still school pupils, 13.4 per cent who were undergraduate students, 12.6 per cent MA or PhD students, and another 10.9 per cent enrolled in other forms of education or training. Compared to other countries in the region, the tertiary education rate in Poland is high (26 per cent), though not as high as in the Czech Republic (29 per cent), which ranks the highest.

In many countries, Poland included, there are persistent inequalities concerning social background and access to higher education, as measured by parents’ education (Domański 2015; Furlong 2013; Pustułka and Sarnowska 2021). “Inherited” educational resources translate into greater opportunities. Only 3.8 per cent of informants whose parents both had basic vocational education managed to complete tertiary education, as compared to 40 per cent among those having two parents with university degrees. Having at least one parent with a tertiary diploma increased one’s chances of completing tertiary

education by almost four times (odd ratio=3.9). Other factors which positively correlated to educational levels attained included living in more urbanised areas ($\rho=0.134$, $p<0.001$) and gender ($V=0.119$, $p<0.001$). Women outnumbered men in almost all phases of education, particularly in primary and secondary schools. The bigger picture shows young women are more educated than men, even compared to their average EU counterparts. In 2020, 52.6 per cent of Polish women aged 25–34 (compared to 32.7 per cent of men in the same age range) had completed tertiary degrees; a dramatic increase can be seen in relation to the numbers from 2000, when the same indicator amounted to 17.3 per cent for women and 11.4 per cent for men (Eurostat LFS). The educational advancement of young women and its effects on their socio-political awareness deserve further exploration.

The majority of respondents (64.7 per cent, excluding those in occupational training) were employed in some capacity², including 33.1 per cent of those in primary and secondary schools, 54.5 per cent of undergraduate students, 71.9 per cent of graduate and postgraduate students, 85.8 per cent of those taking part in other forms of education, and 79.3 per cent of those who were not involved in any educational undertakings. The growing number of employees aged 15–24 has been confirmed by Eurostat data: it increased from 21 per cent in 2005 (when the data was first provided) to 31 per cent in 2019; it declined in 2020 to 28 per cent, most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurostat LFS). 38 per cent of informants declared having no involvement in education or training. The majority of this group were employed; 12.3 per cent stated that they had no job and thus fulfilled the criteria of being neither employed nor in education and training (NEETs). This figure resembles Eurostat data (12.9 per cent).

In the FYS2021 survey, the respondents who declared they were participating in education or training ($n=932$) were asked how many hours they spent on such activities at home daily (including online learning). The mean (M) was 4.6 hours, with longer averages indicated by women ($M=5.1$) than men ($M=3.9$). A similar tendency was observed concerning the after-school study time, at $M=2.6$ hours (total), with 2.7 hours (spent by women) and 2.5 hours (spent by men). In both cases, the averages in Poland were similar to those reported in other countries.

² “Don’t know” and “no” answers excluded.

Life-long learning includes taking internships. Among the CEE and Baltic countries, young Poles most often took part in internships and work placement: 58.8 per cent had participated in them during their education. Significant differences in internship participation rates were visible in other countries; in Hungary, only 33.5 per cent had done them; in Latvia, 47.2 per cent, and in Lithuania, 47.9 per cent had reportedly completed them. Internships were most frequent among older and better-educated people, with tertiary education (79.2 per cent), compared to those in elementary or vocational education (41.9 per cent) and secondary education (57 per cent). Gender was correlated with internships: men (62.4 per cent) undertook internships more often than women (54.9 per cent); however, the relationship was statistically significant only among those with secondary education or lower.

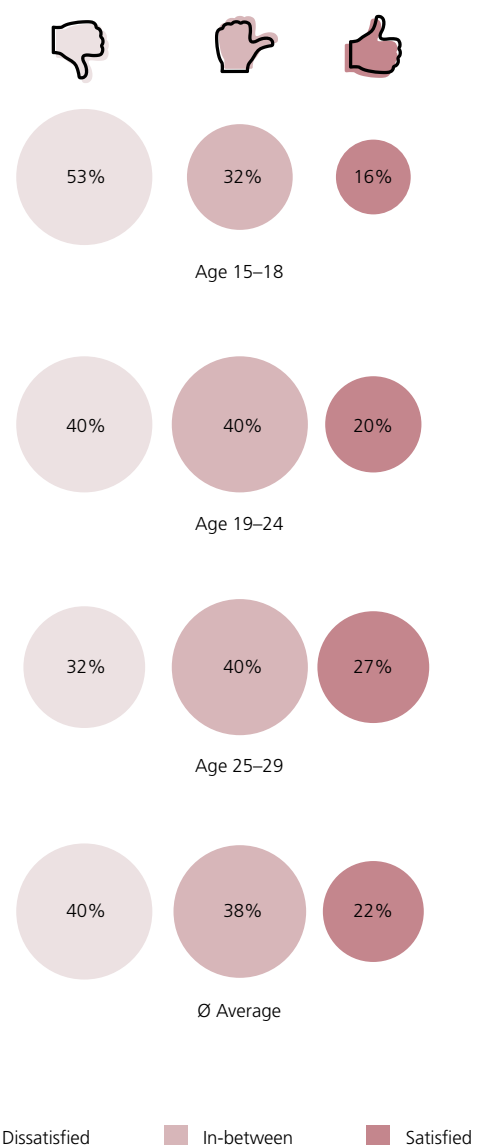
Educational mobility, in the form of international exchange programmes such as Erasmus+ initiatives, have gained importance. 26.2 per cent of respondents indicated that they had been abroad for education or training, with the highest per centage indicating that it had been part of their secondary education (11.6 per cent) and tertiary education (9.9 per cent). Additionally, 31.9 per cent of respondents intended to go abroad for educational purposes in the future (34.4 per cent had not been abroad for schooling and did not intend to in the future). More women (36.2 per cent) than men (27.8 per cent) and more people aged 15-18 (50.3 per cent) than 19-24 (32.6 per cent), or 25-29 (20.9 per cent) planned to go abroad for educational purposes in the future, which may be related to the fact that most educational exchanges took place at the secondary school level.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Young Poles seemed **rather displeased with the quality of their education**. In the FYS2021, satisfaction levels were measured on a scale of 1–5, and averaged 2.72 in the entire sample. In other words, 40 per cent of respondents mentioned that they were not satisfied with the quality of their education (answers 1–2), 38 per cent were in the middle (answer 3), and 22 per cent were satisfied (answers 4–5). This might seem surprising given the earlier results of the European Social Survey, in which the average on a scale of 0 (least satisfied) to 10 (most satisfied) among those under 30 was 6.36 in 2018 and 4.95

in 2002 (ESS 2018). Poles and Hungarians were the least happy with the quality of their education in the sample of CEE and Baltic countries. Moreover, the youngest cohort in Poland seemed the most discontented: 52.6 per cent of those aged 15–18 were dissatisfied, compared to 40 per cent of those aged 19–24, and 32.2 per cent of the oldest group. 53.8 per cent of school pupils and 42.6 per cent of undergraduate students were critical of the quality of their education.

FIGURE 1. SATISFACTION WITH THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION BY AGE (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

The focus group interviews provided insights into the reasons for dissatisfaction. In one of the interviews, the lack of education in political decision-making was mentioned:

“We aren’t really educated in various, useful things (...) For instance, whom we should vote for. There are (...) a lot of different weird classes that never come in handy.”

(FGI, 25–29 years old)

Another reason for relatively high dissatisfaction might have been due to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. As observed by Pavol Baboš and Aneta Világi (2021: 25), “online education created pressure to mature prematurely” and contributed to concerns about the (lower) value of skills received via remote learning.

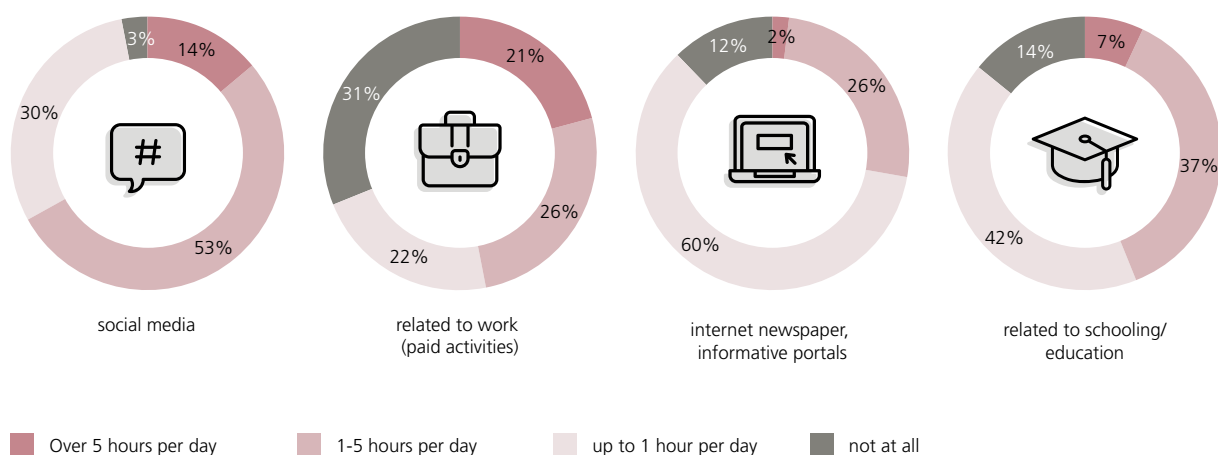
A significant share of informants supported the claim that the **education system is corrupt**, hence many respondents knew of instances in which grades and exams had been “bought” at institutes/universities in Poland: 38.4 per cent affirmed having such knowledge, 30.7 per cent were hesitant (in between), and 17.9 per cent disagreed that such a practice existed. The high frequency of such cases contradicted public opinion research carried out among adults in Poland; in 2017, only two per cent of adults pointed to education as a domain of social life in

which corruption is the most common, as compared to seven per cent in 2001 (Boguszewski 2017). Yet, such convictions about corruption in education were not unique to Poland and were present in other countries studied by the FYS2021. The existence of corruption was mentioned more often by women, who were better educated and with a higher subjective assessment of their economic situations as well as those with more extreme left-wing or right-wing political views.

LIVING ONLINE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF REMOTE LEARNING

The young generation is often claimed to be one of “digital natives” who are “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (Prensky 2001: 1). They spend a lot of time on activities online, in particular on social media, a trend which accelerated during the pandemic (Baboš and Világi 2021; Bristow and Gilland 2021). 67.2 per cent of interviewees claimed they spent over one hour on social media per day, and only 2.8 per cent claimed not to use social media. There was a negative correlation ($\rho = -0.2$, $p < 0.001$) between age and time spent on social media: for instance, 38 per cent of respondents aged 15–18 declared using social media

FIGURE 2. THE USE OF THE INTERNET BY YOUNG PEOPLE (%)



Note: Don't know/no answers excluded.

Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

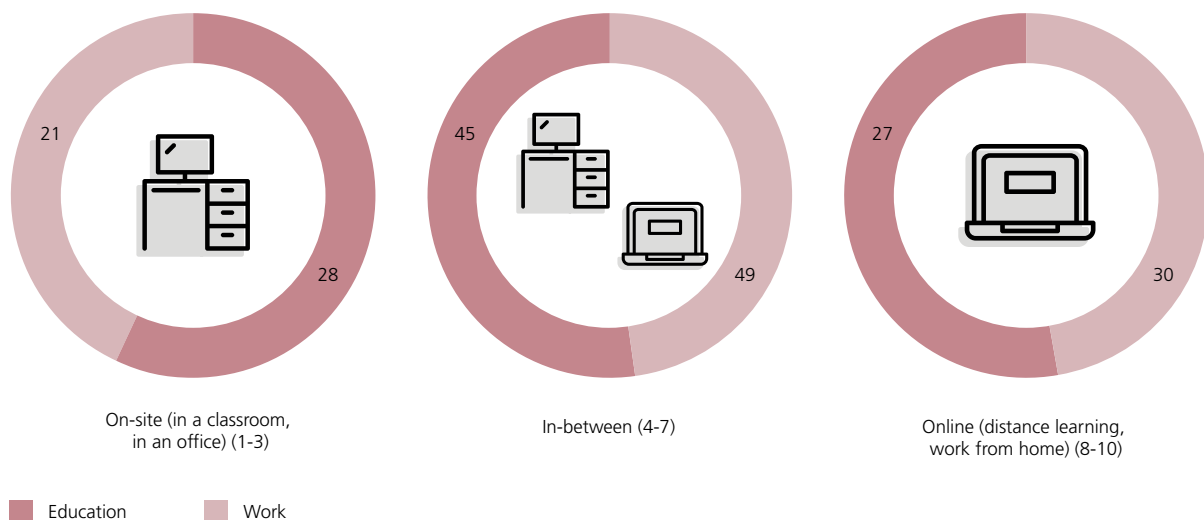
for over three hours per day, compared to 30.2 per cent of those aged 19–24 and 19.5 per cent of those 25 years old and over. No relationship between the self-assessed financial status of a household or place of residence (rural vs urban) and the use of social media was established.

As for other Internet use, 28.2 per cent of interviewees spent over 1 hour per day reading Internet newspapers and informative portals, with older, financially better-off and better-educated respondents reportedly spending more time doing so. Those who indicated right-wing views used the Internet for reading the news longer than left-wingers on average ($\rho = 0.132$, $p < 0.001$). 43.9 per cent of respondents spent over one hour per day on the Internet to do things related to their schooling/education,

with those who were financially better off doing it more often ($\rho = 0.156$, $p < 0.001$). The reported frequency of Internet use for educational purposes did not grow proportionally to education levels. Finally, 47.2 per cent of interviewees made use of the Internet for work, with older and better-educated respondents using it more often ($\rho = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$ for the frequency of using the Internet for work and level of education).

Internet use appeared to be conditioned by a range of socio-demographic factors. The older the respondents were, the less time they spent online on social media and other education-related tasks, instead doing things related to their work and reading Internet portals. The more educated they were, the more often they used the Internet

FIGURE 3. PREFERENCE FOR ON-SITE AND ONLINE EDUCATION AND WORK (1–10 SCALE)



Note: Preferences were measured on a scale of 1-10; missing answers and “don’t know” answers were excluded. Education: N=1,445, work N=939 (only those who were working). Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

for reading news and performing their jobs. On average, women spent more time online for educational purposes and for participating in virtual social networks; men used the Internet more often to read portals.

Skills in using online applications gained new relevance during the sudden shift to online study and work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The preferences for on-site learning versus online learning were almost evenly distributed on a scale of 0 (on-site) to 10 (online). The average for Poland was $M=5.47$ (slightly higher than the average in CEE and the Baltic countries, at 5.28). 28.1 per cent were in favour of classes in traditional classrooms (answers 1-3), 44.9 per cent in the middle (answers 4-7), and 26.8 per cent (answers 8-10) in favour of online schooling. This was higher than could be expected, given widespread public criticism of online schooling. Importantly, key variables (gender, age, educational status, financial situation) were insignificant. Moreover, those in favour of classroom learning tended to prefer to work in an office and vice versa: preferences for remote work and education tended to correlate ($r=0.478$, $p<0.001$).

The FYS2021 research has shown that pupils did not all have sufficient equipment/connections to study online, although that was a relatively marginal group: only 14.7 per cent of the respondents indicated that they lacked equipment or that the equipment/connection was insufficient (for 5.3 per cent, very insufficient); 35.4 per cent were quite well-equipped, and 46.4 per cent had everything they needed. Those better-educated, living in cities, and with a higher assessment of their economic situations reported better access to equipment. 32.7 per cent of those assessing their financial situations as poor indicated having insufficient equipment to study online, compared to 8.8 per cent who declared being able to meet their daily needs.

MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of this chapter include the following:

- Two-thirds of respondents were in the process of obtaining formal education. Progress was more likely among those whose parents had completed tertiary education. The data confirms better education attainment overall by women compared to men.
- Over 40 per cent of respondents were critical of the quality of their schooling, with the youngest being the most dissatisfied. Almost 60 per cent of respondents had participated in internships. Almost 65 per cent worked, often combining work with education.
- Young Poles have intense “digital lives”: two thirds spend over one hour on social media per day, almost half work over one hour per day online, 44 per cent use the same amount of time for studying online, and another third use that amount of time to read Internet portals and news. The process of carrying out education and work online had similar numbers of proponents and opponents (around one-third of the sample), with the majority of respondents being in the middle.

5

EMPLOYMENT AND MOBILITY



Young people's experiences on the labour market include challenges such as the precarious forms of employment in many countries, which are low-paid, short-term and uncertain (Kiersztyn 2015; Standing 2011), or delayed entry into labour markets due to prolonged education (Slany 2006). School-to-work transitions are increasingly non-linear, particularly in the case of youth from socially disadvantaged families (Furlong 2013: 81). Earlier research in Poland suggested that these labour market changes accompanied growing acceptance of occupational flexibility and temporary employment in young people's careers (Giermanowska 2013; Mrozowicki and Trappmann 2021), relatively strong beliefs in entrepreneurship and meritocracy for individual efforts and skills irrespective of social background (Trappmann et al. 2021), and the "normalisation of migration" as one of the important aspects of entering adulthood (Karolak 2020; Sarnowska 2016).

BASIC EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

In the last 20 years, Poland was among the EU countries with the highest share of young people in temporary employment, with rates similar to or higher than those seen in Southern European countries such as Portugal or Spain. Though temporary employment rates have declined in the last five years, according to the Eurostat LFS (2021), 54.7 per cent of people aged 15–24 and 23.2 per cent of those aged 25–34 still worked on temporary contracts in Poland in 2020; the EU-27 averages were 46.3 per cent for those 15–24 years old and 18.1 per cent for those 25–34 years old. Eurofound research demonstrated that during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, 28.7 per cent of those aged 18–34 lost their jobs (Eurofound 2020), most of whom were on temporary contracts at the time.

Existing research and FGIs suggest that young people with temporary contracts comprise a "cushion", absorbing labour market shocks and crises. In FGIs, there was a conviction that the labour market forces young people to participate in harsh competition ("*a rat race*", FGI, 25–29

years old). In the industries dominated by young people, wages were thought to be too low: "*you can't live off of it*" (FGI, 25–29 years old). The work situation deteriorated further during the COVID-19 lockdown. As stated by one of interviewees,

"My friends, even those who have managed to keep their jobs, I don't know, let's say in catering, even if they have that job, they don't get paid for a month or 3 months"

(FGI, 25–29 years old).

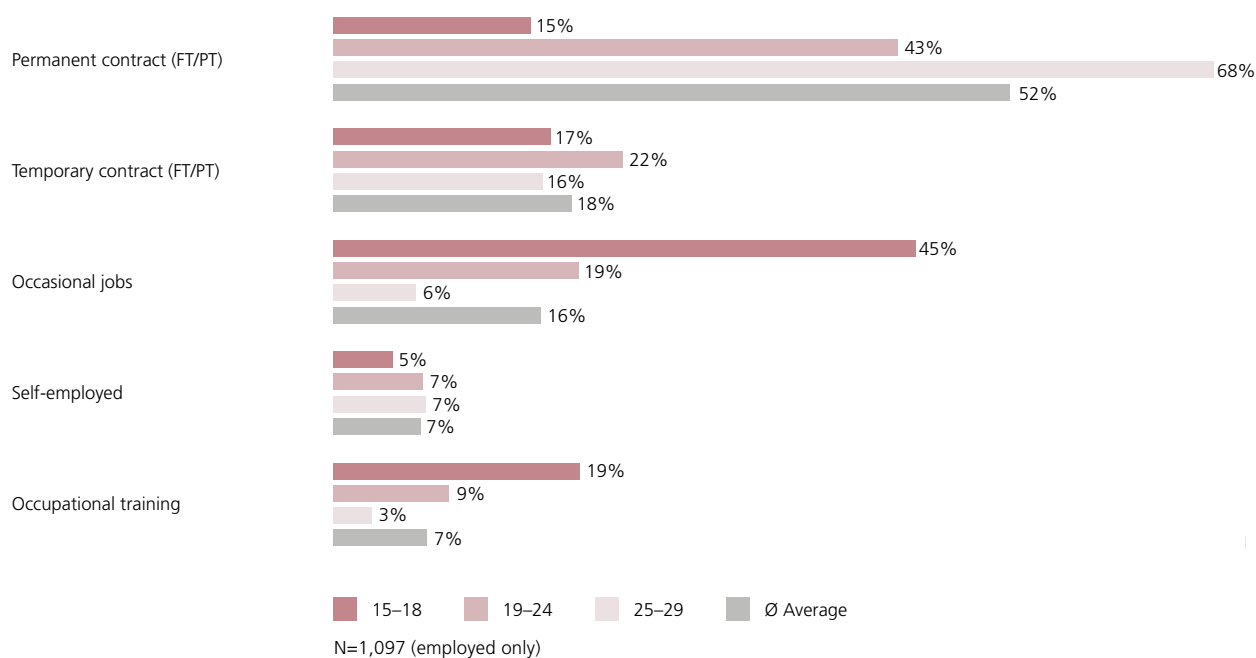
Another respondent described the labour market situation as very selective,

"It is typically an employers' market. And I'm really now going on various interviews, just so I don't fall out of that ability to talk to people and talk about my strengths, my weaknesses. (...). They are very selective."

(FGI, 25–29 years).

The FYS2021 data on employment suggests that labour market uncertainty is underpinned by relatively limited "standard" employment: only 29 per cent of the entire sample reported that they worked on the type of full-time permanent contracts which are considered normative under the Polish Labour Code. 12 per cent had temporary contracts for full-time or part-time jobs, and 10 per cent performed occasional jobs, either with so-called civil law contracts which are not regulated by the Labour Code, or without any contract. Five per cent had part-time jobs, four per cent were self-employed, and four per cent declared being in occupational training. Additionally, 15 per cent had no job but were actively looking for one, and 12 per cent had no job and were not looking for one. The figures for Poland do not indicate much higher rates of contractual precarity than those seen in other CEE and Baltic countries. If temporary employment and occasional jobs are summed up, Poland's rates (22 per cent) are lower than those in Slovakia (33 per cent) and the Czech Republic (32 per cent) but higher than in Hungary and the Baltic states.

FIGURE 4. EMPLOYMENT STATUS BY AGE: YOUNG WORKING POLES (%)



The incidence of temporary employment and occasional jobs is mediated by socio-demographic factors. When excluding the jobless from the calculations, permanent contracts emerged as the domain of the oldest respondents, whilst temporary contracts (as well as occasional jobs) were associated with those aged 15–18 and 19–24 years old. Among the employed, 52 per cent worked on permanent contracts (part-time or full-time), 18 per cent with temporary contracts, 16 per cent undertook various occasional jobs, and 7 per cent were self-employed. Women dominated the categories of part-timers, occasional jobs, and unemployed, as seen in the general Polish population. The data also demonstrated that contract type was dependent on education: among those aged 25–29, those with higher education more often had open-ended contracts, while those in casual jobs and the jobless had more likely completed only primary or vocational schools.

In Poland, a 40-hour working week is the norm under the Labour Code. As the OECD (2021) statistics demonstrate, the average working time in Poland was 40.1 hours per week in 2020 (38.4 in the case of workers aged 15–24); Poles worked longer on average than those in other OECD countries (the OECD mean was 36.6 hours/week). In the FYS2021 survey, the average was 34.6 hours per week for Poland, and 34.4 hours per week for the entire sample. Men and older respondents worked longer on average than women and younger people. The longest working

hours were declared by those with full-time permanent contracts (40.2 hours/week) and the shortest by those with occasional jobs (19.1 hours/week).

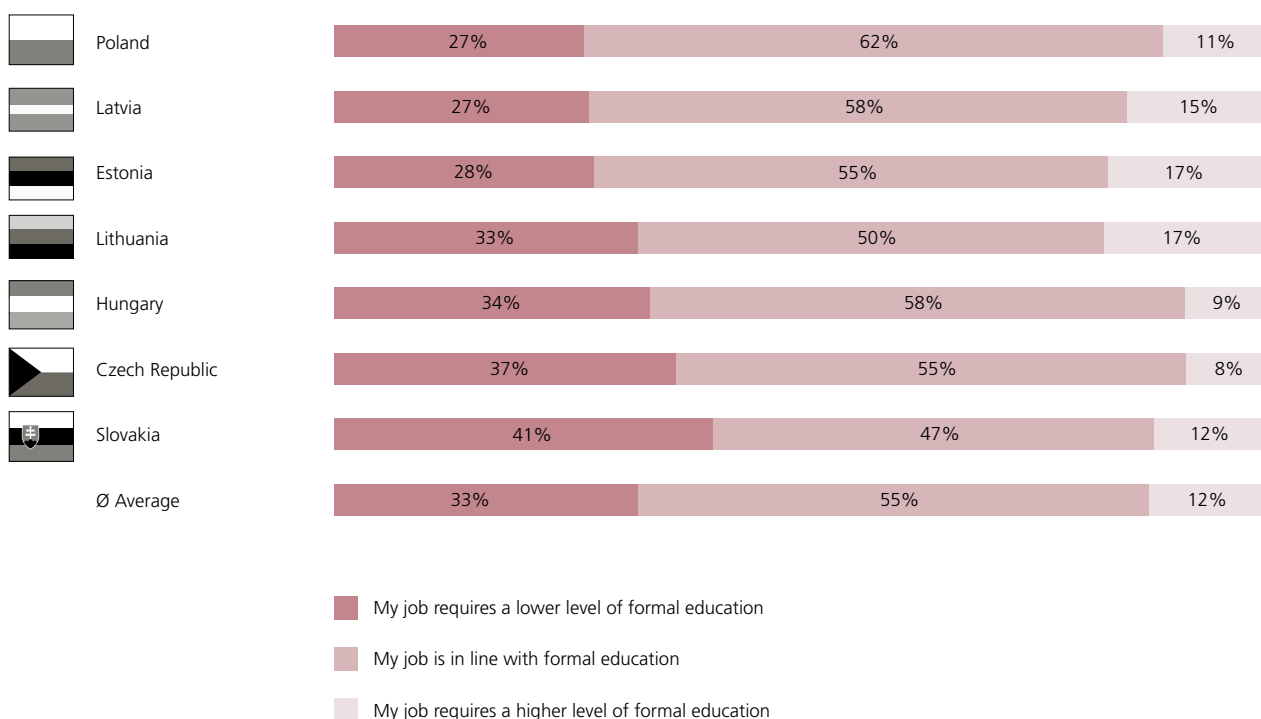
The research also allowed for the exploration of sectoral characteristics in young people's employment. 29.2 per cent of respondents worked in the public sector, 51 per cent in the private sector, 5.2 per cent in NGOs, 4.9 per cent in international organisations, and 9.6 per cent in other types of organisations. As regards the desired employment sector, the proportions were similar: 23.6 per cent chose the public sector, 44.6 per cent the private sector, 6.2 per cent NGOs, 7.2 per cent international organisations, 4.4 per cent other organisations, and 14 per cent could not indicate their preferences. The analysis confirms the **relatively less attractive image of the public sector as a desired place of employment**. 51.5 per cent of those working in the public sector declared they would like to stay there, compared to 71.8 per cent among those in the private sector. Those working in the private sector were better-educated on average and assessed the economic situations of their households more highly. NGOs and international organisations were the most precarious places of employment, due to the prevalence of contracts deviating from permanent employment and the high share of those assessing the situation of their households as unfavourable.

UNDEREMPLOYMENT: MISMATCHES BETWEEN SKILLS AND JOBS

In many OECD countries, the insufficient utilisation of worker labour is a chronic problem, due to mismatches between skills, education, and employers' demands (Woźniak-Jęchorek and Pilc 2021). In Poland, skill mismatches are explained by discrepancies between the educational preferences of young people (long dominated by the social sciences and humanities); a dearth of graduates in engineering, IT and applied sciences; the inadequacy of skills and knowledge in relation to workplace requirements; insufficient participation of employers in shaping the curricula; inadequate emphasis placed on on-job training and internships (Jasiecki 2013: 353–355; Kozek 2013: 220).

The research shows widespread underemployment in all of the countries studied. In Poland, the majority of respondents (38.5 per cent) declared that they did not work in their professions, 16.3 per cent were close to their learnt professions, and 38.5 per cent worked in the profession for which they were trained; 11.2 per cent admitted that they had not been trained for any profession. In addition, 26.8 per cent of respondents acknowledged working below their formal qualifications, 62.2 per cent in line with those qualifications, and 11 per cent above their formal qualifications.

FIGURE 5. THE LABOUR MARKET FIT: WORKING IN LINE WITH FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS (%)



Note: Don't know/no answers excluded.

Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

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

Compared to the other countries surveyed, Poland has the highest percentage of people declaring that they work at a job in which they can use their formal qualifications, and the second highest number indicating that they work in a profession for which they were trained. One explanation may be the high rate of participation in internships. The cross-country analysis shows that work placement or internship participants were 2.5 times more likely to work in a job in (or similar to) the profession for which they had been trained (odds ratio=2.467).

Employability is also improved by undertaking forms of voluntary work. In the 12 months preceding the survey, 31.9 per cent of respondents had been involved in volunteering. Compared to other countries, Poland's score was average – 37.5 per cent of young Lithuanians had been involved in volunteering; only 23.7 per cent of Slovaks had done so. Younger Poles were more engaged in volunteering than the older cohorts studied: 46 per cent of those aged 15-18, compared to 23 per cent of those aged 25-29, had done some volunteering in the past. No statistically significant relationship was observed between volunteering, gender, and education levels. In terms of the types of voluntary organisations for which work was performed, schools and universities dominated (37 per cent of respondents), followed by associations (17 per cent), self-organised projects (14 per cent), and various citizens' initiatives (14 per cent). Trade unions (5 per cent) and political parties (3 per cent) were at the end of the list.

THE ASSESSMENT OF REMOTE WORK

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift to online work; in March of 2020, 14.2 per cent of employees in Poland worked from home (compared to 4.8 per cent one year earlier) (GUS 2021e). According to Eurofound, 34 per cent of people aged 18-34 started to work from home as result of the COVID-19 pandemic (as of April 2020) (Eurofound 2020).

The FYS2021 survey demonstrated that young people's preferences on working from the office or from home were divided, with a surprisingly high percentage who would work from home by choice. On a scale from 1 (work from the office) to 10 (work from home), 20.8 per cent

would rather work in an office (answers 1–3), 29.8 per cent would prefer to work from home (answers 8–10), and the rest (49.4 per cent) had no clear preference (answers 4–7). The mean (M) was 5.82, indicating slightly higher support for remote work in the youngest cohort (15–18, M=5.92; 19–24, M=5.86; 25–29, M=5.76) and among women (M=5.9; for men M=5.71).

Young Poles' opinions were moderate compared to those seen in other countries: the greatest enthusiasts of remote work were found to be Estonians (M=6.16), Latvians (M=6.06) and Lithuanians (M=5.95), whereas the least support was expressed by young Slovaks (M=5.15).

Contrary to fears of large-scale digital exclusion, 80.5 per cent of the respondents stated that they had sufficient equipment to carry out remote work. Only 19.5 per cent perceived deficiencies in such equipment, including 9.3 per cent who described these deficiencies as significant (or reportedly had no equipment at all).

MERITS AND GOOD CONNECTIONS: WHAT MATTERS IN THE LABOUR MARKET

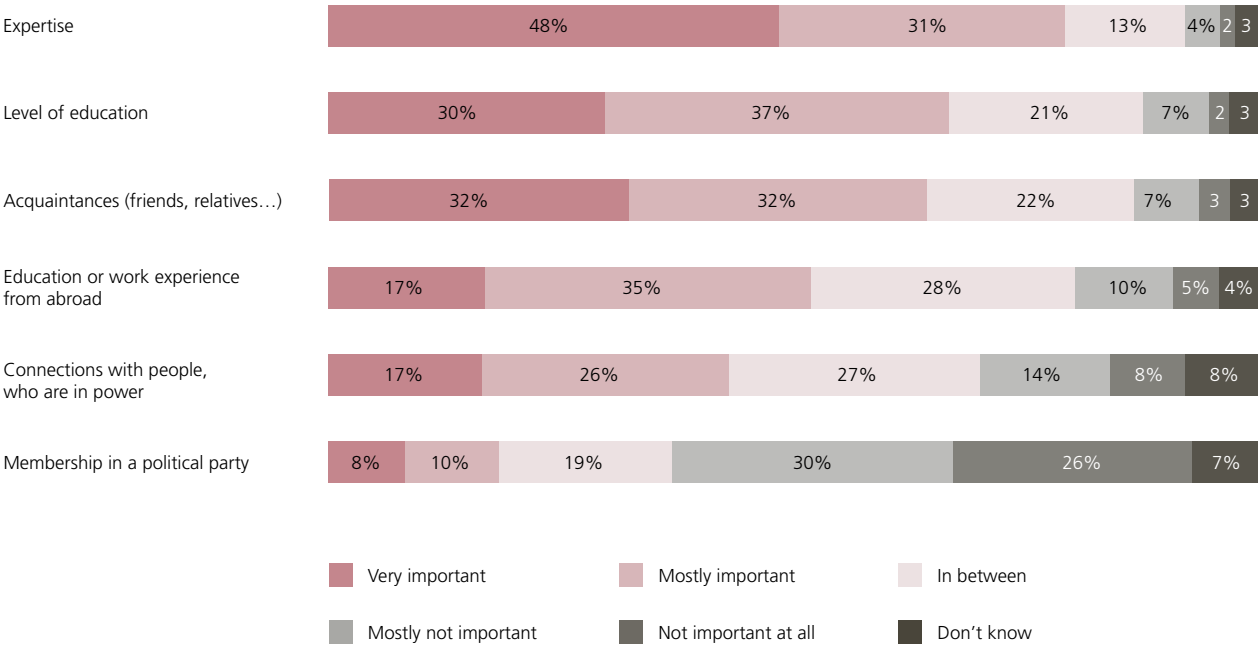
The informants were asked about the various factors in finding a job in the labour market. The results demonstrate mixed beliefs in meritocracy and social/political capital. Concerning important/very important factors in finding a job, the respondents indicated the following: 79.1 per cent – expertise; 66.7 per cent – education level; 64.2 per cent – acquaintances; 51.9 per cent - experience working/studying abroad; 43 per cent - connections with people in power; 18.2 per cent - participation in a political party. Even though the meritocratic principles gained greater support among young people, the conviction that “connections matter” was still quite strong.

The set of meritocratic variables (education, expertise, experiences abroad) and socio-political variables (acquaintances, connections to those in power, and political party membership) were internally correlated³. Thus, indexes were constructed by adding the Likert scale scores of three variables selected for each index and dividing

³ Cronbach's alpha for the socio-political variables was 0.65, while for the 'meritocratic' was 0.56, which can be considered sufficient for the construction of the index.

them by three (“don’t know” and “no” answers were disregarded). The mean for the meritocracy index was 3.87 and for the socio-political capital index, 3.18. Young Poles believed a bit more in meritocratic principles than socio-political capital. Similar results were obtained for other countries: the mean score for the meritocracy index for the entire sample was 3.84, and for the socio-political index, 3.14.

FIGURE 6. IMPORTANT FACTORS IN FINDING A JOB FOR A YOUNG PERSON IN POLAND (%)



Note: Don't know/no answers excluded.
 Source: FES Youth Study 2021.
 Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

The correlations between both indexes and basic socio-demographic characteristics proved weak; the belief in merits increased slightly with age. While men believed a bit more in connections and women demonstrated slightly stronger meritocratic beliefs, overall, the relevance of gender was minimal. Interestingly, those better-educated and with better-educated parents believed more in merits and connections. It seemed that education allowed for recognition of the complex and not always meritocratic labour market rules. There was slightly stronger support for meritocracy among those who assessed the situations of their households better (M=3.87) than those who declared that their basic needs are not met (M=3.66).

MIGRATION EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS

There are continuous emigration flows from Poland to other countries, a process which intensified after expansion of the EU in 2004. Young, better-educated city-dwellers were more likely to emigrate, with the average age of a post-accession Polish emigrant in the early 2010s being 28 years old (Kaczmarczyk 2012; Karolak 2020). The experiences of deskilling abroad and an improving economic situation in Poland contributed to a decline in emigration in the late 2010s. Research carried out in 2018 on young people (18–30 years old) in the Masovian Voivodship showed relatively limited numbers with emigration plans: 67.4 per cent did not plan to leave Poland within 12 months (Karolak 2021).

The FYS2021 survey did not confirm a decline in migration experiences and aspirations among young people. As mentioned above, 31.9 per cent of all respondents intended to go abroad for future educational purposes, while 29.9 per cent had already done so. 17.2 per cent of young Poles surveyed had been abroad for more than six months. This was one of the higher national percentages; it was higher only in Lithuania (22.3 per cent). Migration experience lasting longer than six months was mentioned more often by men (22.4 per cent) than women (11.9 per cent), and those in older cohorts (25–29 years old: 24.8 per cent) compared to younger ones (19–24 years old: 13.6 per cent; 15–18 years old: 10.1 per cent). Those defining their household's basic economic needs as unmet were more likely to have migration experiences (30 per cent) than those whose economic needs were fulfilled (14.1 per cent). Taking into account conventional migration studies (Karolak 2021), individuals in formal and informal relationships (21.2 per cent) were more likely to have migration experiences than single people (13.5 per cent). Education levels and places of residence proved statistically irrelevant. It appeared that in the oldest cohort (25–29 years old), those with basic or vocational education

(29.2 per cent) and secondary education (28.9 per cent) were more likely to have had migration experiences than respondents with tertiary education (18.7 per cent).

The respondents were next asked how strong their desire was to move to another country for more than six months (emigrate). Only 10.4 per cent assessed their desire to emigrate as very strong; an additional 19.3 per cent of young Poles reportedly had no intention of emigrating. The research confirmed that international migration remains an important, conceivable option in developing personal plans (Każmierska et al. 2011). Focus group interviews and individual interviews (IDIs) made it possible to reconstruct some of the motivations for moving abroad.

One of IDI respondents pointed to the deteriorating economic and political situation in the country,

“First of all, I would like to escape from our country, so to speak. I do not see any future here, the economy is sinking ever further, but it was already bad, ruling parties are fooling around, for me there is no good substitute”

(IDI, male, 15–18 years old)

“The young are fleeing our country. - Why? - Why? Because of the government mainly. How they run the country, what direction it's going in”

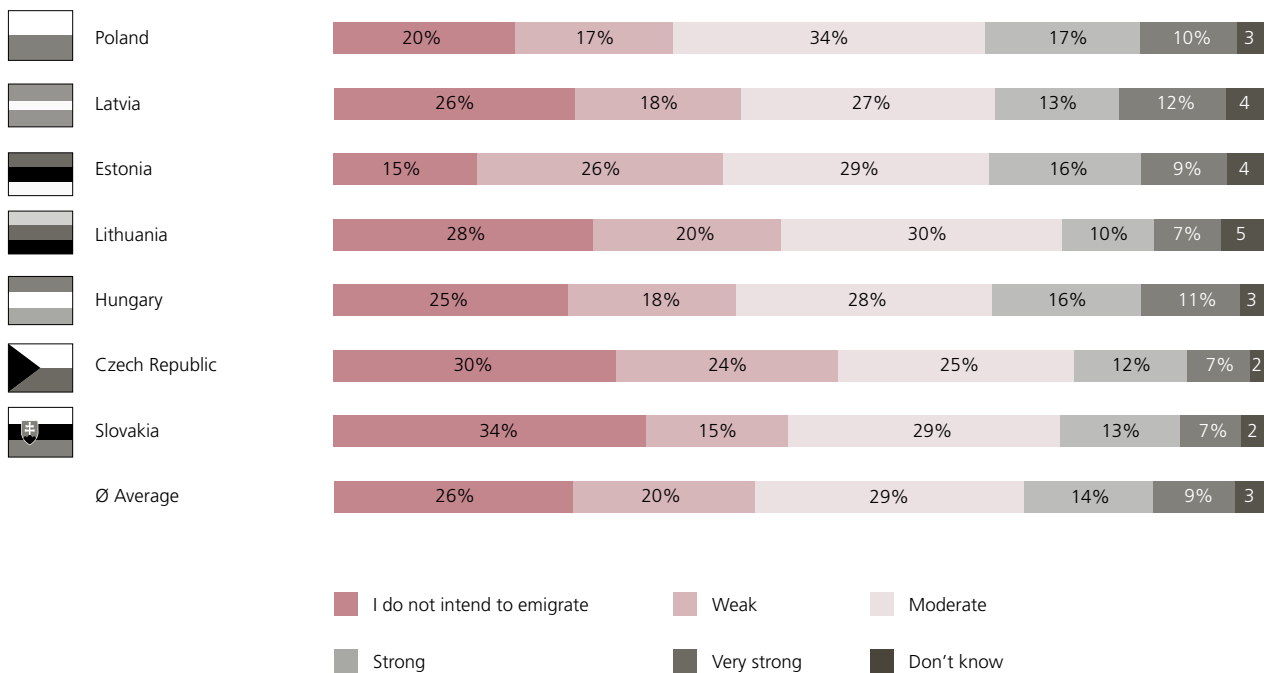
(FGI, 15–18 years old)

Another reason for migratory “escape” was the fear of growing intolerance:

“I have several friends who emigrated from the country because of such situations [of intolerance]. You could say they emigrated because of hate speech and violence”

(FGI, 25–29 years old)

FIGURE 7. READINESS TO EMIGRATE TO ANOTHER COUNTRY FOR MORE THAN SIX MONTHS (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

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

Within the samples from CEE and the Baltic states, only Estonians were more disposed to migrate than Poles; just 15 per cent of Estonians did not intend to emigrate for more than six months. The least inclined to emigrate were young Slovaks and Czechs. In the case of young Poles, the desire to emigrate declines with age ($\rho = -0.189$; $p < 0.001$): 76 per cent of those aged 15–18, 65.6 per cent aged 19–24, and 51.9 per cent of those aged 25–29 declared intentions to emigrate. Women (64.6 per cent) were slightly more likely than men (60.4 per cent) ($\chi^2 = 7.904$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$) to emigrate, a reversal of the trend observed in previous reported migration experiences. Correlations between variables such as marital status, the financial situation of households, place of residence, and education with the intention to emigrate was insignificant, if age was accounted for.

The countries to which respondents would like to emigrate included Germany (11.3 per cent), the USA (10.5 per cent), the UK (7.9 per cent), Spain (6.3 per cent), the Netherlands (6.1 per cent), Canada (2.9 per cent),

France (2.6 per cent), and Sweden (2.5 per cent). Overall, EU countries dominated. The USA was mentioned more often than the UK as a destination, possibly due to Brexit.

Among those who wanted to go abroad, 23.9 per cent could not decide when this might happen. Only 8.3 per cent of young Poles had specific plans to emigrate within six months (and 12.9 per cent, within two years). Among those intending to emigrate, 24 per cent could not answer how long they intended to stay abroad, while 17.5 per cent declared readiness to leave “for good/forever”. Short-term trips of up to a year were declared by 18 per cent of respondents, while 17.3 per cent wished to leave Poland for up to two years. Thus, for the majority of young Poles, migration remains an open but not fully specified option, resembling the “intentional unpredictability” category developed by Drinkwater, Eade and Garapich to describe “fluid, open-ended life plans and therefore open migration plans and career curriculums” (Glorius et al. 2013: 11).

MAIN FINDINGS

The findings on the experiences of young Poles with employment and migration include the following:

- A large share of young workers in Poland experience precarious employment. Slightly more than half of the respondents had permanent contracts, and over one-third had various temporary contracts and occasional jobs.
- The analysis suggests that one-third of young Poles worked below their formal qualifications and almost 40 per cent were employed outside of the profession they were trained for.
- The majority of respondents pointed to expertise, education, and acquaintances as the most important factors when finding a job in Poland.
- Young Poles declared their willingness to leave the country for over six months more often on average than their peers in other countries studied. Yet, their plans seemed largely non-specific: only eight per cent planned to leave in the next six months, and one-fourth could not decide when emigration would occur.

6

FAMILY AND FRIENDS



In recent decades, there have been significant changes in family life in Poland. A phenomenon called “delay syndrome” (*syndrom opóźnienia*) can be observed (Slany 2006). Young people live with their parents longer, postpone marriage or chose to cohabit instead of marrying. Parenting has ceased to be a standard stage in an individual’s life. Simultaneously, based on the results of the European Value Survey (EVS, 1999–2017), family remains a significant value in young individuals’ lives. Both in 1999 and 2017, around 91 per cent of respondents agreed that family is very important to them. The growing importance of friends in people’s lives could be seen, as well: compared to 37 per cent in 1999, as many as 56.3 per cent of young Poles surveyed in 2017 reported friends and acquaintances as very important in their lives. Based on IDI and FGI interviews, one of the lockdown-related challenges was limited social relations with friends (Baboš and Világi 2021).

HOUSEHOLD ARRANGEMENT: HOUSING MARKET CHALLENGES

Despite broader changes in the transition to adulthood, leaving home remains one of the important markers of gaining independence. According to the FYS2021 study, half of young people in Poland lived with at least one parent, and the second largest group (32.5 per cent) lived with a partner. Only 9.1 per cent of respondents

lived alone, and even fewer (3.7 per cent) co-resided with friends⁴. More young men (54.8 per cent) than women (43.6 per cent) lived outside the family home. Importantly, almost one-third of young people (30.7 per cent) in the oldest group (25–29) still lived with their parents, and in that group, men slightly outnumbered women. At that age, young people are expected to be transitioning into adulthood, including living independently from their parents. Compared to other European countries (where the average age for independent living is 26.4), Polish youth currently leave their family homes relatively late, at the age of 28.1 (compared to 27.6, in 2019). Women are 2.3 years younger on average than men when they move out (Eurostat 2021).

34 per cent of young people living with their parents agreed in the survey that “it is the simplest and a more comfortable solution”, whereas 38.7 per cent “would live alone, if financial circumstances allowed it”. As there were no significant differences among age groups who evaluated living with parents as a convenient solution, the problem of insufficient financial resources was noted more by the older age cohorts (19–24: 43.7 per cent; 25–29: 41.2 per cent) than by the youngest group (31.4 per cent). Almost 40 per cent of those living with parents and working on a permanent contract, and 46.2 per cent of those living with parents and working on temporary contracts for full-time jobs, cited financial reasons for not having left their family homes. This may mean that even though they are working full-time, they do not earn enough to move out.

FIGURE 8. SOCIAL GRADE AND HOUSEHOLD SITUATION (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

⁴ According to the question, people who live away from their parents but still regularly/at least once a month sleep at their parents’ houses (e.g. students) should answer in relation to their parents’ household.

Other research indicates limited (family and personal) financial resources, (un)availability and standards of housing in Poland (shortages, high housing market prices, an unregulated rental market, mortgages) (Szafraniec, 2017; Sawulski, 2019) as the issues behind staying in parents' homes. Self-assessment of one's economic situation was lower among those living alone without their parents. For instance, 16 per cent of them had insufficient money for clothes and shoes, compared to 10 per cent of those living with parents.

Other reasons for staying with parents include longer education processes, difficulties with full financial autonomy during studies (Pustułka et al., 2021), or increasing marriage ages; the median has risen from 24.7 for men and 22.8 for women in 1990 to 30.3 and 28.2, respectively, in 2019 (GUS 2020).

RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

Importantly, according to FYS2021 findings, 82.2 per cent of respondents reported having good relationships with their parents. Decisions were often made by young people independently (54.2 per cent) or jointly (34.7 per cent), rather than by parents only (4.5 per cent). Autonomy in decision-making was reported more often in the case of older age groups. Based on the qualitative interviews, respondents (especially those over 18) believed that family did not have much impact on their decisions.

Young people tended to take on their parents' political views: 31 per cent reported their political views and beliefs as moderately aligned with their parents', 27.1 per cent said that their views are very aligned or quite aligned. Based on individual and focus group interviews, a more complex picture emerged, from full intergenerational agreement to more selective approaches. Intergenerational tensions concerned the role of the church and church/political relations. As one of the participants said,

"My mom is a believer, she goes to church, she likes the current policy, we sometimes discuss it, but we generally try to avoid this topic, as it always leads to quarrels."

(FGI, 15–18 years old).

Another one added,

"... if my dad influenced me, I'd be for a ban on abortion and I'd just sit in church."

(FG, 15–18 years old).

MARITAL REALITY AND FUTURE PLANS

Almost 50 per cent of young people surveyed indicated being single, and a similar number saw themselves in the future as being married with children. The number of current singles was larger in the case of young men (53.1 per cent) than women (45 per cent). Predictably, the highest number of singles was among the youngest age group (64.1 per cent), and the lowest in the case of the oldest age group (41.2 per cent). In keeping with the results of other studies, people in more rural areas (56.9 per cent) tended to be single more often than those in urban areas (45.3 per cent). Living in urban areas was also more often associated with cohabitation.

Among people aged 25–29, the highest percentage of married individuals (27 per cent), and those cohabitating (21.8 per cent) was observed. Interestingly, among the CEE and Baltic states, Poles and Estonians most infrequently saw themselves as married with children in the future; 62 per cent of Czechs, 57.4 per cent of Hungarians, 61.6 per cent of Slovaks, 58.3 per cent of Latvians, and 55.3 per cent of Lithuanians had similar ideas. In the Polish and Estonian data sets, it was slightly above 51 per cent. Poles also chose the option "don't know" more often than others (13.3 per cent), revealing uncertainty about the future.

The oldest age group most often reported future plans for marriage and children (55.6 per cent). Although that was also the most common scenario among the youngest respondents, people aged 15–18 often saw themselves as unmarried with a partner, and childless, in the future (11.6 per cent). Future marital plans also depended on current levels of satisfaction with family: while 58.5 per cent of people who were satisfied with their family lives reported willingness toward having a marriage with children, just 28 per cent of dissatisfied people would do the

same. Similarly, when comparing satisfaction with life and future marital plans, those who reported being dissatisfied were less likely to follow a scenario of being married and having children (33.5 per cent compared to 58.4 per cent among the satisfied respondents), and 16.5 per cent saw themselves as remaining single without children. Additionally, plans for having a spouse and children depended on the general picture of one's personal future: those who imagined it improving more often saw themselves as married parents.

Given the demographic decline observed recently in Poland, it is worth examining young people's future plans concerning children. While the majority of respondents (59.8 per cent) planned to have children, 26.9 per cent declared having no such plans. Compared to other CEE countries, young Poles were the least interested in having children (the Czech Republic: 16.5 per cent; Hungary: 22; Slovakia: 19.3). Poles were similar in this regard to respondents from the Baltic states (Estonia: 26.3 per cent; Latvia: 26.2; Lithuania: 31.6). Young women dominated among those who planned children (61.4 per cent) and those who did not have such plans (28.7 per cent), whereas men were more often unsure (16.4 per cent). Age is a key factor; the youngest respondents declared more often that they did not plan children. Interestingly, contrary to certain stereotypes, higher education seemed to positively correlate with planning children. Better economic situations also positively influenced the desire to become a parent. This corresponds with results seen in other research: stable employment for both partners is essential when planning offspring (Kotowska, Mynarska, and Gauthier 2021).

MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of this chapter may be summarised as follows:

- Family remains a significant value in young individuals' lives. The majority reported having good relationships with their parents, and a participatory form of decision-making at home. Moreover, young people tended to take on their parents' political views, despite inter-generational tensions.
- Half of young people in Poland lived with at least one parent, and one third lived with a partner. In older age groups, insufficient financial resources were a barrier to living independently.
- Among the CEE and Baltic countries studied, Poles and Estonians most rarely saw themselves as married with children in the future. One third of young respondents declared having no plans for children. Compared to other CEE countries, young Poles were the least inclined to have children.

7

GENERAL VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND PERCEPTIONS

As shown above, young Poles perceive family and friendships as important, despite changes in personal choices about family. Earlier research suggested that a shift towards post-materialistic values in Poland had been occurring (Marody et al. 2019: 23). Yet, as noted by other studies, preferences for materialistic values, including security and stability, are still strong; welfare and economic prosperity remain high-ranked priorities in many CEE countries (Szafraniec et al. 2017: 227). Post-materialistic values, such as ecology and the rights of minorities and women, are said to be supported mostly by better-educated, financially better-off parts of the youth group, from larger cities (ibidem: 302). In the FYS2021 study, the co-existence of materialist/post-materialist orientations was explored, and insights into young people's levels of life satisfaction, values and fears were obtained.

LIFE SATISFACTION

Based on the presented study, young people were generally more satisfied than dissatisfied with their lives (61.9 per cent), family life (66 per cent), friends (69.5 per cent) and education (62.6 per cent). Notably, the result concerning the final category (education) differed from their generally critical assessment of the quality of education; one may suppose that the formulation of the question mattered. Regarding general satisfaction, respondents assessed their own education rather than the system as a whole. The more satisfied young people were with their family lives ($\rho=0.527$), their education ($\rho=0.471$), and their circles of friends ($\rho=0.437$), the happier they were with their lives in general (all corrections significant, $p<0.001$).

When comparing the data from EVS (2008, 2018), a recent decrease in life satisfaction can be observed. As there was a 1–10 scale in the EVS question, the authors of the present study consider 1–4 as “dissatisfied”, 5–6 as “in between”, and 7–10 as “satisfied”. Both in 2008 and 2017, almost 81 per cent of people aged 15–29 were satisfied with their lives in general, and about 5 per cent reported dissatisfaction. This means that the level of

satisfaction has decreased in recent years, and one can speculate that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may be one of the reasons behind that. Although the majority of young Poles were rather optimistic and envisioned their personal futures positively (67.9), Poles were the most pessimistic compared to other countries studied. Like young Slovaks and Czechs, Poles were also not optimistic about the future of their own society; 36.7 per cent saw the general future as worse than now, and 20.2 per cent were uncertain.

FEARS AND CONCERNS

What young people feared the most were social injustice, pollution and climate change, having no job, and becoming seriously ill. The least important were terrorist attacks and large numbers of immigrants and refugees. It reveals that next to the concern about climate change (which is shared by other studied countries) (cf. Blachnicka-Ciacek 2020), the current fears of Polish youth are structural and material. As mentioned by an interviewee,

“[Climate change] is another issue that affects me depressingly because again - I don't know how plan my future (...) And you can see that the major figures in the international arena are not taking it seriously. And this is sad.”

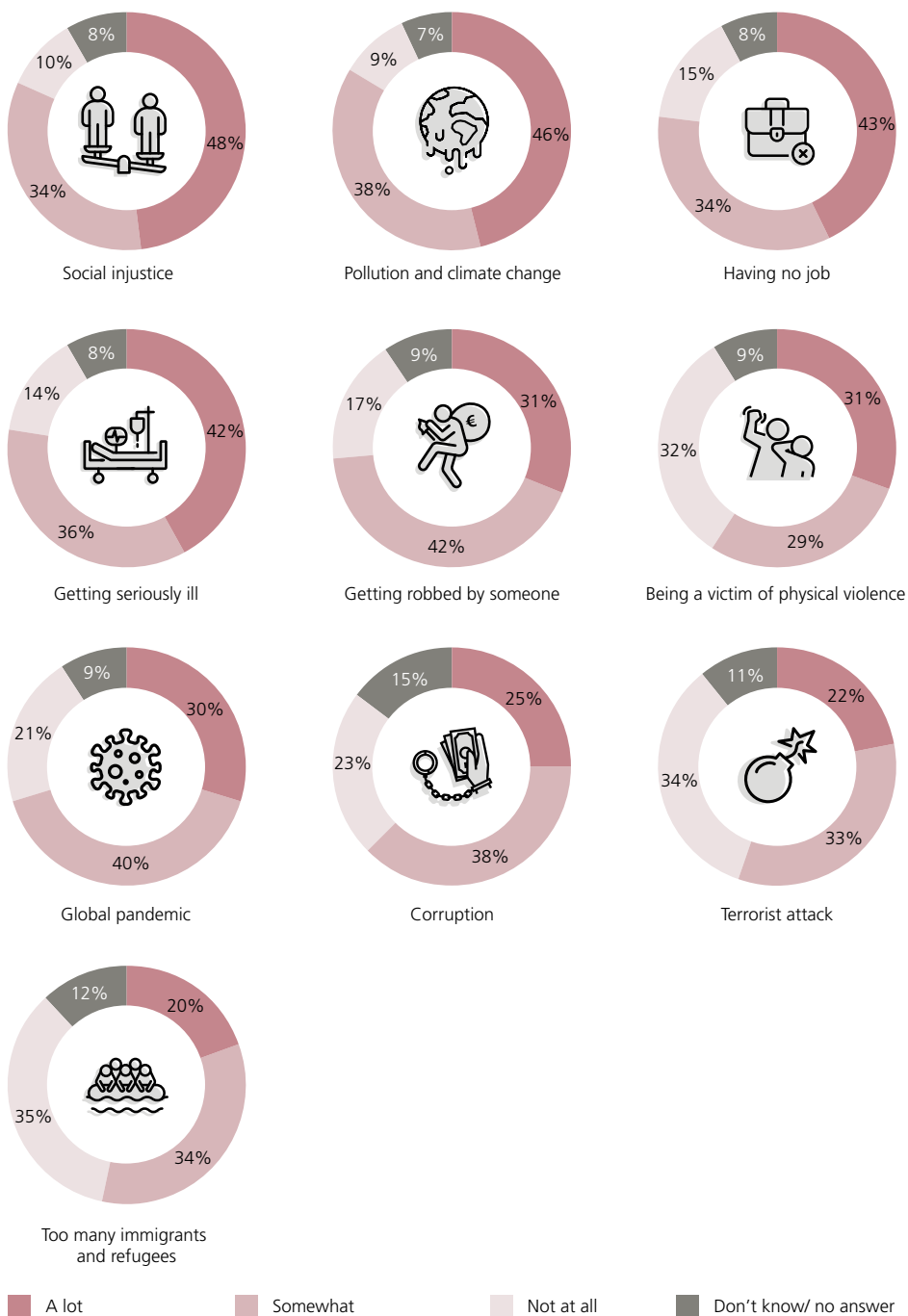
(FGI, 25–29 years old).

Another added,

“It seems to me that a lot of my friends have this problem that they don't know who they want to be in the future, they don't have any idea about themselves, and this is a problem for them and this vision... they don't have such a positive vision of transition into adulthood.”

(FGI, 19–24 years old).

FIGURE 9. BEING FRIGHTENED OR CONCERNED IN RELATION TO CERTAIN THINGS (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021; Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown

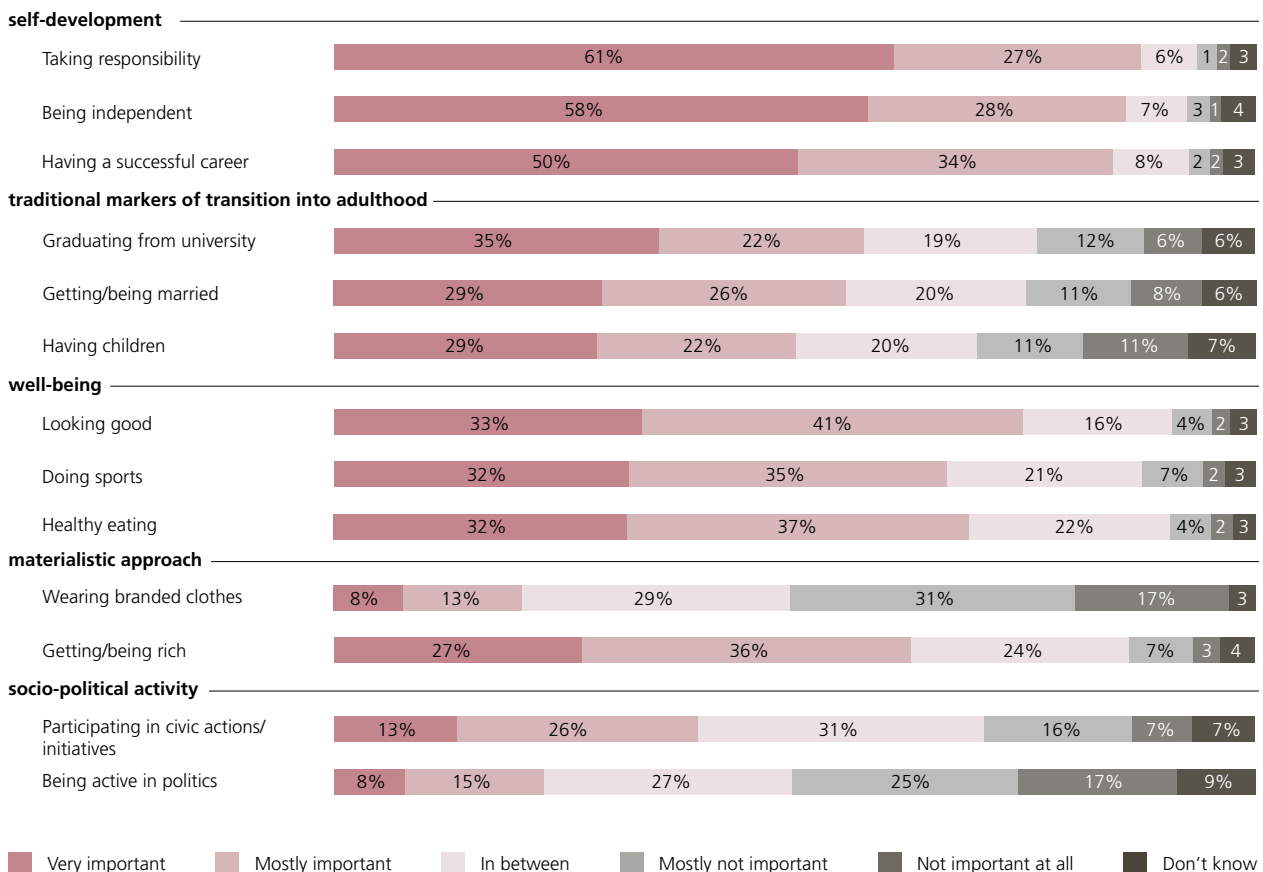
The variables of fear were strongly correlated internally: Cronbach's Alpha equals 0.781, allowing for the construction of an "index of fears" by summing up the variables in the question (the "somewhat" and "yes" answers), resulting in a 0–10 scale, where 0 means no fear, and 10 designates the greatest fear. The mean (M) of fears is M=6.95; women expressed more fears (M=7.54) than men (M=6.39), and those with basic and vocational

education (M=6.66) had fewer fears than those with higher education (M=7.36). Although both women and men had the same top four fears (social injustice, pollution and climate change, becoming seriously ill, and joblessness), 40 per cent of women (compared to 21.5 per cent of men) were also afraid of being victims of physical violence, 37.6 per cent feared the global pandemic, and 34.3 feared getting robbed.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN LIFE?

According to respondents, the most important issues (among those listed below, in Figure 10) were taking responsibility (87.5 per cent), being independent (85.9 per cent) and having a successful career (84.5 per cent). The least important were branded clothes (20.4 per cent) and being active in politics (22.8 per cent).

FIGURE 10. OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES: HOW IMPORTANT ARE THEY TO RESPONDENTS? (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021; Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown

The goals can be grouped into six categories: **self-development** (having a successful career, being independent, taking responsibility), **traditional markers of transition into adulthood** (graduating from university, getting/being married, having children), **well-being** (looking good, doing sports, healthy eating), **material goods** (wearing branded clothes, getting/being rich), and **socio-political activity** (being active in politics, participating in civic actions/initiatives). Summing up the answers “very important” and “mostly important”, the key areas for young people were self-development and well-being.

The traditional markers of transition into adulthood were important for around half of the respondents. Other trends revealed general attitudinal changes. They showed that young people were more oriented toward individual self-development and reaching professional and private stability than participation in collective actions. Although wearing branded clothes was the least important to them, getting/being rich met with the most positive evaluation: 63 per cent reported it as “very important” or “mostly important”.

TOLERANCE FOR WHAT AND WHOM?

When asked about living with different social groups, young people were most willing to have homosexuals as neighbours (only young Czechs answered more often that they would feel “good” or “very good” living next to homosexuals), and the least eager to live next to a drug addict. Juxtaposed with the European Value Studies (1999, 2008, 2017), the most noticeable difference is in the acceptance of homosexuals. In 1999, 37.9 per cent of respondents aged 15–29 mentioned them as “unwanted” neighbours; in 2017, the number was 26.3 per cent. By 2021, 12.4 per cent of young Poles reported negative feelings about living next to homosexuals (almost 50 per cent would feel “good” or “very good”). Importantly, an increase in tolerance for sexual minorities is also noticeable in other age groups in Poland (Scovil 2021b).

The most ambivalent opinions concerned national and ethnic minorities: Roma, Jews, and Muslims, where “in between” opinions dominated. The least negative perspectives were reported in the case of Jews (12 per cent), whereas around 23 per cent of respondents would not feel good having Muslims or Roma next door. Again, when looking at the tendencies (between 1999 and 2017) revealed by the EVS data, the negative attitudes against Jews remained relatively stable (from 13 to 11 per cent); in the case of Roma they increased slightly (from 32 to 38.8 per cent); in the case of Muslims, the increase in negative feelings was the most noticeable (from 10.7 to 32.5 per cent). The change can be interpreted through the lens of radicalised public discourse on migrants, e.g., during the so-called “refugee crisis”, widely discussed in 2015 (see Stefaniak 2015). Nevertheless, based on individual and group interviews, young people felt the generational difference, viewed themselves as more open-minded, and criticised the intolerance that they identified as predominant in Polish society,

“(…) We are not open to any novelties at all. And as it has already been said, we are such traditionalists and we generally do not like it when things are different than they have always been. We always react negatively to such things as a different sexual orientation.”

(FGI, 15–18 years old)

“(…) if there is a sexual or religious minority, or a foreigner, it is not only that someone thinks badly of them, but it often happens that people who have negative thoughts about them, call them names, make up different terms for them. It even comes to violence sometimes.”

(FGI, 25–29 years old)

Simultaneously, when asked about the general situation of migrants in Poland, the participants of qualitative interviews referred first of all to Ukrainians and their position in the labour market. Thus, Ukrainians were presented as competitors (because of the lower wages they accept) or contributors (because they often do “unwanted” jobs). As one of interviewees mentioned,

“it’s migrants, that’s one of the most powerful things that drives the labour force and the economy of countries.”

(FGI, 19–24 years old).

Interestingly, some young interview participants also shared the idea that employers get extra subsidies for hiring immigrants. At the same time, others reacted and compared the Ukrainians’ situations to Poles working abroad,

“There is an assumption that they are taking our jobs, the jobs from Poles, and this is not true because the same Poles go to Great Britain or Germany to do exactly the same thing.”

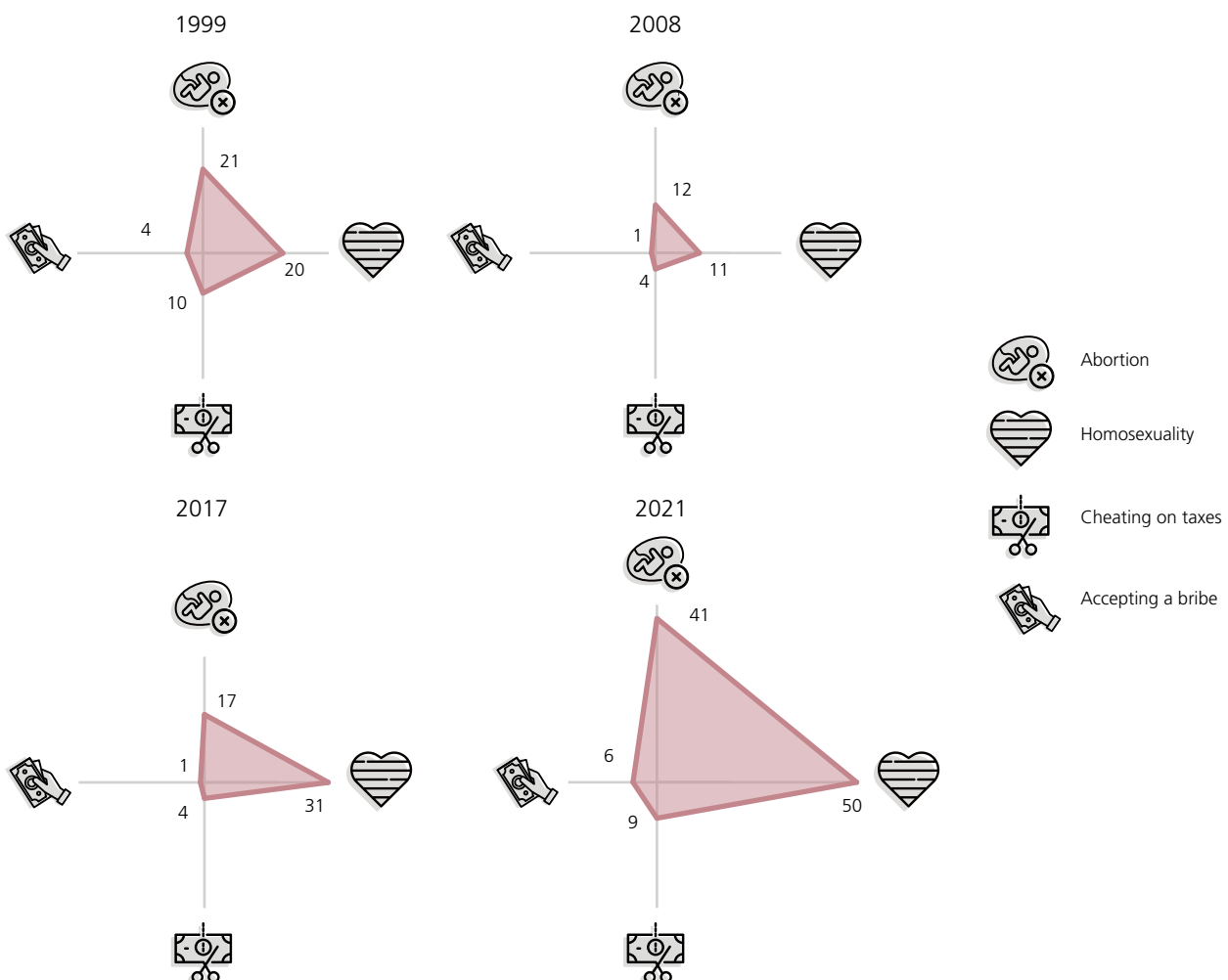
(FGI, 19–24 years old)

When asked about justified behaviours⁵, young people presented the highest support for homosexuality (M= 6.9), using connections to find a job (M= 6.5) and abortion (M= 6.4). The lowest acceptance appeared in the case of accepting bribes (M= 2.8) and cheating on taxes (M= 2.8). While using connections to find a job or “get things done” garnered similar opinions, young people differed on abortion, homosexuality, tax fraud and accepting/giving bribes. Women, the younger age cohort, and left-wingers expressed more acceptance for abortion and homosexuality, whereas men, older age cohorts, and right-wingers presented more support for cheating on taxes “if you have a chance” and accepting bribes.

Based on earlier EVS results, it is worth examining what has changed since 1999. According to a scale (1 “never” to 10 “always”), answers 8–10 were summed up to see the changes concerning acceptance. Despite the decline in acceptance of abortion and homosexuality in 2008, in recent years, more positive perceptions of abortion and homosexuality may be noted. Importantly, 22.7 per cent of young respondents in 2021 answered that abortion is always acceptable. It is likely a result of the restrictions in abortion laws in 2020, followed by the women’s strikes.

⁵ The authors do not consider homosexuality to be a behavior, as that would imply that it is an individual’s decision. However, the question was adopted from the EVS surveys in order to make comparisons.

FIGURE 11. CHANGES IN PERCEPTION OF CHOSEN BEHAVIOURS AS JUSTIFIED (%)



Note: The sum of answers 8–10 on the 1–10 scale (1 “never” to 10 “always”) included.
Source: FES Youth Study 2021; EVS 1999, EVS 2008, EVS 2017.

Another interesting observation is that young people seem to accept cheating on taxes and accepting bribes more than before. One of the potential interpretations can be general disappointment with politics and rather liberal economic views. Thus, cheating on taxes can be perceived as a way of dealing with an unfair State that is not supportive of entrepreneurs or young people trying to reach financial independence and stability. Such a hypothesis could be based on the qualitative interviews, during which participants shared their concerns about their economic situations and future prospects,

“Well, if I ever wanted to start my own business, in Poland there is Sanepid [sanitary-epidemiological stations], inspections, taxes, fees and other strange things, and abroad, when my friends opened their business, it even easier, the government helps them to open it.”

(FGI, 15–18 years old)

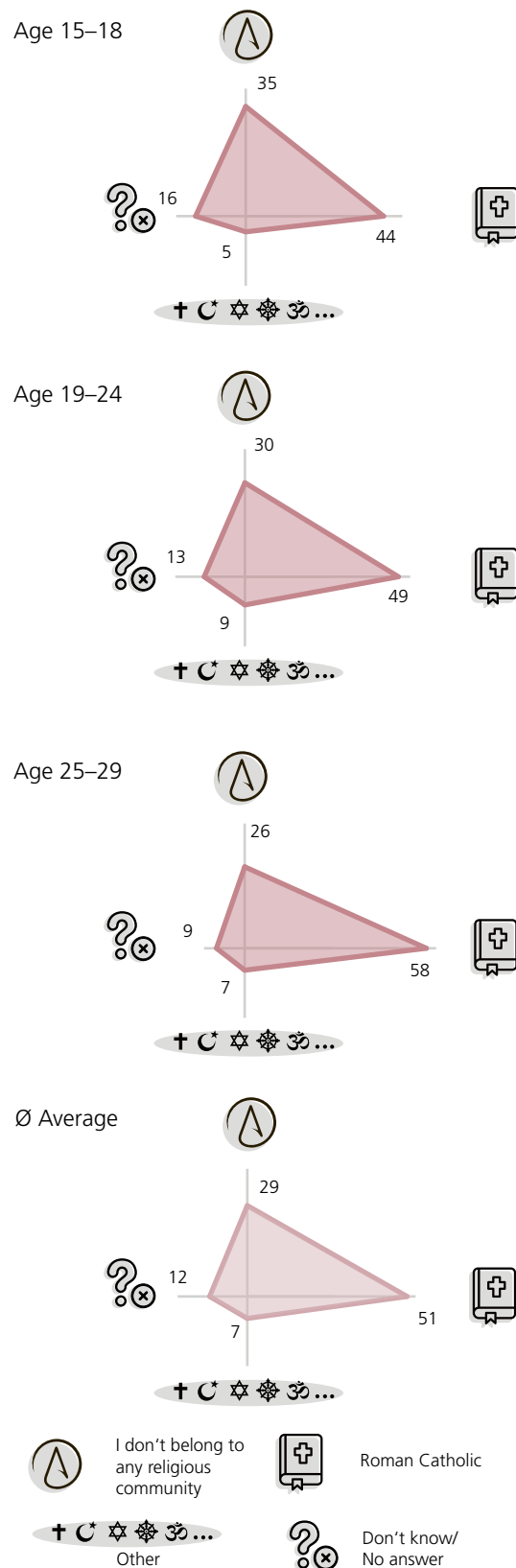
“I can see how many Polish companies decide to withdraw, quit after 20, 30 years (...) High taxes that employers have to pay, social insurance – these are all high costs, they do not help at all.”

(IDI, 25–29 years old)

ARE YOUNG POLES RELIGIOUS?

Importantly, half of the respondents reportedly belonged to the Roman Catholic church, whereas almost 30 per cent stated that they did not belong to any religious affiliation. 12 per cent did not know or refused to answer. Compared to the EVS survey from 2017, a significant increase may be seen in the number of young people who report not belonging to a religious denomination (up from 15.8 per cent) and a decrease in those belonging to the Roman Catholic church (from 81.4 per cent in 2017 to 51.4 per cent in 2021). Interestingly, as about six per cent of young Catholics reported that they practically never attended religious services, the same per centage of non-believers did so regularly (more than once per month). In both cases, more than 40 per cent of young Poles attended religious services irregularly (less than once per month).

FIGURE 12. BELONGING TO A RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION BY AGE GROUP (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

Considering the percentage of young Poles that distrusted the Catholic church, it may be assumed that they were once formally linked to the Catholic church and have distanced themselves from it, manifested in no religious affiliation. Looking at the ages, the youngest cohort most often declared themselves to be non-believers (34.8 per cent) and the least often as Roman Catholics (44 per cent). Among the oldest cohort, 58 per cent belonged to the Roman Catholic church, and 26 per cent did not belong to any religious community. Place of living seemed important: young respondents living in more urban areas reported not belonging to a religious community more often (32.4 per cent) than those who lived in rural areas (24.1 per cent).

The answers concerning religious belonging and practices reveal a generational tendency among younger people to leave the church, which has been noticeable for years (Głowacki 2019). Disappointment in the Catholic church and its involvement in politics was also confirmed in the qualitative interviews and is discussed in other sections of the report.

MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- Compared to earlier years, young Poles expressed greater acceptance of homosexuals. The most ambivalent opinions concerning potential neighbours were reported in the case of national and ethnic minorities (Roma, Jews, and Muslims).
- In recent years, positive perceptions of abortion have risen significantly. A recent increase in the percentage saying that abortion is always justified can be seen as the result of the restrictions in abortion laws in 2020, followed by the Women's Strikes.
- While half of the respondents belonged to the Roman Catholic church, almost 30 per cent stated that they did not belong to any religious community. Compared to earlier research, there is a decrease (especially in the youngest age group) in the number of people defining themselves as Catholics.
- Young Poles were generally more satisfied (between 61 and 69 per cent) than dissatisfied with their lives, families, friends, and education. However, compared to earlier years, satisfaction with life has decreased.
- Social injustice, pollution and climate change, joblessness, and getting seriously ill are the top four fears reported by young Poles. The least important fears were terrorist attacks and too many immigrants and refugees.
- When asked about the importance of different goals/achievements, young people were more oriented toward individual self-development and reaching professional and private stability than participation in collective activities.

8

POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND PARTICIPATION

Public and academic discussions about young people's political attitudes and their disengagement from institutional politics are ongoing. Whilst younger generations are portrayed as potential bringers of change, various surveys show that their political engagement, including voting, has declined (Henn and Weinstein 2006; Zielińska 2015; Pazderski 2018). Some researchers argue that a broader understanding of political participation should be considered, including new channels of mobilisation (e.g. online engagement), and diversification of agencies, repertoires of actions, and targets whom participants seek to influence (Norris 2002; Côté 2014). This would allow for another picture of young people's political activities.

In Poland, two main tendencies concerning young people and politics were noticeable until recently: decreasing interest in official politics, and an increase in support for right-wing and anti-system political parties (e.g. Messyasz 2015; Kazanecki 2015). As public opinion surveys show, that changed in the late 2010s. Firstly, interest in politics has recently increased. Secondly, the percentage of the youngest respondents (18–24) declaring right-wing views has clearly dropped and has become lower than in the general population of respondents, whereas left-wing beliefs have started being declared more often than before (Scovil 2021a).

INTEREST IN POLITICS

A majority of young respondents located themselves somewhere in between, when asked about interest in politics (29.1 per cent). 29.8 per cent claimed to be very interested or mostly interested, whereas 36.3 reported no interest or mostly no interest in politics. However, compared to other countries studied, only young Czechs reported (slightly) more interest in politics. To interpret the data, it is also worth analysing a broader perspective,

and the general increase in interest in politics that started in 2014 and intensified between 2019 and 2021 (Scovil 2021a). According to a CBOS survey, the current level of interest in politics among Poles aged 18–24 is the highest in the history of their research (ibidem). Another survey has shown that more than half of young respondents became more interested in politics during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pazderski 2020). In addition, significantly more women than men (60 per cent vs 46 per cent), have become more interested in politics (ibidem). One may assume that restrictions on abortion laws in 2020 followed by massive women's strikes and the pandemic (including related restrictions) have strengthened young people's interest in politics and their awareness of being dependent on political decisions. The changes were also reflected in the young people's statements during FGLs, including those related to limited consultation of policy-making during the pandemic,

"It [politics] certainly has an oppressive effect, well (...) Well, it blows me away. Well, it's a kind of fear of what will happen next. Because right now it's bad."

(FGL, 25–29 years old)

"(...) our government does what it wants with us. And in other countries people have the right to choose, and here decisions are made on the top. Because we didn't want [the government] to close down hairdressing salons, malls, and so on. (...) Instead of dealing with giving more vaccines and more funds for this, they prefer to close [everything] and tell us not to meet."

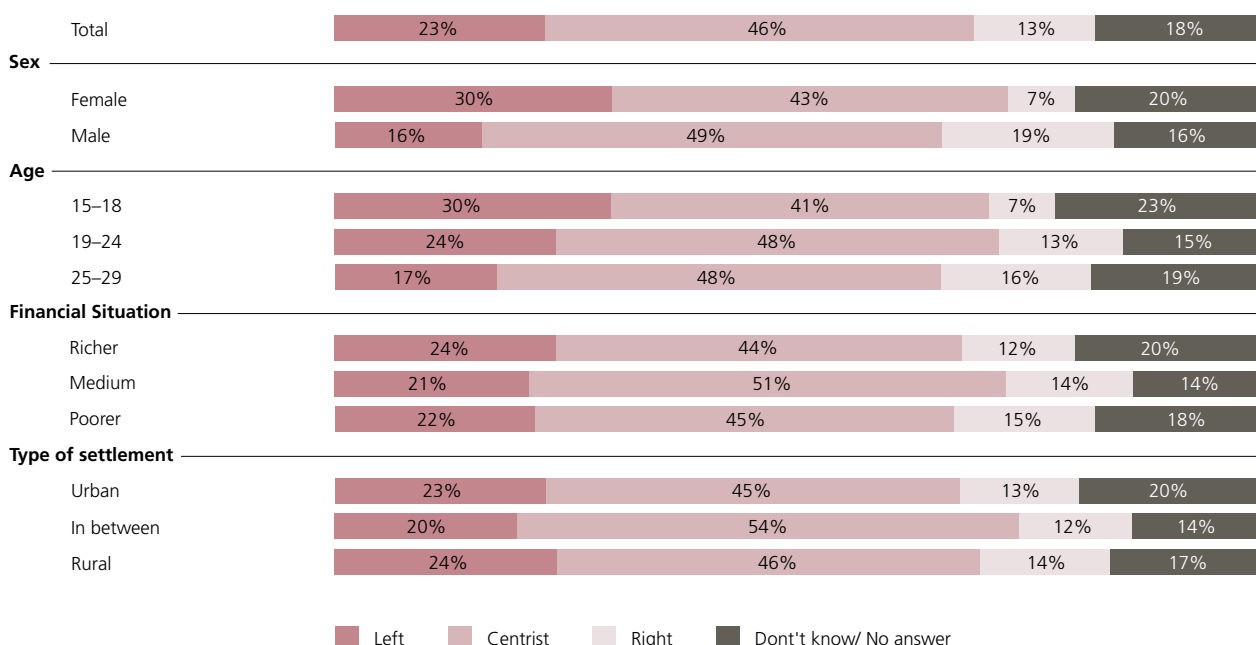
(FGL, 15–18 years old)

POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

One of the noteworthy findings regarding political attitudes relates to the left/right scale. Compared to other countries, the percentage of young Poles declaring left-wing attitudes (the sum of answers 1–3 on a 1–10 scale) was relatively high (22.6 per cent). However, a majority of respondents reported being centrist, and the lowest number (13 per cent) saw themselves as right-wingers. The mean was 4.98. This was in accordance with other research, showing recent increases in left-wing attitudes among young people. As the CBOS (Scovil 2021a) survey

showed, identification with the left-wing among young Poles in 2020 was the highest since the beginning of the 1990s. Nearly a twofold increase in left-wing identification (from 17 per cent to 30 per cent) was reported; it should be borne in mind, however, that the percentage of right-wing declarations among the youngest respondents also increased by four percentage points, while the number of centrist identifications dropped. Above all, the percentage of “it is difficult to say” answers dropped (from 31 per cent to 18 per cent) (ibidem). It shows that young people started to situate themselves on the left-right wing spectrum more decisively than before, which may correspond with the general increase in interest in politics.

FIGURE 13. POLITICAL VIEWS BY FINANCIAL STATUS, AGE CATEGORIES, GENDER AND PLACE OF LIVING (%)



Note: Political views measured on a scale of 1–10, recoded: 1–3: left, 4–7: centrist, 8–10: right.

Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

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

The results show that the new wave of left-wing attitudes is not class-based and does not correlate with economic situation. Age and gender seemed to be the most important variables differentiating political views on the left-right scale. The youngest group (29.7 per cent) and women (29.8 per cent) most frequently declared support for left-wing ideas. When considering the youngest group, 37.1 per cent of the youngest women (compared to 18.3 per

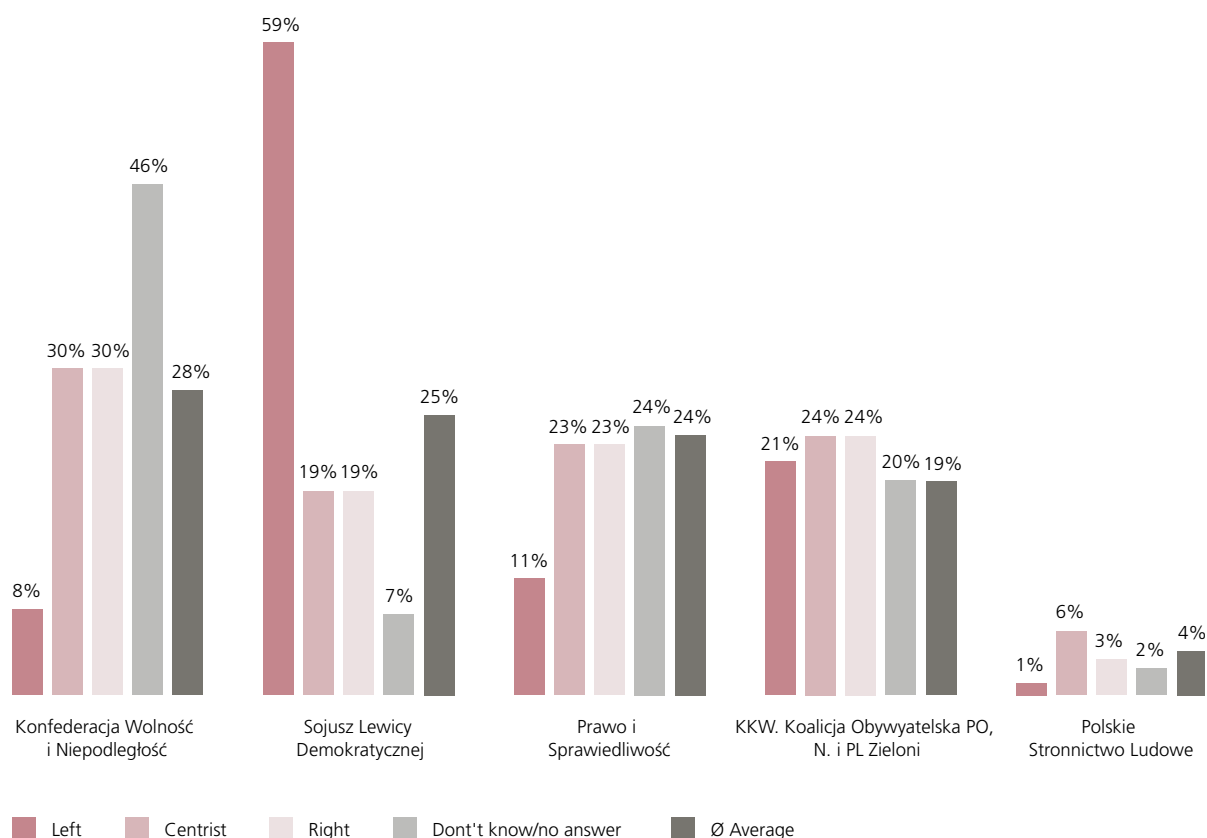
cent of the oldest women) and 17.6 per cent of the youngest men saw themselves on the left-wing spectrum of the scale. 10.7 per cent of the youngest men and only 4.9 per cent of the youngest women declared being more on the right. In the case of other age groups, general tendencies regarding gender differences were similar. The authors assume that this gender-dimensioned political polarisation can present challenges in future romantic relationships.

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH POLITICS

Like their peers in other CEE countries, almost half of young Poles (48 per cent) did not think that their interests were represented in politics. 17.1 per cent said that young people were “not at all” represented, 30.9 per cent stated that their interests were represented “poorly”, and another 29.1 per cent chose the answer “in between”. Taking into consideration that the right-wing conservative party “Law and Justice” has been governing Poland since 2015, people with right-wing views felt they were represented (29.6 per cent, with the “quite” or “very well”

answers combined) more often than people with left-wing views (11.9 per cent). Similar to left-wingers, centrist-oriented respondents reported rather low feelings of being represented (11.6 per cent). The young respondents’ choices in the parliamentary elections in 2019 confirmed their confusion about the political scene. Only the “Democratic Left Alliance” party attracted people identifying themselves with left-wing views. Left-wingers were the least inclined to vote for “Law and Justice” (11 per cent). While the majority of “Confederation” party voters were people who reported undefined political views, the liberal-centrist “Civic Coalition” party attracted a similar percentage of people, representing various political orientations.

FIGURE 14. POLITICAL CHOICES IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN 2019 BY DECLARED POLITICAL VIEWS (%)



Note: The answers of respondents who voted and defined the chosen political party included.

Note: Note: Political views measured on a scale of 1–10, recoded: 1–3: left, 4–7: centrist, 8–10: right

Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

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

The ISP (Institute of Public Affairs) survey conducted in 2020 (N=750) among young people (16–29) showed that 66 per cent of respondents were not satisfied with the political situation in Poland at the time, and dissatisfaction with political life had significantly increased since 2018. Simultaneously, satisfaction with the Polish government had decreased since 2018 by 10 per cent (Pazderski 2020). All three groups who participated in the FGLs were also rather critical about the governing party, and more generally about the political parties in Poland. The results showed that young people tended to feel disappointed, unnoticed, and thus detached from official politics. Moreover, they avoided defining themselves as “political”, but this “(a)politicism” seem to be “a camouflaged political stance that combines both people who display a lack of political engagement in any form (political indifferentism) and people who manifest their negative attitude towards politics and politicians in this way (passive contestation)” (Messyasz 2015: 75). Thus, it is not only a lack of precise political views, but also a certain rebellion against politics (which can be a form of being political in a broad sense) that can result from general aversion to politics.

“I don’t identify with any political group, that’s what I mean by that, I’m apolitical, you can be anti-political or apolitical, well, I think you can tell the difference. Well, it’s just a ‘whatever approach’.”

(FGL, 19–24 years old)

“This moment of the election itself is also one that ... I don’t know, I’m experiencing it, because for me it choosing the lesser of two evils, really. And I am not sure what I am doing, for whom I’m voting for. And I’m really only doing it so that someone else doesn’t win. But I feel bad personally.”

(FGL, 25–29 years old)

Experiences such as the women’s strikes (2020), which did not lead to any political consequences, seem to have provided further confirmation for feelings of being unheard, and may be a source of growing helplessness. Some of the respondents explicitly referred to the need for radicalisation,

“It seems to me that if the women’s strikes, which lasted for many days in fact, accomplished nothing, for the government to come up with any kind of compromise for women, for society, then it really seems to me that until we start setting cars on fire and so on, nothing is going to happen in this country.”

(FGL, 25–29 years old)

At the same time, both the FGLs and the survey showed that a certain number of young people had got involved and believed that young people should have a voice and influence on what is happening in politics.

FORMS OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Despite their reluctance toward involvement in official politics, 22.8 per cent of respondents admitted that being active in politics was (very or mostly) important. Most of the FYS2021 study participants (62.7 per cent) agreed that voting belongs to a citizen’s duties, and young people should have more opportunities to speak out in politics. Although the majority of young people did not want to get involved in official politics (63.1 per cent would not like to take on a political function), most of them (79.3 per cent) declared their willingness to vote in the next elections. Compared to earlier studies, as reported by CBOS (Scovil 2021a), until 2020, the percentage of young Poles determined to participate in elections had never exceeded 70 per cent since 1989. Moreover, some of young respondents had already had experiences with participation in political (online and offline) initiatives. As one of the FGL participants said,

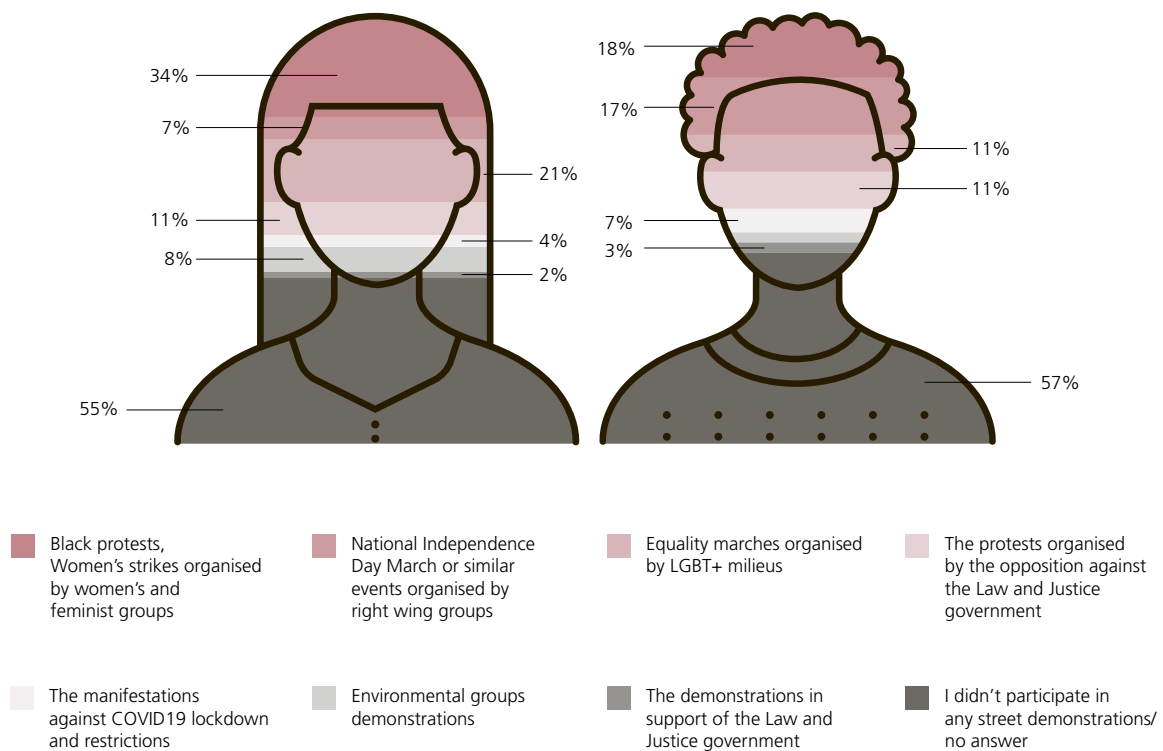
“I think you just need to educate yourself, to become active, I do not mean to be an activist, but to start acting in some small areas, changing things step by step and finally when you reach something bigger, then you can take a pitchfork and try to overthrow what is now.”

(FGL, 19–24 years old)

When looking at gender dimensions, young women were more willing to get politically involved. 48 per cent of female respondents had taken part in volunteer or civil society organisation activities (men, 30 per cent), 53 per cent had signed a petition with political requests (men, 40 per cent), and 36 per cent had stopped doing things for political and environmental reasons (men, 26 per cent). Young men had more experience in only one category, namely working in a political party or political group: compared to five per cent of young women, 10 per cent of male respondents had already done so. Nevertheless, as other research confirms, young Poles prefer less demanding and time-consuming forms of political participation, and they are least interested in joining a political party (Pazderski et al. 2018), which corresponds to their aversion to official politics and distrust in political parties.

When focussing on participation in demonstrations, 58 per cent of young Poles had reportedly had such experiences. Young women had taken part in protests concerning women's rights more often (Black Lives Matter Movement, women's strikes), equality marches, and environmental group demonstrations, whereas men's participation was more noticeable in Independence Day marches or other right-wing events, and manifestations against COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions. Similar percentages of men and women took part in protests organised by the opposition against the actions of the governing party. Again, it shows that gender constitutes a significant factor in differentiating political views and practices.

FIGURE 15. PARTICIPATION IN MAJOR PROTESTS BY GENDER (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

OPINIONS ON DEMOCRACY

Generally, commitment to the democratic political system dominated, with the majority of respondents (52.6 per cent) considering democracy “a good form of government in general”. However, 26 per cent were not fully sure about that, and another 11.3 per cent did not agree. Compared to the previous EVS survey, commitment to the democratic political system remained strong among young Poles, though it has fallen since 2008, when 89.2 per cent of people aged 15–29 agreed with such a statement (importantly, there was no “in between” option in the survey). In relation to other Visegrad countries studied (Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary), young Poles were the most sceptical of democracy.

There was no unambiguous rejection of dictatorship as a form of government that could be better than democracy under certain circumstances: although 44.1 per cent disagreed with it, almost 45 per cent agreed or placed their opinions somewhere in between. It corresponds with the support given to the idea that “we should have a leader, who rules Poland with a strong hand, for the public good”: 35.4 per cent agreed with it, 27 per cent did not, and others (27.4 per cent) put their opinions somewhere in between.

Considering that the criticism of (liberal) democracy and support of strong leadership characterise right-wing groups, the above answers correlated with declared political beliefs. Indeed, right-wing respondents (19.9 per cent) tended to disagree with the statement that democracy is a good form of government more often than centrists (11.3 per cent) and the left-wing oriented (8 per cent). Likewise, they were also more inclined (43.9 per cent) to accept dictatorship as an exceptional form of government compared to centrists (24.1 per cent) and left-wingers (12.4 per cent). Greater support among women than men for democracy and less for dictatorship could be observed (both in the left-wing and right-wing). The older the male respondents were, the more inclined they were to accept dictatorship.

As democracy can be defined variously, it is worth seeing what the FGI participants’ stands were. As in the case of the survey respondents, the idea of democracy seemed tricky: on the one hand, individuals supported the idea (more or less), but on the other hand, they were not very satisfied with how it was working in Poland.

“[Poland is a democratic country], it’s just that often people have the wrong perception of democracy (...) maybe the problem with us, Poles, is that we have a wrong idea of what democracy is, and unfortunately this is what democracy looks like, and in my opinion, democracy is not good at all.”

(FGI, 19–24 years old)

“I think democracy is OK, but maybe not in such a corrupt country, with such a long past, where in fact it is the same people who functioned in communist Poland and only just change their masks (...)”

(FGI, 19–24 years old)

Since consideration of people’s voices was seen by respondents as an important feature of democratic systems, their feeling of powerlessness in the political life of the country led some of them to criticise the existing democracy in Poland.

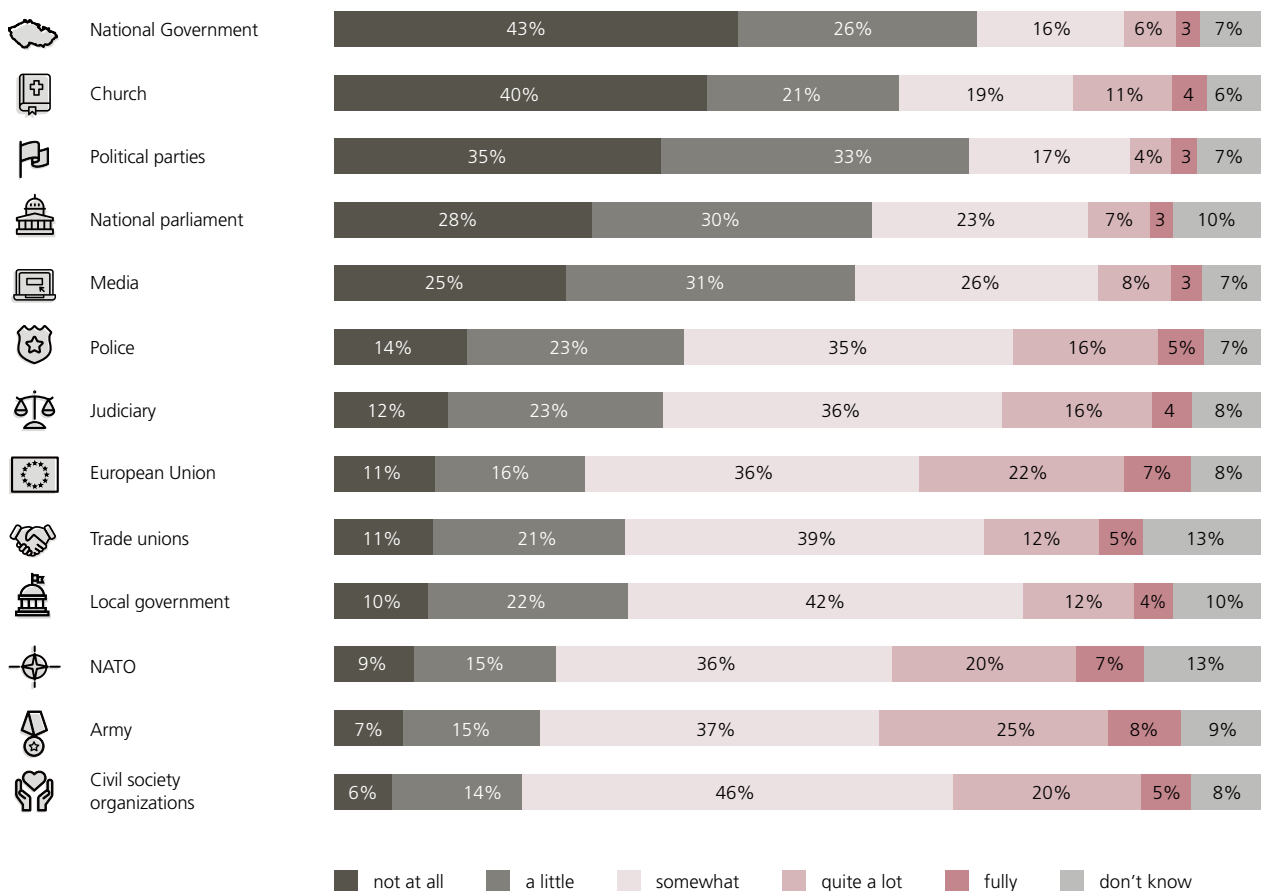
TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

The FYS2021 survey confirmed the limited trust of young Poles in the key political institutions in the country. Firstly, as already mentioned, young people reported little trust in those tied with parliamentary politics. The most distrusted institution was the national government: 43.4 per cent did not trust it at all, and 25.7 per cent trusted it a little. Importantly, compared to other studied CEE and Baltic states, Polish youth had the highest level of distrust in the national government. Similar critical assessments concerned political parties and the national parliament. The second-most distrusted institution was the church: 40 per cent of young people did not trust it at all; 20.7 per cent trusted it a little. The third player that met with little trust were the media: 24.9 per cent of respondents reported having no trust in them; 31.1 per cent trusted them only a little. The most trusted institutions were the army

(7.8 per cent reported complete trust, and another 24.6 per cent trusted it quite a lot); civil society organisations (5.4 per cent fully trusted them; 20.2 per cent trusted them quite a lot), the EU (7.2 per cent indicated full trust, and 22 per cent quite a lot), and NATO (7.4 per cent stated they fully trusted it, and 19.7 per cent trusted it quite a lot).

On a scale from 1 (no trust at all) to 5 (complete trust), young Poles proved to be on average the least trustful towards political institutions in CEE and the Baltic states: the mean (M) of all answers was 2.54, compared to 3.08 for Estonia (whose score was the highest) and 2.78 for the entire sample. Low levels of trust in Polish society compared to other countries in the region was also observed in earlier studies. Among other things, it was explained by the greater relevance of close family and friendship bonds over any kind of socio-political organisations, as a legacy of feudalism which was reproduced and perhaps reinforced during socialist times (Gardawski 2021: 278).

FIGURE 16. TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.; Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

The focus group interviews only confirmed the results. Government, political parties, and the Church were highly criticised. The government and Church were defined as the most influential players, who cooperate with each other:

“The Church I think has a big influence on what’s going on in our country because, well, it’s hard to hide the fact that the government has a good relationship with the Church. Often it just listens to this Church on various issues.”

(FGI, 25–29 years old)

As regards the media, the opinions were more complex: as some FGI participants still saw free media in Poland, others criticised them for being dependent, and manipulative. Thus, as already demonstrated, young individuals tended to look for information in social media and alternative news portals on the Internet (see Pazderski et al. 2018).

OPINIONS ON THE WELFARE STATE AND NATION

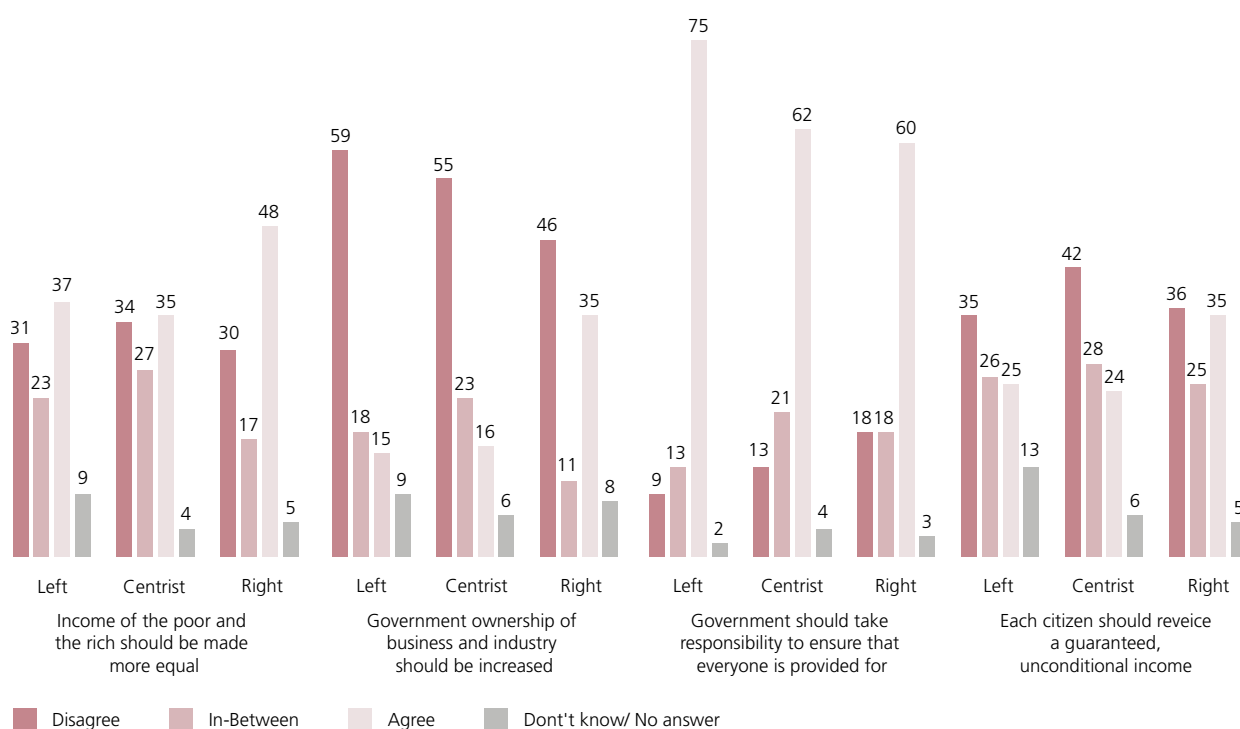
To “unpack” young people’s views on socio-political and economic life, the questions concerning the welfare state and policies favouring more equal incomes were analysed. Generally, young people (66.8 per cent) supported the idea that “government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for” (though 11.3 per cent disagreed, others were ambivalent or did not know how to answer). Simultaneously, 37.6 per cent agreed that “incomes of the poor and rich should be made more equal”, which was the lowest level of support among the studied countries (29.4 per cent disagreed, compared to 5.8 per cent in Hungary). They were not sure about the introduction of universal basic income, either: 37.3 per cent of young people disagreed that “each citizen, including those in work, should receive a guaranteed income from the state without a work requirement”, and only

25.5 per cent were in favour; the greatest enthusiasts of basic income can be found in Hungary (47.2 per cent) and in the Baltic states (around 40 per cent). The majority of the Polish respondents (53.1 per cent) did not agree with the statement that “government ownership of business and industry should be increased”; only 17.3 per cent of respondents agreed. Disapproval of the nationalisation of businesses was the highest in Poland among the CEE and Baltic countries surveyed; the greatest support for it was observed in Latvia (39.4 per cent) and Slovakia (35.5 per cent). This weaker support for regulatory and redistributive functions of the state among Poles would require further analysis, as it contradicts the results of earlier studies which demonstrated the dominance of more protectionist attitudes (Gardawski 2021).

Looking at the answers and financial situations of young respondents, one can say that the welfare state postulates met with higher support from those who had dealt with financial challenges: those who reported not having enough money for basic bills and food or having enough money for basics but not for clothes and shoes agreed the most. The only question in which the support of the richest respondents dominated was the one about the government’s responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.

People define left-wing, right-wing, and centrist views differently, thus it was worth seeing what views were represented when the aforementioned questions were answered. Interestingly, contrary to expectations, left-wing respondents did not necessarily support such postulates as increasing the equality of incomes or the introduction of universal basic income. In both cases, right-wingers agreed with these ideas more often. Although the majority of young people did not support the idea of an increase in government ownership of businesses and industries, again right-wingers were those who supported the idea the most. This suggests that the left-wing turn is mostly driven by opposition to conservative values rather than by support for a traditionally socialist and pro-welfare economic agenda.

FIGURE 17. WELFARE STATE VIEWS BY DECLARED POLITICAL VIEWS (%)



Note: Political views measured on a scale of 1-10, recoded: 1-3: left, 4-7: centrist, 8-10: right.

Note: Don't know/no answers in case of political views excluded.

Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

Based on the focus group interviews, it can be said that young participants are rather individualistic and market-oriented in terms of economics. They criticise the Polish government's flagship program "500+"⁶ as a tool for 'buying voters', which was badly organised. According to some of the interviewees, the idea of social support is not wrong in itself, but it should be dedicated to the needy and should not discourage people from working; it echoes the ultra-liberal argument against the welfare state which stigmatises its beneficiaries as not contributing to the collective good. The respondents did not seem to see themselves as potential beneficiaries of the programme but as taxpayers who lose money because of it.

"The government compounds to simply attract people to themselves. For example, let's take 500+ programme, that the government is giving something to convince people to vote for them, but unfortunately many people do not see that the government does not have its own money, but it all comes out of our pockets."

(FGI, 25–29 years old)

"I'll just say that for example this money, this 500+, well it could be also a bit better organised.(...) in majority of cases 500+ goes to this group of people, who will not contribute anything to the country. They will just live off it, these children will have maybe some part of it, then they will have of all this, there will be decent conditions for them, but most of all these people will not contribute anything."

(FGI, 25–29 years old)

Another relevant issue concerns attitudes towards the Polish nation and the openness of young people to migrants. As the analysis shows, 38.8 per cent of young Poles admitted being "proud to be a citizen of Poland", which was the lowest result among the countries studied, comparable only to Hungarians (40 per cent), but much lower than Estonians (64.8 per cent). 49.4 per cent disagreed with the idea that "it would be the best if Poland was inhabited only by real Poles", which was the highest level of disagreement among the CEE and Baltic countries, toward an ethnocentric vision of one's own nation.

⁶ The government program Rodzina 500+ was created in 2016. A benefit of 500 PLN is paid monthly for every child under 18 years old, regardless of family income.

Similarly, young Poles rejected the statement that people of different nationalities should adopt their country's customs and values (36 per cent disapproved, 30 per cent were in between, 27 per cent approved) more than their peers in other countries. Simultaneously, the majority of young Poles (38.5 per cent) were against the principle that Poland should accept more immigrants; only 21.1 per cent of them agreed, which was more than average and second only to Lithuania (26.7 per cent).

All in all, **despite a right-turn in the recent past, young Poles appear to be less inclined to support “nationalistic” values than their peers in other CEE and Baltic countries, though they are also very sceptical about accepting more immigrants into the country.** The focus group interviews brought deeper knowledge on young people's opinions on migrants in Poland. Unlike the survey results, participants presented themselves as rather open and tolerant individuals, who had observed some tensions and negative attitudes towards non-Poles. Importantly, immigration was perceived differently depending on the immigrants' origins. While the social perception of immigrants from Western Europe was said to be positive, respondents indicated that some Polish workers perceived Ukrainians as competitors on the labour market. However, they tended to distance themselves from such a view by indicating that Poles should be more open and think about the way they would like to be welcomed in other places.

“It seems to me that when someone comes to us from America, England, Spain, Italy, or even from Japan, as some educated people, they are treated in a completely different way than if someone from Ukraine, Syria, Kazakhstan, Romania works here.”

(FGI, 19–24 years old)

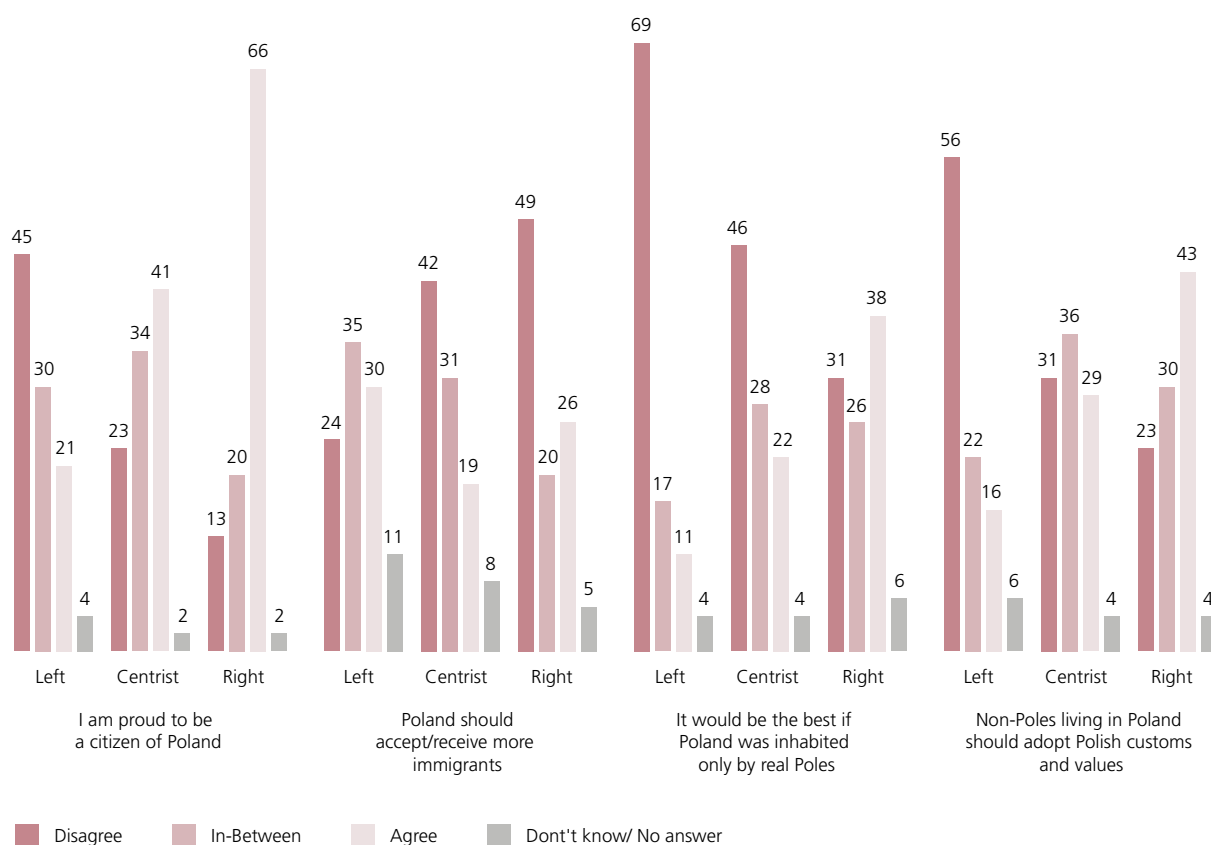
“It seems to me that it depends on the salary, in super corporations they are treated well, no one is humiliated. When they go somewhere to work, some factory (...), there are Ukrainians and Poles, well, you know that Poles think that they are better.”

(FGI, 19–24 years old)

It may be assumed that gender and age mattered here; generally, more “nationalistic” orientations were reported in the case of older age groups, and more often among men than women. The slightest gender differences occurred in the case of acceptance for more immigrants (20.6 per cent of women and 21.5 per cent of men agreed with it). In both cases, the least acceptance could be observed in the oldest age groups: 47 per cent of men and 52.6 per cent of women between 25 and 29 years old did not agree with accepting more immigrants. Additionally, a correlation between the assessed household economic situation and some of the nationalist-oriented statements was observed: the better the economic situation, the less support for the statement that “It would be the best if Poland was inhabited only by real Poles” (ρ : $-.244$, $p < 0.001$) and “non-Poles living in Poland should adopt Polish customs and values” (ρ : $-.165$, $p < 0.001$).

It was also worth assessing the relationship between “nationalistic” attitudes and political orientations (Figure 17). Young people locating themselves more on the right were more often proud to be citizens of Poland (66 per cent) than those in the centre and on the left; they supported the need for non-Poles to adopt Polish customs and values when living in Poland (43.4 per cent); they admitted that “it would be the best if Poland was inhabited only by real Poles” (37.6 per cent), and disagreed that Poland should accept more immigrants (49 per cent). Simultaneously, 69 per cent of left-wingers disagreed with the idea of “Poland for Poles”, 55.9 per cent did not think that non-Poles should adopt Polish customs and values, and only 30.2 per cent agreed that more immigrants should be accepted. In the latter case, people who placed themselves more in the centre presented similar tendencies to right-wingers.

FIGURE 18. NATIONALISTIC ATTITUDES BY DECLARED POLITICAL VIEWS (%)



Note: Political views measured on a scale of 1–10, recoded: 1–3: left, 4–7: centrist, 8–10: right.

Note: Don't know/no answer in case of political views excluded.

Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

Young people's political beliefs were also addressed in the questions concerning social aversions and tensions. Among five potentially conflicting groups, the majority of young people indicated two as strong: between the rulers and the ruled (67.5 per cent) and between people who agreed with the interference of the Catholic Church in political life and those who are against it (60.8 per cent). As the national government and Church were among the most distrusted institutions, these results should not come as a surprise. Less than 50 per cent considered socio-economic conflicts to be strong between the rich and the poor (35.8 per cent), Polish employees and immigrants working in Poland (34.4 per cent), and owners/managers of companies and the workers employed there (33.2 per cent). Earlier studies (Gardawski 2021; Marody et al. 2019) have also confirmed the cultural and political sources of current tensions and the relative lesser importance of the divisions connected with class identities and the sphere of work.

OPINIONS ON THE EU

Concerning discussions and protests against Polesxit in Poland (October 2021), it is notable that 70.6 per cent of the young people surveyed did not want to leave the EU. The idea met with the support of 13.4 per cent of respondents, and a similar share of them had no opinion on that issue. Compared to Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, young Poles answered 'no' the most often. This is in line with other public opinion research, which has demonstrated continuous support for Poland's EU membership. In 2021, support grew to 90 per cent in the adult population, with only 6 per cent against it and 4 per cent hesitant (Roguska 2021). **Young people surveyed in FYS2021 were slightly more undecided and against the membership in the EU than the general population.**

Young women and those financially better-off were more often against leaving the EU than young men and respondents in worse economic situations. The support for Polesxit grew as political orientations shifted to the right. However, centrist and right-wing men were also those who more often were not sure about the answer.

When assessing the impact of EU membership on the economic and political situation in Poland, most young Poles (53.4 per cent) pointed to its positive effect on economics. In the case of politics, opinions were more divided: 26.4 per cent saw positive effects, almost 30 per cent reported no influence, and 21 per cent believed that the influence of the EU was bad. Also, the FGI participants focused on

positive (economic) aspects of being in the EU: they mostly appreciated various kinds of funding but also saw some 'traps of dependencies' and conflicts between the government and the European Commission:

"In the beginning, when we entered the European Union, everything was going in the right direction. And then the current authorities came and imagined that Poland could be a self-sufficient country. And it often speaks negatively about the European Union, about various EU restrictions, that the government does not want to follow these restrictions, if something does not suit them"

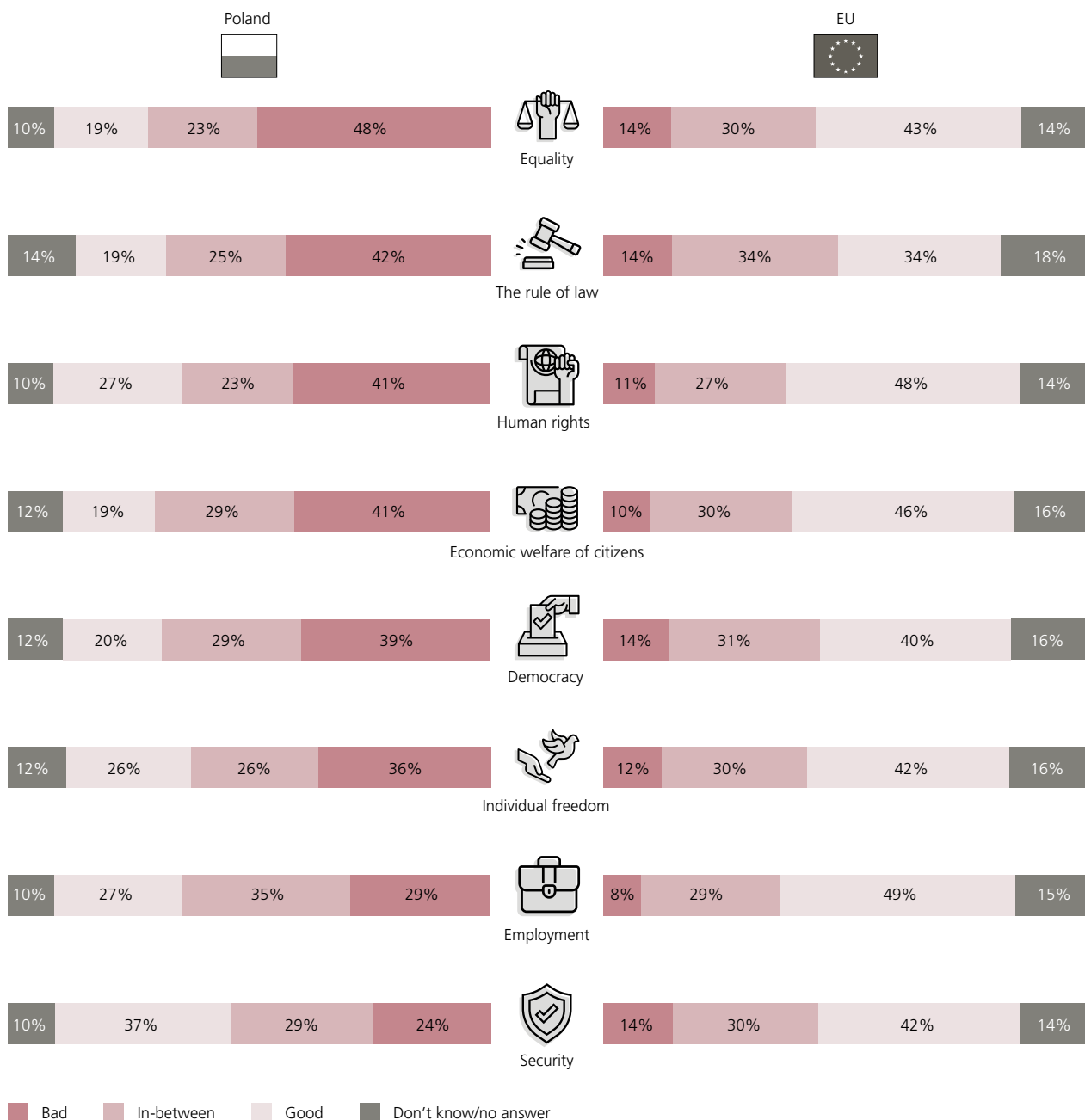
(FGI, 25–29 years old)

"This [EU] policy makes some things easier for us or on the contrary, it has a huge impact. If they introduce some laws that we personally do not like, we will not do anything about it."

(FGI, 19–24 years old)

Comparing the opinions on the status of various values, it turned out that young Poles were much more critical about obeying them in Poland than in the EU. **It can be argued that the positive image of the EU functions as a normative reference point for a critical situation in Poland.**

FIGURE 19. THE VALUES IN POLAND AND THE EU: HOW GOOD OR BAD IS THEIR STATUS? (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021.

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

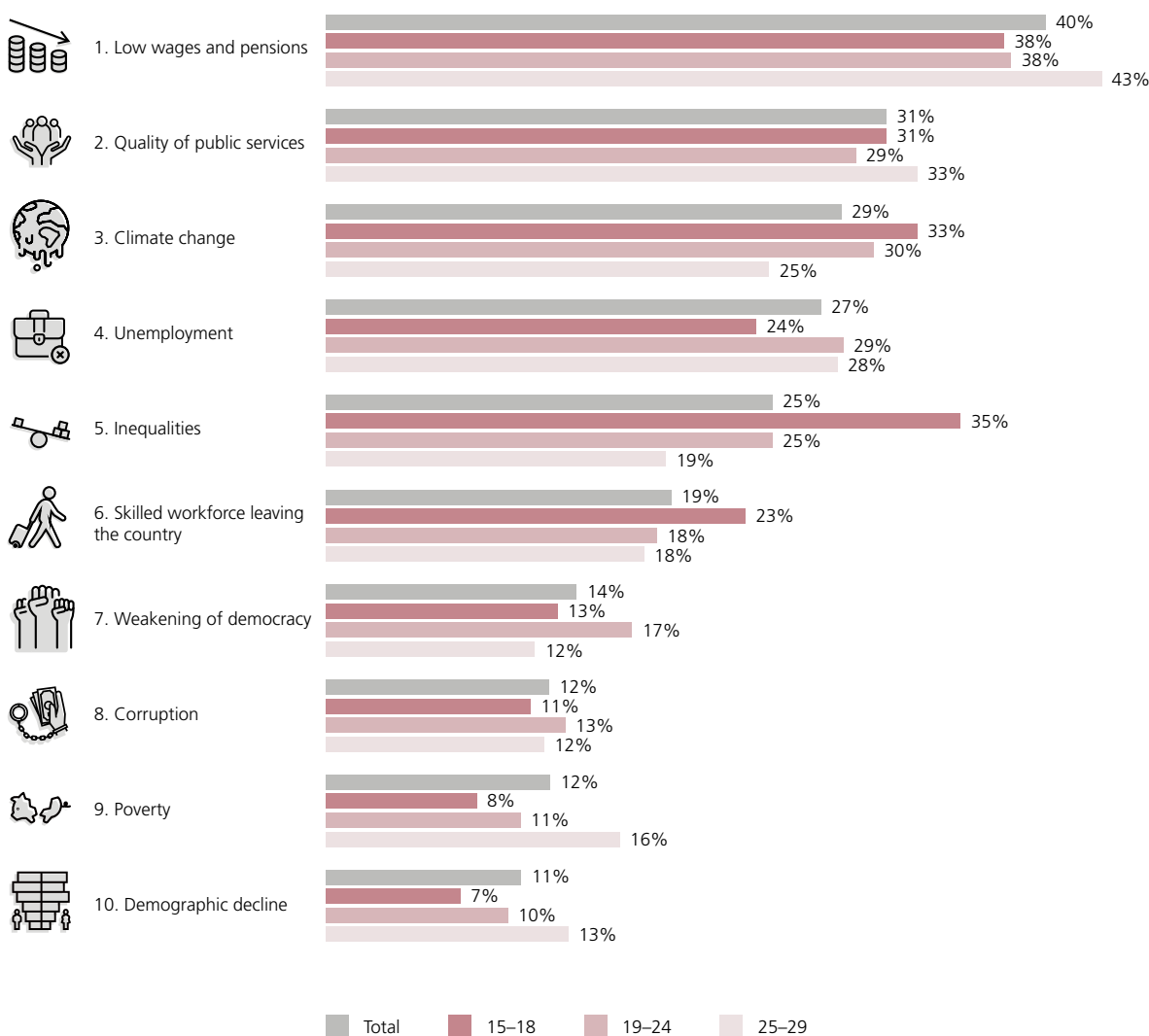
The worst evaluated values in Poland were equality (48.3 per cent), the rule of law (42.4 per cent), human rights (40.9), the economic welfare of citizens (40.6), and democracy (39.1). The same values were relatively positively evaluated in the case of the EU. Only one value in Poland (security) was evaluated more positively than negatively. Compared to other studied CEE and Baltics countries, young Poles and Hungarians most negatively assessed the rule of law, human rights, equality, and the state of

democracy in their countries. Economic welfare of citizens was evaluated worse in Hungary (51 per cent said it was bad) and Slovakia (48.3 per cent) than in Poland (40.5 per cent), whereas Czech Republic reported the highest per centage of positive evaluations (35 per cent), which was nonetheless quite low. Again, gender and political beliefs (left-right) influenced the opinions. The younger people, women, and left-wingers were more critical about the status of core values in Poland than other groups.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN THE NEXT DECADE

Regarding **the biggest issues facing Poland in the next decade**, young Poles chose economic-related issues first, including the labour market, low wages, the quality of public services, unemployment, and the skilled workforce leaving the country, all of which can be located within a set of “materialistic” values in Roman Inglehart’s terms (Gardawski 2021: 266). Yet, climate change was also among the top five most important issues.

FIGURE 20. THE TOP 10 ISSUES FACING POLAND IN THE NEXT DECADE BY AGE GROUP (%)



Source: FES Youth Study 2021. Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

Young women pointed out the above issues more often than men. Exploring the age-related dimensions, the youngest cohort was mostly concerned about climate change, inequalities, and the skilled workforce leaving the country, whereas the older age groups pointed more to low wages and pensions, as well as unemployment.

There were differences regarding political beliefs: climate change was an important issue for 42 per cent of people who located themselves on the left, whereas only 19 per cent of right-wingers voiced the same concern. Similarly, inequalities constituted a challenge for 39.6 per cent of left-wingers, and for 14.7 per cent of those on the right. The quality of public services concerned all respondents, regardless of age, gender, and political orientation. Interestingly, comparing the top five issues reported as the most important in other CEE countries, the quality of public services only appeared in Poland (31 per cent) and Hungary (27 per cent). Additionally, a comparison showed that corruption was relatively rarely pointed out by young Poles, whereas in other CEE countries it was indicated by around one-third of respondents.

MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of this chapter are the following:

- About one-third of young Poles surveyed were very or mostly interested in politics. However, almost half of the respondents did not think that their interests were politically represented.
- Compared to other studied countries, young Poles most often declared having left-wing attitudes (22.6 per cent). The youngest group (15–18 years old) and women declared support for left-wing ideas most frequently.
- While right-wing respondents expressed stronger support for patriotic and nationalistic values than left-wingers, it was harder to find clear patterns in the case of their opinions on the welfare state. Young Poles appeared to be more anti-egalitarian and anti-étatist compared to their peers in other countries.
- Young Poles expressed the lowest trust toward the key political institutions in their country. The national government, political parties, the national parliament, and the Church were the most distrusted.
- Though young Poles remain strongly pro-democratic, their support for democratic principles has fallen since 2008. Compared to their peers in other CEE and Baltic countries, young Poles were the most sceptical about democracy.
- Two-thirds of young Poles do not want to leave the EU, yet those who are undecided and in favour of Polesxit are greater in number than in the general population.
- The labour market, low wages, the quality of public services, unemployment, the skilled workforce leaving the country, and climate change were reported as the biggest issues facing Poland in the next decade.

CONCLUSIONS



The research on young people in Poland was part of a larger Youth Study commissioned by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and was carried out during a challenging moment in Polish, European and world history. Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed young people's transitions to adulthood, making them "mature prematurely" (Baboš and Világi 2021). At the European level, they are starting their adult lives when migration abroad has been "normalised" in young people's experiences (Karolak 2020); on the other hand, the European Union project faces challenges, such as the latest wave of right-wing populism, mass migratory movements, and the crisis of welfare and labour market institutions, resulting in the expansion of precarity. Finally, in Poland, the period of research followed an unprecedented wave of young people's protests in Autumn 2020, caused by the effective ban on abortion introduced by the "Law and Justice" party in government. Ephemeral as it was, the mobilisation of youth in Poland can be considered a part of a broader re-politicisation of those born after the millennium, sometimes called Generation Z, which is said to be "more interested and active in politics than many of the cohorts that preceded it" (Hurrelmann and Albrecht 2021:vii).

The FYS2021 study in Poland confirmed that the majority of young people in Poland are satisfied with their own lives, but very critical of the state of the country and the world they live in. They feel deeply unrepresented in politics and distrust the government, the Church, the parliament, and other key institutions of the Polish state and society, to an extent which is usually greater than in other Central/Eastern European and Baltic countries. Even though a significant number of young people are concerned about pollution and climate change, their main fears are mostly political and socio-economic. This is understandable, given the social inequalities, youth employment precarisation and financially-driven barriers to independence shown in

the study. Contrary to earlier studies, this research suggests that migration abroad remains an important, tangible, albeit not necessarily well-defined option; for young people, Europe provides a space to develop one's own projects and a reference point for an (idealised) comparison, enabling criticism of the situation in Poland.

Despite existential uncertainties, young Poles defined the core social conflicts in more cultural and identity-centred terms than in socio-economic categories. The central divide they saw in Polish society was that between the rulers and the ruled; this is a strong warning signal for those in power. A high share of respondents expressed criticism of the Catholic Church, being the second-most distrusted institution in the country. As compared to their peers in other countries studied, young Poles also proved to be the least proud of being citizens of their country and rejected the nationalistic idea of "Poland for Poles". In the forefront of the opposition against the conservative vision of nationhood, young Polish women appear to be much more (culturally) on the left and more politically active in various protests than young men. Simultaneously, young Poles' socio-economic orientations remain rather liberal: they are the most anti-egalitarian and anti-etatist in the entire region studied.

It remains to be seen to what extent the observed polarisation will translate into further mobilisation. Torn between disappointment with the state and national politics and hopes for a better life, young people may still surprise society, as in Autumn 2020, with lively political involvement. Alternatively, as they keep the migratory option open, they may "turn their backs" on the country which many now see as ignoring their voices and needs. Either way, it seems that the time of their collective silence is over, and their fears, aspirations, and hopes have to be considered by any current and future political elite.

10

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ABOUT FES YOUTH STUDIES



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

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

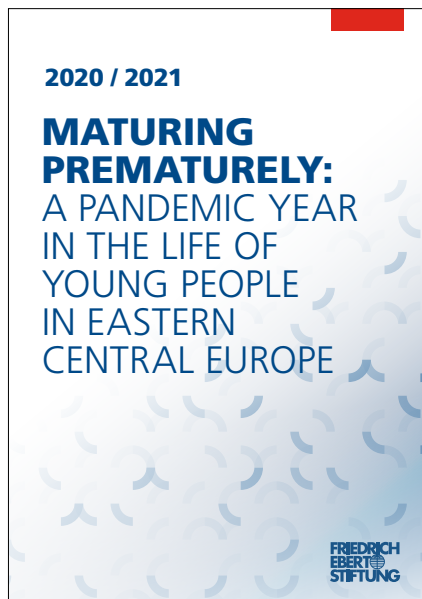
The data that form the basis of this publication were collected in the course of online individual in-depth interviews (n=10 each 60 minutes in average) with young people aged 14–29 years. Various questioning techniques and methods were used in the interviews to specifically address the psychological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

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OTHER YOUTH STUDIES PUBLICATIONS

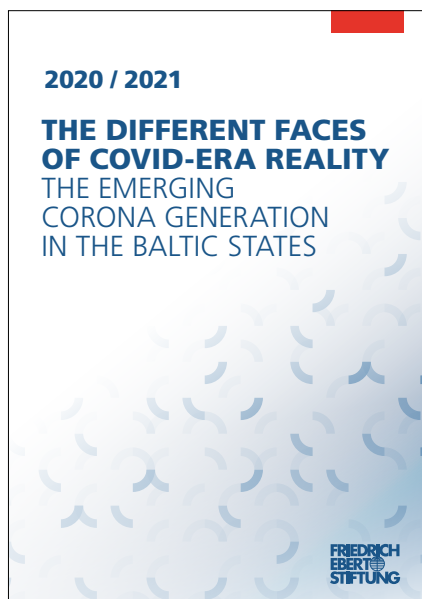


The coronavirus pandemic has been a great shock to societies in Central Europe. The restrictions it has brought about are extensive, and must have been particularly new for the young generation that cannot remember the eras before the democratic regimes were established in this region. In this report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



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



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