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# **YOUTH STUDY GROWING UP IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE**

AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF THE LIVING  
CONDITIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CZECH REPUBLIC,  
HUNGARY, POLAND AND SLOVAKIA

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# MAIN FINDINGS

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## EDUCATION

- Young people in Central Eastern Europe show high educational ambitions in all four countries studied. Almost every second person between the ages of 25 and 29 holds a university degree.
- Young women in Central Eastern Europe are more successful in education than their male peers. They show a high commitment and invest more time in their education.
- Education-related effects of origin are clearly visible in all four countries. In particular, access to tertiary education is significantly more often denied to young people from educationally disadvantaged families and families with an intermediate level of education. This is particularly evident among young Slovak people.
- The education systems in the respective countries are viewed critically by young people. In Hungary, Poland and Slovakia in particular, there is a fundamental dissatisfaction with the quality of education.
- Suspicions of corruption against educational institutions are expressed in all four countries – especially strongly in Slovakia.

## WORK AND MIGRATION

- There is a precarisation of certain groups of young people in the world of work: on the one hand, the exposed position of well-educated young male people in permanent employment, on the other, a gender gap among young people in unemployment. With an overall youth unemployment rate of about 20%, significantly more young females are affected by unemployment. However, this gender gap evens out as the country's economic strength increases.
- Just under one quarter of all young people have a strong to very strong desire to migrate.
- Around one-third of all young people who wish to migrate would like to return to their home country after their migration. In comparison, these homecomers come more often from the Czech Republic, have a stronger sense of national as well as local affiliation, and more often assume a good status of human rights and individual liberties in their home country.
- Just under one-fifth of the young people with the desire to migrate can imagine migrating for more than twenty years and thus permanently. In particular, young Polish people and young people with a less strong sense of national as well as local affiliation are among these expatriates.
- One's own as well as country-specific economic situation influence the actual migration experience. The poorer the young people and the worse the economic situation in the country, the more often the young people migrate.

## **FAMILY**

- The majority of young people in Central Eastern Europe grow up in traditional family structures. The nuclear family is still the most common form of family life. This is most common in Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.
- The majority of young people express a high level of satisfaction with their own family.
- The socio-economic situation is a decisive factor in determining how people judge their own family: the more precarious the financial situation within the family, the more stressful the relationship with parents is assessed yet with clear differences between the countries in terms of the level.
- The reasons for staying longer in the parents' home among young people in Central Eastern Europe are not so much based on convenience and securing comfort, but rather, it is their own financial situation that prevents them from moving out.
- Starting a family of one's own is a central goal in life for the vast majority of all young people interviewed across all countries surveyed. The majority of them are oriented towards traditional family concepts.
- The desire to have children is stronger than to marry.
- Among the members of the Visegrád Group, child planning is most often postponed among the following youth generation in Poland.
- When it comes to starting a family, an urban-rural divide is apparent. The desire to get married and have children is significantly less pronounced among young people in urban structures than in rural regions.

## **GENERAL VALUES, ATTITUDES AND WISHES**

- The majority of young people in Central Eastern Europe are satisfied with their own lives.
- Young people's subjective sense of well-being depends on how comfortable they feel within their own family and circle of friends, how satisfied they are with their own education and what financial resources they have.
- Young people are positive about the future. Three quarters believe that the personal situation in 10 years will generally look better than the current one.
- The personal future forecasts of young females are more positive than those of their male peers in all the countries studied. Young females in Hungary are particularly confident.
- The view of the development of society as a whole is much more pessimistic. A relative majority of 15 to 29 year-olds believe that society is more likely to drift apart and develop negatively.

- With regard to value concepts, clear individualisation tendencies are recognisable. Self-realisation and one's own career are at the centre of life planning. This is flanked by the demand for a good life and a sense of personal well-being.
- Intolerance towards social, ethnic and religious groups is not uncommon, at least among some young people in Central Eastern Europe.

## POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND INVOLVEMENT

- Only 6 per cent of young people in the Visegrád countries are very interested in politics, and a further 21 per cent are somewhat interested. By contrast, 19 per cent are not at all interested, and 23 per cent are not very interested, showing a difference of magnitude between those who are interested and those who are not.
- More than four-tenths of young people in the Visegrád countries rarely discuss political issues, while only 4% do so very often. Therefore, most of them live in an environment where public and political issues are not part of everyday communication.
- Young Hungarians agree with their parents the most, but they are also the least aware of their parents' political views. In comparison, the political conformity of young people in the other three countries shows similar rather than divergent characteristics.
- Half of 15-29-year-olds in the region feel that political elites do not sufficiently represent their interests. Only 1-2% think that young people's interests are well represented in politics. The proportion of young people with a very negative opinion varies from country to country, with 8 per cent of Czechs and Slovaks, 17 per cent of Poles and 20 per cent of Hungarians giving a mark of 1 on the 5-point scale.
- Slovak young people are the most likely to want to participate in a future parliamentary election (81%), followed closely by Polish and Czech 15-29-year-olds (79-79%), while Hungarians are the least likely to vote (71%).
- The most common form of protest used by young people in the region is signing a petition, followed by boycott and civic activism. While the former was done by 37 young people in the V4 countries, the latter two forms were done by around a quarter. Online activism is a less popular form of participation. Overall, party work has the lowest prevalence (6%).
- There are significant differences in the participation of 15-29-year-olds in each country. Regardless of the form of the involvement, it is clear that the political participation and willingness to participate of Hungarian 15-29-year-olds is far below their peers in the V4 countries. On the other hand, Polish young people show outstanding activism in several types of participation.
- Based on the averages of the ideological scale, young people in the Czech Republic take the most right-wing position of the four countries, with an average score of 5.71, but this is still actually in the middle. They are followed by young Hungarians (5.45) and then by Slovaks (5.41). More than a quarter of Slovak and Hungarian young people cannot or do not want to place themselves on the left-right scale. Unknown ideological orientation is the highest-scoring category for Slovak young people.

- Among young people in the four countries, Polish people are the most polarised in left-right self-definition, with the highest polarisation index (0.65), two to three times higher than in the other three countries. Czech 15-29-year-olds are the least divided, i.e. they place themselves in the centre. Moreover, the polarisation of young Hungarians and Slovaks, measured by ideological self-classification, is close and relatively moderate.
- Among the V4, Hungary is the only country where more people support basic income than reject it. Introducing a basic income is not a popular idea in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia.
- Young people in the Visegrád region trust the armed forces and international alliances (NATO, EU), and least trust in political institutions and the media.
- In all Visegrád countries, young people consider democracy to be a good system and want more say in politics, but in none of the countries do young people consider themselves politically informed.
- Low wages and pensions are seen as the biggest problems for the next ten years. In addition to other material issues (poverty, quality of public services, emigration and unemployment), corruption and climate change are also seen by many as significant problems.
- The majority of young people in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are anti-immigrant. Young Poles are the most tolerant and least nationalistic in the region. National pride is strongest among Czech and Slovak young people.
- The vast majority of young people in the V4 would stay in the EU. The EU is a strong positive reference point for all four countries, with only a tiny minority considering leaving the EU.

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