



Young people between marginalization, radicalization, and potential

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Introduction

Young people are a crucial resource for democratic prosperity, growth, and development in every society, including Montenegro.

This publication presents the findings of empirical research and focus groups with young people, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the realities of everyday life, experiences, and needs of young people in Montenegro. The research covered a wide range of questions - from how young people spend their free time, how they educate themselves and face the challenges of employment, to what extent they are satisfied with their family and personal lives, from whom they maintain social distance, and who they perceive as discriminated, to how engaged they are in socio-political processes. Through the analysis of each of these segments, insights are provided into both individual challenges and broader implications.

The overall position of young people in Montenegro can be described as challenging and uncertain, especially in the context of employment. The high youth unemployment rate, which affects nearly 60% of this population, represents the most serious obstacle to the transition into adulthood and the prospects of young people. Poor economic conditions slow down housing and financial independence, and burden relationships and family life, all of which have implications for challenges related to self-esteem and self-worth among young people.

If young people lose interest in social engagement, volunteering, and politics as indicated by research results it can lead to a lack of representation in decision-making and other processes that concern their lives. Youth apathy also contributes to a decline in the level of democratic participation and legitimacy of political institutions, as well as the loss of new ideas, perspectives, and innovations which are generators of societal progress.

Young people in Montenegro feel that their needs and opinions are not sufficiently taken into account by decision-makers, leading to a democratic deficit manifested through increasingly pronounced mistrust in institutional

systems. When all the challenges they face accumulate, a sense of hopelessness among young people arises, escalating to a significant percentage (40%) stating that they want to leave the country.

It is important to note that young people in Montenegro recognize societal challenges and irregularities, and they want a system that values expertise and education, where they have equal chances of success regardless of their background or connections.

Therefore, it is essential to work on raising awareness among young people about the significance of politics and political engagement, to encourage their more active participation in shaping the future of society. This ensures a sustainable democratic future and creates an inclusive society where the voice of every young person is heard and valued.

We hope that this study will be beneficial to various stakeholders working with young people as material for further research and analysis, to continuously monitor trends and changes in the lives of young people, and to identify new needs and challenges they face. In this manner, it is possible to timely and appropriately adjust policies and programs to make them more effective and relevant for young people.

We hope that decision-makers will carefully consider the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study and provide support to young people through fair employment policies, the improvement of educational quality, and the creation of a more favorable environment that fosters the realization of the potential that young people possess. After all, the potential for overall community prosperity lies therein.

Methodology

The basis of this study is empirical research conducted by the Centre for Civic Education (CCE) in collaboration with the specialized agency DAMAR, within the project „I ACT – I CHANGE,“ supported by the U.S. Embassy in Podgorica, through the Democracy Commission Small Grant Program.

The research was carried out from 10 to 17 December 2022, with a sample of 833 respondents.

Data collection was done by the CAPI method, which involves face-to-face interviews by application of tablet computers.

The sampling frame was based on the 2011 population census, the most recent one available. To achieve a more accurate sample, population estimates and voter lists were included. The research was conducted in three stages, through a stratified random sample. The first stage was conducted through census circles and polling stations. The second stage was conducted in households using the random walk method, and the third stage involved interviewing a household member selected using the birthday method.

Regarding the gender structure of respondents, 47.9% were male and 52.1% were female. The age structure of respondents was diverse, including young people aged 15 to 19 years (30.9%), respondents aged 20 to 24 years (33.7%), and those aged 25 to 30 years (35.4%).

The educational level of respondents varied during the research period, 26.1% were in the process of secondary education, 21.1% were in the process of higher education, 32.8% of young people had already completed secondary education, and 20% had completed higher education.

In addition to public opinion research, the project also conducted focus groups with the participation of 19 young individuals from three cities in Montenegro – Kotor (Southern region), the capital city Podgorica (Central region), and Bijelo

Polje (Northern region).

The research was carried out to contribute to better policy and practice development for young people by providing updated data that would offer a more accurate picture of the situation and needs of youth in Montenegro, which are often overlooked. The study not only relies on the aforementioned research but also draws upon insights from the previous CCE/CGO's research, in which CCE/CGO led or participated through its team, in an attempt to provide a comparative perspective on certain issues¹.

¹ Youth - social ornament or social capital, Podgorica, 2016, Centre for Civic Education (CCE/CGO), <https://cgo-cce.org/en/2021/10/01/young-people-in-montenegro-social-ornament-or-social-capital-2/> and Study on young people in Montenegro 2018/19, Berlin/Podgorica, 2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/15293.pdf>, <https://cgo-cce.org/en/2021/10/01/youth-study-montenegro-2018-2019/>

Free time and Lifestyle

“Free time is a collection of activities that an individual can engage in voluntarily, whether for rest or entertainment, to increase their level of knowledge or education, to engage voluntarily or to exercise their creative abilities, once freed from their professional, social, and family obligations,” is one of the most frequently quoted definitions of free time, coined by the French sociologist Gérard Dumazedier.

This definition has served sociologists to formulate a “universal” definition of free time: *“Free time is the time available to an individual outside the demands and obligations of their work, family, and the society to which they belong. Leisure activities are occupations of all kinds that individuals engage in during their free time, driven by their conscious or unconscious inclinations. These leisure occupations have an equal function in providing rest, entertainment, and means for self-affirmation and personal development”*².

Especially interesting and crucial, particularly when researching youth, is the category of **young people’s free time** and how they spend it. During their younger period, free time can significantly contribute to personality development, indicating how young people are preparing for adulthood and the challenges it brings. In many countries, data is specifically collected on this aspect to shed light on the quality of life of this population, however, this is not the case in Montenegro, which negatively affects the content of public policies created for the youth in Montenegro.

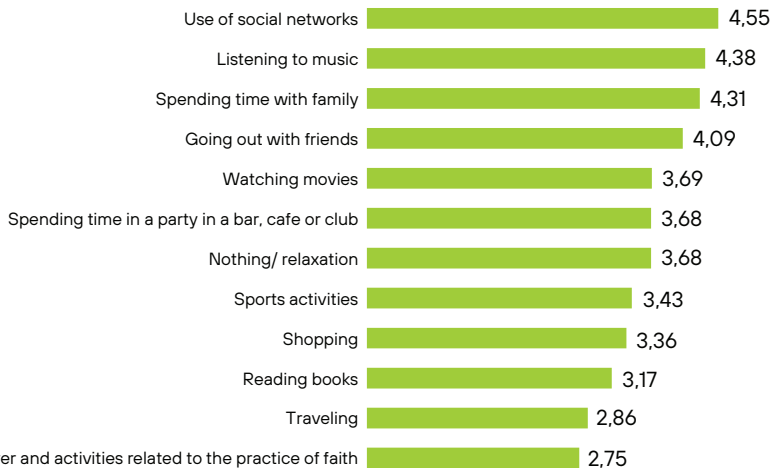
Empirical research findings indicate that young people in Montenegro spend their free time primarily using social media, listening to music, and then with their families

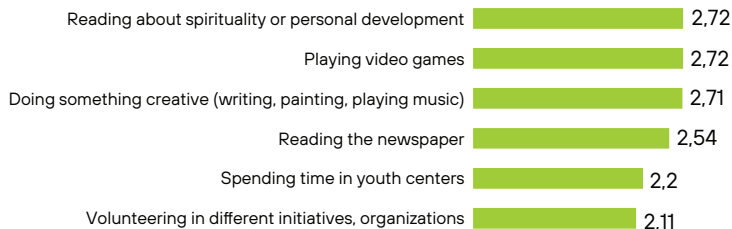
² Selected Works, N. Potkonjak, Osijek, 1991, p. 298-299

or hanging out with friends. On the other hand, they dedicate the least time to volunteering in various initiatives, organizations, and activities within youth circles.

These findings are in line with previous research on youth, with the note that a cause for concern today is the slightly lower participation in sports activities among young people instead, activities such as watching movies, socializing in cafes or clubs, or idleness and relaxation seem to prevail. This also illustrates the shortcomings of institutions, especially the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which has failed to establish a systemic approach and engage more actively to encourage young people's involvement in sports. Furthermore, compared to earlier research, reading books is slightly less favored, suggesting there is room for improvement in promoting physical and mental exercise among young people, considering these are important factors for their development.

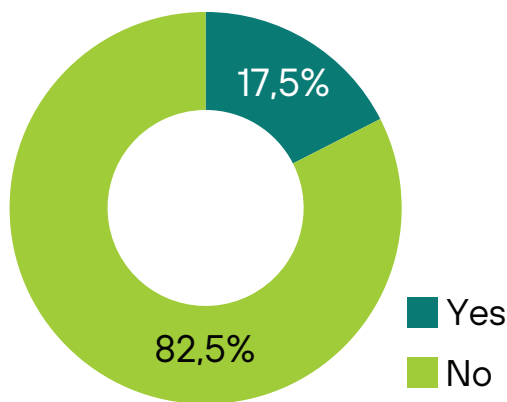
Additionally, young people tend to allocate less of their free time to travelling, which unfortunately could be attributed to lower living standards, as indicated by results from other surveys conducted by the CCE/CGO. This aspect could be significant for broadening horizons, exploring other cultures, and enhancing knowledge, which not only benefits the youth but also contributes to societal development and overcoming stereotypes and prejudices that influence polarization in Montenegro.





Graphic: On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 never, 5 very often), indicate how often on average you engage in the following activities?

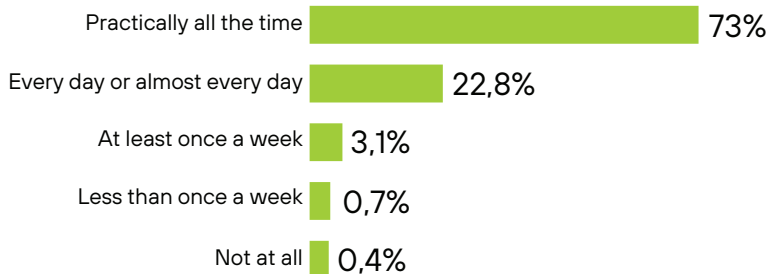
The vast majority of young people in Montenegro have not participated in any form of voluntary or volunteer work over the past year, with only 17.5% of young people dedicating their time to this type of activism during the mentioned period.



Graph: Have you participated in any kind of volunteer work in the past 12 months?

Young people in Montenegro have broad Internet access, with a significant majority of them (73%) using it practically all the time. An additional 23% access the internet every day or almost every day, while a negligible number use it at

least once a week (3.1%), less than once a week (0.7%), or never (0.4%). The number of young people accessing the internet daily has increased by about 10% compared to the data from the *Youth Study 2018/2019*.



Graphic: *Do you have access to the Internet?*

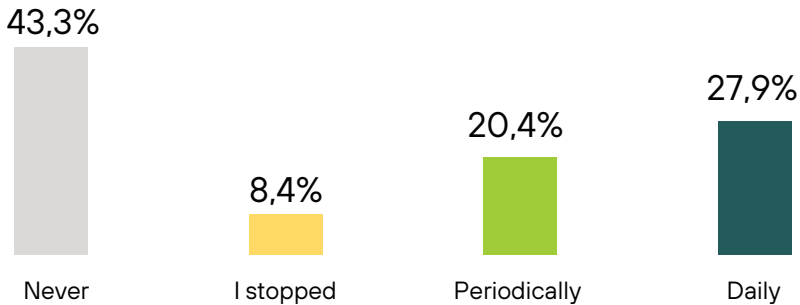
On average, young people spend nearly five hours a day on the internet, with a minimum of about one hour and a maximum reported time of 15 hours daily by respondents. As expected, due to technological advancements and their integration into daily life, these averages have increased compared to previous research.

Young individuals primarily use the Internet to communicate with friends and family through social media platforms and applications (such as Viber, WhatsApp, etc.), and to access social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, etc.). Among those under 30 years old, it is least used for online banking, reading books, or online shopping/payment bills/reservations.

Regarding the ***lifestyle of young people***, attention is drawn to several key findings that indicate the highlight their adherence to a healthy lifestyle. This pertains to tobacco product consumption, alcohol the consumption, and risky sexual activity.

A significant proportion of young people, slightly over 43%, stated that they have never consumed tobacco products. However, cumulatively, 48.3% of young individuals in Montenegro smoke cigarettes daily or occasionally. Slightly over

8% mentioned that they have smoked cigarettes in the past but have since quit. Compared to data from the *Youth Study 2018/2019*, a noticeable drastic decline is observed in the number of those who have never consumed tobacco products (over 20%, as this figure dropped from 64% to 43%), which raises concerns about the significant increase in tobacco product consumption among young people.

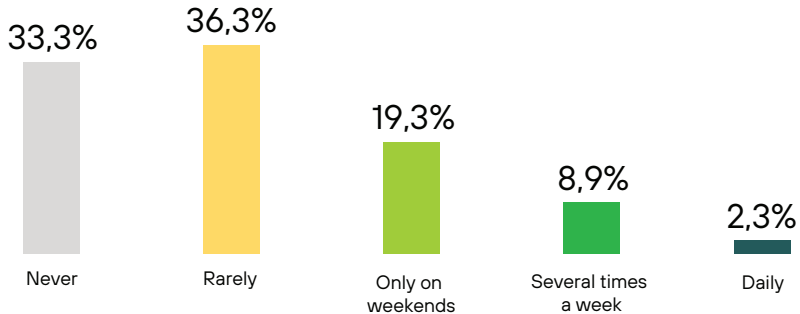


Graphic: How often do you smoke cigarettes?

The number of daily smokers has also risen (by almost 6%), which should serve as a call to educational and healthcare institutions, as well as organizations advocating for healthy lifestyles, to engaged more actively in efforts to change this unhealthy and prevalent habit among young individuals.

When it comes to alcohol consumption among young people, a negative trend is evident. The number of young individuals who never consume alcoholic beverages remains the same (33%), while the number of those who drink alcohol only on weekends has increased from 14% to 19.3%, and those who consume alcohol daily rose from 0.9% to 2.3%, compared to data from the *Youth Study 2018/2019*.

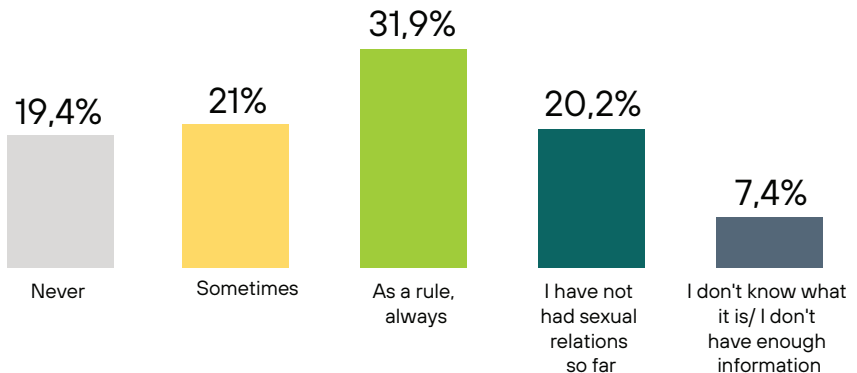
Alcohol consumption among young people is more pronounced compared to tobacco product consumption, with only every third young person abstaining from alcohol, while over two-thirds (66.8%) consume alcohol, this includes 36.3% doing so rarely, 19.3% exclusively on weekends, 8.9% several times a week, and 2.3% daily.



Graphic: How often do you drink alcohol?

When it comes to the sexual activities of young people and the use of contraceptives, nearly a third of young individuals in Montenegro always use contraceptive methods during sexual intercourse, while one in five young people does so occasionally. However, it is concerning that nearly 20% of young people never use any protection during sexual intercourse.

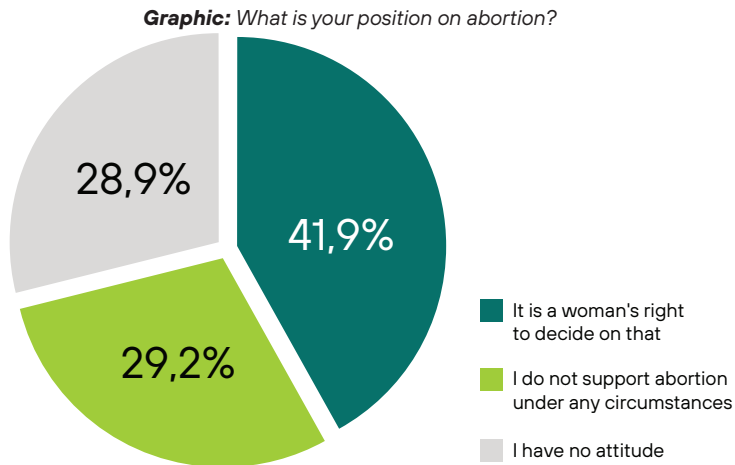
The research indicates that one-fifth of those under 30 years old in Montenegro are sexually inactive, and over 7% do not know what contraceptives are.



Graphic: Do you use contraceptives during sexual intercourse?

Compared to previous research, the number of young individuals practicing safe sex has increased (by 5%), while the number of those who never use protection has decreased (by almost 10%). However, the number of young people who use protection occasionally has declined (by 10%). Additionally, there are positive findings indicating a nearly two-fold decrease in those who lack information.

Within the scope of this research, the topic of attitudes toward abortion was also addressed. Nearly half of young people in Montenegro support the right to abortion (42%), believing that it is a woman's right to decide, which represents a shift in the attitudes of young people compared to data from the *Youth Study 2018/2019* when the same percentage of respondents (42%) considered abortion never justified. Conversely, today 29.2% of young people do not support abortion under any circumstance, and a similar number (28.9%) have no stance on this issue.

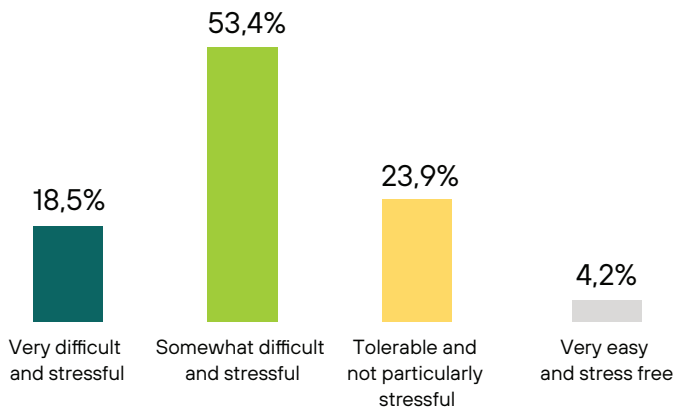


Education and Employment

Education and employment questions are crucial in the life of every young person, and they represent two interconnected and vital categories. Education level affects the possibility of employment, and conversely, employment relies on education. Consequently, the future of young people is significantly influenced by their academic and professional outcomes, although the challenging element is the insufficient connection between the education process and the labor market in Montenegro.

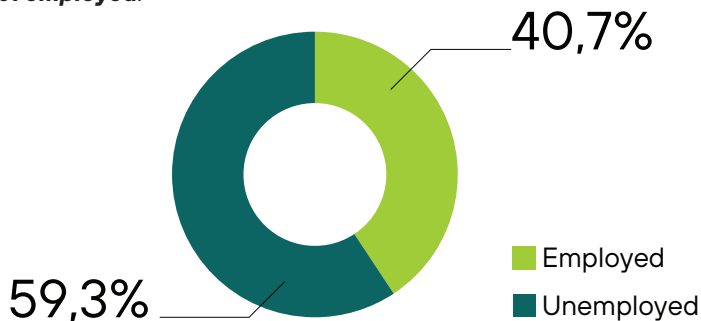
Institutions in Montenegro need to work much more on providing better systemic support for young people to succeed in these fields, i.e. to acquire quality education and secure appropriate employment opportunities in line with their professional qualifications and education. It is also essential to further enhance certain programs that receive significant funding, such as the Government's Professional training program. Regular and comprehensive evaluations of these programs should be conducted, monitoring user satisfaction, specific impacts, as well as identifying shortcomings and abuses.

Young people are moderately satisfied with the quality of **education** in Montenegro, which is reflected in an average rating of 6.42 on a scale from 1 to 10. Furthermore, the perception of everyday life in the Montenegrin education system - schools and universities - presents a somewhat different picture. The majority of young people (almost 54%) consider this segment to be difficult and stressful, while an additional almost one-fifth (18.5%) regard it as very difficult and stressful. On the other hand, around 24% find this aspect of life tolerable and not particularly stressful, and only 4% perceive education as very easy and stress-free.



Graphic: How would you describe everyday life at school/university in Montenegro?

Furthermore, almost 60% of young respondents in Montenegro state that they are not **employed**.



Graphic: Which of the following categories do you belong to?

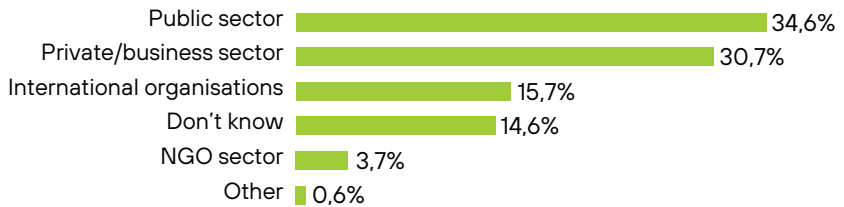
Among young people who are employed, many have fixed-term contracts (46.6%), while 44% have indefinite contracts, and just under a tenth (9.4%) work

based on service contracts. These figures underscore the need for creating stable jobs and greater employment security for young individuals.

The overwhelming majority of young people who are employed work full-time (82.9%), every tenth (10.3%) work part-time, and every seventh young person (6.8%) states that they are registered as part-time workers but work full-time.

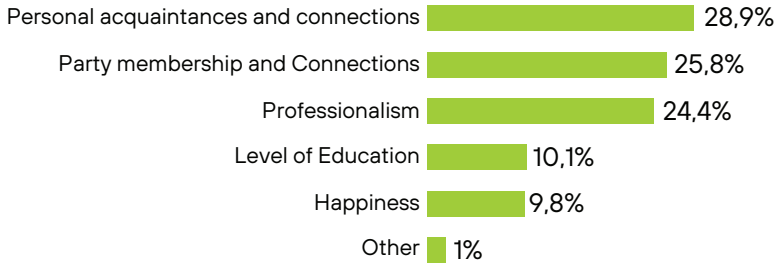
This low percentage of those employed part-time might indicate a lack of such positions that are often a solution, for instance, for students as a subgroup of young people, aligned with their needs and time availability due to academic commitments. In certain more developed countries, this is systematically addressed through special laws that provide students with specific working hours and a minimum wage tailored to their needs and available time. This does not jeopardize their educational process while offering an opportunity to secure necessary income and gain work experience. On the other hand, employers following this principle could benefit from tax incentives, ensuring consideration for all stakeholders and promoting responsible social policy.

Regarding the employment preferences of young people, the data indicates that the state (public) sector remains the most desirable, followed by the private/business sector, then international organizations, with the least popular being employment in the NGO sector. Furthermore, about 15% are yet to identify themselves within any specific sector. It is evident that the unfavourable environment for the functioning of the civil sector, especially critically-oriented NGOs, which are often the most recognizable, has resulted in the unattractiveness of employment engagement, even though the NGO sector is a space where young individuals can quickly profile themselves.



Graphic: In which of the listed sectors would you like to work?

Finally, it is concerning that the majority of young people (55%) believe that personal connections, relationships, or party membership are crucial for finding a job. Significantly fewer, around a third, believe that expertise and level of education are important factors, and slightly less than 10% mention luck as a significant factor in the employment process.



Graphic: Which of the listed factors do you consider most important for finding a job in Montenegro?

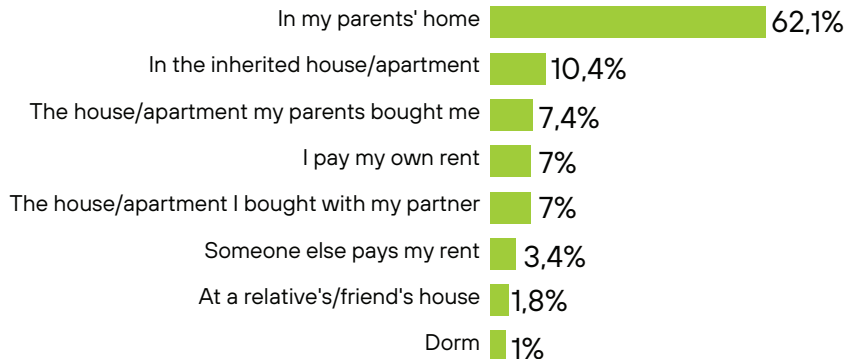
This points to serious challenges related to transparency and fairness in employment, of which young people are aware. Simultaneously, this emphasizes the need for changes towards establishing objective and measurable employment and advancement criteria, both to encourage the youth and to ensure the sustainability of society.

Family life

Quality of life, employment, and the level of economic stability are factors that influence a range of issues for young people, including family life and the organization of family dynamics, becoming independent, and forming a family.

Young people in Montenegro are consistently positioned as among the latest in Europe to leave their parental homes. According to the latest Eurostat data from January 2023, 68% of young people aged 25 to 34 in Montenegro still live with their parents, which is the highest average age in Europe. For instance, on the other end of the spectrum are Scandinavian countries, like Sweden and Denmark, where young people leave home at the age of 21, influenced by their higher standard of living, development, economic stability, and social policies.

Research data indicates that around 62% of young people in Montenegro continue to live in their parents' home, and only 14% of those under 30 years old pay rent or manage to buy a property on their own or with a partner. Other young people live in inherited homes or properties bought for them by their parents, or their rent is covered for by a third party.

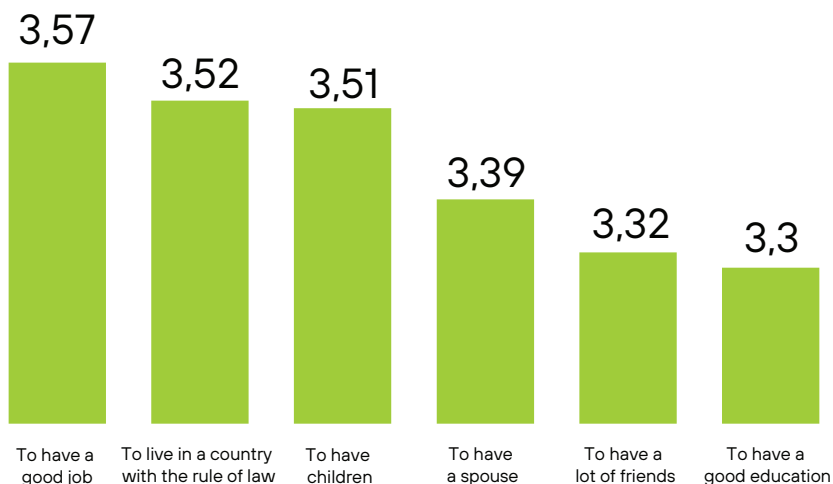


Graphic: *Where do you live?*

A significant majority of young people have a good or very good relationship with their parents, even if they hold differing views from them. One in 10 young individuals mention that they disagree and frequently argue with their parents, while around 3% of young people are in a conflicted relationship with their parents.

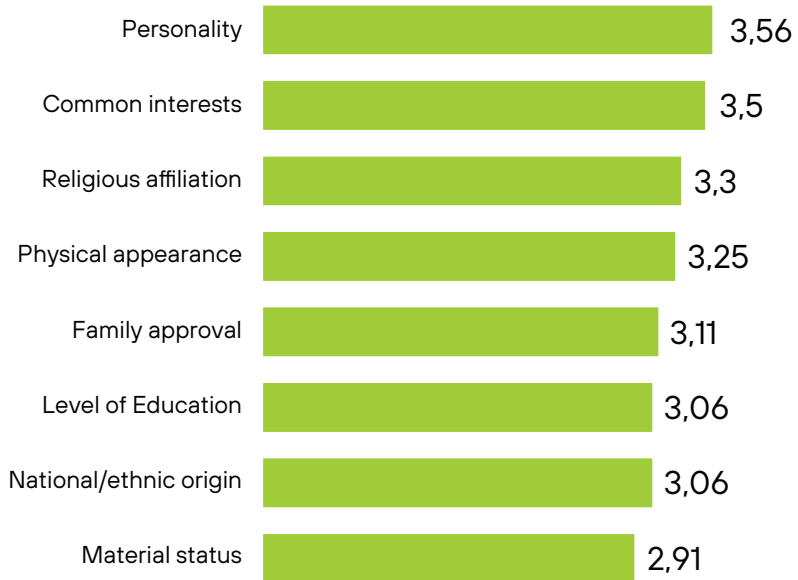
Regarding upbringing and raising children, two-thirds of young people in Montenegro would raise their children the same or nearly the same way their parents raised them. On the other hand, one-third of young people believe that they should raise their children differently or completely differently from how their parents raised them.

For young people in Montenegro, numerous factors contribute to a happy personal life, with a good job being positioned as the most important. Additionally, it is very important for them to live in a country with the rule of law and to succeed in their role as parents. Social relationships, including friendships, also rank high in importance, as does receiving a quality education.



Graphic: How important are the following factors to you to have a happy personal life? (On a scale of 1 to 5, 5=very important, 1=not important at all)

The choice of a spouse among young people in Montenegro is influenced by factors such as personality and shared interests, rather than material status. Religious affiliation emerges as one of the key determinants, and interestingly, it holds greater importance than some other identity characteristics, such as national/ethnic affiliation.



Graphic: Which of the following factors are important to you when choosing a spouse?
(On a scale of 1 to 5, 5=very important, 1=not important at all)

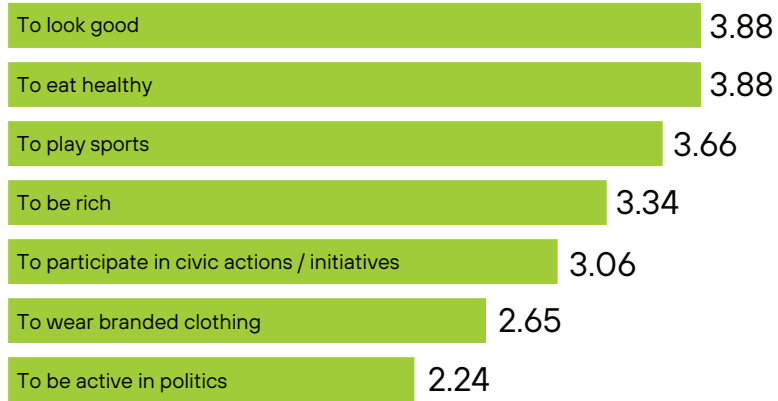
Values and life satisfaction

People have diverse opinions and attitudes, which shape their priorities and values framework. Young individuals in Montenegro exhibit variations in material, family, professional, and social status, which are further reflected in their lifestyles and beliefs.

However, for the majority of young people in Montenegro, it is the most important to be independent, take responsibility, be loyal (to partners, friends, employers), and have friends. Professional fulfillment or career follows, and then forming a family. Good education and appearance fall somewhere in the middle, while healthy eating and sports are in the lower half of the priorities. Interestingly, material status is not ranked high, i.e. wealth and branded clothing are not given as much importance.

Young individuals also express a lower interest in being actively involved in politics, and participation in civic actions or initiatives is also not popular among this population.





Graphic: *Different things are important to different people. Are the following things important to you?*

Scale from 1 to 5 (1 not at all important, 2 mostly unimportant, 3 somewhat important, 4 quite important, 5 very important)

Integrity (correctness) and personal dignity are values that young people value most in others. Altruism and tolerance are also highly ranked, and it is encouraging to see that material wealth and social reputation, or status, have significantly lower value for young people.

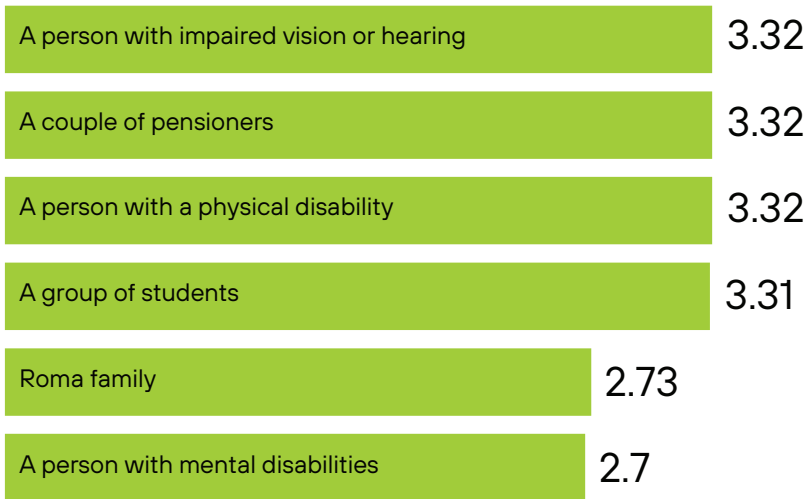
In terms of satisfaction with various aspects of life, young people in Montenegro are most satisfied with their family life, and least satisfied with their economic status. For comparison, while over 80% of young people are very or quite satisfied with their family life, just slightly over half of the same population is equally satisfied with their economic status.

Finally, on a scale from 1 to 10, young people rate their own level of happiness on average as 7.68.

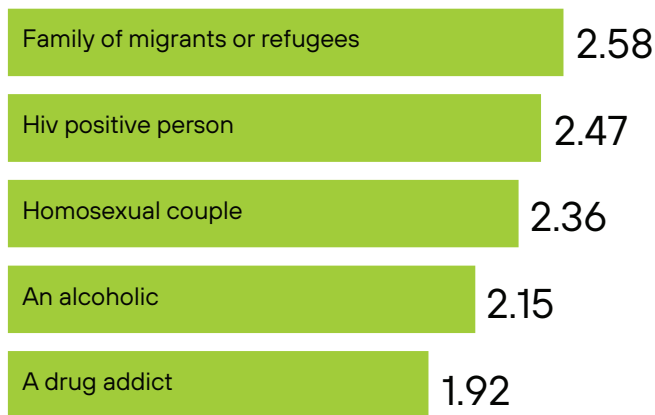
Social distance and discrimination

Young people in Montenegro express the highest level of intolerance towards drug and alcohol addicts, as well as towards homosexual couples and HIV-positive individuals.

On the other hand, they generally would not mind having a group of students, a person with a physical disability, an elderly couple, or a person with visual or hearing impairments as neighbors. In comparison to other categories, they are significantly more tolerant towards these groups.



Graphic: How would you feel if one of the following people or families moved into your neighborhood?

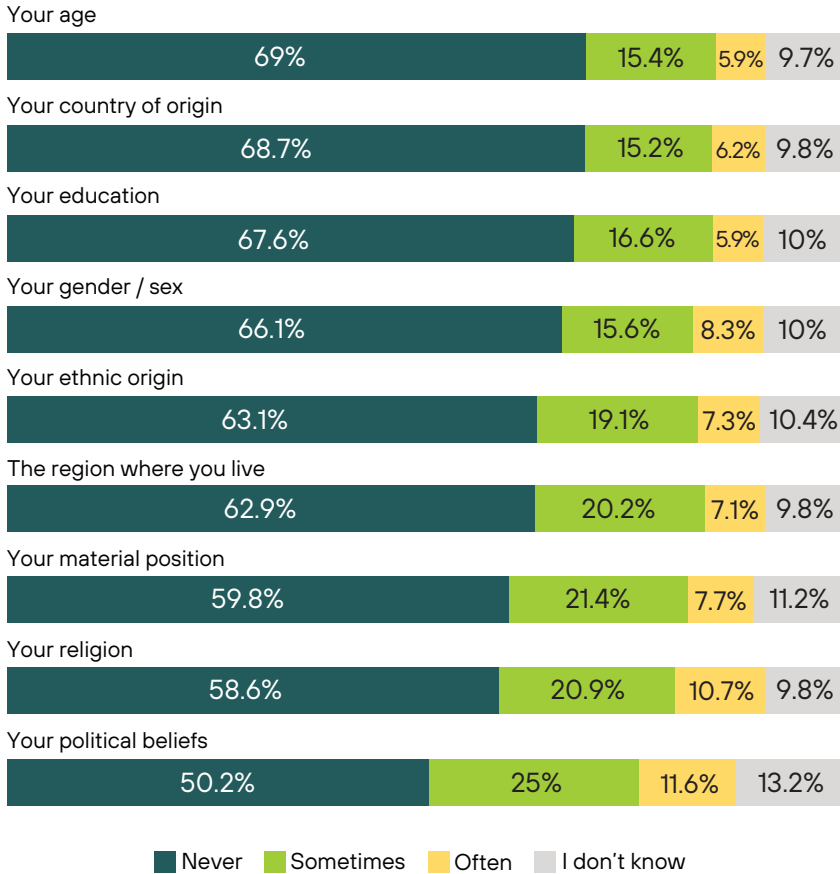


(on a scale of 1 to 5 - 1 - very bad, 2 - I wouldn't care, 3 - I wouldn't care, 4 - relatively good, 5 - very good)

The significant bias against others who are different highlights serious shortcomings in the educational process, which fails to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices in a timely and appropriate manner. For instance, the level of homophobia among young people is of particular concern, even though there has been some improvement compared to 2016 CCE/CGO's research, where LGBTQ+ individuals were ranked as the least desirable neighbors by young people.

Similarly, the limited knowledge among young people about HIV-positive individuals is reflected in their distance from this part of the population.

When asked about their perception of discrimination against themselves, over a third of young people believe they have felt discriminated against to some extent due to their political beliefs, which has been a constant in relation to previous research. Slightly fewer than a third have felt discriminated against based on their religious beliefs or their socio-economic status. More than a quarter of young people in Montenegro believe that they experience discrimination based on the region they live in and their ethnic background.



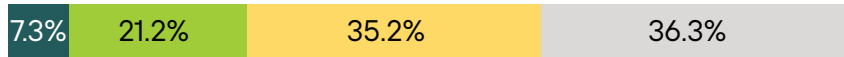
Graphic: Have you ever felt discriminated against because of any of the following things?

Education, raising awareness, promoting tolerance, and dialogue are crucial steps toward building an inclusive society where social distance is reduced and discrimination is prevented, particularly these efforts are important in shaping young individuals as bearers of social change.

Youth and politics

Politics represents an essential element of every individual's life who wishes to contribute to the community they live in. Therefore, it is concerning that young people show little interest in political issues and topics. The degree of significant or complete disinterest ranges from over 70% for global issues, then 66.6% for EU policies, and nearly 64% for political developments in the Balkans. Even for political matters concerning Montenegro, disinterest prevails among almost 60% of the young population.

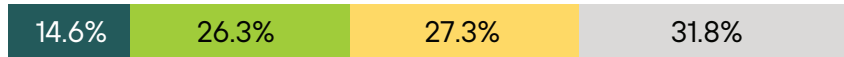
Global politics



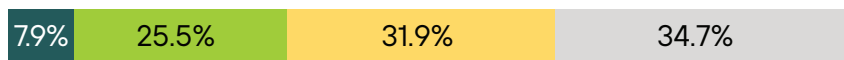
Politics in the Balkans



Politics in Montenegro



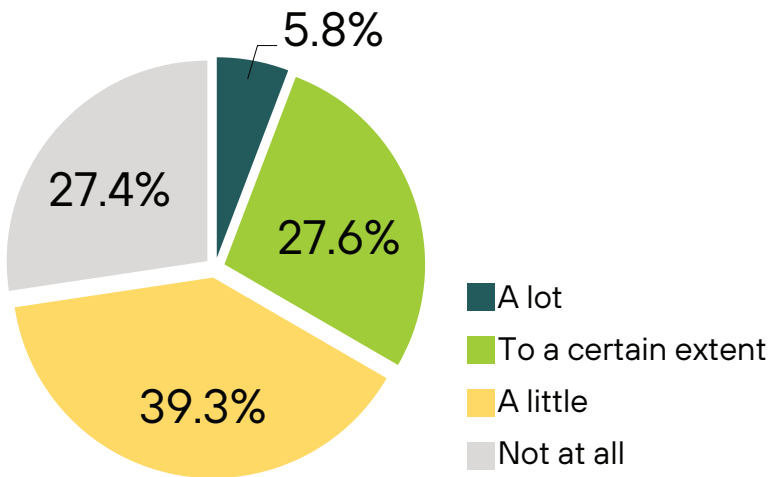
EU policies



Graphic: How interested are you personally in political issues and political topics from the domain of ...?

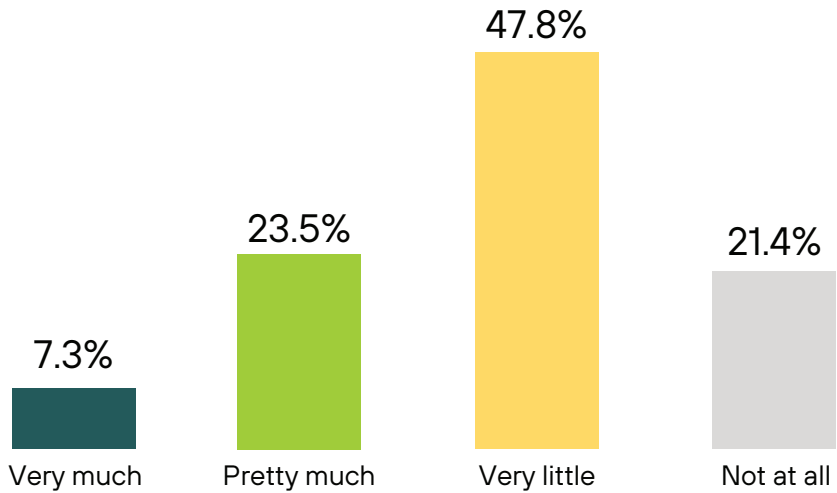
Comparing the research from 2016 and 2019, there is a noticeable decline in the interest of young people in Montenegro regarding global political events, as well as a decrease in interest in politics within Montenegro itself when compared to the baseline of 2016.

This lack of interest in political matters is accompanied by an apathy about the possibilities of influencing political decision-making. Among two-thirds of young individuals, the prevailing belief is that their voice either has no impact or has very little influence on the actions of institutions. Only one in six young respondents believes that their voice can bring about a change in the behavior of the institutional system.



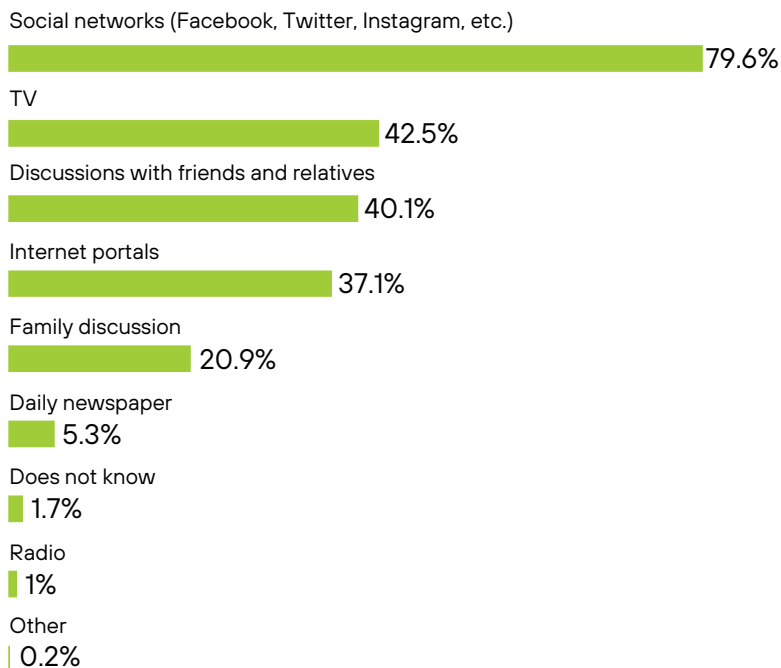
Graphic: *How much influence do you think your voice has (or could have) on the functioning of institutions?*

As expected, young people in Montenegro have a strong perception that political decisions are often made without considering the perspective of youth and their specific needs. This is confirmed by the finding that over two-thirds of young individuals believe that their interests are very poorly represented or not represented at all in politics, while less than a third hold the opposite view.



Graphic: *To what extent, in your opinion, are the interests of young people represented in politics in Montenegro today?*

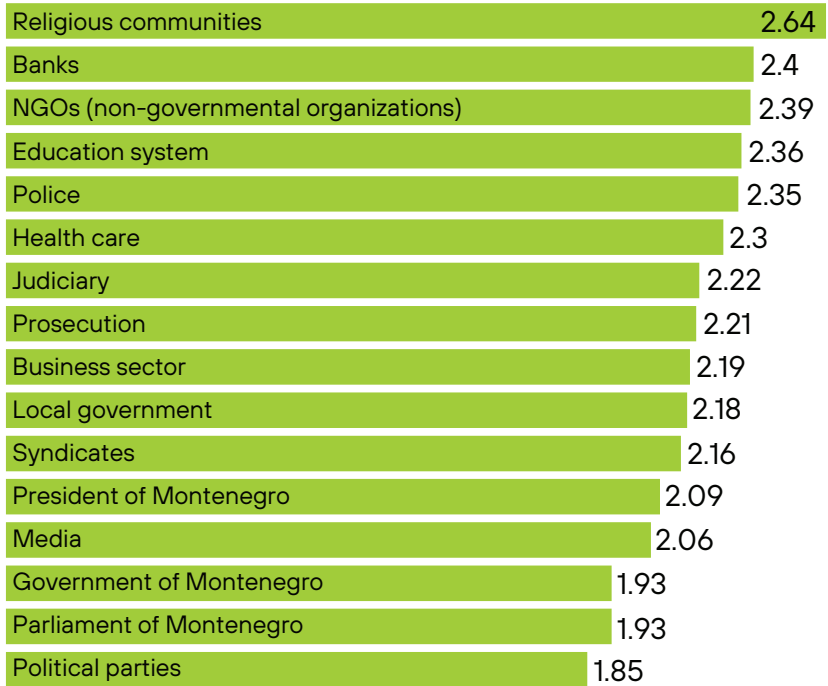
Social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) have become the leading source of information for young people on current political issues, with nearly 80% of those under 30 years of age relying on them. This marks a significant increase compared to previous years' research. For instance, findings from a 2019 survey indicated that only 22% of young people at that time used social media as their primary source of political information. Additional sources mentioned by young individuals include television (42.5%), discussions with friends (40.1%), and online news portals (37.1%). A considerable number also gather information within family discussions (20.9%). Daily newspapers are practically irrelevant to the youth, with only 5% considering them a source of political information.



Graphic: *What is the main source from which you get information about current political events?*

One of the most crucial elements of a democratic political system is trust in institutions, namely that they act in the public interest. On the other hand, widespread distrust in institutions over time can lead to questioning their legitimacy and a decrease in political participation.

Young people have the highest level of trust in religious communities, followed by banks and non-governmental organizations. The educational system and the police also enjoy relatively high levels of trust. However, political parties, as well as key state institutions such as the Government and the Parliament of Montenegro, are the least trusted by young people. Media also ranks very low in terms of trust among young people.



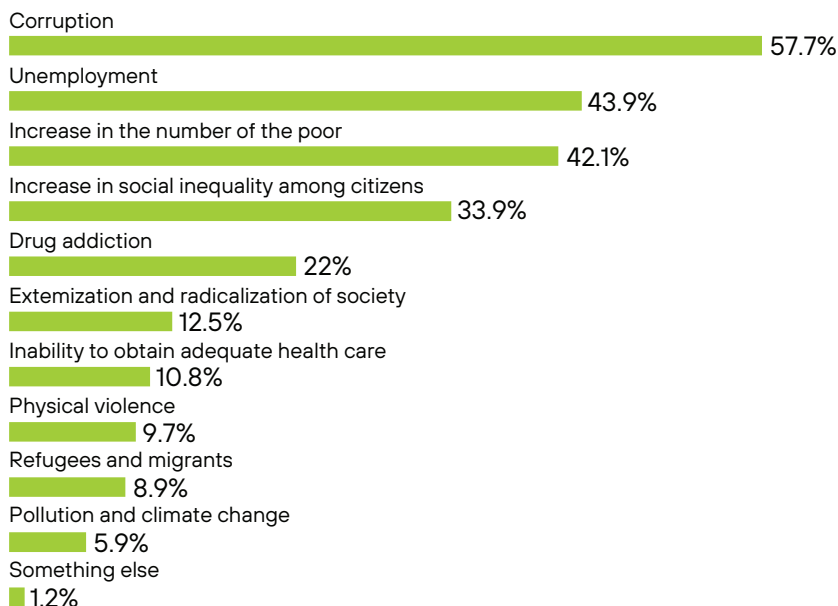
Graphic: To what extent do you trust the following institutions? (scale from 1 to 4)

Although the level of trust in any institution or organization does not exceed three (out of 4), religious communities are still significantly positioned, which represents continuity compared to the previous two waves of research. This also aligns with what the public opinion surveys have shown, not only among young people but also in the general population in recent years in Montenegro. On the other side of the spectrum, but also as a consistent trend, there is distrust among young people towards political parties.

When it comes to the executive branch, young people in Montenegro believe that the primary goal of the executive authority should be ensuring human rights and freedoms (47.4%), followed by reducing unemployment, economic growth,

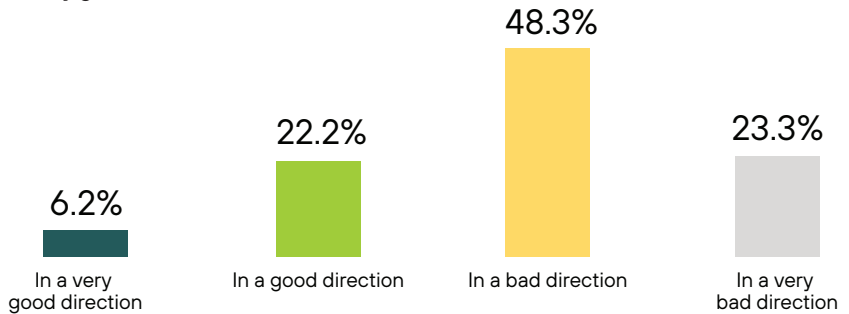
and development (42.5%), improving the position of youth (41.5%), as well as ensuring social justice and security for all (31.5%). Unfortunately, young people do not recognize the current poor position of women or their low representation in institutional structures (13.7%), environmental preservation (9.8%), or preparation for Montenegro's accession to the European Union (8.5%) as issues that should be at the top of the Government of Montenegro agenda. The areas of least priority importance for youth include strengthening military forces and security (1.9%), spiritual revival (2.4%), and encouraging population growth and childbirth (5.5%).

Young people recognize corruption as the most significant problem, and economic issues and social inequality are also highly ranked concerns. Youth are concerned about unemployment and the increase in the number of poor individuals, while pollution and climate change are among the least concerning issues for young people in Montenegro.



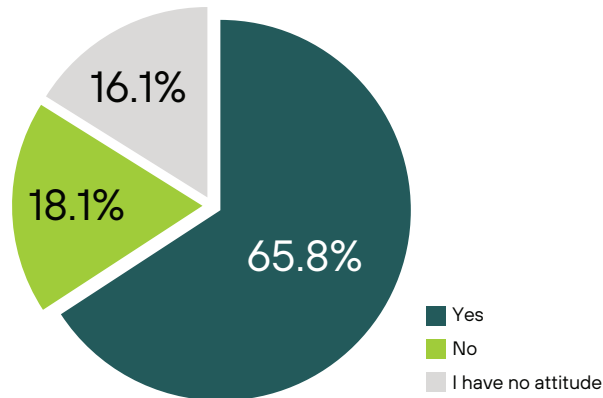
Graphic: In your opinion, what are the biggest problems in Montenegro that you fear?

Young people are pessimistic about the direction in which the country is heading. Cumulatively, 71.6% of them believe that Montenegro is moving in a bad or very bad direction, while just over a quarter (28.4%) consider that direction to be good or very good.



Graphic: In which direction is Montenegro going?

Furthermore, it is encouraging to note that almost 66% of young people unequivocally express support for Montenegro's accession process to the European Union. Less than one-fifth (18%) are against this path, while the current stance on Montenegro's European integration is undecided for 16% of this population.

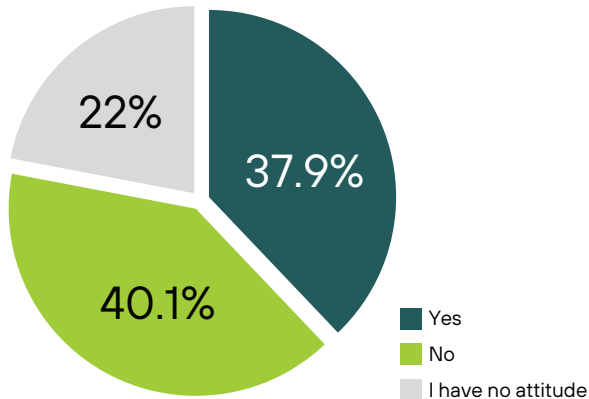


Graphic: Do you support the process of accession of Montenegro to the EU?

Future

There are no official data, regarding how many young people have left Montenegro in recent decades. The first indication that 50% of young people wanted to emigrate from Montenegro came from a 2016 CCE/CGO's survey. This figure did not decrease in the findings of the *Youth Study 2018/19*. On the contrary, these data suggest a strengthening commitment among young people to build their future outside Montenegro. The key motivation for departure for over a third of young people at that time was cited as the improvement of their standard of living, followed by higher salaries and better job opportunities.

The most recent research from December 2022 indicates that almost 38% of individuals under the age of 30 have a clearly defined stance that they want to leave Montenegro, while 40% do not want to, and 22% have not yet formed a defined opinion.

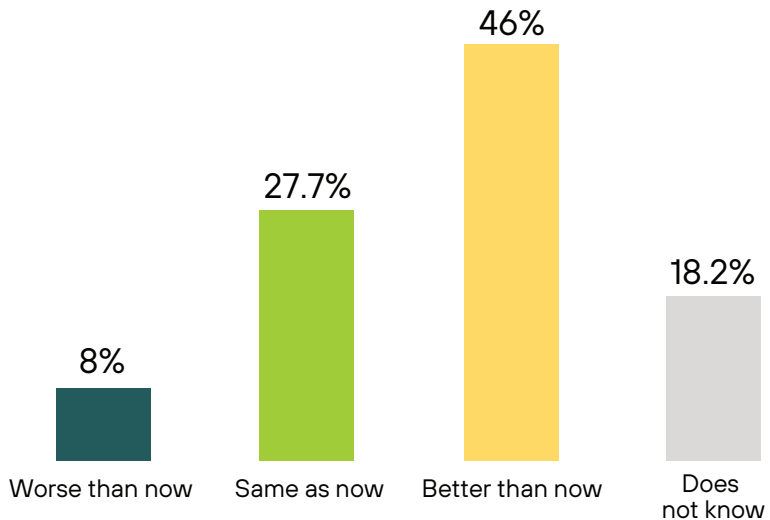


Graphic: Do you have a desire to leave Montenegro?

This means that the number of those who do not want to leave the country has remained at a similar level, and there has been a noticeable decline in those who

have the desire to leave their homeland. Additionally, there is a significant number of young people who are undecided on this issue, indicating uncertainty and indecisiveness among the youth regarding their future. Moreover, the reasons for young people wanting to leave Montenegro remain unchanged, namely the desire for a better standard of living, the lack of prospects in Montenegro, and the opportunities for easier employment abroad.

Young people are mildly optimistic about their future, with 46% seeing a better situation in a decade compared to today. Meanwhile, 27.7% believe that the situation will not fundamentally change by then. In this context, pessimists make up around 8% of the young population in Montenegro.



Graph: How do you generally see your situation in 10 years?

Perspective from Focus groups

The educational system does not prepare young people for the job market or for participation in other processes. This is one of the conclusions drawn from focus groups with young people from Bijelo Polje, Kotor, and Podgorica conducted by CCE/CGO in an effort to qualitatively deepen the findings from empirical research.

Young people from different regions believe that the Montenegrin educational system cannot adequately prepare them for the labor market. *"Our educational system is outdated and relies on the educational system of the former Yugoslavia, which no longer exists, but we still use some of those educational materials. Besides not keeping up with the times in terms of literature, there is also a lack of practical training,"* explains a young participant from Podgorica who took part in one of the focus groups. In addition to their personal experiences, they point to the results of PISA testing as an indicator that the educational system does not provide them enough to be competitive in terms of knowledge compared to young people from Europe. *"If you want to destroy a country, destroy its education. I think our education has been brought down to zero, and everything starts from there. You have uneducated people becoming teachers, doctors, judges, politicians... We should first address education, and then everything else,"* warns a young woman from Bijelo Polje a participant in one of the focus groups.

In principle, focus group participants perceive volunteering positively, considering this type of activity helpful for developing numerous skills such as teamwork, flexibility, critical thinking, leadership, and more. They see volunteering as an opportunity to compensate for the lack of practical experience in formal education and to better prepare young people for the labor market. However, they also point out that the drawback is that volunteering is often unpaid. *"I fully support volunteering in terms of helping the local community through ecological*

or humanitarian actions. On the other hand, I do not support the concept of unpaid internships at all," says a young person from Kotor.

When it comes to employment, besides motivation and self-belief, young people often emphasize personal connections and networking as significant factors. However, when faced with the choice between a job in the public or private sector, it is noticeable that participants primarily mention the downsides of both options. This suggests that they are essentially choosing the "less bad" option when deciding where they would like to work. The major downsides of the public sector that they pointed out are a lack of work ethic, political employment, and the increasing number of employees year after year. On the other hand, they see the biggest drawback of the private sector as the lack of job security, including undeclared work.

The majority of young participants from Kotor, Bijelo Polje, and Podgorica have, at some point, considered leaving Montenegro, with the main reasons being the economic and political situation in the country. The strongest desire to leave their hometown was expressed by young people from Bijelo Polje. However, linguistic barriers and foreign companies' skepticism about the quality of the Montenegrin education system affect the fact that young people from Montenegro, when initially abroad, often work in positions that require lower qualifications than they possess.

The research results regarding the attitudes of young people from all over Montenegro prompted the research team to also explore the relationship between young people and religion. Some young individuals emphasize the importance of their faith. *"Without fear of someone's divine hand, regardless of how that God is named, I think we would live in a completely anarchic world, and I think faith is like our conscience,"* explains a young person from Podgorica. Some distinguish between religion and spirituality, and most state that they don't feel the need to publicly display their religious identity. In this regard, the least importance is attributed to religious identity by young people from Kotor, who note that both Christmases and both Easters are celebrated in their community, with the remark that the Islamic religion is less represented there. On the other hand, young people from Bijelo Polje and Podgorica highlight that mixed marriages are not well accepted in their communities.

Young people recognize individuals in their communities for whom their religious

identity is “the sole purpose of their existence”, and they also point out the existence of so-called “internet believers” who, in their view, do not adhere to religious principles in their lives. “Since the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion, and its amendments, we have become a rather believing society, which didn’t seem to be the case a few years ago. Now, whether we are part of the Montenegrin or Serbian Orthodox Church is very important. I see that people wouldn’t stand up against a great injustice that happens to someone in Montenegro or to themselves, but if Christianity or Islam is touched, everyone will jump,” states a young person from Podgorica.

Young people generally do not believe that religious communities contribute to improving their situation, emphasizing that these are primarily interest groups representing the interests of their members, and that “the lives of young people and their position in society are not high on their priority list, or we don’t get the impression that it is.” However, some young people also highlight the assistance provided by religious communities to young people in overcoming addictions such as alcohol, drugs, and gambling, as well as their humanitarian support.

In general, young people from Kotor, Bijelo Polje, and Podgorica who participated in the focus groups are not overly inclined to engage in activities that involve defending their religious identity. When it comes to protest marches, most young people in Podgorica and all young people from Bijelo Polje expressed their readiness for such activities, even though they previously emphasized that religious identity does not play a significant role in their lives. Young people in Bijelo Polje mention that they attended *litije* during 2020. On the other hand, participants who stated that they would not attend protests to defend their faith primarily cited the politicization of the entire process as the main reason. Similarly, young people are not willing to join a political party whose central agenda is a religious issue.

Regarding their attitude towards politics, young people criticize politicians for not addressing the economic situation more and not making efforts for Montenegro to function as a democratic system instead giving priority issues related to religion and nationality.

Young people see personal enrichment and raising issues related to interethnic relations in the country as the main priorities of politicians, believing that politicians primarily look after their personal interests rather than the interests of

citizens. *"We've seen this through various agreements regarding the formation of the Government - nobody cares about how the people live and what the people want, or what they should do. We have these party quarrels and fights about who will be the Prime Minister, whose minister of which department, who will get what... It's clear from this that there is very little concern for the interests of citizens,"* concludes a young person from Podgorica. Among the priorities that Montenegrin politicians deal with, young people no longer see the European Union as one. *"We've deviated so much from that path that it's not even mentioned anymore as something important for our country and something we aspire to,"* says a young woman from Kotor.

There are positive reactions to the increase in the number of young people in the Parliament of Montenegro. However, young interlocutors also highlight that political parties do not involve young people in the decision-making process because they are concerned about their position, but the reasons are more pragmatic – younger parliamentarians are, in their opinion, a product of the necessity of political parties, which, due to the compromise of some other cadres, turn to generational shifts. Therefore, young people serve as a simulation of party reforms and rejuvenation, and in their view, nothing fundamentally changes when it comes to the position of young people.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study "*Young people between marginalization, radicalization, and potential*" provides a range of new and updated data regarding the attitudes, values, and perspectives of young people in Montenegro across various domains that are meaningful to them, as well as those that shape and guide them.

In Montenegro, young people spend their free time predominantly using social media, listening to music, spending time with family, or going out with friends. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of young people practically use the internet constantly. The least amount of their free time is dedicated to volunteering in different initiatives, organizations, or youth activities.

The study's findings signal a concerning trend of increased consumption of tobacco products and alcohol among youth, as well as the fact that nearly a fifth never use protection during sexual intercourse. Additionally, every seventh young person doesn't even know what contraceptive methods are.

Young people express only moderate satisfaction with the quality of education in Montenegro, and they generally perceive the educational process as challenging and stressful. Approximately 60% of young people are unemployed, and most of those who are employed work full-time. They believe that personal acquaintances, as well as party memberships and connections, are crucial for finding a job. Among the most pressing social issues, they see corruption, unemployment, and the rise in the number of impoverished individuals.

As many as 62% of young people live with their parents, and on average, they achieve independence only around the age of 33, which is relatively late compared to European statistics, although they report having good relationships with their parents.

Young people exhibit strong social distance towards users of psychoactive substances and alcohol, HIV-positive individuals, as well as homosexual couples, indicating the presence of homophobia within this group.

A prevailing disinterest in politics is evident among youth, which aligns with the belief that their voice has limited influence on the actions of institutions and that their interests are minimally or not at all represented in politics. Besides, young people have the least trust in political parties, the Government, and the Parliament of Montenegro.

The fact that 38% of young people want to leave Montenegro is not surprising, considering previous research. However, it is evident that this issue inexplicably remains outside the focus of decision-makers. As dominant reasons for leaving the country, young people cite the desire for a better standard of living, the lack of prospects in the country, and the opportunity for easier employment abroad.

Furthermore, a trend of youth re-traditionalization is noticeable through a series of research findings. This includes their highest level of trust in religious communities compared to other institutions/organizations in the country, the acknowledgment that religion is one of the most important factors in choosing a future spouse, the belief that they would raise their children similarly to how their parents raised them, and the social distance towards homosexual couples. This is further accentuated by their stance on the issue of abortion, as a significant number of young people today do not support abortion, and a similar number do not have a stance on the topic.

Taken together, all of these findings serve as a warning that a systematic and comprehensive approach is needed to address the challenges faced by young people to create a stimulating environment where they can fully utilize their capacities. Such an approach would contribute to sustainable inclusion and democratization of society in Montenegro.

In this direction, the following recommendations are suggested:

- designing various educational approaches and campaigns for youth regarding digital literacy, potential risks of excessive use of social media, constructive and responsible Internet use;

- providing support for the functioning of youth clubs as attractive and inclusive spaces where young people would want to spend their free time. This includes investing in strengthening the spatial and human capacities of these centres to implement various programs, workshops, social games, and sports activities for young people through which they would socialize in an interesting way and train for soft skills, develop emotional intelligence and strengthened civic participation;
- encouraging young people within the formal education system to practice healthy lifestyles, which also includes constructive ways of spending free time that contribute to the mental and physical well-being of young people;
- investing in education to ensure adequate resources for the improvement of the teaching process, enhancing infrastructure, technical equipment for work, as well as capacities building of teaching staff in promoting critical thinking and engagement of students;
- developing programs, in formal and informal education, which bring together young people from different ethnic groups to facilitate dialogue, encourage understanding and promote respect for diversity, thereby strengthening mutual acceptance;
- within the formal educational process, allocating time for discussing topics related to protection during sexual intercourse, women's rights to abortion as part of the modern concept of human rights, and issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. This is intended to inform young people about LGBTIQ+ individuals based on scientific facts;
- re-introducing civic education as mandatory subject into the formal education system to systematically work on strengthening the critical thinking of young people and their understanding of the values of the civic concept of society in Montenegro, as well as the consequences of re-traditionalization;
- improving the legislative framework for the development of volunteerism and proper evaluation of volunteer work and experience;
- promoting, through formal and informal education, the importance

of youth volunteerism and activism for their personal development and the creation of positive social change, which includes the use of social media, online platforms, and mobile applications, as channels familiar to young people;

- ensuring that educational programs are relevant and align with the needs of the labour market, which would include incorporating skills and knowledge demanded by the market across various sectors, developing vocational training programs in cooperation with employers, and strengthening of career counseling systems and professional orientation programs for young people;
- improving of the Professional Training Program of the Government of Montenegro, following the independent performance evaluation and user satisfaction for the previous implementation period;
- legal regulation of part-time jobs for students, with facilities for students to be able to get an education, gain income and work experience at the same time;
- promoting competitiveness, transparency, and merit-based employment, and creating a climate of social unacceptability of employment based on party and nepotism ties;
- promotion of entrepreneurial spirit and support for the development of entrepreneurial skills among young people through training programs, mentoring, and incentives for starting a business, especially in sectors that have a high potential for growth and employment of young people, such as information technology, tourism, green economy, creative industries, etc;
- developing policies and strategies to support young people in housing independence through subsidies or favorable loans for buying a first apartment or paying rent;
- development and provision of continuous formal and informal education programs, as well as campaigns, so that young people better understand their role and responsibility in the development and preservation of democratic values and standards in society, but also be encouraged to a

greater degree of interest in politics and political activism;

- creating a favorable environment for the development and free functioning of the non-governmental sector, to enable young people to organize themselves, express their opinion, and contribute to positive social changes, but also to be supported more effectively through NGOs dealing with youth issues;
- establishing the practice of holding the Youth Parliament in the Parliament of Montenegro, once a year, so that young people could express their needs, problems, and challenges they face, which would be addressed by the parliamentary political parties in the further priorities of their activities.







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