



Overview of the 2011 Youth monitoring yearbook “Youth and youth work”

In this document, you will find a short summary of the 2011 Youth monitoring yearbook. The Estonian full text of the Youth monitoring yearbook is available at: www.noorteseire.ee

The youth monitoring yearbook is an analytical and detailed publication on situation of youth in Estonia. It reflects the most significant changes that have taken place in the lives of young people and creates a basis for knowledge-based policy formation in specific fields related to the lives of young people.

The 2011 yearbook is focused on the participation of young people in youth work. The yearbook comprises two parts. The first gives an overview of the develop-

ments in young people's lives during 2010-2011 in light of the youth monitoring indicators (including demography, education, labour market, economic and social welfare, health, youth work, civic activity and attitudes, justice and security). The second part is built on a survey organised in 2010 among the youth and their parents, involving approximately 7,000 young people aged 7-26 and 1,600 parents. Further we will give a summary of the topics discussed in the yearbook.

As of January 1, 2011, there were a total of 321,705 young people aged 7-26 in Estonia. They made up 24% of the population. The number of the youth has shown a continuous downward trend caused by both a decreasing rate of birth and increasing emigration.

A majority of the youth is active in studying. Of those aged 15-26, the proportion involved in studying is 57%. In the same age group there is 7% of NEET youth – young people who are not in education, employment or training. The share of the unemployed among the 15-26

age group has fallen in 2011 from 10% to 7%, but is still clearly over the pre-crisis level. The part of those studying and working at the same time is also rather large – 11% (see Figure 1).

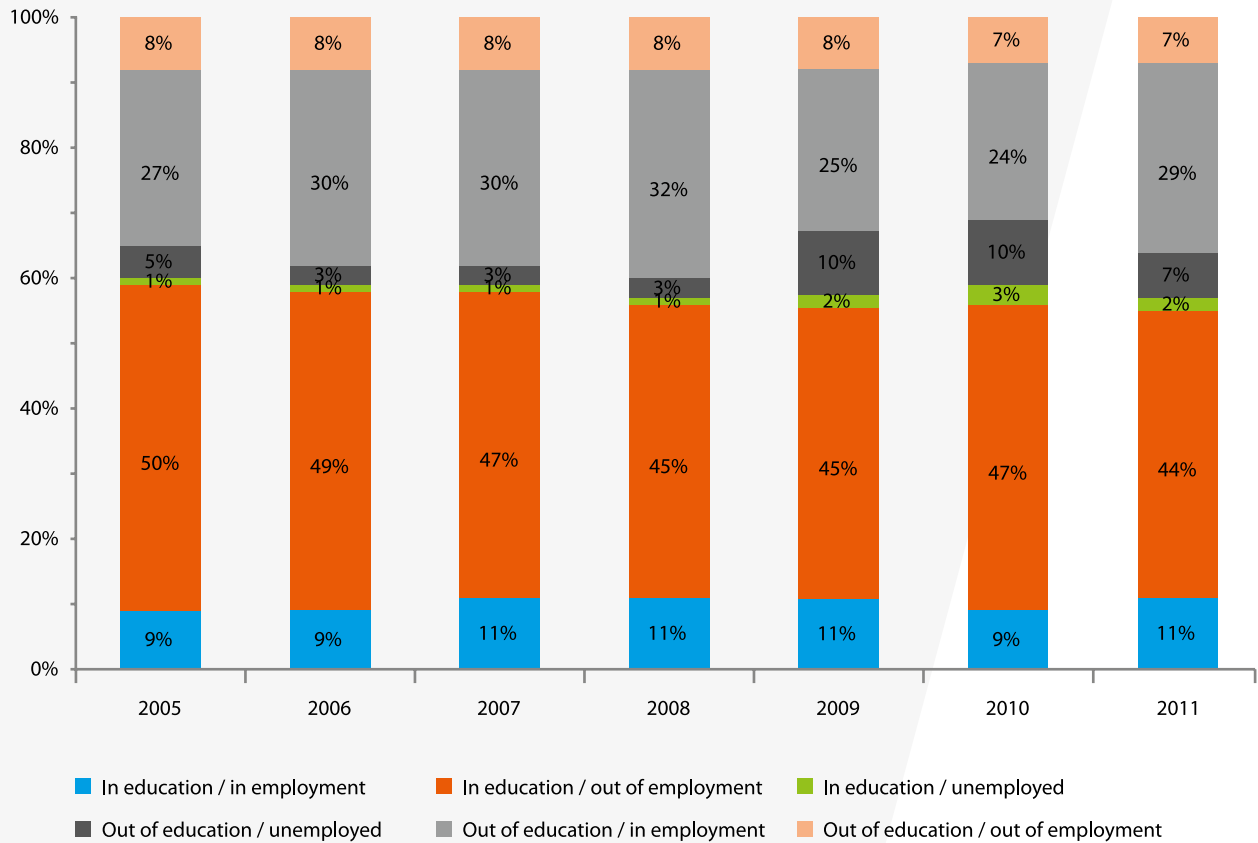
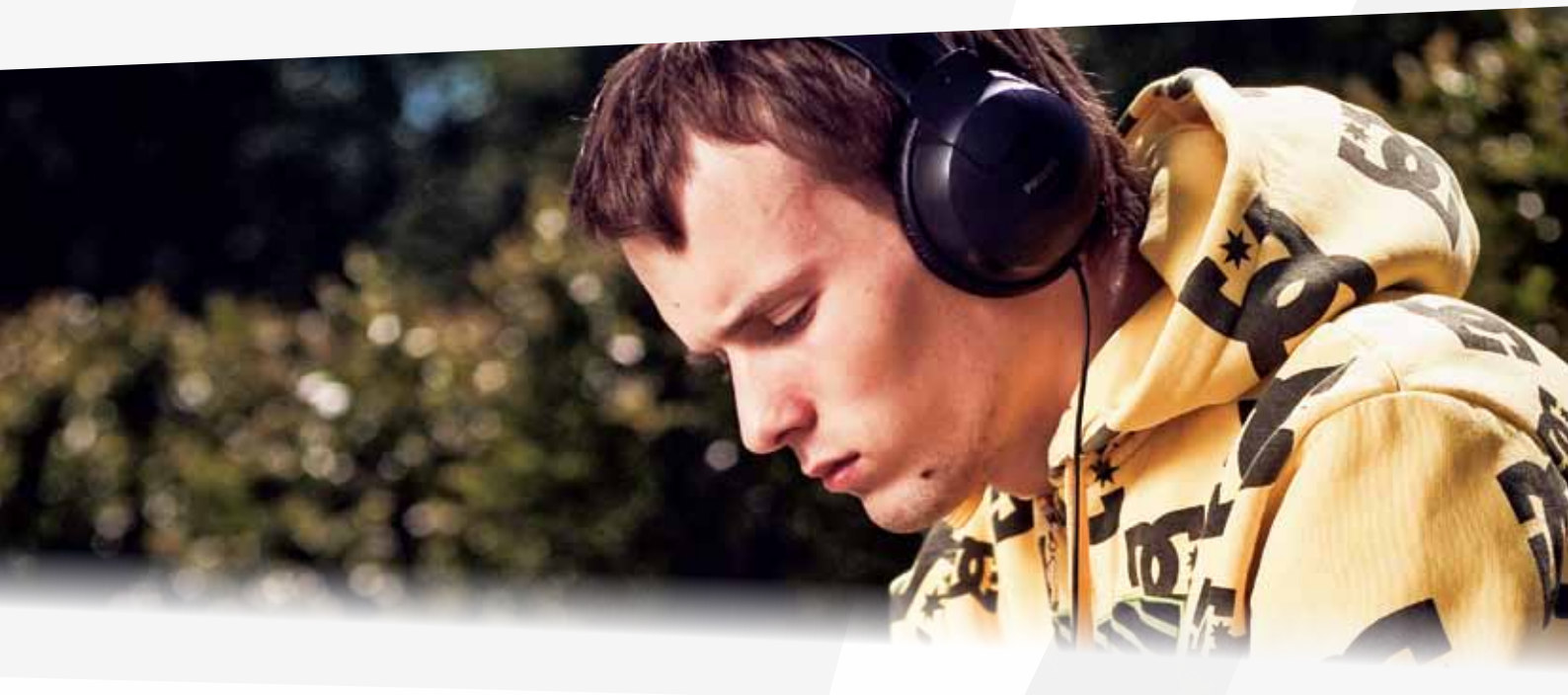


Figure 1. The distribution of the 15-26 age group in the labour market and the education system

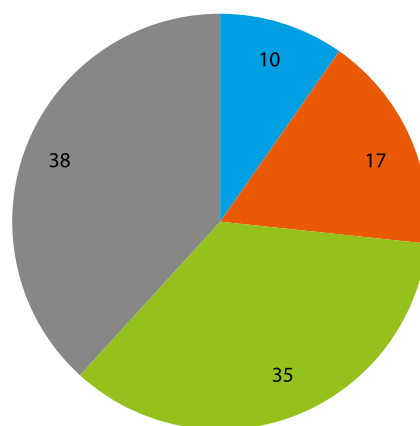


The development of a young person is affected by many factors and processes, incl. youth work as an environment where a youth can voluntarily take up activities that contribute to his or her development. In youth work activities, a young evolving person can acquire various experience and skills that help him or her better understand the world, make better informed choices in life and be more competent in everyday situations. In Estonia, the youth work is regulated by the Youth Work Act. According to the Youth Work Act, youth work is defined as the creation of conditions to promote the diverse development of people aged 7-26 which enable them, on the basis of their free will, to be active outside their families, formal education and work. The organisation of youth work proceeds from the following principles: youth work is performed for the benefit of and together with young people, involving them in the decision making process; the creation of the conditions for the acquisition of knowledge and skills shall be based on the needs and interests of the young people; youth work is based on the participation and free will of young people; youth work supports the initiative of young people; youth work is based on the principle of equal treatment, tolerance and partnership.

While the goal of youth work is to create development-enhancing conditions, the experts of the field and youth workers are not of the same opinion as regards what are those developing activities and how to offer them to the youth. The introductory article of the subject in the yearbook points out that youth work encompasses a broad range of dimensions that all have a part in creating the necessary developing environment for the youth. It is necessary to create the conditions to promote development, but just rooms or instruments are not enough – professional tutors are also necessary as well as moral and financial support. The voluntary basis of the work on the young people’s part also has to be kept in mind, hence, not everything should be decided for them when creating the conditions, but they should be given the experience of developing entrepreneurial capabilities and active personal involvement. On the other hand, it cannot be assumed that the youth know exactly what they need and that the task of youth work is simply to “fill orders”. The mission is rather to widen the youth’s world-view, offering them options for discovering and challenging themselves. Thus, the diversity of the forms of youth work is very important for reaching the goals -

the youth must be offered a range of opportunities from sports to creative activities and hobby education, as well as for showing initiative and entrepreneurship.

The next part of the yearbook gives an overview of the patterns of the Estonian youth’s participation in youth work by age group, gender, region and home language. On the basis of the responses to the survey it might be argued that Estonian young people have very good opportunities for participating in youth work and that participation in youth work is popular among the youth. Only approximately 10% of the youth told that they have not been involved in any youth work activity during the last three years, while the number of those young people who have participated in more than three activities was 38% (see Figure 2), reaching as high as 50% among the age group 10-18.



- Not participating in any activity
- I participate in one activity
- I participate in 2-3 activities
- I participate in more than 3 activities

Figure 2. Distribution of the youth according to the involvement in youth work during the last three years, %

Based on the young people's responses, it can be argued that the Estonian youth has made very active use of the various opportunities offered to them. Although a large part of their activities have to do with hobbies, often

related to the opportunities offered at schools, many young people find time for other youth work activities, too – ranging from voluntary work to work camps and youth projects (see Figure 3).

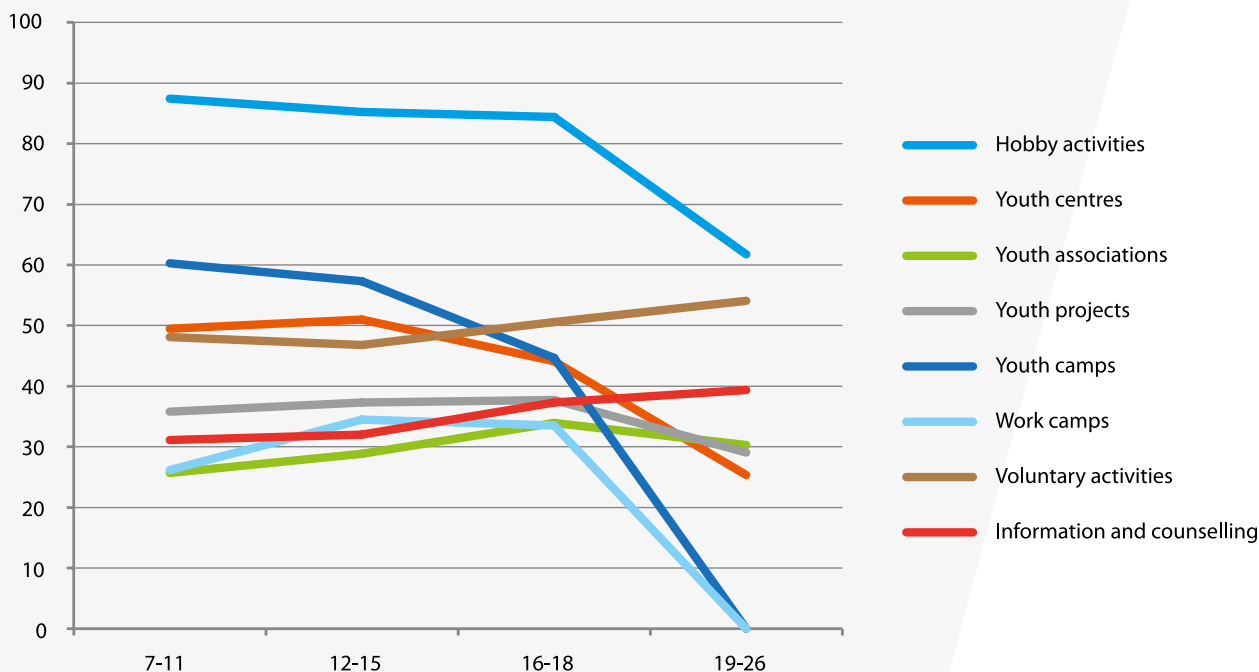


Figure 3. Participation of different age groups in areas of youth work, % of all youth

Hence, the situation as regards participation in youth work, might be considered as satisfactory in Estonia. However, as regards the patterns of participation, the proportion of hobby activities compared to other areas is very large. Among the hobby groups, sports activities as well as soft areas such as arts, music and choral singing are prevalent (see Figure 4). On the one hand, their success is great – physical activities contribute to better health and developing creativity is a precondition for entrepreneurship and innovation.

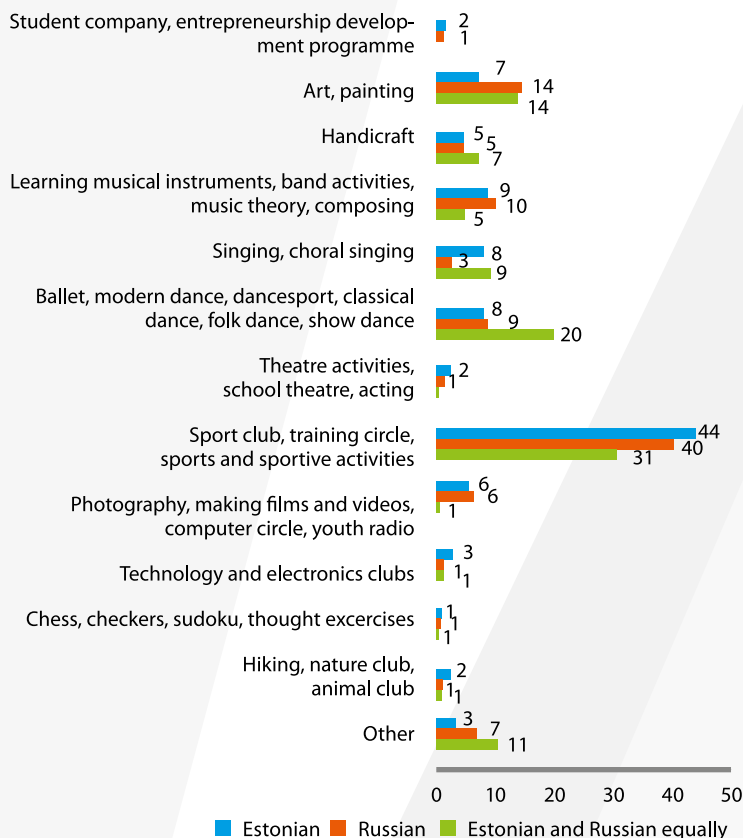


Figure 4. Distribution of the youth with different home languages among hobby activities, % of all who involved in hobby activities

On the other hand, the 10-18 age group had only 5% of regular (at least once a week) attendance in nature and hiking hobby groups, while the number going regularly to technology and electronics groups was 7%. The participation in entrepreneurship projects was even smaller (see Figure 4). For a country that gives high value to knowledge-based economy and innovation, this seems less than moderate. The hobby groups of those areas need relatively more professional instructors and complex instruments, the provision of which might not be affordable for the institutions that organise hobby activities. This field needs support from both state and municipal level to ensure the availability of appropriate materials, rooms and tutors. On the other hand, there is room for citizen initiative and voluntary work here: the opportunities for hobby activities for the youth could be broadened in cooperation between schools, youth work institutions and parents, involving parents with technological skills or local entrepreneurs in the instruction of the youth besides the youth workers.

The participation of the youth in activities that are less formalised and require more of the young people's own initiative is lower compared to the hobby activities, but still relatively high. For example, about a half of the up-to-18 age group has visited youth centres during the last three years, while voluntary activities are also engaged in by approximately 50% of the youth; between a quarter and a third of the youth participate in youth associations' activities (the participation increases with the age). On the other hand, such participation is in many cases infrequent and irregular. The youth centres are visited less than once a month simply to spend time and see friends (see Figure 5). Voluntary work, too, is taken up at most a couple of times per year. In this regard, only the individual voluntary work can be distinguished with about 20% of the youth engaging in such a couple of times a month. The number of youth participating in the activities of youth associations at least once a month is approximately 4%.

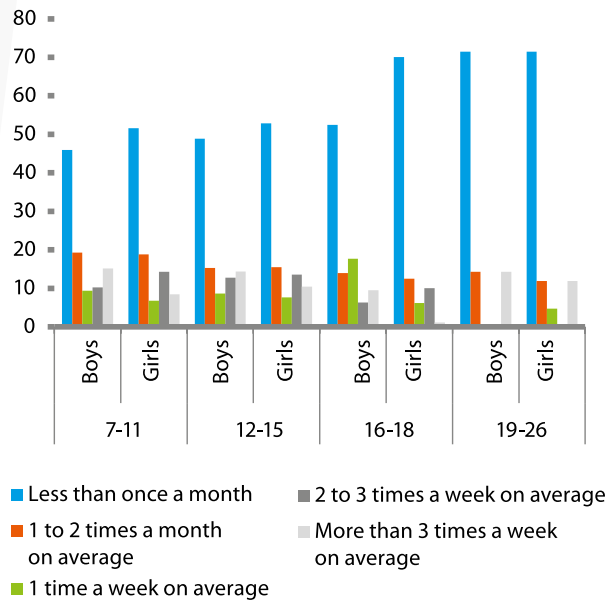


Figure 5. Distribution of the young people as regards the frequency of visiting youth centres by age group and gender

Although offering a safe environment for resting and relaxing as such is important in itself, the youth centres, in cooperation with youth associations and unorganised youth could seek opportunities for bringing more targeted content into free time. Compared to hobby activities, the advantage of youth centres is the more open environment for activities, offering good opportunities for supporting the youth's own initiative. Thus, the youth centres might, for example, in cooperation with the organisations arranging voluntary work, find more opportunities to present the nature of voluntary work and ways of participating. While almost 50% of the Estonian youth have had some contact with voluntarism, their assessments allow for some doubt as regards whether they have really understood the concept of voluntary work. It is especially important to introduce the content of voluntary work and activities among the youth whose home language is Russian, as the proportion of those who have been involved in voluntary work is considerably lower among them compared to the people with Estonian as their home language. The youth centres also have a strong potential for supporting projects initiated by the youth themselves and supporting the development of entrepreneurship.

Based on the survey, the participation of Estonian young people in youth work is mostly affected by the need to belong - for participating in youth activities, participation of close friends and agreeability of other participants were important factors. Hence, in the provision of youth work activities, "from youth to youth" work plays an important role, as does the creation of an environment for socialising. Naturally, this entails some dangers, for friends' interests and abilities might not be similar, so that sometimes the need to belong might start dominating over one's actual abilities and interests. The youth worker could be just the person to point out this contradiction and bring such a young person to try other activities that are more suitable for him or her. As one gets older, the sense of belonging grows weaker, but the self-esteem and recognition as well as opportunities for acquiring and developing skills become more important for the youth. For the younger group, the agreeability of the instructor is important in addition to that of other participants. A youth worker must take these specificities of age groups into account when planning his or her work, and create a positive environment, preventing and easing tensions between participants, while offering adequate chances for developing and learning new skills.

Therefore, a youth worker's role in the development of a young personality is crucial.

In addition to the opinions of the young people, the survey examined their parents' expectations as regards youth work and how they are related to their own experience in both youth activities and current participation in hobbies or social activities. While the youth themselves see their parents' or other adults' recommendations as having little impact on their choices of youth activities, the responses of parents show that their behaviour and attitudes clearly affect their children's participation in youth work. On the one hand, the children of the more active parents do more themselves, too (see Figure 6). On the other hand, the parents' views on how much a child could engage in youth work are important. If a parent thinks that the child should be as active as possible in instructed activities and organisations, the child is more active. Such a result shows that the youth are affected by their parents' attitudes and preferences even if they do not recognise it. Therefore, cooperation and communication with parents and aspects of parent education have a very important place in the shaping of youth activities.

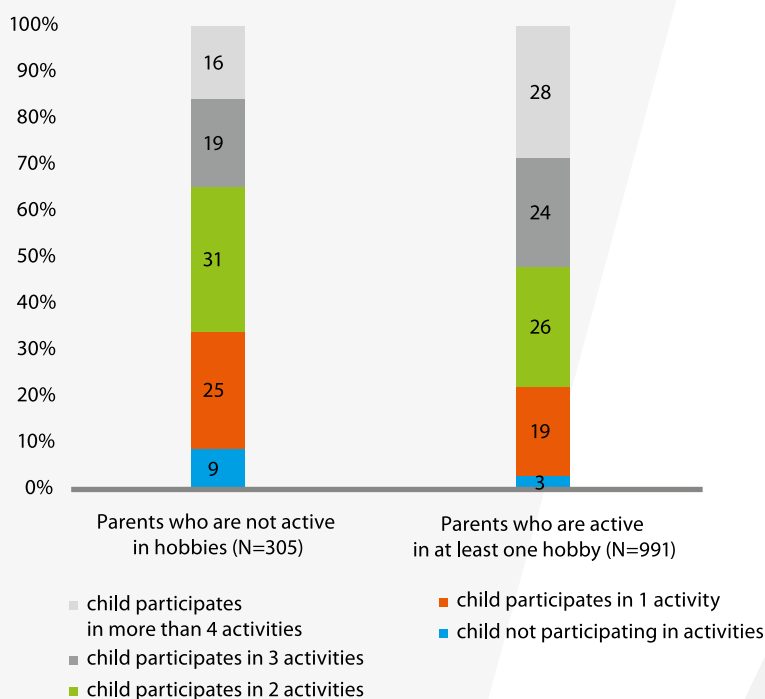


Figure 6. Children of parents who actively take up hobbies and those who do not, by the number of youth activities that the child participated (% of children)

Note: hereinafter, N means the number of respondents

Estonian parents are rather well aware of the benefits of participating in youth activities and consider that participation has given their children pleasant experiences and excitement. The parents point out as important that youth work has given new knowledge and skills that are useful in their children’s future and that it offers versatile development. A little less than three quarters of the responding parents found that participation in youth

work has made their children more responsible and helped them discover themselves and be able to make more informed choices. In the parents’ view, youth work has been least helpful in finding employment and creating plans for entrepreneurship and future education, but it is mostly not considered to be a goal of youth work (see Figure 7).

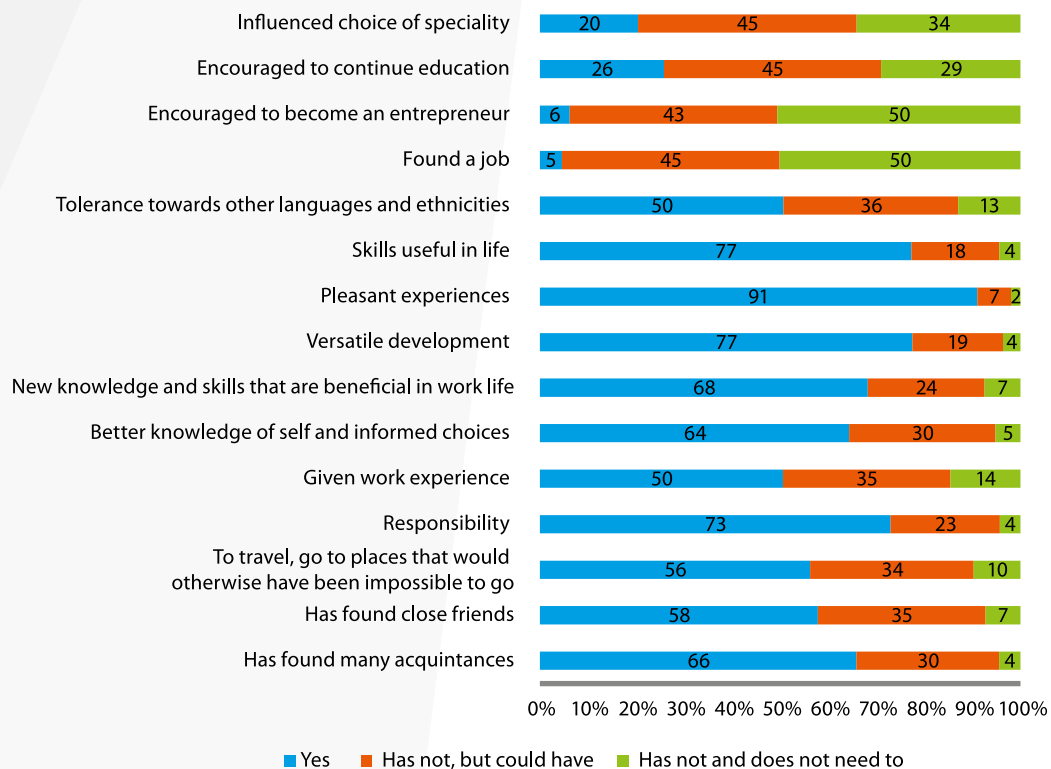


Figure 7. Parents’ assessments of what participation in youth activities has given their children

The survey results show that the hobby chosen in one’s youth carries over to adulthood. A majority of hobbies are started at a young age and people often continue with the hobbies that were taken up as a youth. Those who were passive as a youth are generally passive as an adult, too. This shows the importance of early choices for one’s later life and adulthood. Hence, if we wish for more active and creative citizens who realise themselves in various fields of life, we should foster the youth’s participation in youth work.

The number of Estonian young people who have not had any contact with youth work is small and their reasons

for not participating differ by age group. In the youngest group, the main reasons are the wish to spend time with friends, being unable to find a suitable activity from the abundance of information, and the unsuitability of the offered activities. In older age groups, the work load at school and later at work is highlighted as not allowing to participate in youth work as much as desired. In all age groups, there are significant problems as regards the lack of information and choosing a suitable activity. Therefore, it is clearly still necessary to inform the youth of the opportunities of youth work, to try and spark interest for the various forms of youth work and explain the specificities and characteristics of various activities

so that they could find one that suits them. The challenges related to unawareness are relatively easy to overcome with communication work – you only have to find suitable information channels to reach the youth. Communication from youth to youth should be seriously considered, as friends and companions have the strongest influence on a young person’s choice of activities.

The trend that older age groups more often mention the lack of activities as the reason for not participating, also deserves attention, showing that it is necessary to involve the youth in developing activities suitable for them and to do youth work together with the youth rather

than seeing them as just a target group.

Factors related to family and financial resources also have some influence on participation. Only a sixth (16%) of parent can say that their economic situation allows for taking into account all their children’s wishes. On the other hand, there were 8% of the responding parents who cannot afford participating in paid activities for their children. The young people themselves do not see participation fee or costs as a significant barrier. Only in the 12-15 age group, 15% mentioned lack of money as a main reason for not participating (see Figure 8).

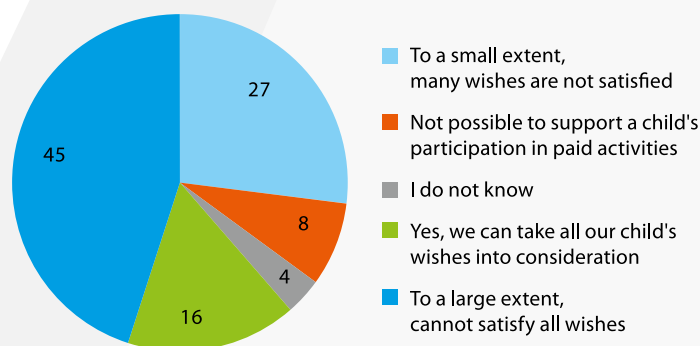


Figure 8. Does your family’s economic situation allow for providing participation in instructed activities according to your children’s wishes? (N=1215)

Hence, overcoming the financial challenges would require a target group based or case by case approach in order to help the children from poorer families. The magnitude of the problem might be larger still, for in many municipalities youth work is offered for a symbolic fee, allowing for the youth’s participation but also limiting the financing of the activities. Reasonable cost-sharing with the parents who are able to pay would bring additional financial resources to the youth work activities and allow raising the quality of the offered service.

In conclusion we could say that Estonian young people have adequate opportunities for participation in youth work in their own opinion, but the question remains as regards how well the opportunities reflect the society’s needs and interests. Hence, a future task is to give a

clearer meaning to the role of youth work in the society and the resulting goals in the context of the development of the society – a better balance needs to be found between youth work as an environment for acquiring specific skills and youth work as an environment for initiating societal changes and fostering civic activity and solidarity. Therefore, the goals of youth work should be more strongly bound to other policy areas necessary for the development of modern democratic welfare societies, such as education, employment, civic activity and participation. The lengthening of youth as an “age of transition”, the diversification of life patterns, individualisation of values – all those changes going on in today’s society create new challenges for youth work as an important area of integrated youth policy.