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YOUTH STUDY

BALTIC COUNTRIES

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1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2021, about 3,900 young people aged 14–29 from the three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – participated in a survey of seven countries covering a broad range of issues that concern their experiences and aspirations in different realms of life. These include education, employment, political participation and family relationships, as well as values, attitudes and beliefs. In addition, ten individual interviews and three focus group interviews were conducted in each country. This study covers the issues relevant to the Baltic region as a whole, with an emphasis on cross-country comparative analyses.

Today's Baltic young people strive above all for individual development and social recognition. Respondents most value opportunities to **be independent, have a successful career and take responsibility**. They also tend to conceive of their **personal future more optimistically** than that of society as a whole. A **stronger sense of national identity among Baltic young people is associated with a more optimistic attitude** towards the future of their society. Still, it is more common for Estonian and Latvian young people to perceive their national identity in ethno-cultural and ethnocentric terms.

Young people's perception of the importance of private ownership of business and industry indicates their commitment to the market economy. Nonetheless, at the top of their concerns are individualistic issues such as health and unemployment as well as larger issues such as pollution and climate change, indicating that **environmental matters are also very important**. They **have high hopes for state assistance in ensuring their livelihood** – many of them would like the state to take more responsibility to guarantee that everyone is provided for and that incomes be made more equal. Moreover, Baltic young people see **socioeconomic difficulties**, such as low wages, unemployment, inequality and poverty as the **biggest issues that their countries will face over the coming decade**. Notably, persons from well-off backgrounds and young women are particularly inclined to highlight socioeconomic issues. Global, governance or identity-related matters appear to be less important issues for young people.

More than one quarter of Baltic young people are not planning to have children. This finding is particularly concerning in light of the fact that the populations of the Baltic countries are shrinking. This would imply the

need to develop a family policy targeted to supporting young families. Furthermore, a large proportion of Baltic young people would like to live separately from their parents, but the current financial situation makes this difficult. Efforts must be made to ensure available housing at a reasonable cost.

A potentially problematic finding is that **some 37 per cent of young people in the Baltic countries do not work in a job matching the profession they have been trained for**; only one-third (31 per cent) work in their profession and one-fifth (19 per cent) in a job close to their profession. Lithuania has the highest share of those reporting such a qualification mismatch. These mismatches between employment and education/training should be addressed. It may turn out that education does not provide the skills demanded in the workplace or that there is a lack of jobs in the economic sector that correspond to young people's education. Measures should be developed to ease young people's transition into the labour market and recruitment systems should be made more transparent to ensure that no one is discriminated against.

Despite the skills mismatch, young people in the Baltic countries are actively employed on average 35 to 40 hours per week. **Even while studying, young people work a great deal:** the average number of hours worked per week by those in higher education and other forms of education and training was between 21 and 37 hours. Lithuanian students seem to be the most hard-working among the three countries. Having a paid job while studying is also an undeniable reality for many Baltic students. **Most young people in higher education or other forms of education and training are employed.** The share of students who only study and do not work or are not actively looking for a job is very modest, ranging from only 7 per cent in Latvia to 9 per cent in Estonia. Information should be collected and the socioeconomic situation of working students monitored in order to increase the education system's responsiveness to actual needs. In addition to having a job, **a significant number of young people in the Baltic countries report having participated in an internship or practical training.** Estonia has the largest number (63 per cent) of young people who have completed an internship or practical training as part of their education, followed by Latvia and Lithuania (both 56 per cent).

Among the Baltic states, only Estonian youth are satisfied with the quality of education, with 72 per cent expressing satisfaction. In the other two states, numbers were far lower, with only 31 per cent in Latvia and only 26 per cent in Lithuania content with their education. **Digital equipment and infrastructure required for e-learning is generally available to young people in the Baltic countries**, but **young people residing in rural areas more frequently report having no equipment at all or having somewhat insufficient equipment for distance learning** (21 per cent) than young people residing in urban or more urban areas (10 per cent). **There is a shift towards greater interest in online schooling and working from home among young people in the Baltics**, which can be partly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic reality of distance learning and working. However, quite a few young people in Estonia (41 per cent), Lithuania (30 per cent) and Latvia (30 per cent) report **not using any online resources for schooling/learning purposes**. In contrast, **social media seems to be an engrained habit** among Baltic young people, with 20 per cent browsing social media for at least 1–2 hours a day and nearly half (43 per cent in Lithuania, 42 per cent in Latvia and 46 per cent in Estonia) spending 2–3 hours or even more time a day on social networking sites. Online learning should be continuously developed, and the use of information technology expanded throughout the education system.

When it comes to politics, **personal interest in politics is moderate** among Baltic young people. Half of the respondents never or rarely discuss politics with their family or acquaintances. In total, 53 per cent of 19-to-29-year-olds surveyed voted in the most recent parliamentary elections, although 75 per cent of respondents are planning to vote in the next parliamentary elections. Baltic young people have more experience with **political participation that does not require direct engagement and is not time-consuming**, such as signing petitions. However, the data suggest that they would also prefer more socially engaging political activism orientated towards enriching their social capital. All in all, **young people do not rate their own knowledge of politics very highly**. Despite this admission, two-thirds of them share, to a greater or lesser extent, the belief that young people should have more opportunities to have a say in politics. The majority of respondents are in favour of parliamentary democracy.

These data suggest that young people's involvement in the activities of civil society organisations should be promoted. Their participation in decision-making on policies that affect them should also be increased. Moreover, the prevailing individualistic forms of political activism constitute a resource that could help in overcoming political disenchantment among Baltic young people. Many of them have such experience and this should be considered an avenue to promote policies for social cohesion. Interestingly, there are **significant gender differences with respect to political activism** in the Baltic states. Whereas young women have more often participated in individualistic or distanced actions, young men are more likely to be involved in more cooperative, active and socially engaged political participation, such as involvement in demonstrations or work in political parties/groups. Youth policymakers should develop strategies to enhance youth participation in civic life. Young women in particular should be targeted, as they are evidently more isolated from organised forms of civic participation. Extending voting rights for young people by lowering the voting age to 16 should be considered.

Young people in the Baltic states have grown up during a period of intensive labour migration to Western Europe and the Nordic countries. The majority of Baltic young people, however, **do not express strong and immediate migration plans**. Along with economic reasons, weak attachment to country and national identity are equally important factors that may motivate Baltic young people to emigrate. Policymakers should consider the various reasons behind such desires. For example, whereas lifestyle migration tends to be a short-term mobility strategy, economically motivated migration is associated with more existential societal challenges. The origins and nature of economically driven youth migration should be addressed in each Baltic country as part and parcel of local employment policy.

2

INTRODUCTION



The goal of this study is to investigate Baltic young people – their values, attitudes, position in society, lived experiences and future trajectories. Young people aged 15 to 29 make up around one-sixth of the population in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This share has decreased over the past decade, thus exacerbating the challenges of the gradually ageing Baltic societies¹. The current sociodemographic situation of the Baltic states, in conjunction with their cultural and historical legacy and political regimes, furnishes conditions that both enable and constrain youth agency vis-à-vis future social changes.

Naturally every generation has its predecessors. Today, the parents of Baltic young people largely represent the *transition generation* whose formative period was marked by the collapse of the USSR in the late 1980s and by profound societal transformation towards a neoliberal order in the 1990s. An individualistic ethos and growing opportunities, coupled with increasing social inequality, shaped the transition generation. The 2008 economic crisis shook this cohort, increasing their anxieties. The young people who are the focus of this study were born in the 1990s and 2000s, when the Soviet Union had already ceased to exist and the states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were free and independent. Living through the past two decades, they have absorbed the rapid developments of the 2000s and 2010s with all of their side effects. The Covid-19 pandemic over the past two years is also part and parcel of this formative experience. Covid-19 has radically reduced the opportunities of Baltic youth for a meaningful life. Undoubtedly, this extraordinary experience will feed into the identities of the emerging generation and may also become a source of lingering in-group differentiation, as young people in the Baltic states will not all cope in the same way with Covid-era reality (see Kaprāns 2021).

Given the unique formative experiences of Baltic young people, this study intends to show the distinctive nature of this emerging generation. Previous research has already demonstrated that young people in the region differ significantly in terms of political beliefs and values (Kaprāns and Mieriņa 2019). However, their *modus operandi* within different social fields, as well as their ethical stances, remain understudied. More specifically, there is insufficient knowledge of the difficulties that young people in the Baltics face in accumulating cultural, economic and

social capital. The sociology of generations suggests that every generation includes both liberal and conservative tranches. In fact, as Mannheim has argued, it is these relational units that make generations possible (Mannheim 2005). Are there similar differentiating generational units among Baltic young people? What factors determine young people's relative homogeneity or heterogeneity? How do Baltic youth see themselves as actors within different social contexts? And to what extent have they benefited from social mobility? These are only some of the major sociological questions that shall be addressed in this report.

In the study, "Baltic young people" is defined as an analytical category. We are nevertheless fully aware of the numerous historical, political and social differences that prevent us from reifying them as a distinctive group called "Baltic youth" (see Duvold et al. 2020). Various sociodemographic indicators and trends reveal not only structural similarities but also socioeconomic conditions that make young people different across the Baltic states. Arguably, varying opportunities and constraints predate the development of the values, political attitudes or occupational prospects of young people in their respective countries. In order to interpret the differences in the YS findings, the different histories of the separate Baltic states should also be taken into consideration. For example, Baltic Germans exerted a strong influence on the value space of Estonians and Latvians until the national awakening in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, Lithuania was a regional power until its incorporation into the Russian Empire. Likewise, pivotal changes occurred during the Second World War and Soviet occupation when the ethnic composition of Baltic societies was significantly altered. As a result, the share of Russian-speaking people in Estonia and in Latvia was dramatically increased, whereas Lithuanian society remained relatively homogenous.

The study is organised into chapters covering education, employment and mobility, basic world views, sociopolitical values and attitudes, political and civic participation, families and transition to adulthood. The final chapter offers a set of framework recommendations for national and international actors involved in decision-making processes in the Baltic states.

¹ In Latvia, the share of young people has fallen most significantly, from 20 per cent in 2012 to 15.2 per cent in 2020. In Estonia, this share has declined by 4.1 percentage points, whereas Lithuania has experienced the smallest decline, at 3.5 percentage points (see Eurostat 2021a).

3

METHODOLOGY



This study is based on online survey data and qualitative data that were collected in 2021. The survey sample in each of the three Baltic countries was drawn from the Ipsos Online Access Panel. It was quota sampled according to age, gender and region in order to achieve a sample that reflects the target population regarding these characteristics. These central sociodemographics were predefined so that respondents could be targeted directly via email. Data were collected between 10 June and 20 July 2021. The questionnaire, including 61 common questions and 10 country-specific questions, was in English and then translated into the local languages. The survey had a final median length of 18 minutes.

As young people are always a challenging target (partly because they often have to be reached via their parents) and willingness to participate is often lower among male targets than female targets, the response rate of the young male subsample was lower than expected. In order to achieve the full sample size in all Baltic countries, the age and gender quota had to be opened towards the end of field work. Due to the resulting discrepancies, as well as other minor structural issues that inevitably occur despite a carefully constructed sample, weighting was used to adjust the structure of the sample to the official data regarding age, gender and region.

The survey target population for Estonia and Latvia included citizens aged 14 to 29 who had access to the Internet and were able to speak Estonian, Latvian or Russian. In Estonia and Latvia, the questionnaire was translated into the state language (Estonian or Latvian) and into Russian as a major minority language. The sample size in each country was 1,200 respondents. The target population for Lithuania consisted of citizens aged 14 to 29 with Internet access and the ability to speak Lithuanian. The Lithuanian sample size was 1,500 respondents.

The qualitative fieldwork, conducted by Ipsos, consisted of $n=10$ in-depth interviews and $n=3$ focus groups in each country. For the focus groups, the respondents were split into three groups by age to best display the relevant life circumstances:

- 14–18 years of age: school education, graduation and first decision-making processes regarding choice of future education and profession;
- 19–24 years of age: voting age, first steps to become more independent by moving out of the parental home;
- 25–29 years of age: university graduation, entering the job market and start of family planning.

Throughout the sample respondents were recruited on the basis of gender, living situation and education/working status. For the research in Lithuania, the sampling points were divided between the capital city of Vilnius and numerous more rural and sometimes poorer areas (the counties of Šiauliai, Tauragė, Mariampolė, Panevėžys, Utena, Alytus and Telšiai) in order to include a diverse mix of living situations. For each focus group, the aim was a ratio of one-third of the respondents coming from the capital city and two-thirds from poorer rural and urban settlements. The average duration of individual interviews was 60 minutes, and the average duration of focus groups was 90 minutes. All participants signed a consent form concerning their participation and data protection.

For the research in Estonia, the sample points were divided between the capital city of Tallinn and numerous more rural and relatively poorer areas (Viljandimaa, Jõgevamaa, Järvamaa, Ida-Virumaa, Valga, Võrumaa and Viljandi) in order to include a diverse mix of living situations. The focus groups were split as for Lithuania, with one-third of the participants from the capital city Tallinn and two-thirds from the smaller/poorer regions. The average interview length of the in-depth interviews was 61 minutes, whereas the focus groups lasted about 100 minutes.

The research in Latvia focused on three regions: the capital city, rural settlements in Latgale and urban settlements in Latgale. For the focus groups (FG), local partners advised focusing on one age group and one location to represent regional differences. Thus, FG 1 (14–18 years old) and FG 2 (19–24 years old) involved respondents from rural settlements in the Latgale region, while FG 3 (25–29 years of age) involved respondents from the capital, Riga. Respondents were recruited with the involvement of interviewers living in the respective region. Invitations and reminders were sent via email plus one SMS. The average length of the in-depth interviews was 70 minutes, while the focus groups had an average length of 110 minutes.

The qualitative fieldwork took place in April 2021. All interviews and focus groups were conducted online via the platform MS Teams. All participants signed a consent form concerning their participation and data protection. Each interview and focus group was recorded, and a transcript was produced.

All group differences presented in this study are statistically significant. With a few exceptions, survey items “Don’t know” and “No answer” are excluded from the data analysis.

4

BASIC SOCIO- DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The present study uses residential area, parents' education and social grade as sociodemographic indicators that help to control for their social background of respondents. In this chapter, these indicators will be briefly outlined.

The place-of-residence indicator is based on a five-level scale that ranges from rural (village) to urban (city). Our data demonstrate that Estonian respondents included in survey sample are more likely than their Latvian and Lithuanian peers to live in rural areas or somewhat more urban than rural areas, whereas Lithuanian and Latvian young people were more likely to reside in urban areas, 48 per cent and 43 per cent respectively. From this we can conclude that Estonian represent a more diverse residential background in survey sample.

Parents' education levels reveal that the mothers of Estonian respondents are more likely to have a secondary school (university-preparatory type) education or university-level education (MA/MSc degree) (14 per cent), whereas the mothers of Latvian respondents are more likely to have either no formal education or to have a doctoral/post-doctoral degree. Lithuanian respondents (30 per cent) more often report mothers who have a lower university-level education (bachelor's degree or similar). When it comes to fathers' education, secondary school (university-preparatory type) is most frequently mentioned (20 per cent) by Estonian respondents. Meanwhile the fathers of Latvian respondents are more likely to have a primary school education. Lithuanian young people more often report that their fathers have lower university-level education (bachelor's degree or similar). Overall, the parents of Latvian respondents are more likely to represent the lowest educational groups. It should also be noted that every fifth Latvian respondent (22 per cent) was unable to describe their father's education, and 14 per cent of surveyed Lithuanian young people did not know about their mother's education.

Finally, the social grade indicator is derived from the respondent's self-assessment of their household's financial situation. The collected data reveal that Estonian young people (24 per cent) are more likely than those in the other Baltic countries to report the most affluent living conditions, in which their household can afford to buy whatever they need for a good living standard. By contrast, Latvian young people (32 per cent) are more likely to assess their financial situation in moderate terms, such as that they have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (such as a fridge or TV set). Lithuania had the highest percentages of respondents in the least well-off categories, in which their households do not have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating) and food or have enough money for basic bills and food but not for clothes and shoes (5 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively).

5

EDUCATION



According to the policies of the United Nations and the European Union, education is defined, among other things, as a means of achieving competitiveness in a globalised economy and of fostering social cohesion and inclusion. The Baltic countries have few natural resources, which is why an educated workforce (with cultural similarities to Nordic countries) is often considered the principal asset of their knowledge-based economies (MPMG Baltics 2015). However, education is essential not only in the context of investment, economic growth, technological innovation and maintaining the competitiveness of the Baltic region. It is also fundamental in improving young people's welfare, their employability and social mobility, giving them an opportunity to live a prosperous and fulfilling life. In the early 1990s, all the Baltic countries regained independence, adopted new constitutions and established new legal frameworks and institutions. The aim was to develop new democracies and new market economies and to eliminate Soviet ideology and corruption from every sphere of life. Huge progress was also made in restructuring the school and higher education systems by ensuring autonomy, developing research infrastructure and establishing quality (and frameworks for quality assessment) within education. All three countries to this day continue to implement education reforms aimed at improving education infrastructure and funding, providing quality education in line with labour market demands, as well as striving to widen access to education for all.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF BALTIC YOUNG PEOPLE

The Baltic states are among the leading OECD countries by share of population that has attained at least upper secondary education. Lithuania takes second place, Estonia sixth place and Latvia ninth place. By share of population that has attained tertiary education Estonia was seventh, Lithuania twelfth and Latvia twentieth among the OECD countries in 2018 (OECD 2021a). Baltic countries also have relatively low NEET (young people not in employment, education or training) rates (OECD 2021b). Young people in the Baltic countries are also among the most active in entrepreneurship: 7.8 per cent of young people in Lithuania (first place in the EU), 7.7 per cent in Latvia (second in the EU) and 6.2 per cent in Estonia (fourth in the EU) aged 18–30 were owners-managers of new

businesses (OECD and EU Commission 2020). As of 2018, government expenditure on education (as a percentage of GDP) was 5.2 per cent in Estonia, 4.2 per cent in Latvia and 3.9 per cent in Lithuania; for comparison, the figure for Germany was 5.0, for the Czech Republic 4.3 and for Greece 3.6 (World Bank 2021).

The education system of Latvia is becoming more inclusive in terms of ethnic minority children and students with special needs (EU Commission 2021a). In Latvia, the tertiary attainment rate among young adults (25–34 years of age) is improving, but there is still a wide gender gap, as only 30 per cent of men have a tertiary qualification compared with 54 per cent of women. Net financial returns for a tertiary education are relatively low in Latvia, however, especially for men. The employment rate among 25–34-year-old men with an upper secondary vocational qualification reaches 88 per cent, only 4 percentage points below those with a tertiary education (92 per cent). Moreover, small class sizes in Latvia raise the cost of education per student, but teachers' salaries remain low (OECD 2019a).

In Lithuania, tertiary-educated adults have strong employment opportunities, and attainment levels are much higher among younger generations than in the adult population as a whole. At the same time, total expenditure per student in Lithuania is quite low compared with the OECD average, especially at the tertiary level (OECD 2019b). The teaching workforce in Lithuania is ageing and salary progression is limited; fixed-term (one-year) contracts do not motivate qualified professors and/or practitioners to apply for work at higher education institutions (EU Commission 2021b).

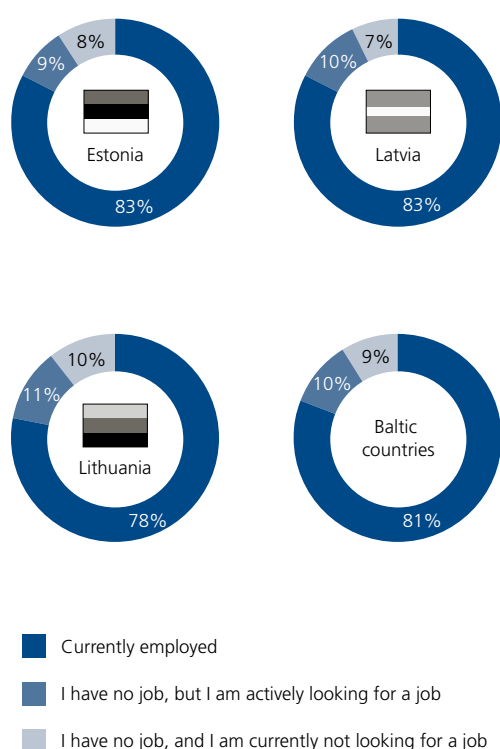
In Estonia, total spending on tertiary education was somewhat higher than in Lithuania and Latvia but spending per student remains below the OECD average. Estonian women are considerably more likely to obtain tertiary education than men, although they still face lower employment rates and earnings regardless of their level of educational attainment. Despite considerable increases in recent years, teachers' salaries remain low and below the average earnings of tertiary-educated workers in the country (OECD 2019c).

According to the data of the Youth Study (YS), more than half of the young people in the Baltic countries are involved in either formal (school, vocational school, higher

education) or another type of education and training. Roughly every fifth respondent is a student at a high school or vocational school. Around 16 per cent of respondents are undergraduate students, and 10 per cent are master's or doctoral degree students. A small fraction of respondents was enrolled in other forms of education or training.

The data show that the majority of young people in higher education or other forms of education and training are also employed (Figure 1). The share of students who do not work and are not actively looking for a job is very modest, ranging from 7 per cent in Latvia to 9 per cent in Estonia. Thus, having a paid job whilst studying is an undeniable reality for many Baltic students. Young people need to work to cover their living costs; otherwise, many of them would not be able to afford to study.

FIGURE 1: YOUNG PEOPLE IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS (UNDERGRADUATE, GRADUATE OR OTHER FORMS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING) (IN %)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
 Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, so that original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

A challenging question is whether combining work and study may help young people to develop the skills needed in the job market and make the transition from school to work easier or whether it is detrimental to academic progress and performance. Research studies show that not only hours worked but also the type of employment, motivation and attitudinal factors may play a significant role when it comes to answering this question (Quintini 2015). Eurostudent data demonstrate, however, that a higher share of students identify foremost as employees rather than as students in Estonia and Lithuania (Maseviciute et al. 2018; Hauschildt et al. 2021).

SATISFACTION WITH THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

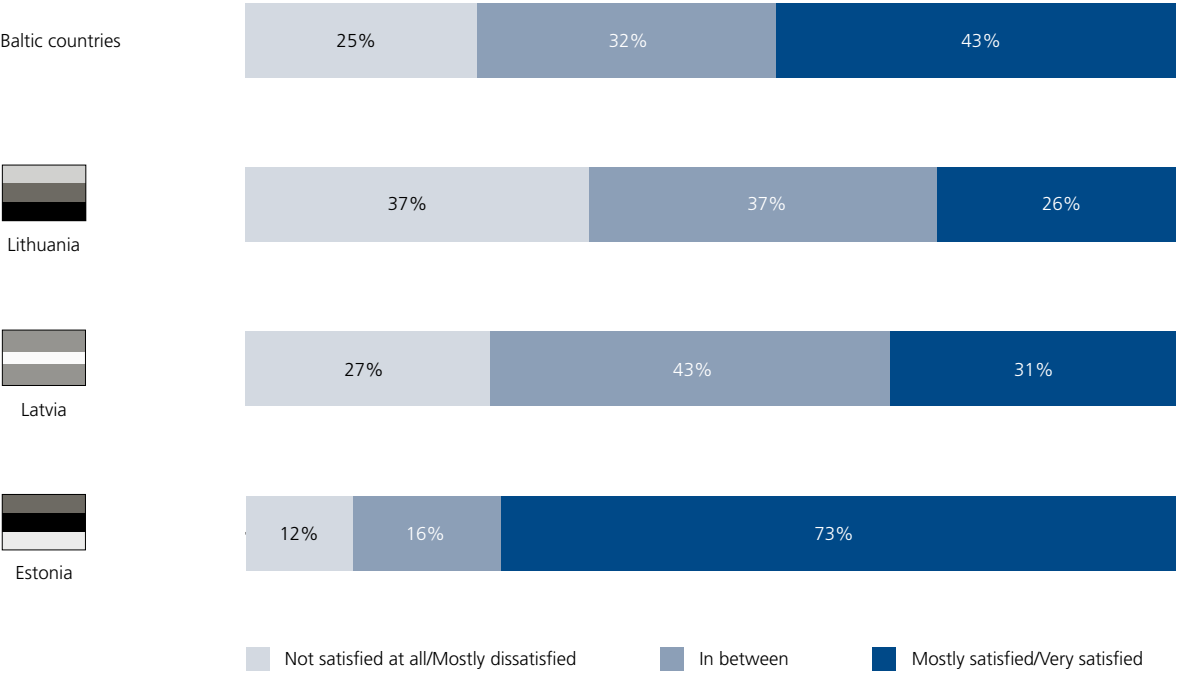
Education quality is a multi-dimensional concept that young people may understand in many different ways. Some emphasise the quality of inputs to the education system (for example, investment in education, facilities and infrastructure), whereas others may emphasise the quality of processes (for example, students' expectations, quality of teaching) and outcomes of education (for example, opportunities in the labour market and self-fulfilment).

The YS questionnaire used a range of indicators to measure quality of education, encompassing the respondents' satisfaction with the quality of education and perception of corruption in education, as well as optimism or pessimism regarding employability as the expected endresult of education. In general, young people in the Baltic countries are satisfied with the quality of education (43 per cent very satisfied or mostly satisfied and 32 per cent in between). However, there are notable differences between the three countries: a very high satisfaction was expressed by Estonian respondents (72 per cent), whereas the level of satisfaction with the quality of education is lower in Latvia and significantly lower in Lithuania (Figure 2).

Only one-third of young people in Latvia (31 per cent) and only one-quarter in Lithuania (26 per cent) are content with education quality. Lithuania has the highest number of young people not satisfied at all with the quality of education (37 per cent) followed by Latvia (26 per cent), whereas Estonia has the smallest share of young people

with this assessment (12 per cent). Given also the higher rate of perception of corruption in Lithuania and Latvia (Figure 3) these data indicate that there is widespread discontent and disillusionment with the quality of education in those two countries.

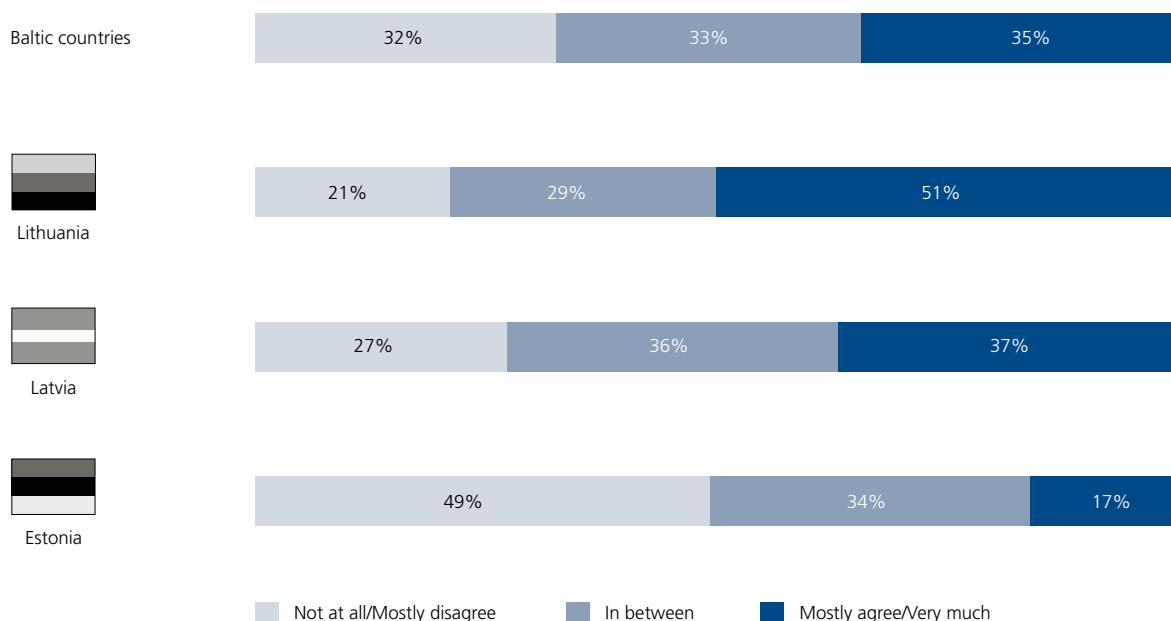
FIGURE 2: HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU GENERALLY WITH THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION? (IN %)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, so that original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

The (dis)satisfaction with the quality of education most likely reflects factors including individual experiences in various educational settings, values and attitudes, social, emotional, cognitive, physical development and sociodemographic conditions. For example, satisfaction with the quality of education in the Baltic countries differs slightly by age group. It can be seen that 18–21-year-olds tend to be less satisfied than young people in other age groups. This finding may be related to the disillusionment with the Covid-19 pandemic, as the data most likely reflects the experience of first- and second-year higher education students, their lack of social contacts and uncertainty about how the situation is going to develop in the future.

FIGURE 3: **DO YOU AGREE THAT THERE ARE CASES WHERE GRADES AND EXAMS ARE "BOUGHT" IN INSTITUTES/UNIVERSITIES? (IN %)**



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021

Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, so that original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

Half of Lithuanian young people (51 per cent) and more than one-third (37 per cent) of young Latvians very much agree or mostly agree that there are cases in which grades and exams are “bought” in institutes/universities, while only 17 per cent of Estonian young people believe that such corruption exists in their education system. This indicates that there is still much room for improvement in the education system in Latvia and Lithuania, as well as a certain cynicism among students (especially in Lithuania) that may translate into a sense that inclusive and quality education for all is not currently available. This subjective disillusionment and perceived corruption, which undermine the development of educated, competent and ethical individuals, is also expressed in the qualitative data.

ONLINE LEARNING VS TIME SPENT ONLINE

The YS data indicate that the digital equipment and infrastructure required for e-learning are available to the majority of young people in the Baltic countries. However, a minority of respondents (7 per cent) report having no or very insufficient equipment for distance learning and up to 15 percent of young people report having somewhat insufficient equipment.

FIGURE 4: **SOME PEOPLE PREFER LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM WHEREAS OTHERS ARE MORE INCLINED TOWARDS DISTANCE LEARNING. HOW WOULD YOU PLACE YOURSELF ON THIS SCALE (0 – CLASSROOM LEARNING, 10 – DISTANCE LEARNING)?**



Note: The graph shows mean values for each item.
Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

In Estonia, a slightly higher number of young people among all three countries report having all the necessary equipment for attending online classes. Sociodemographic breakdown of the data reveals that Baltic young people residing in rural or more rural than urban areas (21 per cent) are more likely to report having no equipment at all or having somewhat insufficient equipment for distance learning than young people residing in urban or more urban areas (10 per cent).

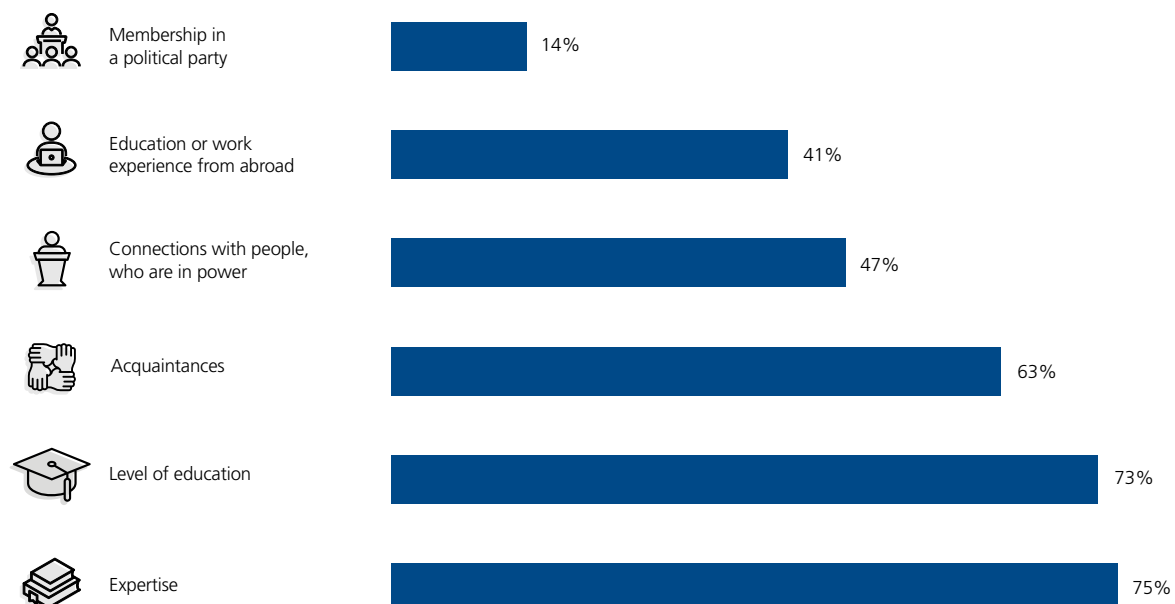
Online schooling is not only crucial in a time of pandemic but may also determine young people's level of engagement with technology. The effectiveness of online education can also affect young people's learning preferences. The data show that there has been a subtle shift towards a greater interest in online schooling: young people in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia slightly favour online schooling to traditional classroom education, but this shift could not be described as profound. Reasons for having a positive attitude towards online schooling may reflect access to and the efficiency of remote learning; an engaging online curriculum may encourage young people to participate in online schooling. Lithuanian and Latvian young people have slightly more diverse opinions about online versus traditional schooling (st deviation ≥ 3) than young people in Estonia (st deviation ≤ 2.7), who seem to be more in consensus that online schooling is the type of schooling they prefer. Online schooling and the use of information technology in education have been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and these will become integral components of education in the future. However, challenges remain, as some young people in the Baltic countries still struggle to participate in schooling online without reliable Internet access and/or technology.

Online resources are indeed a valuable source of learning. However, there seems to be little time for online learning activities outside of school hours. The data show that a substantial number of young people in Estonia (41 per cent), and 30 per cent of young people in Lithuania and Latvia, report not using online resources at all for schooling/learning purposes. By contrast, social media seems to be an engrained habit among Baltic young people, as more than 20 per cent report browsing social media for at least 1–2 hours a day and even greater numbers (43 per cent in Lithuania, 42 per cent in Latvia and 46 per cent in Estonia) report spending at least 2–3 hours or more on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat.

EDUCATION AND PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYABILITY

The YS concurs with many previous studies that despite the rhetoric about education providing personal enrichment and intangible societal benefits, the desired end-result of learning is employability (Jarvis 2004, p. 19). Young people in the Baltics consider expertise (75 per cent) and level of education (73 per cent) very important and mostly important in finding a job.

FIGURE 5: IN YOUR OPINION, HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS, WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING A JOB FOR A YOUNG PERSON IN YOUR COUNTRY? (% OF RESPONDENTS ANSWERING “VERY IMPORTANT” OR “MOSTLY IMPORTANT”)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

The data also show that, besides expertise and education, Baltic young people attach significant importance to acquaintances and connections with people in power (non-merit factors) as a contributory factor in maximising their chances of getting a job. Thus, it can be concluded that young people in the Baltic states acknowledge and might be willing to rely on informal (possibly even corrupt) networking channels in order to succeed in their careers. They also believe that education or work experience abroad might play a role in finding a job, yet hypothetical membership in a political party is granted significantly lower importance in terms of finding a job.

A significant number of young people in the Baltic countries report having participated in an internship or practical training. Estonia has the largest number (63 per cent) of young people who have completed in an internship or practical training within their education, followed closely by Latvia and Lithuania (56 per cent in each country). The Eurostat (2021f) data also indicate that participation of young people aged 15–29 in non-formal education and training is much higher in Estonia than in Latvia and Lithuania. Overall, such findings suggest that the Baltic countries make quite substantial practical training efforts in conjunction with the education system in order to improve young people's employability. In Lithuania, for example, traineeships and apprenticeships are a requirement of higher education programmes and students at vocational schools, colleges and universities must participate in traineeships in order to gain professional experience. The quality of such practical training, however, is not assessed and monitored. In Estonia, educational programmes based on apprenticeship are less common than traditional programmes. However, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy (2020) foresees the development of both apprenticeships and the placement system (traineeship) according to the needs of the future labour market. In Latvia, there are established procedures for organising and implementing workplace-based training, yet successful implementation of practical training directly depends on entrepreneurs' willingness to take part in such a training model (see EU Commission 2021c).

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA (LT=LITHUANIA; LV=LATVIA; EE=ESTONIA)

"The education system may need to be put in order [...] teacher salaries first because there is no motivation for teachers to teach."

(Male, 18, LT)

"To keep my grandmother from suffering, I tried to study as hard as I could. I was the best pupil in my class. I finished with a medal. I got into university. The same goes for university, but I will say that it is quite positive, because now I have a lot of knowledge. I immediately got a job in my profession at exactly the institution I wanted. It was very cool that you know that you are really a good professional and not just graduating in whatever and finding any kind of job afterwards."

(Female, 25, LV)

"I had started new studies, but due to Covid-19, I had to do distance learning. There was no consultation with lecturers. It was more difficult to do the assigned work. I really didn't like it. When I previously graduated from higher education, learning was face-to-face, and I enjoyed it. Remotely, not so much. Communication and getting assignments done did not work at all."

(LV focus group, 25–29-year-olds)

6

EMPLOYMENT AND MOBILITY

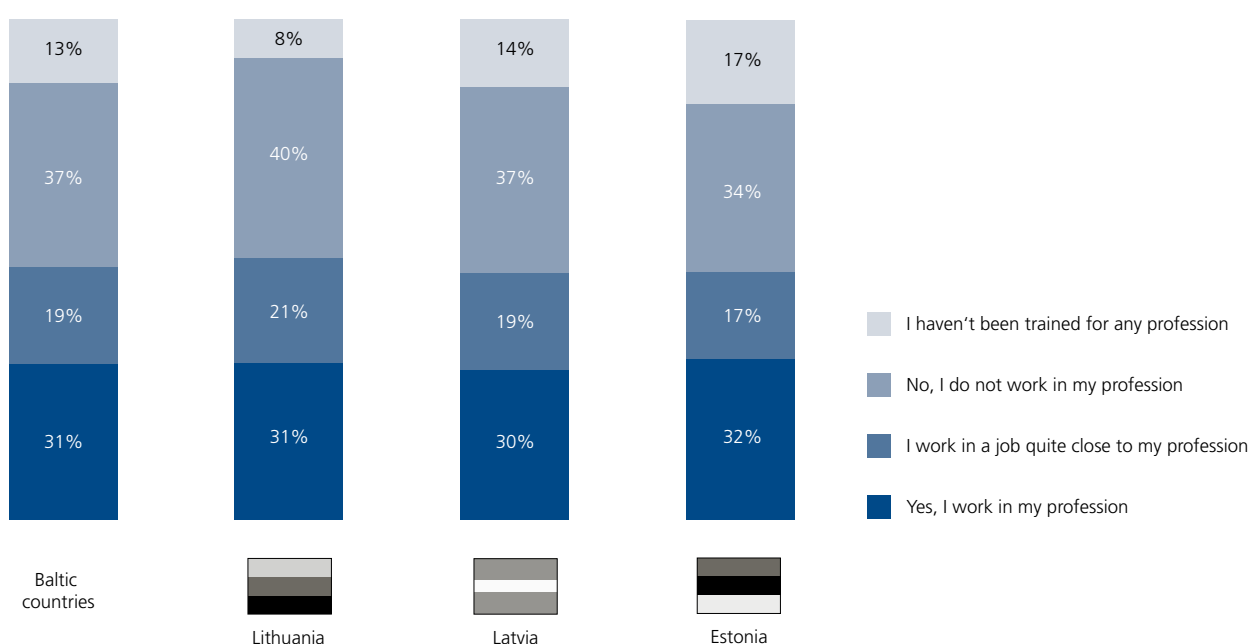


Transitioning from education to employment may have a lasting impact on young people's lives and prospects in the labour market. Some of the study's findings provide insights on youth transitions to the workforce. Besides studying, the vast majority of young people – 76 per cent of respondents aged 25–29 and 73 per cent aged 19–24 – were also in employment.

The data on the employment status of Baltic young people show that almost half were employed on a full-time permanent contract. The other half were involved in a less “standard” type of employment: every tenth respondent in the entire survey sample worked on a temporary contract, a small fraction (from 3 per cent in Lithuania to 6 per cent in Latvia and 7 per cent in Estonia) had occasional jobs, and up to 9 per cent in Lithuania, 8 per cent in Latvia and 5 per cent in Estonia were self-employed. Roughly every tenth respondent had no job but was actively looking for one; a similar share reported having no job and not looking for one.

The data on youth unemployment show that in 2020, of all the Baltic countries, Latvia (14.9 per cent) had the lowest youth unemployment rate (Statistics Latvia 2020), followed by Estonia (17.9 per cent) and Lithuania (19.6 per cent). Before the pandemic the youth unemployment rate in all three countries was consistently lower than the EU average. The largest decrease in youth unemployment over the past decade can be observed in Latvia and Lithuania (Eurostat 2021c). However, the study's data reveal that there is a mismatch between qualifications and employment: 37 per cent of Baltic young people do not work in a job matching the profession they have been trained for, only one-third (31 per cent) work in their profession and one-fifth (19 per cent) in a job close to their profession (Figure 6). Among the Baltic states, young Lithuanians have the highest share of those whose work is not in line with their formal qualifications.

FIGURE 6: DO YOU CURRENTLY WORK IN A JOB WITHIN YOUR PROFESSION (ONE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN TRAINED/EDUCATED FOR)? (IN %)

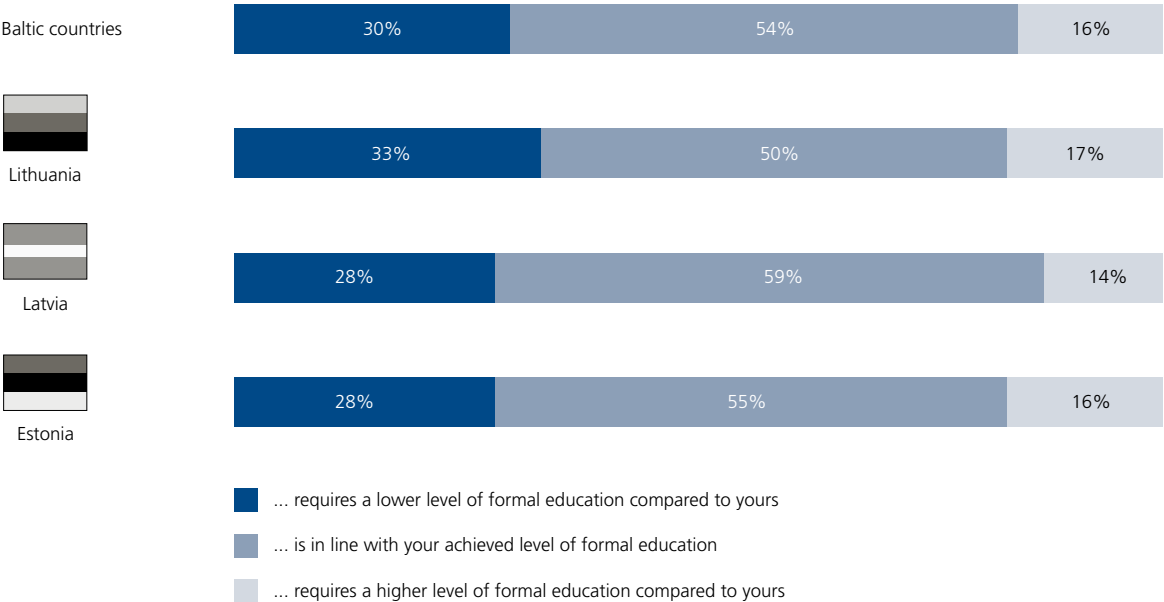


Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, so that original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

Survey data indicate that more than half (54 per cent) of Baltic young people had a job that was in line with their level of formal education, whereas 30 per cent of respondents asserted that their job required a lower level of formal education. Meanwhile, 16 per cent of survey participants indicated that their current job required a higher level of formal education (Figure 7).

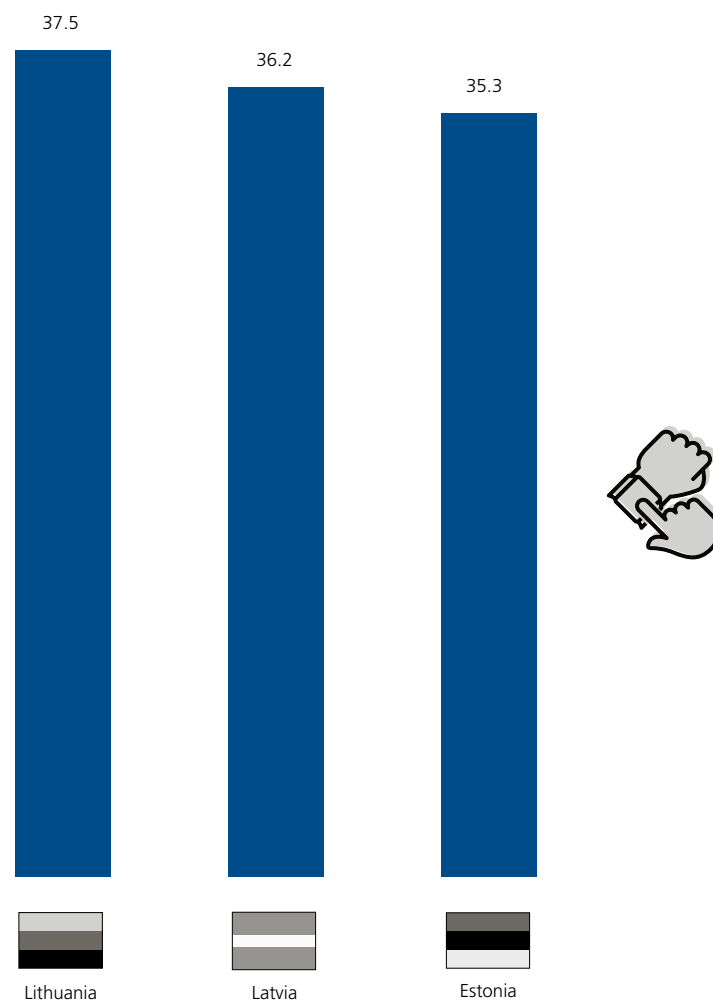
FIGURE 7: DO YOU CURRENTLY WORK IN A JOB THAT ... (IN %)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
 Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, therefore, original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

Baltic youth were also asked about their current and preferred occupational sector. According to these data half of young people in the Baltic countries work in the private sector and over one quarter (28 per cent) in the public sector (but slightly less in Latvia – 21 per cent). Every third respondent in the survey reported that they are involved in some form of volunteering that is most commonly related to educational settings (school or university), such as volunteering within youth organisations, citizens’ initiatives and associations or clubs. Other types of volunteering included work with religious organisations, charities and animal welfare organisations. Regarding the preferred employment sector, the majority (52 per cent) would like to work in the private sector, while willingness to work in the public sector was less pronounced (22 per cent), although some young people do seem keen to work in international organisations (14 per cent).

FIGURE 8: HOW MANY HOURS PER WEEK DO YOU WORK ON AVERAGE?



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

Baltic youth work a substantial amount (Figure 8). The average number of hours worked per week is between 35 and 40 hours. The highest workload in terms of working hours can be observed in Lithuania.

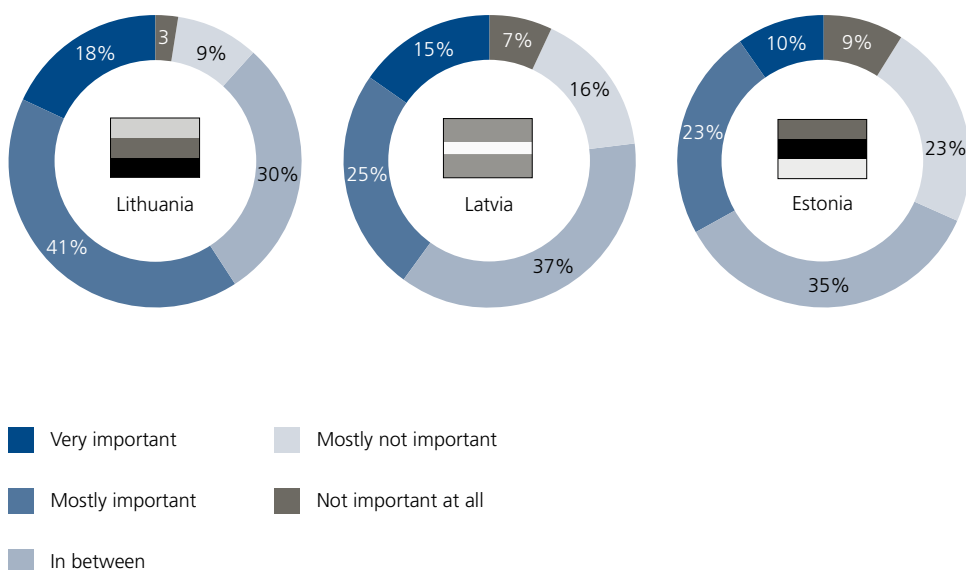
Even while studying, young people in the Baltics work a substantial amount. The average number of hours worked per week by those in higher education and other forms of education and training is not much lower than the average of all surveyed young people. Students work between 21 and 37 hours on average. Lithuanian students seem to be the most hard-working, however, the differences between the three countries is not very significant. The data show that, in line with the findings on online learning (see Chapter 5), there is also a shift towards a greater interest in working from home. Estonian young people are slightly more likely to work from home.

INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

Young people are usually the most mobile part of any society and thus can be associated with higher migration expectations. Migration has been a hot issue in the Baltic states for the past 20 years, exacerbated by more generic concerns about the decreasing population in Baltic societies.

Previous studies have demonstrated that the ideas of migration, education or work experience abroad have become synonymous with a “good life” among young people in the Baltics and are seen as a desired “social good” as well as a career strategy (Labanauskas 2013). This belief can also be noticed in the data, with 59 per cent of Lithuanian young people asserting that education and work experience abroad is an important or very important factor in finding a job, although this opinion is less pronounced among Latvian and Estonian young people.

FIGURE 9: IN YOUR OPINION, HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS, WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING A JOB FOR A YOUNG PERSON IN YOUR COUNTRY: EDUCATION OR WORK EXPERIENCE ABROAD? (IN %)

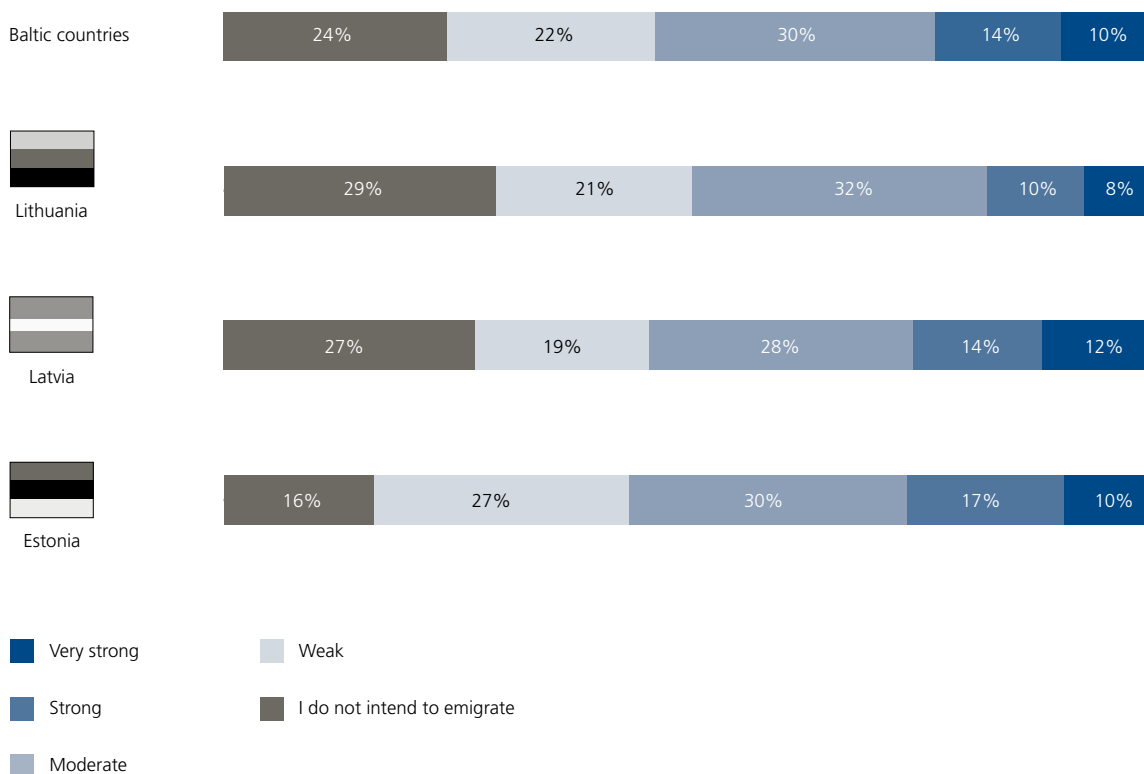


Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

The YS data show that a strong or very strong desire to live abroad is expressed by a rather small share of young people (22 per cent) in the Baltic states (Figure 10), although if a moderate desire is also included, fully half of young people in all three states would like to move abroad for at least six months. Such a desire is not necessarily an immediate strategy, however – only 19 per cent of respondents planned to leave their country in the next two years (Figure 11). Those who express a strong or very strong commitment to move to another country are more intent on emigrating within the next five years. These young people would also be

more likely to live abroad for more than ten years, which migration scholars often see as sufficient time for acculturation in the host country. Survey data suggest that weak identification with one's country ("not at all" or "a little") increases the emigration probability by 2.5 times. Prior migration experience also matters here, as young people who have lived abroad for more than six months (18 per cent) convey a stronger desire to emigrate. According to the YS data, the United States, Germany and Spain are the most preferred destination countries among Baltic young people.

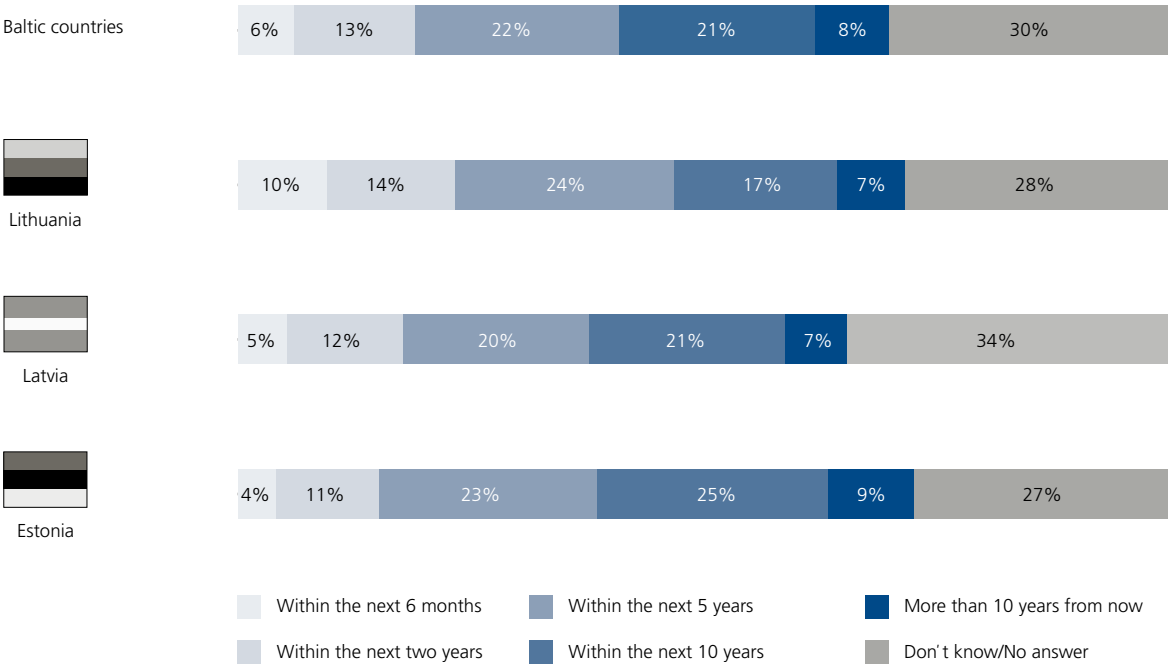
FIGURE 10: **HOW STRONG IS YOUR DESIRE TO MOVE TO ANOTHER COUNTRY FOR MORE THAN SIX MONTHS (EMIGRATE)?**



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

Sociodemographic data reveal that younger respondents (aged 14–24) in the Baltic countries are more likely to emigrate. Arguably, flexible social status enables this age group to be more committed to living abroad. Conversely, female young people more often tend to exclude emigration from their mobility strategies. Young people whose households have enough money for basic bills and food but not for clothes and shoes demonstrate a stronger desire to move to another country. Yet, this does not apply to the least well-off category of Baltic young people, for whom emigration plans do not significantly differ from those of wealthier young people.

FIGURE 11: IN WHAT TIME DO YOU IMAGINE LEAVING THE COUNTRY? (IN %)



Source: Field reserach for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, therefore, original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

A cross-country analysis indicates that migration expectations are much stronger among Latvian and Estonian young people. Meanwhile, determination to emigrate immediately – within the next six months – is more pronounced among Lithuanian young people (Figure 11). Moreover, Lithuanian respondents exhibit significant regional differences, as young people from Klaipeda County more often express a strong desire to emigrate. Interestingly, attitudes towards migration in Latvia are more polarised, as one quarter of Latvian young people do not intend to emigrate, whereas an equal share express a strong desire to emigrate. There is also considerably greater hesitancy towards migration, as one-third of Latvian young people do not know when exactly they might move to another country. At the same time, survey findings suggest that young people in Latvia are more often determined to stay abroad permanently.

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA:

“Bigger cities have better and much more options than smaller ones. Here in Viljandi, for example, many look for a job and can’t find one because it doesn’t suit the person or the person can’t do the job.”

EE focus group, 14–18-year-olds

“If we talk about people whose mother tongue is Russian, then they really struggle to build a career because to get a job with a good salary you need to be fluent in Estonian.”

EE focus group, 19–24-year-olds

“Young people can’t stay in their home town because they need to go elsewhere for a job.”

EE focus group, 19–24-year-olds

“The biggest thing [problem] is the salary. Because in Estonia, if you have an average salary, you have a completely different quality of life, than if you have the average or even close to the minimum salary in Australia, Canada – then the quality of life is something completely different than in Estonia.”

EE focus group, 25–29-year-olds

“I think it [globalisation] doesn’t pose a threat to us. It rather gives young people more opportunities, the world is more connected and there’s more options to work and study abroad.”

EE focus group, 19–24-year-olds

“But I have thought that if I ever move abroad, then when I get old I’d want to return to Estonia for sure. So not to stay for good.”

EE focus group, 14–18-year-olds

“I don’t think I ever want to move away. Because Estonia actually has quite a good social security system.”

Female, 28, EE

“In their time some guys got to the top and they knew some other guys very well and now they are all at the top together and when now the younger generation with a good education tries, they don’t get there. It’s like a closed circle, incompetent leadership.”

EE focus group, 25–29-year-olds

“I was 16 or 17 years old, I wanted to find a job and, of course, I looked at all the vacancies on sludinajumi.lv [job search site]. No one chose me anywhere because no one wanted to connect with an underaged person, there were problems with papers and so on. In the end, of course, I found a company that agreed and said yes, it is possible to work but with no a contract. [...] I worked there for a week and then I was told, thank you for your time, you can go home. They even didn’t pay me anything.”

LV focus group, 19–24-year-olds

“Young people’s wages are so low that after working for some 10 or 15 years, they will not be able to afford to buy real estate (a house) because the price of real estate grows in Latvia by about 8–10 per cent every year, but wages are not growing so fast.”

LV focus group, 19–24-year-olds

“[In the future I see myself as] a freelance programmer in a large company or internationally with a high salary [...] I have been interested in computers since I was a child, and I started to be interested in programming a year ago, and I can usually work in programming from anywhere with a flexible schedule. Even when on holiday in another country, I can work [online anywhere] and then go to the beach.”

(male, 18, LT)

“The greatest fear of [the pandemic] is losing my job and returning to my former income.”

(female, 27, LT)

“I would [...] work remotely, what is happening now, the more we look to the future, the more of a reality it seems.”

(male, 23, LT)

7

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

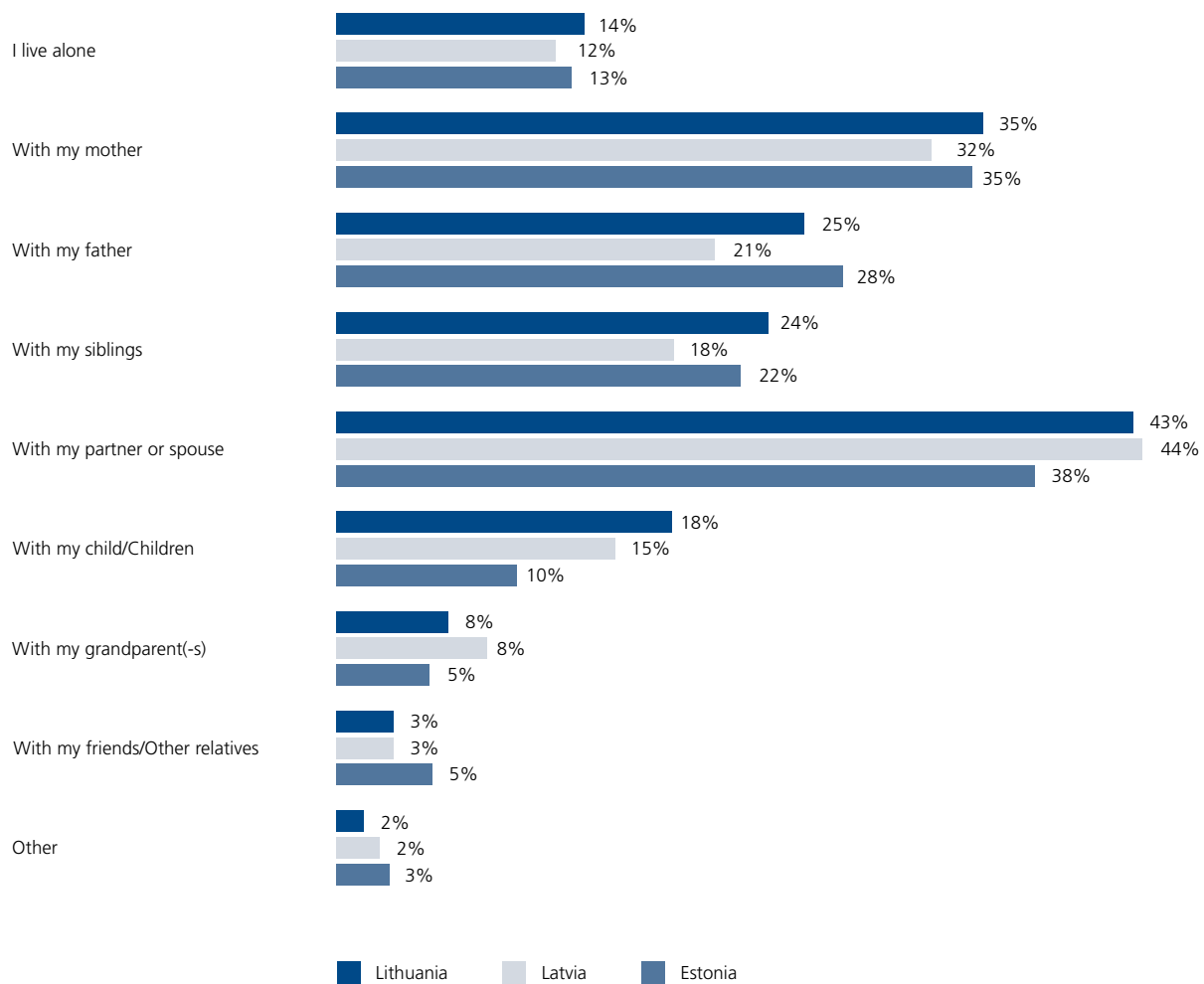


The Youth Study results also shed light on youth satisfaction with family life and friends. Starting a separate life – leaving the parental home, first cohabitation and marriage, birth of the first child – are significant milestones in young people's lives. One such milestone in social life is expanding or changing one's circle of friends. The ways in which young people see both family and friendship ties characterise their strategies for accumulating social capital.

In the Baltic countries, 71 per cent of young people are content (very or mostly satisfied) with family life and 70 per cent are happy with their circle of friends. Notably, satisfaction with family life and friends are higher than satisfaction with life in general (65 per cent). However, Baltic young people do not rate marriage and having children among the most important values – despite being held to be mostly or very important (by 47 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively) they rank slightly below the median among the 13 items offered in the questionnaire. Marriage or having children is more important to young people at the age of 25–29 than to younger cohorts (53 per cent and 66 per cent, respectively). Considering the average age of first marriage in the Baltic countries, most recently found to be 32 for men and 29 for women (Eurostat 2021d), it is understandable that the importance attached to these values varies with age. Interestingly, having children is considered more important than getting married. Hence Baltic young people do not see marriage as a precondition for partnership and having children. A cross-country analysis reveals that fewer young Estonians find getting/being married to be important (39 per cent) than do Latvian (48 per cent) and Lithuanian (52 per cent) young people.

Logically, the households of Baltic young people are linked to their age. The share of young people living with mother, father, siblings or grandparents is greatest for the youngest cohort (14–18). Eurostat data show that Estonian young people tend to start living apart from their parents earlier than their Latvian and Lithuanian peers. Moreover, the decreasing average age of young people leaving the parental home has also been most striking in Estonia, falling from 24.6 in 2012 to 22.1 in 2020. In Latvia, the average age fell from 27.9 to 26.7, whereas in Lithuania, it decreased from 26 to 25.6 (Eurostat 2021b). This suggests that Estonian youth are more independent and perhaps also more able to acquire a sense of autonomy earlier. Baltic respondents more often answered that they live with a partner or spouse than respondents in other Central European countries included in the YS survey. The share of young people in the Baltic states living alone is also higher than in other Central European countries. At the same time, Baltic young people are relatively less likely to live with one or two parents. On average, 46 per cent of respondents in the seven countries surveyed were living with their mother and 35 per cent with their father. These figures are significantly lower in the Baltic countries. As for young people who are already parents themselves, the highest share of young people living with their children is in Estonia (18 per cent), whereas in Latvia and Lithuania this share is 15 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively (Figure 12). Such differences can be associated with the results of demographic and family policy in respective countries. Namely, government support for every child and for parents in Estonia is stronger than in other Baltic countries (Chzhen et al. 2019).

FIGURE 12: HOUSEHOLD FORMATIONS IN THE BALTIC STATES (IN %)



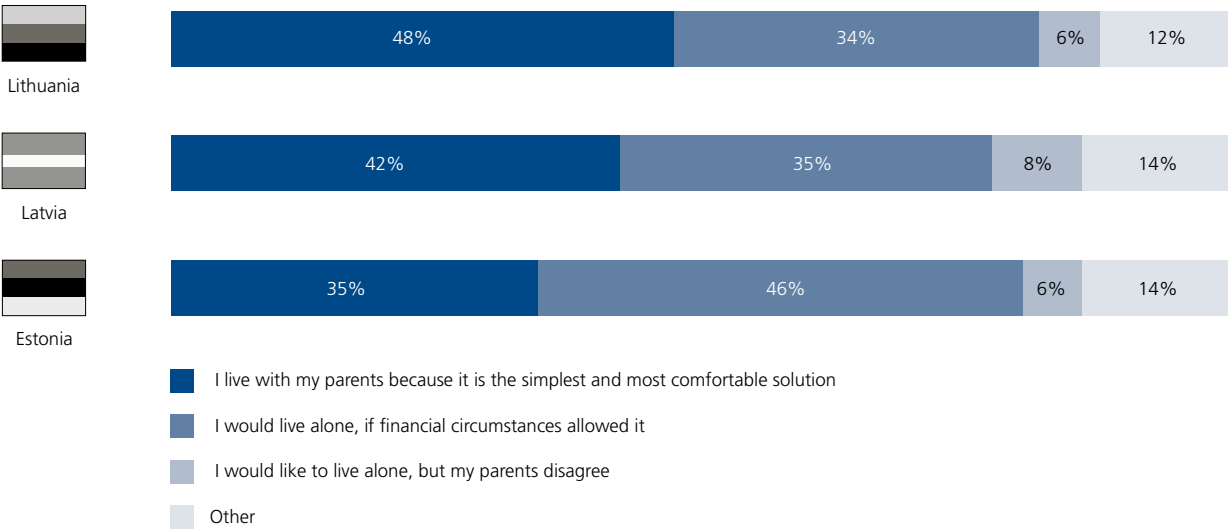
Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

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

The majority of Baltic young people choose to live with their parents, either because it is the simplest and most comfortable solution (41 per cent), or because it is not financially viable to live alone (36 per cent). There are significant cross-country differences, however (Figure 13). In focus group discussions, young people often describe the difficulty of starting an independent life. Their interpretations of their living situations differ significantly across age groups. In the age group 19–24 a large share (43 per cent) of Baltic respondents point in particular to the financial hardship entailed by living alone. Young men (48 per cent) are also more likely to live with their parents because it is the most comfortable solution.

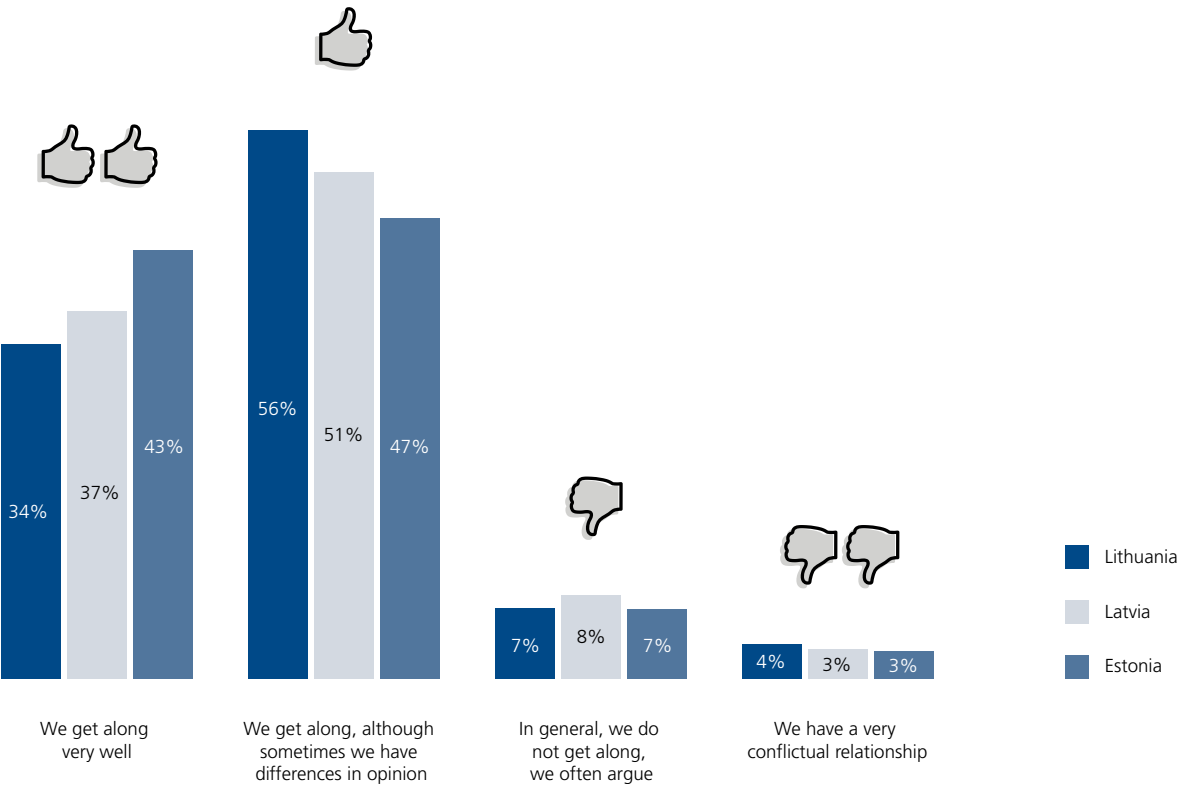
Most young people in the Baltic countries have a good relationship with their parents, with the vast majority getting on well or with only occasional differences of opinion (Figure 14). Nonetheless, almost half of Estonian young people (46 per cent) would prefer to live alone if financial circumstances permitted it. Overall, a more positive assessment of relationships with parents can be observed in the older cohort (19–29 years of age). This may point to specific psycho-emotional problems characteristic of teenage years. Gender, too, may sometimes explain young people's relations with their parents in the Baltics. For example, young women (52 per cent) are more likely than men (46 per cent) to state that they get along with their parents, even if they sometimes have differences of opinion.

FIGURE 13: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES YOUR SITUATION? (IN %)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, therefore, original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

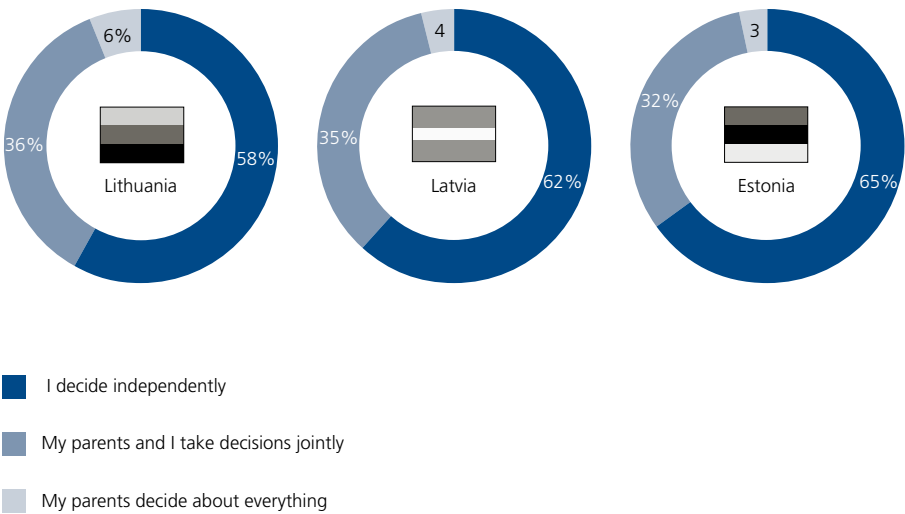
FIGURE 14: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARENTS? (IN %)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

Differences can also be observed with regard to how Baltic young people assess their parents’ influence on their life decisions (Figure 15). The data reveal that Estonian young people tend to feel more independent of their parents than Lithuanian young people. Interestingly, young women in the Baltic states demonstrate significantly higher autonomy and less often report parental influence on their decision-making. Although the older cohort (25–29) is also more likely to demonstrate more autonomy, every fifth respondent in this age group reported that they take decisions jointly with parents.

FIGURE 15: **DO YOUR PARENTS INFLUENCE IMPORTANT DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR LIFE? (IN %)**



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Note: The data is presented in accordance with the relevant rounding rules. In some cases original values would not add up to 100% without arbitrary determination, therefore, original values were kept instead. This explains eventual deviations in the graph.

Not all respondents were able to provide answers about the number of children they may want to have in the future. This is also understandable – some of the young people surveyed were as young as 14 and family planning can be influenced by a variety of factors. Among those who answered, the commonest number of children was two. Family planning triggers very different views among Baltic young people. The distribution of answers regarding the age at which they plan to have their first child was quite scattered, with answers varying from 15 to 50, but the most frequently mentioned period was from 25 to 34 years of age. One in four respondents in Estonia and Latvia are not planning to have children. The proportion of Lithuanian young people who do not plan to have children is even higher (31 per cent), which is somewhat surprising, given the catholic culture still prevalent in the country.

// QUOTES FROM INTERVIEWS TO THIS CHAPTER //

“Because they [parents’ generation] are very racist and have a bad attitude towards any differences, and if you’re different, then you’re a freak. So practically everyone is supposed to be similar.”

Estonia, female, 28 years of age

“I think that same-sex marriage can be registered because there is no problem here, people want to live together, it’s just their choice. But I don’t agree they should have rights to adopt children, because I don’t think it’s a full-fledged family. Moreover, this child, he doesn’t choose those parents [...] if they take him from an early age, they have to be prepared for the fact that the child will not be treated properly at school and he may later suffer from the fact that his parents are same sex.”

Latvia, focus group, 19–24 year-olds

8

GENERAL VALUES, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Values are formed through the process of socialisation and reflect youngsters' accommodation to their social environment (Rezsohazy 2001). The first post-Soviet studies of youth values indicated a decrease in the importance of values of self-expression and a sharp increase in the importance of individualistic materialistic and success-oriented values (cf. Saarniit 1998; Inglehart & Baker 2000). However, subsequent studies of values in the following decades have shown a slow recovery in the importance of values of self-expression (Ainsaar and Strenze 2019).

In the current study, respondents were asked to rate thirteen items measuring basic social values in terms of importance in their everyday life. From this, the factor analysis identified four basic value orientations representing their aspirations towards desired goals: social recognition (graduating from university, having a successful career, getting and being rich, looking good, wearing branded clothes); individual development (taking responsibility, being independent, healthy eating, doing sports); political and civic activism (being active in politics, participating in civic actions and initiatives); and family values (getting and being married, having children). A closer analysis of the underlying value judgements reveals variations in the values of young people in the Baltics (Figure 16).

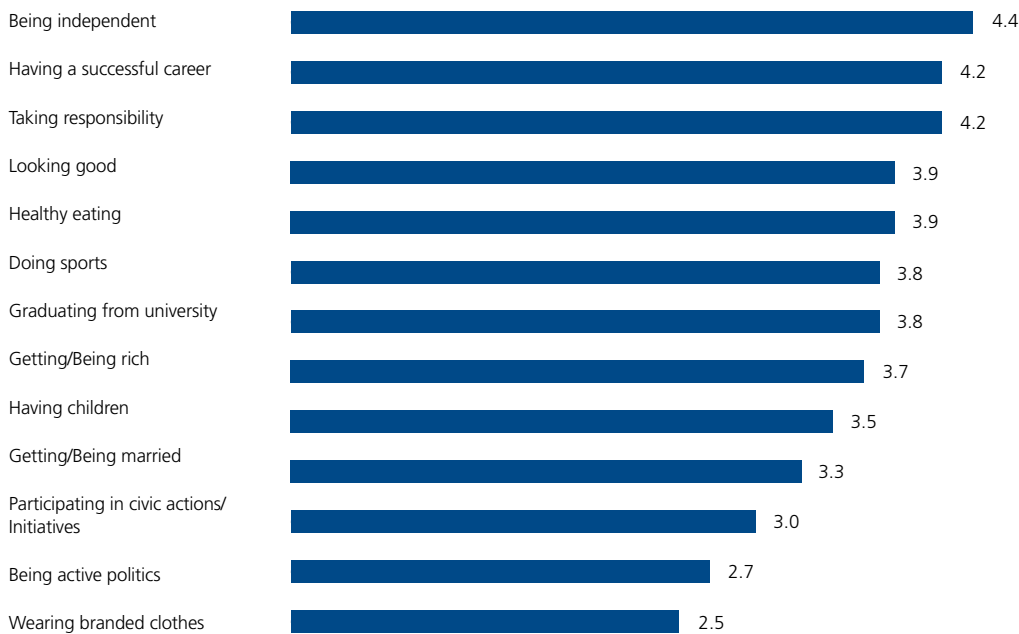
It is not surprising that Baltic young people today strive most of all for individual development and social recognition, having fully assimilated the requirements and challenges of a modern open market society. They most value the opportunity to be independent (4.4 out of 5), which is also testified by their strong appreciation of opportunities for a successful career (4.2), taking responsibility (4.2) and looking good (3.9). The importance of healthy eating (3.9) and doing sports (3.8) show that a healthy lifestyle is valued alongside success. Two in three respondents desire to graduate from university. They understand that a university diploma paves the way to a successful career. A little over half of the sample (58 per cent) consider getting rich a more or less important goal. Wearing branded clothes is not as important as it was after the collapse of communist rule, when it served as a status symbol; it is now the least valued item on the list. Thus, it appears that self-expressive criteria of individual development and success outweigh potential material rewards.

Young Estonians are more consistently orientated towards independence and taking responsibility than their Latvian and Lithuanian peers. They also attach more importance to healthy eating. In general, Latvians rate individual development and social recognition values lower than their Baltic peers, except for having a successful career. When it comes to gender differences, female respondents value looking good, graduating from university and healthy eating more highly than males, indicating with their higher valuation of independence and responsibility that they want to be modern and independent women. Young men placed greater importance on doing sports and getting rich than young women did.

Family-related values are not clear-cut – although 56 per cent of respondents considered having children important, less than half of them endorsed marriage as an important goal.

Our respondents do not consider social and political activism to be particularly significant to them. Only one-third of them declared participation in civic actions important and only one in four of them saw political activism as an important goal.

FIGURE 16: HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS TO YOU? MEANS OF ESTIMATES ON THE SCALE FROM 1 (NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT) TO 5 (VERY IMPORTANT)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

The lower valuation of participation in civic actions and initiatives declared by respondents in Latvia can be explained largely by the passivity of the Russian-speaking young people in the country (2.65), who are not as politically active as Latvian-speaking young people (2.91). It seems that Russophones, who preferred to complete the questionnaire in Russian, are less politically motivated in the Baltic states, as the Estonian Russian-speaking respondents (2.60) also rated such activities lower than their peers in Estonia (3.21) who preferred to fill in the questionnaire in Estonian. Young men attributed higher importance to being active in politics than young women.

SATISFACTION WITH CENTRAL ASPECTS OF LIFE

Our results reveal that Baltic young people's satisfaction with various areas of life is typical of their age. The highest levels on average are for a circle of friends (3.9) and family life (3.8). This indicates the importance of closest social networks for young people. The highest correlation among aspects of life was between satisfaction with family life and with life in general ². Although there are no statistically significant age differences in these ratings, there are

a number of regional and gender variations. Satisfaction with friends (4.0) and family (3.9) is slightly higher among Estonians than among Lithuanians (3.9 and 3.8, respectively) and Latvians (both 3.8). Although respondents of both sexes considered friendship to be equally important, females were more content with family life than males.

Satisfaction with education (3.8) is higher than with life in general (3.7) and is higher in Lithuania and Estonia (both 3.8) than in Latvia (3.7). There are also significant differences in this respect between different language communities within Estonia: Estonian-speaking respondents rated education more highly (3.9) than Russophones (3.5).

It should be noted that Estonia has separate school systems for Estonian- and Russian-speaking young people, as does Latvia. Overall satisfaction with life in general is slightly lower in Latvia (3.6) than in Lithuania (3.7). In summary, the regional comparison of satisfaction ratings given to different areas shows that, in most cases, the ratings given by Estonians are the highest and those by Latvians the lowest.

² Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.476.

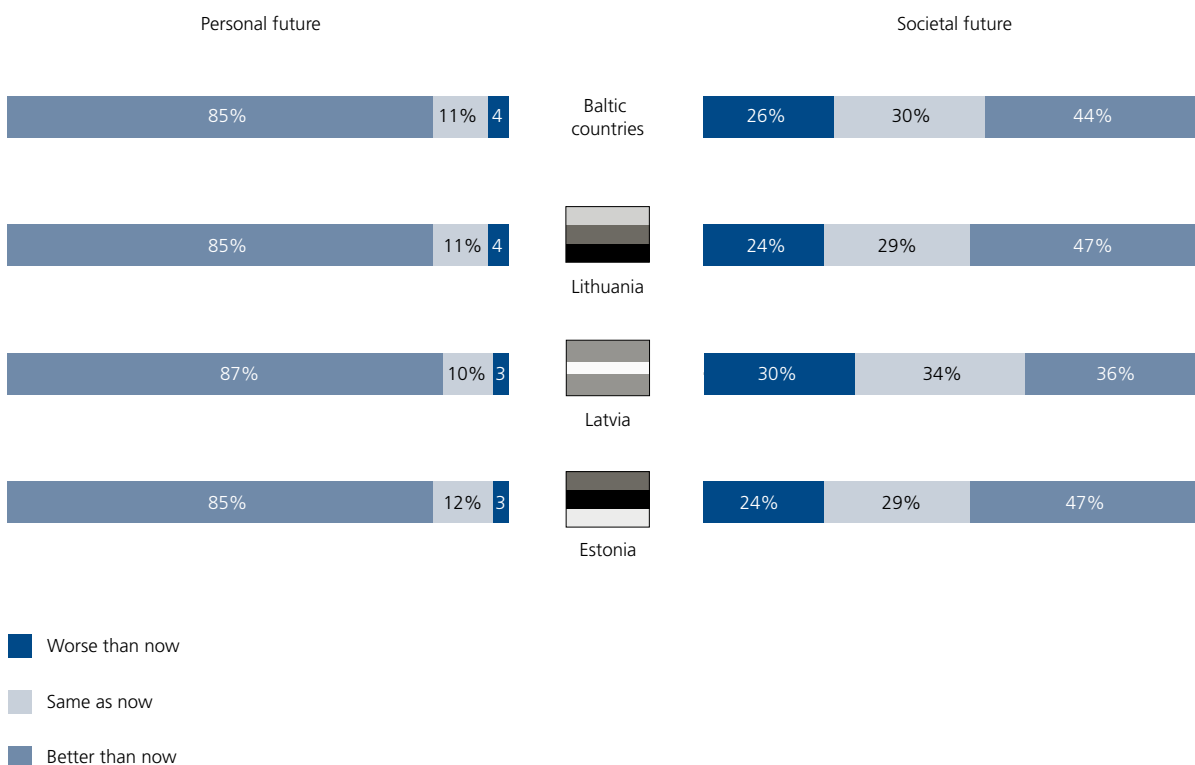
VIEWS ON PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL FUTURE

In general, Baltic young people view their personal futures more optimistically than those of their societies (Figure 17). Most of them see their personal future in 10 years as better overall than now (85 per cent). Only 4 per cent, on average, of Baltic young people expect that their personal future will be worse. Views about the future of society are more pessimistic and diverge more widely among Baltic countries. On average, only 44 per cent of Baltic young people expect that the future of their country will be better than now. Latvian young people stand out with a more pessimistic view than their peers in Estonia and Lithuania, with only 36 per cent answering that they believe the future will be better. For Estonian and Lithuanian young people, the share of optimists reached 47 per cent.

Regional differences within countries emerged for such views in Latvia and Lithuania but not in Estonia. Latvians' more modest expectations can be explained partly by these differences, whereas youngsters in the more developed metropolitan areas of Latvia tend to be more optimistic, their peers in more rural areas expressed much more pessimistic views about their future. Regional differences in Lithuanian young people's views are somewhat less pronounced.

In general, girls and women tended to be more optimistic than boys and young men in relation to their personal futures in all Baltic countries, and in Lithuania towards their homeland's future.

FIGURE 17: PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL FUTURE AMONG BALTIC YOUNG PEOPLE (IN %)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

FEARS AND CONCERNS

Young people experience various worries and fears in the course of their lives. The YS results reveal that individualistic issues, such as health and unemployment, dominate their concerns; pollution and climate change are equally important. The fact that more than 40 per cent of respondents are concerned about these issues shows that, in addition to their personal lives, environmental issues are also very important for young people.

Some 30 to 38 per cent of respondents were concerned about such issues as being a victim of physical violence, social injustice, terrorist attack, robbery, global pandemic and corruption. Among the three Baltic countries, Latvia's young people are most deeply worried on all issues. In terms of expressed fears and concerns, Latvians particularly fear unemployment, serious illness and physical violence (being a victim of physical violence, getting robbed or a terrorist attack) but also climate change, social injustice and global pandemics.

Gender-based comparison revealed significant statistical differences, according to which women were more worried about all listed items except immigration, which men were more concerned about. In general, the number of worried people decreases with age, but 19-to-24-year-

olds are most concerned by issues such as serious illness, corruption and environmental pollution.

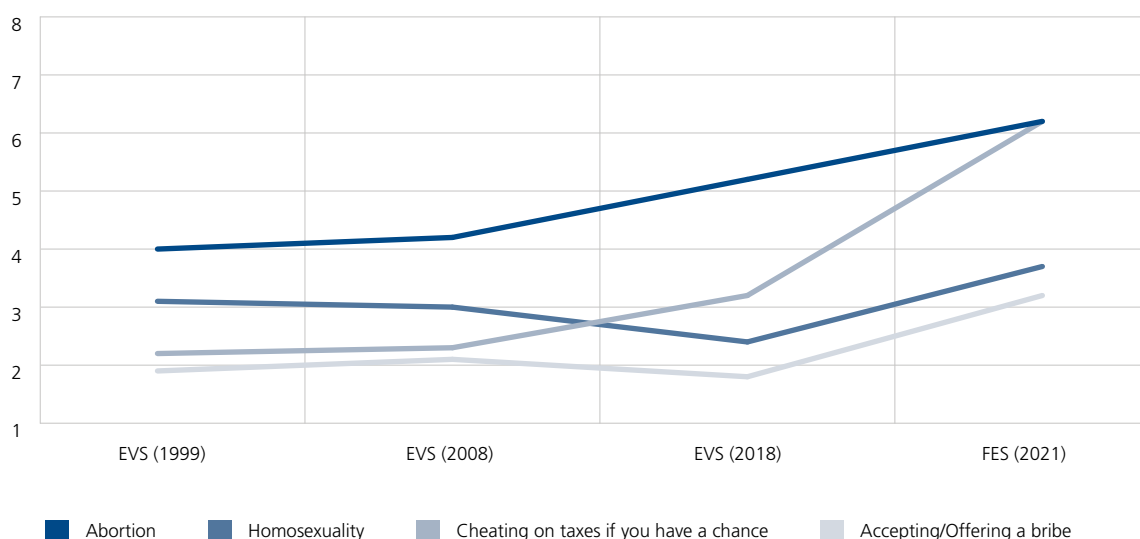
COMMUNITY VALUES

Community values reflect young people's perceptions of acceptable behaviour, in terms of both tolerance and law-abidingness. Tolerance towards others can be understood as the acceptance of minorities and of potentially controversial issues such as homosexuality and abortion.

The YS results reveal that social distance towards groups that are sometimes subject to discrimination varies. The most accepted group is Jews, although still 8 per cent of respondents express a negative attitude towards them. About one-fifth of respondents express a negative attitude towards homosexuals (20 per cent) and Muslims (18 per cent), whereas 27 per cent dislike Roma and the vast majority (79 per cent) feel negatively toward drug addicts. Latvians are the friendliest to homosexuals, Jews and Muslims, and Estonians the least. In general, younger respondents and females are more tolerant.

A methodology comparable to the European Value Study makes it possible to compare the attitudes of 18–29-year-olds to various behaviours over time (Figure 18).

FIGURE 18: ACCEPTANCE OF VARIOUS FORMS OF BEHAVIOUR (SCALE: 1 NEVER - 10 ALWAYS)



Note: Data are combined from the European Value Survey (1999) and the FES Youth Study (2021). The graph shows the means of estimates on a scale from 1 (never) to 10 (always). As Latvia did not participate in the EVS in 2008, only the estimates of the Estonian and Lithuanian respondents have been considered when calculating the averages for this period.

Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

The results of the European Value Study show that although the younger generations in the Baltic states are more tolerant of homosexuality and abortion than their older generations and their Russian peers, this tolerance is not as high as that of their Scandinavian peers. It is evident that tolerance of homosexuality has increased significantly over the past twenty years – it was significantly lower in the Baltic states in the 1990s (Klingemann et al. 2006) – and respondents approve of it to the same extent as abortion. According to the YS data, Estonians are most and Latvians are least tolerant towards these issues. Although there are no significant age differences in abortion estimates, 14-to-18-year-olds are the least tolerant and 19-to-24-year-olds are the most tolerant of homosexuality. Females are significantly more tolerant of both abortion and homosexuality than men.

We also see that acceptance of cheating on taxes and bribery has slightly risen over time. In general, patterns of law-abiding or relaying on informal networks are similar among the Baltic states. The results of the YS survey show that today's young people are most tolerant of looking for work through acquaintances (7.02) and using connections to "get things done" (5.17), and less tolerant of tax evasion (3.70) and bribery (3.19). Latvians are the least law-abiding: besides using connections to "get things done" they tend to tolerate bribery and tax evasion more than Estonians and Lithuanians. In general, women are more law-abiding than men.

RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION

Baltic young people's religious participation has been moulded by dominant historical religious traditions and experiences. Although only four in ten of YS respondents associate themselves with a religious community, remarkable cross-country differences emerged in terms of religious identity. The Baltic states stand out by comparison with the other four countries surveyed for their secular attitudes. The highest proportion of people who do not identify with any religious community are in Estonia (77 per cent) and the Czech Republic (73 per cent).

According to the YS data, Lithuania has more secular young people (58 per cent) than Latvia (44 per cent), Hungary (40 per cent), Slovakia (31 per cent) and Poland (29 per cent). The higher secularity of Baltic societies can be explained by the long experience of living under anti-religious communist rule (Rezsöházy 2001).

As a result of different historical experiences, the religious identifications of young people in the Baltic countries also differ. The highest identification with the Orthodox religious community can be found in Estonia and Latvia among those who preferred to fill in the questionnaire in Russian (29 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively). In predominantly Protestant Estonia, only 4 per cent of Estonian-speaking respondents are religious and the vast majority (81 per cent) are secular. Among Russian-speaking respondents in Estonia, significantly fewer do not identify themselves with any religious community (53 per cent). Latvian respondents vary in terms of religious preferences: 18 per cent prefer Roman Catholicism, 13 per cent Orthodoxy and 8 per cent identify with Protestantism. Young Lithuanians identify mostly (21 per cent) with Catholicism.

Estonians are least likely to participate in religious services, apart from weddings and funerals. There is a participation gap in Estonia, where more Estonian-speaking (71 per cent) as opposed to Russian-speaking (64 per cent) respondents never attend religious services.

The debate on the legalisation of cannabis has received much publicity. Comparative studies (ESPAD Group 2020, p. 111) reveal that cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in Europe and is easily accessible to one-third of Estonian and Latvian and one quarter of Lithuanian school students. The results of the study show that attitudes towards cannabis legalisation vary across the Baltic countries. A fair number of respondents (16 per cent in Lithuania and Latvia and 24 per cent in Estonia) have not thought about it at all. Opposition to legalisation is highest in Latvia, where slightly less than half of respondents do not support it, and lower in Estonia and Lithuania, where one-third oppose it. In Lithuania, about half of those surveyed are in favour of legalising cannabis, and four out of ten respondents in Latvia and Estonia are in favour.

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA

"There should be an effort to get this society to be more tolerant and accepting of each other the way we are."

Female, 18, EE

"We need to be more tolerant, a hundred per cent. This hate for someone and this kind of thing, it will kill us as an Estonian nation."

Female, 20, EE

"Our generation is much more tolerant towards all people who are different."

Female, 17, EE

"But if they [immigrants] demand more rights for themselves and are given them then there might be a situation where Estonians are not treated equal to them anymore because they have more rights and also more courage."

EE focus group, 25–29-year-olds

"And I believe that a bit more of other nationalities here in Estonia is good because in that way, I think, people will change to be more tolerant."

EE focus group, 14–18-year-olds

"It's okay, let them [homosexuals] live in peace, but sometimes I feel that they push themselves too much into the media or try to get some kind of attention."

EE focus group, 14–18-year-olds

"We are lagging far behind in the freedom and rights of homosexuals, for example, registration of their status or hereditary rights. There are many painful issues that affect them. In this respect, they are limited. [...] I have no bad thoughts about them as human beings, but I don't like that their lifestyle is propagated."

LV focus group, 25–29-year-olds

"We have much better quality [of life] than our parents. Purely in terms of opportunities to solve your problems and to fulfil your dreams. It seems that all this is much easier to do than was the case for our parents. [...] The Internet has opened up a lot of opportunities: to buy goods from abroad, to sell, to study, to work."

LV, focus group, 25–29 year-olds

"[LGBTQ+ people] advertise themselves too much."

Female, 15, LT

"I have homophobic friends. For me, they [LGBTQ+ people] can exist, only those parades overdo it, but maybe it's their kind of protest, I don't know."

Male, 15, LT

"I think there is nothing wrong with a person feeling different. [...] but people of a normal [heterosexual] orientation do not walk the streets and do not protest."

Male, 23, LT

9

POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND IDENTITIES

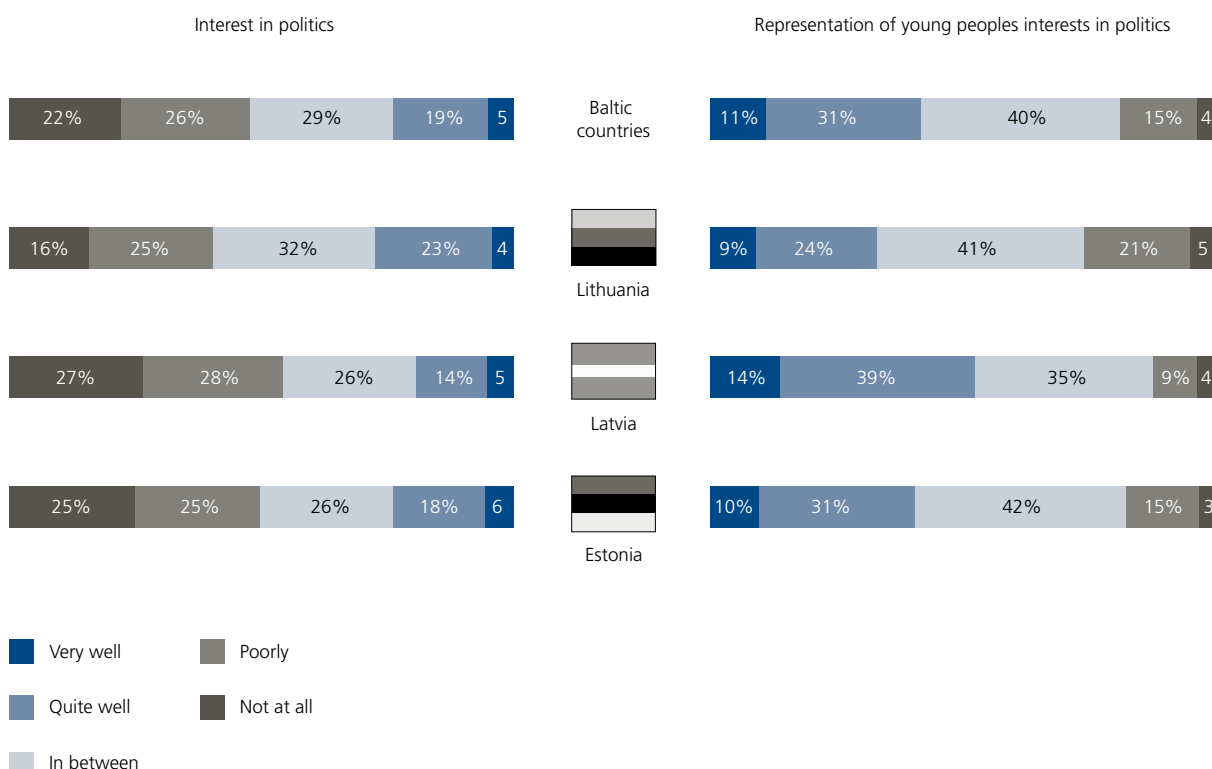
After the restoration of independence three decades ago, the political activities of Baltic young people remained low for a long time, and political interest is not a key feature of their lives. The fact that most young people are still not interested in politics has been confirmed by various studies (Kalmus and Beilmann 2019). Lack of interest in politics has been explained by both post-communist disappointment (Howard 2003) and by the democratic immaturity of the countries in question (Kitanova 2020).

POLITICS AND PARTICIPATION

The YS results indicate that politics remains unattractive for Baltic young people. There are some cross-country variations: Lithuanian respondents report stronger interest and Latvians are the least interested in politics (Figure 19). Overall, young males show greater interest in politics than young females. Such a gender gap is particularly evident in Latvia and Estonia. Although there are no significant regional differences in Estonia, young people's interest in politics varied in different regions of Latvia and Lithuania.

Young people's indifference to politics is also shown by their political self-identification. In terms of political beliefs, they are centrists, positioning themselves in the middle of the 10-point left-right axis (5.43).

FIGURE 19: **INTEREST IN AND REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN BALTIC POLITICS (IN %)**



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.
Any differences in the presentation result from the decimal not being shown.

An important contributor to their (lack of) political interest might be the perceived lack of representation of young people's interests in politics. Only every fourth young Lithuanian and every fifth young Estonian believe that their interests are quite or very well represented in national politics. Young Latvians feel themselves most excluded – only 13 per cent of them expressed the view that their interests are represented (Figure 19). Estonian and Latvian young men were more convinced than young females that their interests are sufficiently represented in politics; no gender gap in this respect emerged in Lithuania. Regional differences in the perception of representation follow a similar pattern to interest in politics: no significant regional differences in Estonia, however significant differences in Latvia and Lithuania.

Our data also reveal that youth turnout in parliamentary elections is a little higher in Lithuania than in other Baltic countries. In Lithuania and Latvia, young females with the right to vote are more active voters than young males. In Estonia and Latvia, turnout is much higher among those who preferred to fill in the questionnaire in Estonian or Latvian than among Russophone respondents. Although there were no regional differences in Estonia, turnout was higher in Latvian and Lithuanian metropolitan areas.

Both family and circle of acquaintances play a significant role in the formation of political views. Discussions on important political issues are central to this process. In general, half of YS respondents never or rarely discuss politics with their family or acquaintances. Only 10 per cent consult with people close to them on political issues often, and 5 per cent very often. Politics is an equally unpopular topic of conversation in all countries and age groups but is discussed slightly more frequently among men (18 per cent) than among women (15 per cent). Two-thirds of respondents believe that the family plays a significant role in shaping political views.

In total, 53 per cent of 19-to-29-year-olds surveyed voted in parliamentary elections. The electoral cycle must also be considered when calculating turnout: the last parliamentary elections in Latvia before the poll were in 2018, in Estonia in 2019 and in Lithuania in 2020. Therefore, the estimates of the youngest group are not comparable to those of the older respondents. This also partly explains

why turnout was higher among Lithuanians (57 per cent) and Estonians (55 per cent) than among Latvians (43 per cent).

These cross-country differences can also be attributed to the lower turnout of Russian-speaking respondents in Estonia and Latvia. One in five of the 19-to-29-year-old Russian-speaking respondents in Estonia and Latvia stated that they did not yet have the right to vote in the last elections to parliament. The number of those who did not vote even though they were entitled to do so also shows the infrequency of the respondents' voting behaviour. While in Estonia and Lithuania there were one in three such respondents, in Latvia as many as 45 per cent did not consider voting important. Both in Estonia and in Latvia, alienation from voting was higher among Russian-speaking respondents; about half of those who preferred to complete questionnaires in Russian did not vote despite having the right. The respective proportions were 32 per cent among those who filled in the questionnaire in Estonian and 42 per cent among those who filled in the questionnaire in Latvian.

The intention to vote in the future is much higher, however, with 75 per cent of respondents planning to vote in the next parliamentary elections. Lithuanians are the most confident of their intention to vote (78 per cent) and Latvians the least, with only two-thirds of respondents expressing such an opinion. Results show that turnout also increases with age: while 70 per cent of 19-to-24-year-olds intended to vote, 75 per cent of 25-to-29-year-olds expressed that intention. Results also show active electoral behaviour among females. Among 19-to-29-year-olds, they voted in parliamentary elections more frequently (60 per cent) than males (54 per cent). Among all age groups, they also show higher motivation (76 per cent) than males (71 per cent) to vote in the next parliamentary elections.

Previous research shows that only a small proportion of young people are actively involved in politics (Kalmus and Beilmann 2019). This trend was also confirmed in the YS survey. Only 1 per cent of respondents consider themselves ready to take on a political role, while an additional 10 per cent would be willing to do so. Willingness to take on a political function is significantly positively correlated with trust in political institutions.

Attitudes towards government policy play a significant role in the socialisation of young people. They reflect young people's perceptions of how society and social justice should be organised. In the Baltics, young people positively value the state's assistance in ensuring their livelihoods: three out of four respondents were convinced that the state should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for. Most respondents think it is unfair when incomes differ by wide margins: 56 per cent of them are convinced that incomes should be made more equal. In country-wise comparison, Lithuanians were more likely to consider economic security to be important (62 per cent).

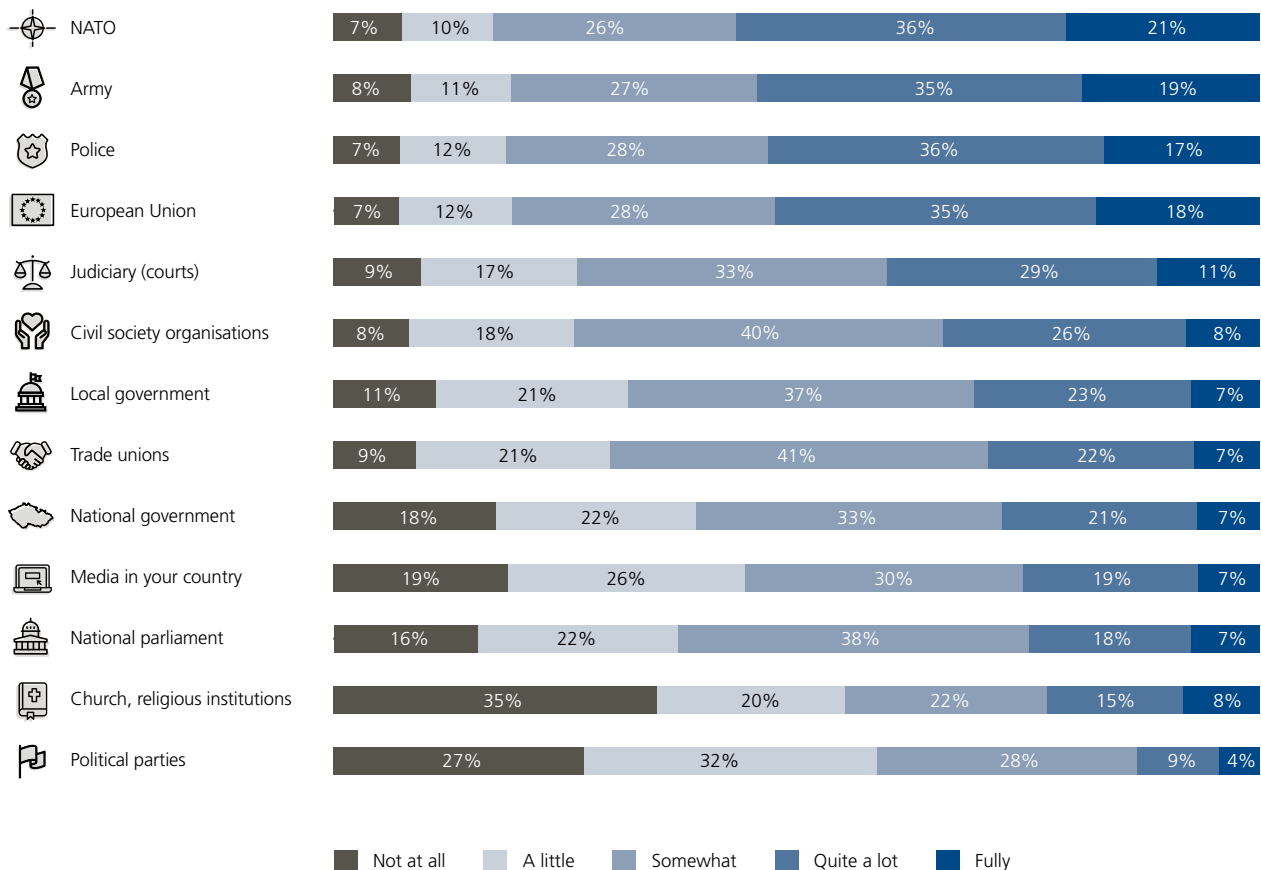
The adjustment of young people to a market economy is reflected in their commitment to the importance of private ownership in business and industry: only about one-third of them believe that the role of public ownership in business and industry should be increased. The role of the state in the economy is much more important for Latvians (46 per cent) than for Estonians and Lithuanians (both 32 per cent). The gender comparison showed that females are more concerned with income equality and state care for citizens, while males are more likely to consider state participation in business to be more important. Some 45 per cent of respondents supported the idea of a basic income. This proposal has the most advocates in Latvia (49 per cent) and the fewest in Estonia (41 per cent).

In the Baltics, the issue of institutional trust is very interesting. During the changes that have taken place in the past three decades since the restoration of independence, state institutions have undergone major changes and the Baltic countries have integrated into international organisations. Institutional trust can be defined as the extent to which individuals accept and perceive institutions as benevolent, competent, reliable and responsible towards them (Devos et al. 2002).

We see from Figure 20 that non-political law enforcement agencies (army, police) and international institutions (NATO, EU) enjoy predominant support (over 50 per cent). Such opinions reflect young people's desire for both individual and societal security. Four out of ten respondents endorse the courts and about one-third trust civil society organisations and local government. The government,

the national media, the parliament and the Church have slightly fewer supporters. The least trusted institution is political parties: only 13 per cent of respondents trusted them to a greater or lesser extent. In comparison between countries, trust was generally lower among Latvians than among Lithuanians and Estonians. In most cases, trust in institutions is higher among Estonians than in the other two countries (in relation to police, courts, civil society organisations, local government, trade unions, domestic media), while Lithuanians trusted the Church more than their neighbours. This is not surprising, as long-term comparisons between the Baltic states reveal that the Church is regarded as the most reliable institution in Lithuania (Beilmann et al. 2021). As a general pattern, trust in institutions is higher among males.

FIGURE 20: LEVELS OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN THE BALTIC STATES



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

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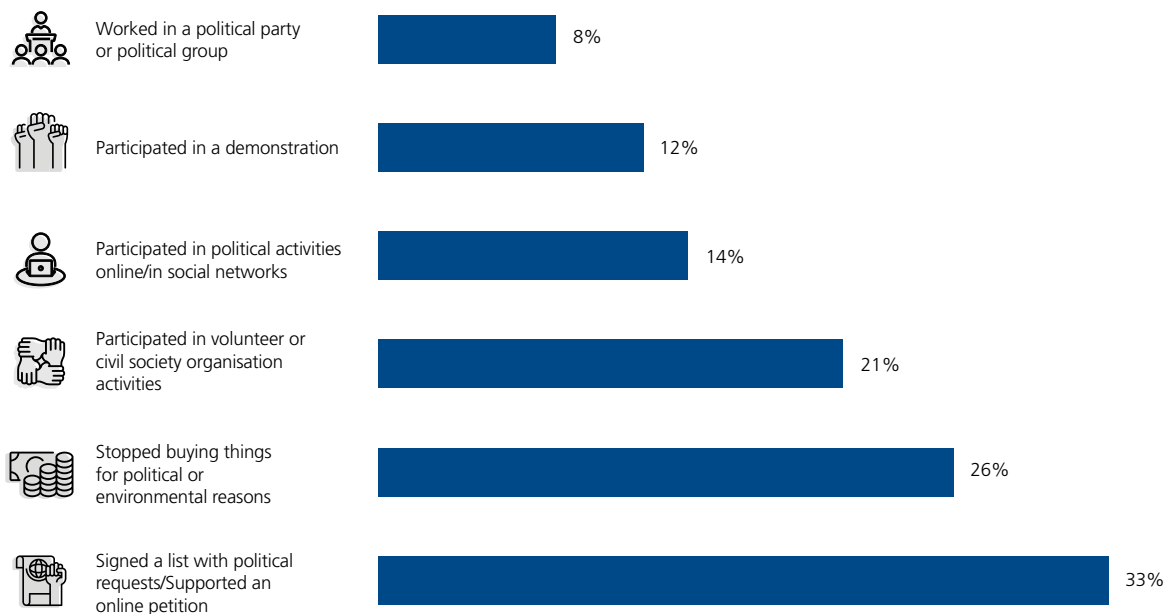
Their attitude to political issues reveals the development of variations of democratic mentality among young people. They do not regard their own knowledge of politics very highly – only approximately one in four respondents believes that they know a lot about politics. Two-thirds of them share, to a greater or lesser extent, the belief that young people should have more opportunities to have a say in politics. Although respondents rate democratic governance and authoritarian leadership equally highly (63 per cent approval), the majority of Baltic young people are in favour of parliamentary democracy. Six out of ten believe that it is the duty of every citizen in a democracy to vote. However, one in four respondents is convinced that, in certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy.

Patterns of democratic thinking vary from country to country. There are more people in Lithuania who believe that voting in elections is the duty of every citizen and that a strong leader ensures the public good. The YS survey

confirms results of earlier studies that support for a strong leader is less prevalent in Estonia than in the other Baltic states (Titma and Rämmer 2006). Young people in Latvia are less convinced than their peers in neighbouring countries that young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics and that democracy is a good form of government in general. Although males rated their own political knowledge higher than females did, more women stated that democracy is a good form of government in general and that it is the duty of every citizen in a democracy to vote. Women are more convinced than men that young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics.

Signing a set of political demands and supporting an online petition are the most common forms of political activism among Baltic young people. More than a quarter of young people also report experience in boycotting products for political or environmental reasons. The data suggest, however, that Baltic young people would prefer

FIGURE 21: THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS TO SHOW POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT. HAVE YOU DONE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING? (ALL BALTIC COUNTRIES)



Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

socially more engaging political activism, such as participation in volunteer or civil society organisation activities or participation in demonstrations and political activities online or in social networks (Figure 21). A cross-country analysis reveals significant differences between the Baltic states. Estonian young people more frequently report signing a set of political demands and supporting an online petition. Meanwhile, the experience of socially engaging and organised political activism is more characteristic of Lithuanian young people.

There are also significant gender differences in relation to political activism. For example, young women in all Baltic states are more likely to have signed a set of political demands. Young Estonian and Lithuanian women have also more frequently participated in boycotts for political or environmental reasons. Concurrently, young men in Estonia and Latvia are more likely to have participated in demonstrations or worked in political parties/groups. A few forms of political participation also exhibit considerable differences between age groups. The experience of signing political demands is more common for 25-to-29-year-olds. Taking part in demonstrations or online activities, on the other hand, is more often reported by young people in their early 20s (19–24). Interestingly, while the

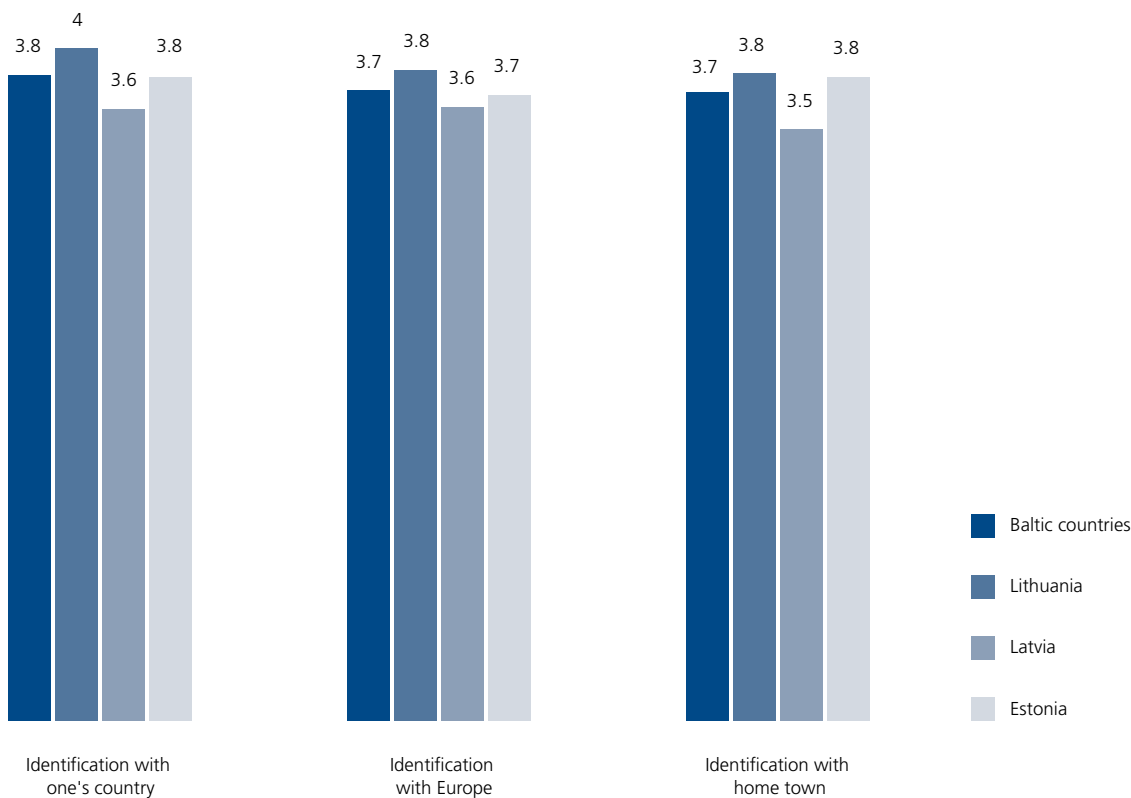
political activism of Estonian young people is not associated with the respondent's financial situation, Latvian and Lithuanian young people from less wealthy households are more likely to have participated in demonstrations and political online activities.

PROJECTING A NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE

Baltic young people are strongly affiliated with specific local areas, their country and Europe (Figure 22). Significant cross-country differences can be noticed, however. Whereas Lithuanian young people demonstrate the strongest identification, Latvian young people express relatively weaker attachment to these entities. This variation occurs within the limits of a rather strong identification, however. Moreover, all three identity types reveal significant correlations, suggesting that young people in the Baltic states who have stronger national identity are also more likely to express stronger local and European identity and vice versa.³

³ $r = .48, p < .01$ and $r = .46, p < .01$ respectively.

FIGURE 22: **STRENGTH OF IDENTITY**



Note: The survey question asked how much respondents see themselves as (i) Estonian/Latvian/Lithuanian, (ii) European, and (iii) a citizen of their hometown. Items were measured on a five-point scale, where 1 means "not at all" and 5 means "completely." The figure demonstrates mean values. Cross-country differences are statistically significant.

Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

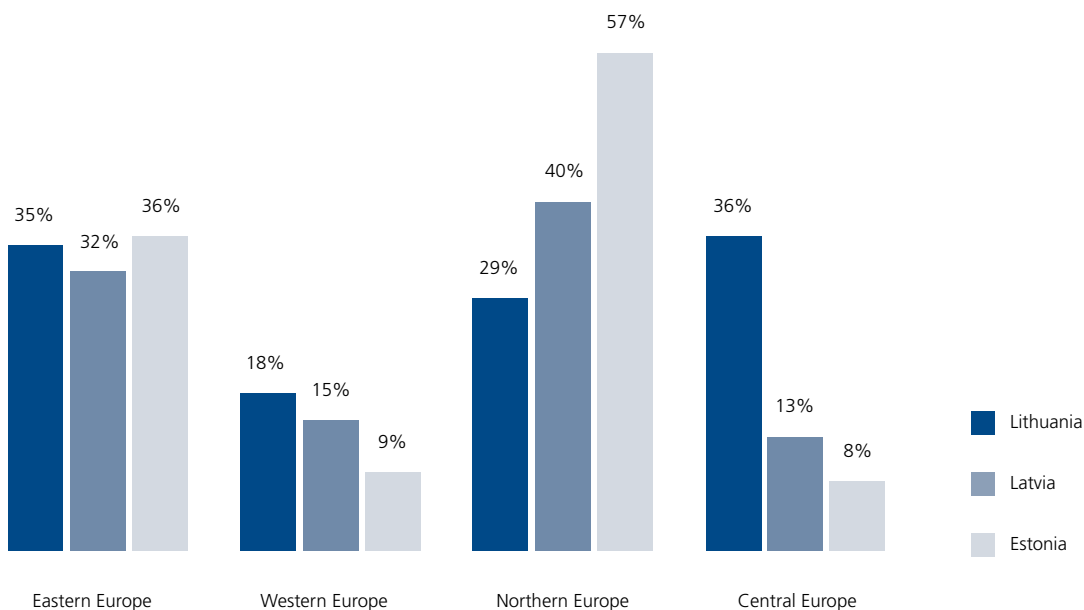
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Interestingly, the national and local identification of Baltic young people is also strongly or moderately correlated with national pride or a sense of pride in being a citizen of one's country. Likewise a stronger sense of national identity is associated with a more optimistic attitude towards the future of one's country. In other words, such optimism is eight times greater than that of young people who express weak ("not at all" or "a little") identification with their country ⁴. Sociodemographic data reveal that identification is most consistently associated with affluence: the more well-off Baltic young people feel, their local, national and international identification is stronger. It should be also noted that young women express stronger affiliation with regard to all three identity types.

⁴ $r = .52, p < .01$ and $r = .31, p < .01$ respectively.

Regarding national identity, young people in the Baltic states tend to align with the understanding of a moderately conservative and ethnocultural political community. This is particularly visible in Estonia and Latvia, where young people more often disagree that their countries should accept/receive more immigrants (disagree or mostly disagree 43 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively), or are more inclined to agree that foreigners should adopt their country's customs and values (agree or mostly agree 59 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively). Such cross-country differences reflect the varying intensity of xenophobia that has been observed in Baltic societies (Kapraņš and Mierīņa 2019). On the aggregate level, an ethnocentric and conservative political imagination is more pronounced among the most affluent Baltic young people, who, as previously demonstrated, are associated with a stronger national identity.

FIGURE 23: **WHERE DO YOU PLACE YOUR COUNTRY GEOGRAPHICALLY?**
(YOU CAN CHOOSE UP TO 3 ANSWERS) (IN %)



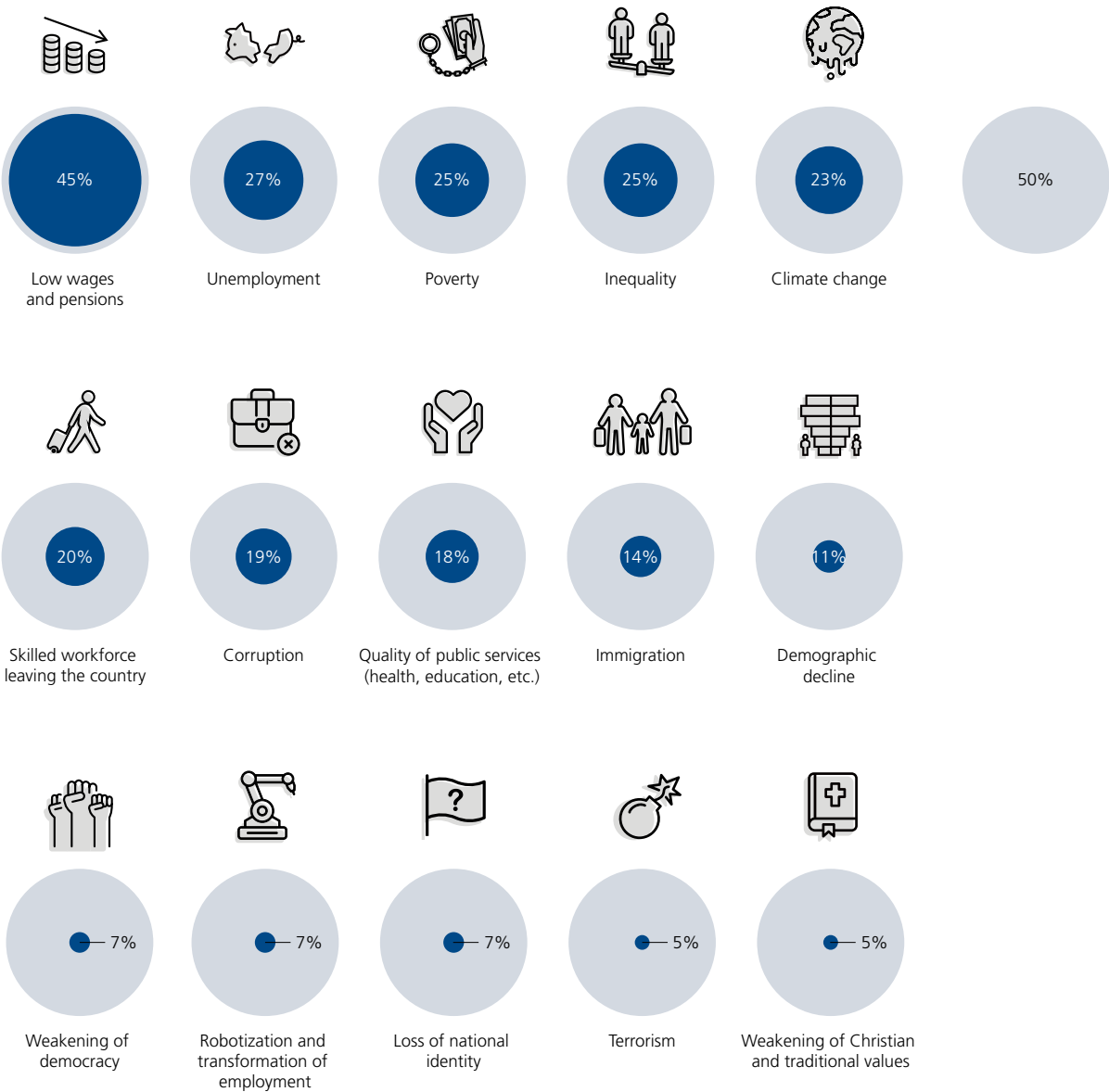
Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

The respondents place their geographical location at the crossroads of three cultural zones: as favoured regions they identify Northern, Eastern and Central Europe. It is not surprising that the vast majority of Estonian and Latvian youngsters identify with Northern Europe and secondly with Eastern Europe. Lithuanians conceive themselves equally as Central and Eastern Europeans, with Northern European following in third place (Figure 23). Thus, Lithuanian young people are more open to multiple geographical contexts, combining Central European, Eastern European and Northern European identities. Estonian and Latvian young people who express a strong national identity are particularly keen on placing their countries in Northern Europe, whereas Lithuanian young people with a strong national identity tend to see Lithuania as part of Eastern Europe.

⁵ Housing deprivation is a measure of poor amenities and is calculated with reference to leaking roofs, lack of bath/shower and absence of indoor toilet or dwellings considered to be too dark. See Eurostat Statistics Explained (2021).

Projecting the future of the country is not only related to youth identification but also to underlying structural problems in the respective country. According to the data, socio-economic matters such as low wages, unemployment, inequality and poverty are the most salient issues that Baltic young people believe their countries will face within the next decade (Figure 24). Whereas youth unemployment is a relatively small problem (see Section 6), other socio-economic issues that appear in the survey data can be more directly associated with current precarious conditions (for example, income inequality and at-risk-of-poverty rates) in which a considerable number of Baltic young people live. For example, the 2020 Eurostat data show that roughly every fifth young person aged 16–29 lives at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the Baltic states ($M = 21.4$ per cent). The most pronounced changes have been registered in Latvia, where this share has declined by 20.2 percentage points since 2011. In Lithuania and Estonia, it has decreased by 11.6 and 5 percentage points, respectively (Eurostat 2021e). The housing deprivation rate – which is lowest in Estonia and highest in Latvia – still reveals striking differences between Baltic young people, however.⁵

FIGURE 24: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE BIGGEST ISSUES FACING YOUR COUNTRY IN THE NEXT DECADE? (ALL BALTIC COUNTRIES) (IN %)



Note: Respondents could choose three items, which were presented at random.
Source: Field research for Youth Study Baltic Countries 2021.

Apart from evidently socioeconomic issues other issues feature less consistently in the risk awareness of Baltic young people. Respondents attach equal importance to climate change, good governance (corruption, quality of public services) and demographic change (emigration of skilled workforce, immigration and demographic decline). The least salient challenges are identity-related issues, such as loss of national identity or weakening of Christian and traditional values. On the one hand, this might

suggest that Baltic young people feel confident about their national roots and cultural legacy. On the other hand, the low profile of identity matters could indicate that Baltic young people prefer mainly to express future concerns within a societal rather than a national framework. Overall, respondents are concerned with tangible issues, whereas more abstract categories of identity, democracy and values seem to be less important. In general, survey data suggest that 25-to-29-year-olds or young people

who live in cities are more concerned about various future issues pertinent to their country. Interestingly, women and young people from well-off backgrounds tend to highlight socioeconomic issues more frequently. In contrast, young men in the Baltic states are more often worried about governance (corruption and weakening of democracy) and identity issues. Thinking about the future of their country, Estonian young people stand out with their perception of socioeconomic problems (inequality, low wages and pensions), global issues (climate change and terrorism), robotisation and transformation of employment, weakening of democracy and loss of national identity. Latvian young people more often highlighted socioeconomic issues (unemployment and poverty) as well as demographic decline and corruption. Conversely, Lithuanian young people are more likely than their peers to be concerned about the weakening of Christian and traditional values, which perhaps can be associated with the traditional role of Catholicism in Lithuanian society.

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA:

"I vote and I think that's enough for me. ... It's one chance to state your opinion. And I think not voting is equal to voting, just that when you don't go voting, then that's just a wasted vote."

Female, 28, EE

"I'm not very familiar with political issues at all. They don't interest me. I rather look at other things, but I do feel that who is friends with whom, who went to school with whom, which party's member the head of a media company is, plays a big part in Estonia. Like it feels like it's very important."

EE focus group, 25–29-year-olds

"The parliament could do with a makeover, in the sense that there's a lot of older people who might not think very much about what is good for young people – they're more interested in how to keep their position safe until death."

Female, 20, EE

"Latvia is a democratic country as we have the opportunity to make our own decisions, to do what we want. If we want to, we can start a party, get involved in politics; if we don't want to, we don't have to get involved. [...] We have opportunities. We are not controlled as in a totalitarian state or authoritarian state."

LV focus group, 25–29-year-olds

"I believe that Latvia can be treated equally perhaps even with other European countries, which is very important because before, it seemed that in the early 2000s it was not possible to compare Latvia with any other European country, but now, in my opinion, Latvia really has its own identity and it has really changed and improved."

LV focus group, 19–24-year-olds

"If there are relatively few immigrants, there is no problem, but if they are the majority, perhaps at least 20 per cent, that would be crazy. If they start imposing their religion, I am definitely against it."

LV focus group, 25–29-year-olds

"Poland is to my knowledge quite a religious country too, there it's possible to make this decision [ban abortion] but I think in Estonia this wouldn't be possible."

Estonia, focus group, 19–24 year-olds

10

CONCLUSIONS



This report provides a snapshot of some of the young people who will shape Baltic societies in the coming decades. The data we collected provides a solid ground on which to reach an understanding of how Baltic young people live today and what the enabling or constraining factors are in accumulating social, cultural and economic capital.

The study has outlined how education contributes to building cultural capital (skills, knowledge, expertise) that can help young people to enter the labour market. According to the YS data, formal education and youth employment experience rarely overlap in the Baltic states. Of course, employment mismatches are to some extent structurally conditioned, as young and inexperienced workers cannot quickly find a job that would perfectly fit their occupational qualifications and ambitions. One cannot exclude that many young people entering the labour market could become frustrated if this situation continues for longer than expected and labour market mobility does not provide a better match. Given the problem of labour shortages in the Baltic states, the qualification mismatch is a growing challenge to policymakers. The gap between generic knowledge and practice can be bridged through internships or practical training. This is clearly a popular form of acquiring new skills among Baltic young people. Moreover, we have identified striking cross-country differences in terms of satisfaction with the quality of education. Estonian young people stand out as significantly more satisfied with their education. This might be related to more consistent government policy and investment in education over past decades. Overall, the Estonian education system seems to be providing a better motivational platform for learning and applying knowledge than those in Latvia and Lithuania.

Regardless of cross-country differences, Baltic young people, particularly those in their 20s, regularly combine studying with part-time or full-time jobs. Moreover, people's workloads are likely to have increased in certain occupational sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kaprāns 2021). This raises the question of how early employment affects attitudes to education. Policymakers should promote consistent monitoring of working students in order to increase the education system's responsiveness to their demands. This study reveals a sizable youth demand for online learning, which would also be convenient for working students. As well as highlighting the important role of distance learning, the YS data indicate a dispar-

ity in the availability of IT equipment in rural and urban areas. Policymakers in the Baltic countries should address this issue in a targeted and consistent manner. Not only does IT equipment facilitate learning processes, but it also provides access to social networking sites (such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube), a primary source of information and socialisation for the majority of young people in the Baltics.

Just as early employment is an expression of social mobility, youth migration can also be seen as a mobility strategy. Young people in the Baltic states have grown up during a period of intensive labour migration to Western Europe and the Nordic countries. In this study, however, we have not found compelling evidence that emigration dominates in the youth mobility repertoire. Out-migration is still most often driven by a desire to increase economic capital. It is telling that 44% of Baltic youths on average (including 59% of Lithuanians but only 33% of Estonians) feel that education or work experience abroad is an important factor in finding a job. A weaker identification with country of origin and its society may also foster lifestyle migration. While this is more of a short-term mobility strategy, economically motivated migration is associated with more existential societal challenges. Policymakers in the Baltic states should take into account various factors that motivate young people to migrate. The origins and nature of economically driven youth migration should be addressed in local employment policies.

Youth emigration and low birth rates have been two major causes of the worsening demographic situation in the Baltic countries over the past 20 years. More than one quarter of YS survey respondents expressed the desire not to have children at all. Socioeconomic factors, among other things, account for this hesitancy. In response, a family policy targeted at supporting young families must be reinforced. In particular, housing at moderate cost must be made available, as young people's inability to rent or buy a home in the Baltic states is one of their concerns.

In this report, we have also sought to show how Baltic young people perceive ties with their nation states and how this identification situates and positions them in social space. Our analysis indicates that young people who express a stronger national identity are generally more optimistic about the development of their country. Nonetheless, these relations should not be treated in causal terms: national identity is both a process and

a result of statecraft and cultural discourses. Survey findings suggest that the ethnocultural components of national identity are more salient to Latvian and Estonian young people. They, unlike Lithuanian young people, live in ethnically fragmented societies where the necessity to maintain ethnocultural boundaries is more common. Of course, along with national identity there are other relevant social identities that we have only touched upon in this report. At the same time, the YS study reveals that the core values of Baltic young people emanate from an individualistic worldview that can evolve and be meaningful beyond communitarian identities. Individualistic values, such as aspiring to personal autonomy and a successful career, are often mentioned by Baltic young people. This perhaps “(neo)liberal” but not necessarily hedonistic life trajectory may be felt to be more manageable and thus more easily associated with an optimistic personal future. By contrast, communitarian values, by their very nature, imply a degree of limited agency and thus uncertainty and possibly precarity.

Aspiring to self-realisation and social recognition may increase satisfaction with personal life but may also alienate young people from a shared civic culture and increase their ignorance of politics. The data show that interest in politics is relatively moderate among Baltic young people. However, they do believe that they should have more opportunities to have a say in politics. This resembles a paradox also observed in Southeastern Europe, where “young people overwhelmingly want a stronger political voice yet at the same time admit a low level of political knowledge and limited interest in politics” (Lavrič et al. 2019: 108). Policymakers in Baltic countries should take this paradox into account when considering how to involve young people in civic life. Our study contends that Baltic young people’s experience of civic activism largely comprises individualistic involvement that does not require systematic activity. At the same time, young people would also prefer a socially more engaging civic life. Given this discrepancy, policymakers should identify constraints (social, psychological, economic) that discourage young people in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from taking part in more communal and organised forms of civic life.

In contrast to prevailing individualistic values, young people in the Baltic states express high hopes for the role of the state in ensuring social security. They tend to believe that the primary objective of the state is to cope with social inequality and poverty. Baltic young people would thus prefer that the state pursue communitarian aims and realise its social responsibility. This position may well be an expression of young people’s precarious circumstances.

Despite the serious global issues currently confronting society – economic insecurity, climate change, the global pandemic – the young people of the Baltics express the resilience and optimism of their youth. They value independence, responsibility and hard work and are positive in their personal outlook for the future. If this optimism can be harnessed for the greater good and directed toward civil engagement as well as individual achievement, the Baltic societies will reap the benefits of their most precious natural resource: their young citizens.

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ABOUT FES YOUTH STUDIES

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

A dedicated Advisory Board (Dr Miran Lavrič, Univ.-Prof. Dr. Marius Harring, 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 à 60 minutes in average) with young people aged 14–29 years. Various questioning techniques and methods were used in the interviews to specifically address the psychological consequences of Covid-19 for young people. The online interviews were conducted by experienced moderators from the polling agency and research institute Ipsos and local partners. Ipsos Germany, Janine Freudenberg and Laura Wolfs, coordinated the study both in terms of content and organisation.

