

# Youth activism

report by important issues foundation

2024

Report “Youth activism”  
important issues foundation

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The report was prepared with financial support from the European Union. The report only reflects the position of the authors. The European Union and its institutions are not responsible for its content.

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\*Appendices available online: <https://waznesprawy.org/aktywizmmlydych>

# About important issues

We work to improve the quality of public debate by speaking simply about what is complicated.

## We create content on the Internet

In the most popular social media, we explain important social and economic phenomena in a simple, reliable way. We are on Instagram, Tik Tok and Facebook. We provide our community with key, proven information in a simple, modern, aesthetic form.

## We design educational experiences

We develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of young people by working with them in the spirit of non-formal education – in the form of workshops, conferences and discussion meetings. We focus on high-quality experiences and a partnership atmosphere.

## We build digital products

We are happy to share our experience and know-how in the form of accessible tools and platforms that we make available on the Internet. We believe in open and equal access to knowledge.





Throughout our activities, it is particularly important to improve the quality of public debate and animate high-quality discussions about the most pressing contemporary challenges. We direct our content and activities primarily to young people, giving them space to express their opinions, gain experience and develop competences that fill the gap between the education system and the labor market. We are building a community of sensitive people who actively approach the world and strive to improve it. We value the ability to listen, express yourself and understand others. We cultivate readiness for development and striving for agency. In everything we do, we rely on credible sources and reliable, modern information.

We develop our expertise by conducting various social research. They allow us to better understand the needs of our community and more adequately define the challenges of the reality around us.

# About the project

**Author: Tomasz Raclawski**

In important issues, we believe in the power and fundamental importance of **learning from each other** (in the peer2peer model), which can not only effectively complement the formal education system, but also in certain contexts prove to be simply irreplaceable. This form of learning is particularly important for young people when trying to solve complex and unique problems.

Problems most often faced by people who want to be socially active – regardless of whether their activism takes the form of belonging to an organization, trying to create their own entity, devoting their time to participate in volunteer initiatives, creating social projects, protesting or any other manifestation of responsibility for one's environment – usually belong to the above-mentioned category of more or less serious, but complicated and unusual challenges for which there are no good or bad solutions, only better and worse ones.

Over the last 10 years, we have found that the peer2peer model is exceptionally effective in helping young people acquire know-how related to activist activities. Unfortunately, in 2020, **the COVID-19 pandemic completely changed the situation**. Bringing profound consequences for people and institutions in all areas of life, **it also influenced the involvement of young people in social activity**. On the one hand, it hindered the operation of social organizations and other institutions that previously created a context in which the energy of young people was gathered and directed, and on the other – by limiting social contacts – it made it difficult to learn from each other, stopping the flow of knowledge between more and less experienced people. As an organization working directly with young, socially active people, we have strongly felt the effects of this crisis. And although at the time of writing these words it seems that as a society we have returned to the pre-pandemic mode of functioning, the question about its long-term impact and, consequently, the change in the way young people function, their priorities, needs and expectations, remains valid.

\*\*\*

This report is part of the “NGO Forge 2.0” project, which we created on important issues out of the need to understand the changes taking place and find a new story for young people **to inspire them to be active for their immediate and distant surroundings**.

The NGO Forge 2.0 project consists of three parts. The first, research part included a survey and focus interviews with young activists from Poland, whose conclusions are summarized in this report. It provided us with knowledge about the challenges, problems and needs of young people in the context of social activity. The second part of the project is direct support for young people in their development of social activities through the training and mentoring process, within which we work with three social organizations that were established over the last year and want to develop and professionalize their activities. The third part is to create tools based on the acquired knowledge that will support young people in taking social activity for their environment.

The project also has an international dimension, because as part of the above activities, we cooperate with the Interactive Bulgaria Foundation from Bulgaria and the Helix Social Innovation Hub from Greece. These organizations have also carried out similar research in their countries and cooperate with us on other stages of the project. **In 2024, the second version of this report will be published, including an international appendix** showing a summary of the results obtained in our countries.

\*\*\*

The information collected as part of the study and contained in this report is made available primarily to people working with young people, as well as to educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, local government units and cultural institutions that address the needs of young people and deal with them in their work and programs. supporting. In the area of work with young people, in recent years there has been too little available, reliable and reliably collected data that can support the creation of better tailored solutions that address the real needs of our beneficiaries. We hope that by making this information available in the spirit of data openness and knowledge sharing, we will contribute to the creation of valuable and innovative solutions that will actually strengthen the creation of civil society in Poland.

# Acknowledgments

Our entire team would like to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to all the people who contributed to the creation of the “Youth activism” report. This document is the fruit not only of our joint work, but also of the commitment and passion of people who believe in the power of social change led by young people.

We would like to express our special thanks to **prof. Barbara Fatyga**, whose substantive support and supervision of the study were invaluable to us. Your knowledge, experience and understanding were crucial in shaping the directions of our research and analyses.

We also cannot forget about non-governmental organizations that, with great commitment, participated in the process of disseminating the survey questionnaire among young activists. Your contribution to the development of our project was extremely important, and cooperation with you showed how powerful organized activities for the common good are. The co-authors of the report deserve our gratitude in particular:

**Fundacja Zróbmy.to,**

**Koło Naukowe Stosunków Międzynarodowych Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku,**

**Koło Naukowe Interdyscyplinarnych Działań Europejskich,**

**Młodzieżowa Rada Miasta Krakowa,**

**Młodzi o polityce,**

**Start-ED,**

**Stowarzyszenie Kontrasty,**

**YPI Consulting.**

The “Youth activism” report is the result of the joint efforts of many people and organizations that care about the future of the young generation and their participation in social life. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to its creation. Your commitment and work are part of the mission of our foundation and help build a better future for all of us.

With gratitude,

important issues foundation team

# Methodological note



**Author:** Julia Kelsz

The research on which this report is based is primarily exploratory in nature. We focus on the topic of social activity of young people in Poland, especially in the context of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; on the changes and needs that it caused in young members of school councils, youth councils, social organizations, voluntary groups, etc. The study recognizes the situation of people active socially at a young age, the obstacles experienced by this group and the expectations expressed by it. The data we discuss in this document were obtained in the spirit of quantitative and qualitative research, using two different research tools.

The basic research tool was a survey questionnaire addressed to activists aged 16-30 from all over Poland. The content of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix No. 1 to the report. It was developed by prof. Barbara Fatyga, cultural expert, sociologist, cultural anthropologist, professor of social sciences, head of the Department of Cultural Research Methods and the Youth Research Center at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw. The questionnaire contained 34 questions, of which 26 were closed single- and multiple-choice questions, 4 were semi-open questions and 4 were open questions. In the introduction, we asked activists to evaluate the last 12 months of their lives in terms of their successes and failures, with particular emphasis on their public life, activities and activities in organizations. Then we moved on to the part devoted to the diagnosis of current social problems - both the immediate and local ones, as well as those affecting Poland, Europe and even the entire world. The respondents also assessed their sense of influence on solving the above challenges. The next part of the study included questions focused on obstacles that young activists must overcome in their everyday activities. Finally, we asked about the assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the lives and activities of the respondents.

The last part of the questionnaire was the Twenty Statement Test (TST), the aim of which was to obtain a more accurate picture of the representatives of the group of young activists. *TST is a simple identity data collection tool created in 1954 by Manford H. Kuhn and Thomas S. McPartland. The subjects answered the question "Who am I?" 20 times. The method is used to examine 1) self-esteem and attitudes of individuals, 2) social groups and classifications; 3) ideological beliefs; 4) interests; 5) ambition; 6) self-assessment*<sup>1</sup>.

For the interpretation of TST results, prof. Barbara Fatyga used the concepts of incorporated, objectified and institutionalized capital according to Pierre Bourdieu, the theory of social capital (bridging, binding and connecting) according to Robert Putnam, as well as her own method of measuring emotional temperatures, which consists in reading the emotional character of individual self-descriptions and assigning them to sets of positive, negative, ambivalent, indifferent or neutral expressions<sup>2</sup>. All analyzes fall within the so-called methodology. The third way (basically qualitative, but due to the large amount of analyzed data, also using a quantitative approach)<sup>3</sup>. The elements of the analysis constitute an integral part of the report in the form of appropriately described quotations, and the entire study constitutes Appendix No. 2 to the report.

The selection of the research sample began with a list of various types of organizations, institutions and non-affiliated units prepared by prof. Barbara Fatyga and consulted by the important issues foundation. This was a starting point for us in an attempt to reach the widest possible group of representatives of various groups involved in activist activities. The tool was promoted via the social media of the important issues foundation, as well as in cooperation with entities associating people belonging to the established research group selected by the study organizers.

<sup>1</sup> Fatyga, B. (2023). *Wyniki TST (Twenty Statement Test) oraz deklarowane typy działań w badaniu młodych osób aktywnie angażujących się w życie publiczne w Polsce*. Warsaw - Milanówek. Appendix No. 2 to the report. (Translated from Polish)

<sup>2</sup> Author's method titled "Inwentarz JA-MY-ONI, przystosowana do odszukiwania autoidentyfikacji i autoprezentacji w tekstach wywiadów biograficznych" (see, e.g., Fatyga, B., *Dzicy z naszej ulicy. Antropologia kultury młodzieżowej*. Warsaw: ISNS UW, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Based on Fatyga, B. (2023). *Wyniki TST (Twenty Statement Test) oraz deklarowane typy działań w badaniu młodych osób aktywnie angażujących się w życie publiczne w Polsce*. Warsaw - Milanówek. Appendix No. 2 to the report.

These were the following organizations: School of Life, Koło Studentów Stosunków Międzynarodowych UJ, Fundacja Ad Personam, Stowarzyszenie Europe4Youth, Młodzieżowa Rada Miasta Krakowa, Samorząd Studentów ASP Katowice, Społeczna Inicjatywa Narkopolityki, BEST Wrocław, Stowarzyszenie BEST, Kongres Kobiet, Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Dolnośląskiego, Dom Spokojnej Młodości, Stowarzyszenie „Europejski Instytut Rozwoju”, Klub Naukowy Fenix, Młodzieżowa Rada Miasta Słupska, Stowarzyszenie LevelUp, Koło BIZ SWPS, Młodzieżowa Rada Powiatu Opoczno, Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego, Fundacja EIAS, YPI Consulting, Młodzi o Polityce, Koło Naukowe Stosunków Międzynarodowych Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Koło Naukowe Interdyscyplinarnych Działań Europejskich, Fundacja Start ED, Fundacja Zróbmy To, Młodzieżowa Rada Miasta Człuchowa oraz Stowarzyszenie Kontrasty, whom we would like to thank for their support. Organizations particularly involved in supporting the promotion of the questionnaire are presented in the report as entities co-creating the study. The questionnaire was completed by n=439 people included in the study group.

A complementary research tool, in the form of 29 discussions conducted in the spirit of focus group interviews (FGI), was prepared and conducted entirely by the team of the important issues foundation. The study group consisted of 13 activists, selected due to their sociodemographic characteristics, so as to reflect the structure of the group of people who responded to the survey questionnaire, divided by gender, age and place of residence. Table 1 presents the profiles of people interviewed during group interviews along with the codes assigned to them.

**Table 1: Classification of people examined in group interviews**

<b>F1</b>	woman aged 20, living in a very big city (>250,000 inhabitants), involved in the activities of a youth council, co-founder of a foundation, leader of a local association
<b>F2</b>	woman aged 18, living in a village (<5,000 inhabitants), active in school self-government, local volunteering and youth council
<b>F3</b>	woman aged 20, living in the capital, employee of the foundation
<b>F4</b>	woman aged 24, living in a small city (5,000 - 20,000 inhabitants), social activist and youth worker
<b>F5</b>	woman aged 21, living in a very big city (>250,000 inhabitants), active in the pro-ecological movement, volunteer of several foundations
<b>F6</b>	woman aged 19, living in the capital, educational activist, co-founder of the foundation
<b>F7</b>	woman aged 18, living in a village (<5,000 inhabitants), social project coordinator, foundation intern, volunteer, active in the school government
<b>F8</b>	woman aged 16, living in a medium city (20,000 - 100,000 inhabitants), member of a local consultative body, youth councilor
<b>M1</b>	man aged 21, living in a very big city (>250,000 inhabitants), associated with the youth council and provincial assembly, creator of civic movements and founder of the association
<b>M2</b>	man aged 23, living in a medium city (20,000 - 100,000 inhabitants), member of the association
<b>M3</b>	man aged 20, living in a very big city (>250,000 inhabitants), pro-ecological activist, local activist, foundation volunteer, trainer
<b>M4</b>	man aged 24, living in a very big city (>250,000 inhabitants), member of an association, fundraiser
<b>M5</b>	man aged 30, living in the capital, educational activist, social project coordinator

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

The discussions were aimed at deepening and developing the issues raised in the questionnaire, including learning about the history of social activists, better understanding their motivation, experienced difficulties, specificity of relationships and specific memories from the pandemic period. Individual discussions lasted from 15 to 30 minutes, and each of them was attended by 2 to 5 people. Each of the 29 interviews focused on a selected area from those covered in the survey questionnaire, giving young people with different views, origins, age or education a space to confront their beliefs and perspectives.

The leading topics of the interviews were presented in Table 2.

The number of conversations on a selected topic depended on the number of respondents who expressed the need to speak on a given matter.

Transcripts of all discussions were subject to factual coding. Quotes constituting an element of the report are coded as follows: X[no.]\_Y[no.], with X being the code of the discussion's topic and [no.] being its ordinal number (in situations where there were more than one conversation on the given topic), and Y[no.] being the code of the interviewed person.

This report is the result of the analysis of the results obtained using both research tools, with the basic source of data being the responses to the survey questionnaire, and the content of the interviews supplementing the information obtained in this way. Its content was created by employees of the important issues foundation with substantive support from prof. Barbara Fatyga. When developing the material, we primarily had in mind the usefulness of the report, trying to respond to the need for a better understanding of the target group by non-governmental organizations and other entities working with or for young people.

**Table 2: Thematic classification of group interviews**

No.	code	description
1	<b>IDENTITY</b>	one conversation about the identity of an activist, in which we asked about the characteristics of activists, their dreams, priorities, challenges and how activists are assessed by their environment
2	<b>DIVISIONS</b>	two conversations about political divisions
3	<b>INEQUALITIES</b>	three conversations about social inequalities
4	<b>EDUCATION</b>	two conversations about the education system
5	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	three conversations about low civic participation; conversations no. 2 - 5 concerned specific aspects of a given problem, its impact on young people and how young activists can influence the problem
6	<b>OBSTACLES</b>	one conversation about general obstacles to the activities of activists, in which we asked the group about their understanding of the problems indicated by the majority of respondents in the questionnaire: lack of knowledge, lack of professional support, internal problems of the organization, mental characteristics of young activists and lack of interest of the authorities in the problems of young people
7	<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>	four conversations about the mental characteristics of activists that may be an obstacle to conducting activist activities
8	<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	four conversations about lack of sufficient knowledge
9	<b>SUPPORT</b>	four conversations about lack of external support
10	<b>AUTHORITY</b>	two conversations about the lack of interest of national and local authorities in matters important to young activists
11	<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	one conversation about internal problems of the organization; conversations no. 7 - 11 sought answers to questions about how a given obstacle manifests itself in the interlocutors' lives, what a given person can do to face a given obstacle and what systemic support in this area could look like
12	<b>PANDEMIC</b>	two conversations about the impact of the pandemic on the lives of young people, in which we asked what the pandemic was for the interviewees, how they remember it and what impact it had on their immediate surroundings

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

# Who are activists?

activists attach great importance to their worldview and identity choices; it is an important element of their self-identification for them

young activists tend to have a myopic perspective when planning their social activities

young people recognize that the social perception of their group is wrong – public opinion associates activists with politics and scandal, not with grassroots work and local involvement

Author: Kaja Gagatek

## Twenty Statement Test

The interpretation presented below is based on data collected as part of the TST, i.e. the Twenty Statement Test. This is a tool for collecting data on the identity of respondents, which is described in detail in the methodological note of the report. Based on it, prof. Barbara Fatyga created an image of the young activists who took part in the study.

### attachment to identity choices

Among the descriptions of their own identity indicated by the respondents, some of them include the so-called consensual categories, i.e. formal ones, describing belonging to a species, profession or social role, and some – to subconsensual categories, more private and intimate descriptions, including, for example, character traits.

Table 3: Analysis of sociodemographic data of the study group

		n	%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	279	63.6
	Male	148	33.7
	Other	12	2.7
<b>Place of residence</b>	Village (<5,000 inhabitants)	64	14.6
	Small city (5,000 - 20,000 inhabitants)	52	11.8
	Medium city (20,000 - 100,000 inhabitants)	51	11.6
	Big city (100,000 - 250,000 inhabitants)	50	11.4
	Very big city (>250,000 inhabitants)	119	27.1
	Capital city	103	23.5
<b>Age</b>	16 - 18 years old	87	19.8
	18 - 26 years old	313	71.3
	26 - 30 years old	39	8.9

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

Within the consensus categories, the respondents described themselves both through the prism of their identity choices (e.g. I am an ecological activist) and sociodemographic characteristics (e.g. I am from Warsaw). The data show that identity choices are especially important for young people and constitute a very important element of their self-identification<sup>4</sup>.

*If the interpretation of the data took into account the weight assigned to (...) categories resulting from identity choices in the public sphere, we would receive a total of 55% of the entire set of consensual categories; the remaining 45% can be considered as resulting from the so-called objective features of sociodemographic characteristics.*

### *Here are some tips for organizational activities:*

- \* it is worth to clearly communicate your worldview orientations and directions of action;*
- \* it seems that problems affecting the foundations of the current world order are more important for the surveyed people than traditional socio-political orientations;*
- \* in organizational work, the principle of glocality should be clearly promoted (i.e. combining global and local issues and building stronger identification with a specific place and local community)<sup>5</sup>.*



<sup>4</sup> Fatyga, B. (2023). Wyniki TST (Twenty Statement Test) oraz deklarowane typy działań w badaniu młodych osób aktywnie angażujących się w życie publiczne w Polsce. Warsaw - Milanówek. Appendix No. 2 to the report. (Translated from Polish)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 8, translated.

## positive self-assessment

Within the subconscious categories, young activists list primarily their positive traits (e.g. I am an optimist, I am cool). They constitute as much as 44.7% of all subconscious self-identifications.

*It seems that the well-being of the examined people is in excellent condition. It also seems that concerns about the effects of the pandemic did not affect this group of people (there is only 1 self-report in the collection, indicating that the person began to change after the pandemic). (...) It can be assumed that the vast majority of features that positively influence potentials (resources) bode well for the surveyed people, both in public and personal life, and the threats here are (...) few<sup>6</sup>.*

## directions of future activities

Based on the answers provided in the TST, it is possible to classify the areas in which young respondents are most often active. These are mainly activities covering: 1) activation of young people and students, 2) the education system, 3) ecology and animal rights, 4) public and media discourse, and 5) politics.

Moreover, activists had the opportunity to declare what areas of activity they would like to engage in in the future.

*The only 2 areas that were mentioned more often in (future) declarations than in current activities are ecology with animal rights and climate change, as well as involvement in politics. In the context of growing threats to the planet, the first of these choices is absolutely justified and rational.*

*I am inclined to interpret the second choice in a similar way: if young people, by acting quickly, become aware that the actions of individual organizations, in a project-based, always too short perspective, do not have a greater chance of bringing about social change – only systemic solutions can ultimately achieve this<sup>7</sup>.*

This is somewhat consistent with the conclusion described later in the report regarding the obstacles identified by young activists in their current activities - over 70% of respondents consider the lack of interest in the problems of young people on the part of local authorities as an obstacle, and over 80% – on the part of state authorities.

Perhaps the desire to get involved in politics results directly from frustration with the low quality of the current support from the system and the mission to change it in the future.

## short-term activity perspective

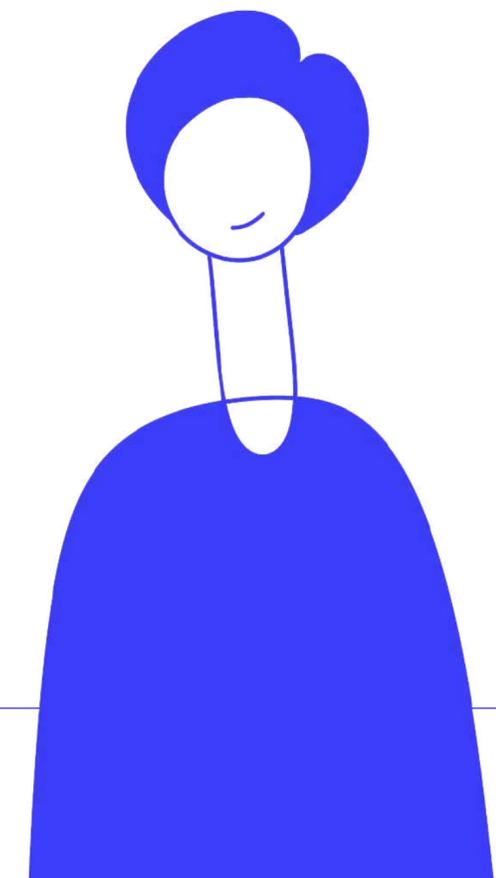
In the perspective of prof. Fatyga, when creating a picture of the social activism of young people who completed the questionnaire, the most important conclusion is:

*[...] a flickering interest in the public sphere of the surveyed people, one of the symptoms of which is a presentist orientation, or to put it simply: preoccupation with the present time.*

*Appropriate "sensational" news could, in this case, inform about: "short-distance Strong Girls and Judyms", because – as it was seen in the analysis – the potential for activity here is high, and the threat may be the rapid burnout of specific activities<sup>8</sup>.*

According to prof. Fatyga activism represented by the surveyed people does not assume long-term commitment, but is based on action "here and now".

*However, I do not think that these results can be explained [...] solely by the young age of the people examined. The short term perspective for particular activities may be worrying given that it is difficult to suspect that most of the current problems involving young people will disappear or be solved in the short term. In the light of these analyses, presentism of involvement seems to be one of the main threats to the activities of organizations working with and for youth. Another question arises: in the design of work by organizations, is it more important to establish identity (expressed in self-identifications and self-presentations) or declarations of action, or maybe only the observation of actual effects of action? It seems that these three levels should be balanced<sup>9</sup>.*



<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 9, translated.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 20, translated.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 20, translated.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 20 - 21, translated.

# And how do activists paint their image?

As part of a supplementary focus group study, the participants of the discussion talked, among others: about the social perception of activists, as well as how they perceive themselves. The self-images of the surveyed people and their image in society are expected to differ significantly. In their opinion, activists are generally associated by fellow citizens with radical media activists or with collecting signatures for social initiatives. Actions taken by activists are said to evoke negative or ambivalent feelings in people.

this is how we mark quotes from interviews →

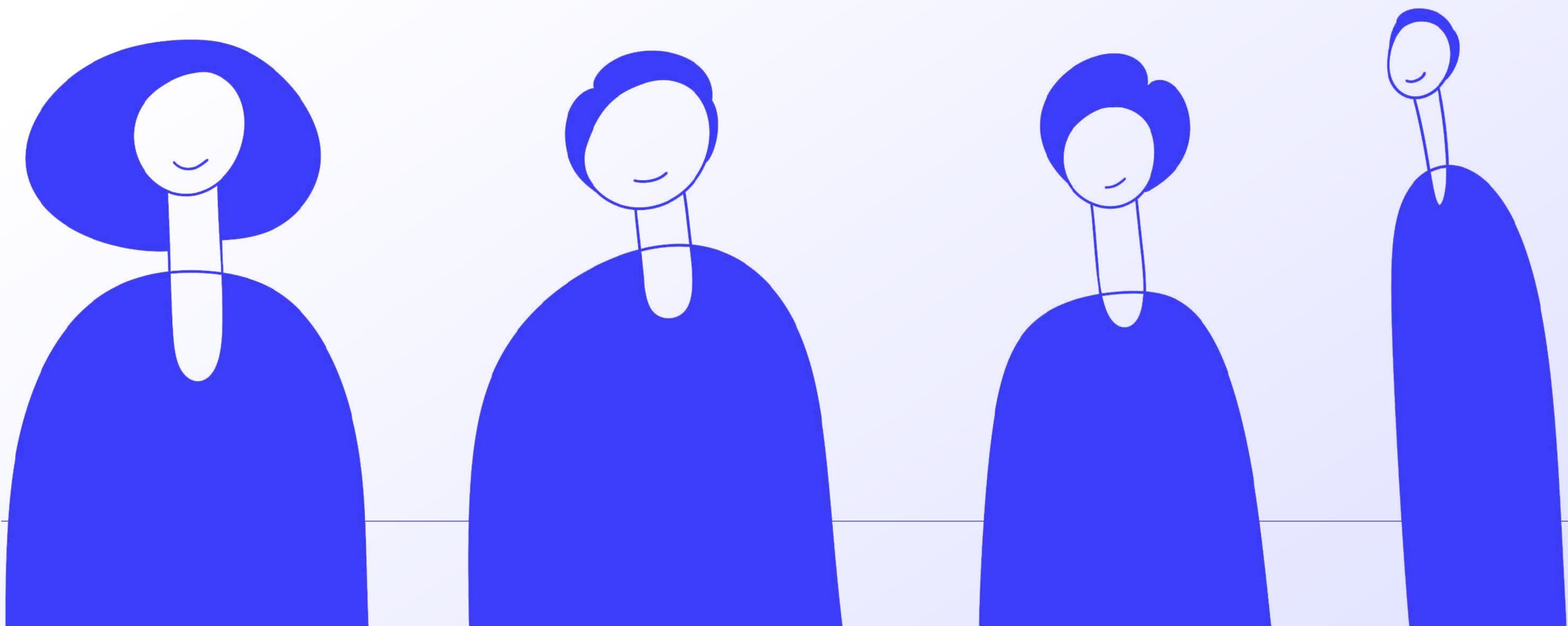
*According to society, an activist is always a controversial figure. They talk more than they actually do. They often seek attention and will do anything to get it. First of all, with their actions they want to draw attention to themselves, not to the problem. People often associate activism only with political activism, so they probably think that it must be politically related. It is usually associated with left-wing views, less often with right-wing ones. (IDENTITY\_M5)*

From the perspective of the people participating in the study, such an image has little in common with real activism. The basic difference between them is the space of operation. Based on their experience and observations, they believe that activism is mainly practiced locally.

*Activists are very often people who act locally. These newspaper headlines concern the most famous, controversial, nationwide or even international actions, and the vast majority of activists are involved locally. (IDENTITY\_F6)*

They also emphasize the importance of office, accounting, organizational and research work in their daily activities.

*Activism is hard skills that society often does not see. This is work in Excel or Word, requiring office skills. An activist is a person who often does not have time, so he must be very well organized. An activist creates opinions based on facts and his actions are based on a lot of research, personal experiences*



*and much more methodical work than it might seem. (IDENTITY\_F6).*

The discussants also emphasize the positive impact of activist activities on the environment, as well as the fact that they focus on searching for what is common and not what is different in society.

*Activism unites, not divides. Activists usually strive to work across divisions, although this is not always possible. (IDENTITY\_M3)*

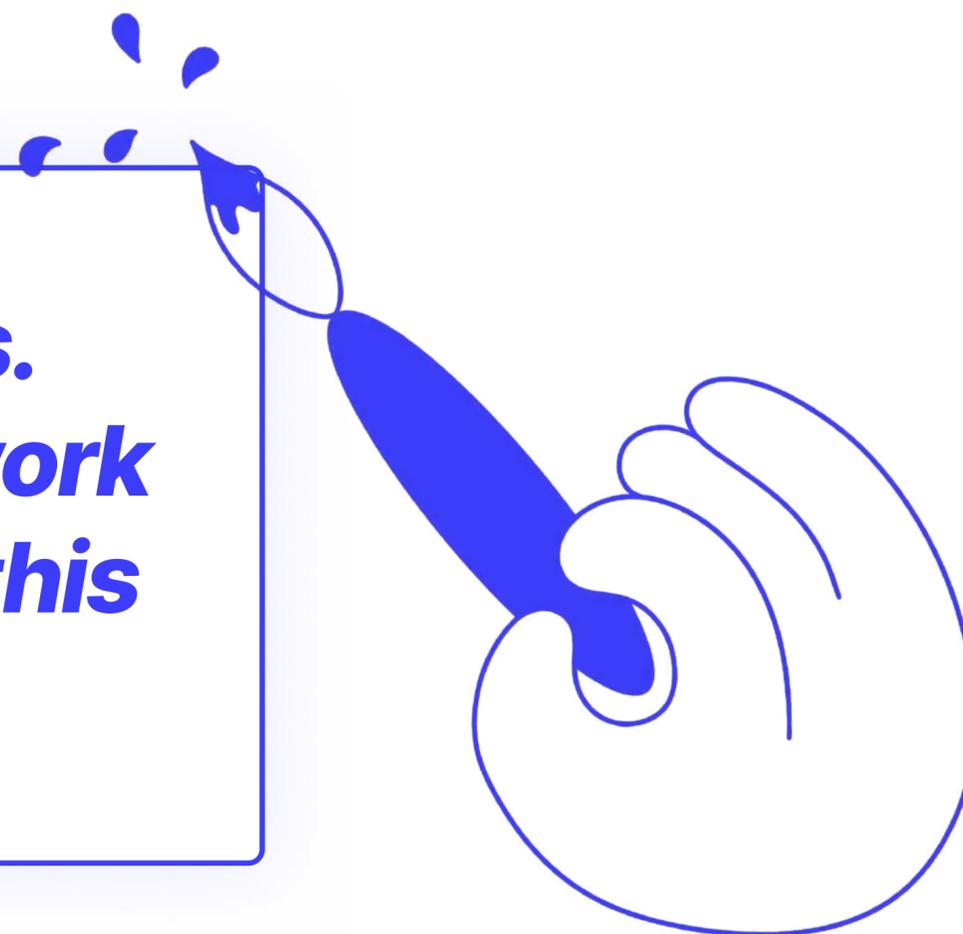
*An activist tries to act, reach out to people, listen to their needs. (IDENTITY\_F7)*

Additionally, people participating in the study draw attention to the problem of fatigue and difficulties in reconciling their private life with social and professional activities.

*(...) it's about chronic fatigue. It is difficult to find some time for yourself, which leads to neglecting your own needs and losing contact with yourself. (IDENTITY\_F6)*

To sum up, according to people who took part in the focus group study, the image of activists in society does not match the way they perceive themselves. Young activists believe that their work is much more complicated and time-consuming than society thinks. They emphasize the multi-aspect nature of this type of work, the good intentions and positive effects of their actions, as well as the difficulties encountered during them.

**“ Activism unites, not divides. Activists usually strive to work across divisions, although this is not always possible. ”**



# The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people

Author: Julia Kelsz

young people do not evaluate the pandemic clearly - they notice both its positive sides, e.g. more time for themselves, less sense of peer pressure, the possibility of getting involved in the activities of organizations from other parts of Poland (online), but also the negative ones – e.g. reduced motivation or long-term lack of integration with their peers

some young people notice that despite the end of the pandemic crisis, we have not managed to regain full enthusiasm, willingness to work with others and good moods

the end of the pandemic is not always associated with an improvement in the situation of non-governmental organizations – although some of them declare a better financial situation and more efficient organization of activities, this applies only to some entities

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point in the lives of young people, not only those identifying as activists. It turned their lives upside down, in particular affecting the organization of everyday activities at school, universities and workplaces. More than half of the respondents (53.5%) indicate that the way they function at school or work has changed completely, and another 30% – that it has changed at least a little. This was definitely the area of life that changed the most at that time. It seems that the effects of the pandemic have affected all young people to a very similar extent – regardless of gender, place of residence of the respondents or the intensity of their public activities.

COVID-19 also affected the functioning of social organizations (68% of people associated with NGOs indicate a complete or partial change in their method of operation during the pandemic). 3 out of 4 respondents also declare that their general social activity, including non-affiliated ones, has changed completely or to some extent. Interestingly, this is not a clearly negative change. The young activists we talked to as part of the focus group study point to numerous positive effects of pandemic restrictions:

*I have not only negative associations with the pandemic. It is known that the first waves were not easy (...) But when there were subsequent waves, I got involved in the ZHR Scout Emergency Service. I have been a scout for many years, and it was an organization that was created during the pandemic to deliver lunches to people in need. The Legia Warszawa Foundation simply gathered volunteers at the stadium and we got on our bikes and delivered lunches day after day on bikes or electric scooters. (PANDEMIC2\_F3)*

*(...) during the pandemic I didn't have to waste time commuting. I could do more. I had contact with people in the youth city council, which operated as part of the Youth Cultural Center, and MDKs [Miejskie Domy Kultury – Polish Municipal Cultural Centres] were not covered by the regulation that reversed everything to remote work, so we could work stationary – with restrictions, but still (PANDEMIC2\_M3)*

*The organization in which most of my activism is focused (...) was established shortly before the pandemic and was supposed to operate locally in Łódź, but the pandemic forced them to switch to online, which consequently led to them spreading on a much larger scale, than if they operated locally. Because of this, not being in the city where they initially operated, I was able to get involved (PANDEMIC1\_M5)*

# Effects of the pandemic

Of course, the positives indicated above are only one side of the coin – non-governmental organizations, just like institutions and entities in the first and second sectors, adopted various adaptation strategies to survive the crisis caused by the pandemic, and some of them turned out to be exceptionally effective. However, restrictions limiting direct interpersonal contact, gatherings, and even the basic use of public space have also had negative effects in all areas of life. Some of them remained with us even after the crisis had ended.

When asked about the changes they noticed after the end of the pandemic, young people pay attention primarily to their social life – most of them (55.3%) were changes for the better, returning to the possibility of maintaining regular contacts. It is worrying, however, that as many as 30% of people believe that after the pandemic, their interpersonal contacts not only have not returned to their previous state, but have changed for the worse – perhaps due to the loss of the ability to naturally shape important relationships at a key moment of development.

A break of more than two years in free contacts with peers may have resulted in some young people finding it difficult to make close friends again:

The spread of the COVID-19 virus has caused many difficulties: in family, social, public and professional life, therefore a positive conclusion from the study is the fact that a large part of young people are relieved that the pandemic is over. In addition to a better social situation, approximately 40% of respondents believe that their financial situation has improved partially or completely after the crisis has ended, and almost 60% of respondents indicate that their ability to organize their own activities has improved.

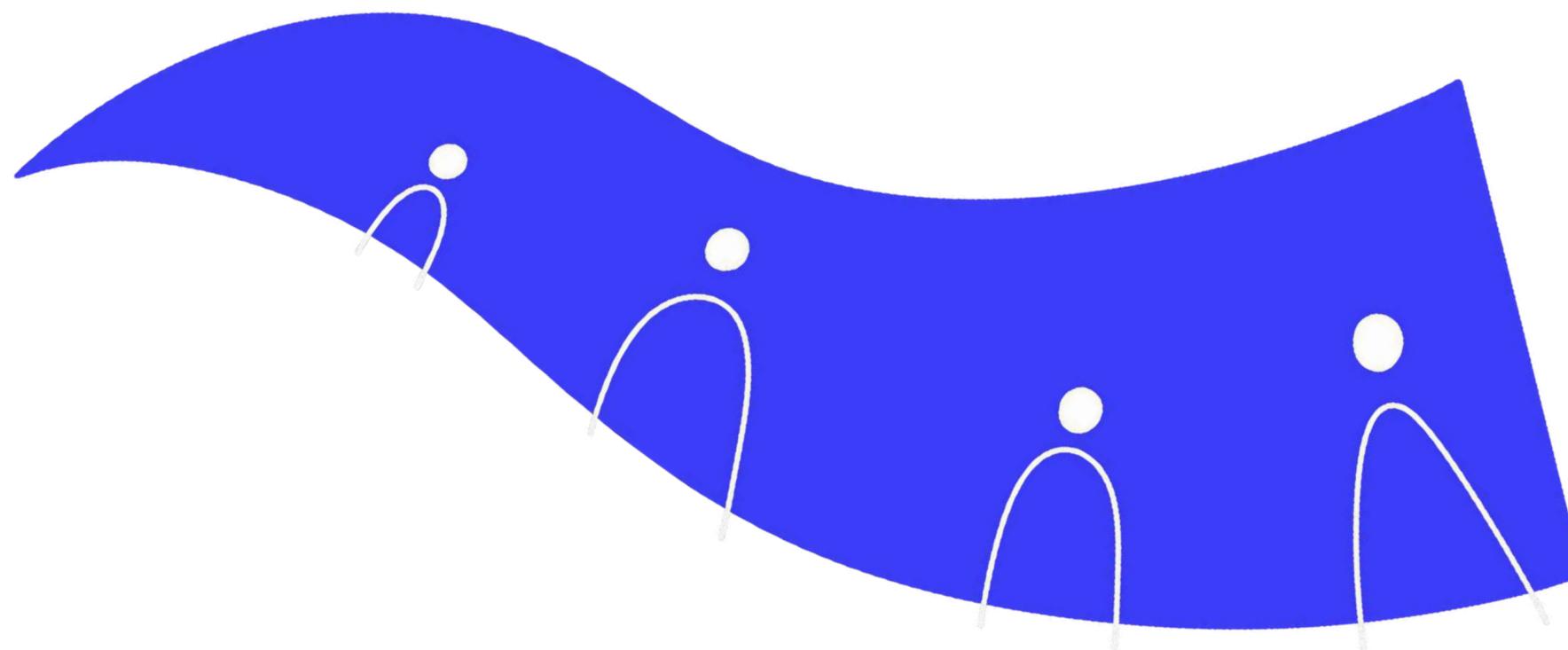
*We held meetings, unfortunately, online, and it was a tragedy. And I did everything to motivate everyone, to have energy. To speak. Well, sometimes we didn't even see the people we were talking to (PANDEMIC2\_F7)*

*(...) the student experience was such that I had the first semester stationary, the second, third and fourth semester completely remotely. I had a third year with a hybrid of lectures and only in the last semester everything returned to normal. My experience is that this time was a bit wasted. I missed a lot of things (PANDEMIC2\_M2)*

**40%**  
of respondents declare that their financial situation will improve after the pandemic

**55%**  
of respondents have a greater opportunity to maintain contacts with people after the pandemic

nearly **60%**  
of respondents notice an improvement in their ability to organize their own activities after the pandemic



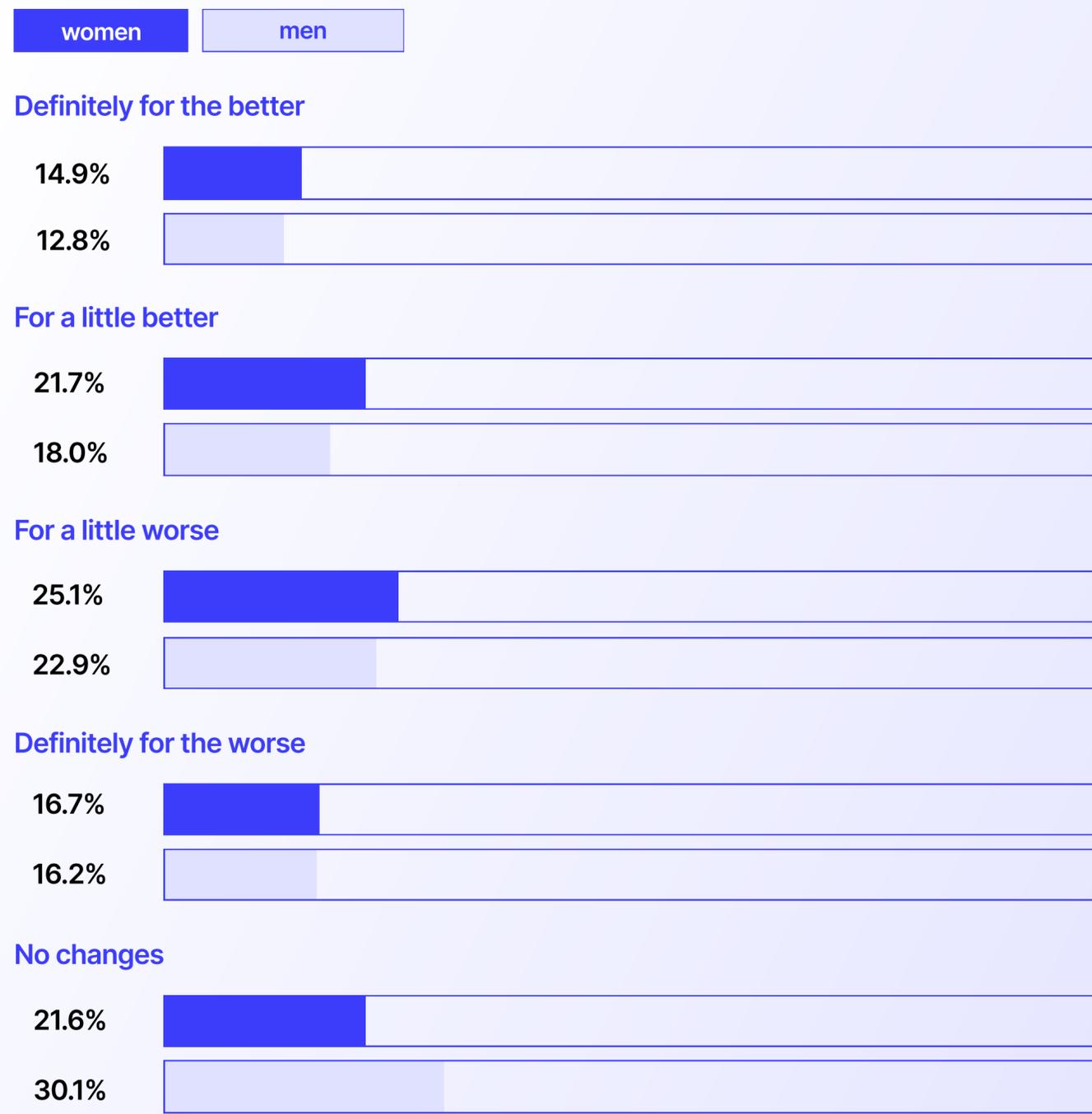
An important aspect that has worsened – despite the end of the pandemic – is the sense of general apathy and deterioration of mood among the surveyed activists. As many as 41% of respondents indicate that the mood in their homes, schools, work or organizations has changed for a little or much worse after the pandemic. This is especially noticeable among young people living in small cities – 1 in 4 people rated the level of general apathy and bad mood as much higher than before. Women are slightly more likely to notice worsening moods than men; nearly 1/3 of men and only 20% of women declare no noticeable changes in this respect.

**1 in 4 people**  
 surveyed living in a small city assesses the level of general apathy and bad mood as higher than during the pandemic

What did the return to life in terms of social activity and work in non-governmental organizations look like after the pandemic? Almost 2 out of 3 activists and people belonging to or working in NGOs indicate that after the pandemic, their ability to maintain contacts and the ability to organize their activities have improved. Interestingly, the greatest improvement in the organization of social activity and work in NGOs is noticeable among people living in a village (77.4%), and the smallest among young people living in the capital (57.5%), where every fourth person surveyed indicates a downward trend in this respect. skills. Men assess the financial situation in the area of social activity better (51% declare partial or complete improvement) than women (39.8%).

Figure 1: Respondents' answers to the question "How has the level of general apathy and deterioration of mood changed?" broken down by gender, expressed as a percentage; n=336

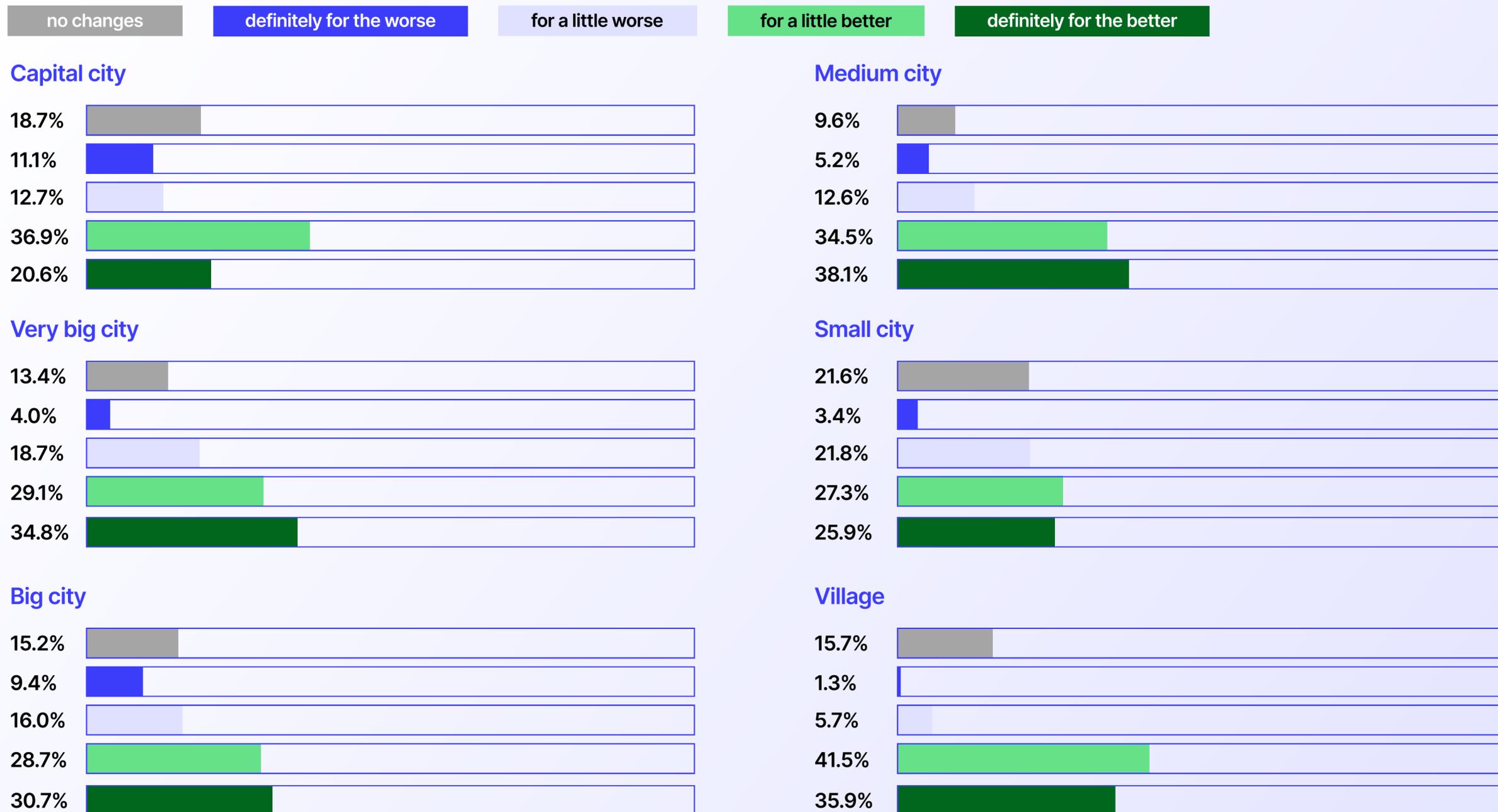
## How has the level of general apathy and deterioration in mood changed since the pandemic?



Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

Figure 2: Respondents' answers to the question "How have the ways of organizing your activities in the area of your social activity and in your organization changed after the pandemic?", divided by place of residence, expressed as a percentage; n=301.

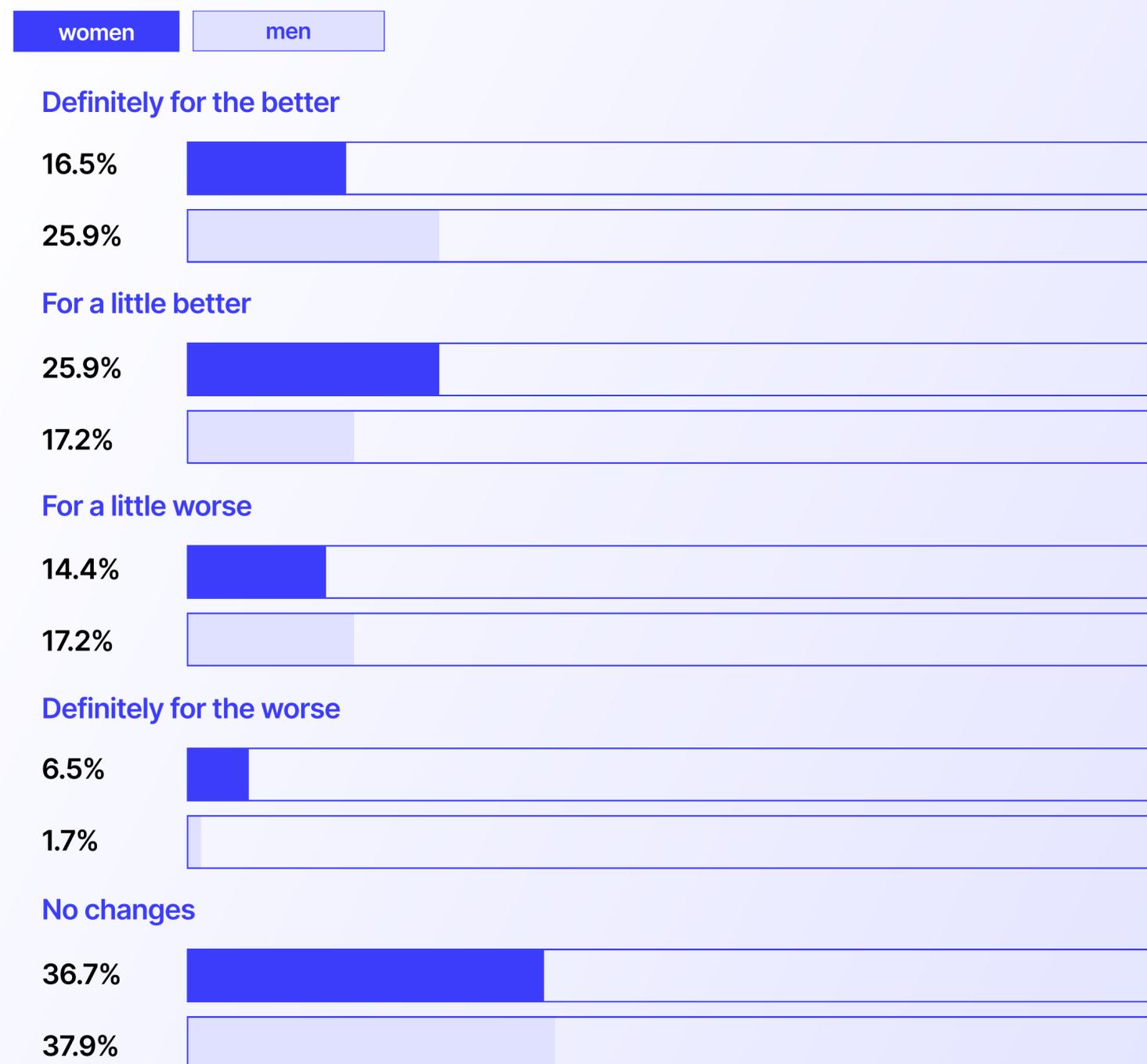
# How the way of organizing the activities of the surveyed people has changed in the area of their social activity and in their organizations after the pandemic



Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

Figure 3: Respondents' answers to the question "How has your financial situation in the organization changed after the pandemic?" broken down by gender, expressed as a percentage, n=203.

## How the financial situation has changed in activist organizations after the pandemic



Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

**65.2%**  
of surveyed NGOs declare better organization of their activities after the pandemic

**62.5%**  
of surveyed NGOs declare that the networking situation has improved after the pandemic

# Problems

Author: Mateusz Domarski

young people clearly negatively evaluate the Polish education system, both at the local and national level; First of all, they point out the anachronism of the system, strong pressure and competition

young female activists pay more attention to the problem of social inequalities than male activists; activists primarily emphasize the issue of communication exclusion, the rights of national and ethnic minorities and economic inequalities

respondents recognize environmental problems as a very important challenge, but they notice them especially on a global scale, but do not necessarily appreciate its local dimension

In the questionnaire, we asked the participants questions about what they believed to be the key social problems occurring in their town, country, Europe and the world. We wanted to find out how they diagnose the reality around them and what motivates them to be active on behalf of other people. In a semi-open question, respondents had the opportunity to assess the importance of social problems on various scales (city, country, Europe, world) from among 11 challenges developed by prof. Barbara Fatyga, as well as adding those that did not fit into the indicated categories. Then, the activists indicated the extent to which they felt they could personally contribute to solving a given problem – or whether, in their opinion, it was completely unattainable.

Among the proposals indicated in Table 4, young people considered issues related to education, as well as social inequalities, poverty, consumerism, environmental problems and political divisions, to be the most troublesome.

Table 4: Social problems indicated in the questionnaire

Education system

Education as an institution

Low civic activity in society

Low social activity among young people

Environmental issues

Poverty

Social inequalities

Blocks to development opportunities

Political divisions

Consumerism

Crisis of values

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

Table 5: Percentage of respondents considering given social problems as severe on the selected scale (n=439)

Problem:	On a city scale	On a national scale	On a European scale	On a global scale	It is not a problem
Education system	21.2	<b>87.7</b>	15.3	23.5	<b>2.3</b>
Education as an institution	23.9	<b>90.7</b>	14.4	18.0	<b>1.1</b>
Social inequalities	20.7	<b>41.9</b>	29.2	83.4	<b>4.8</b>
Poverty	15.0	<b>31.4</b>	18.2	84.3	<b>3.0</b>
Consumerism	19.1	<b>35.1</b>	35.3	81.8	<b>6.2</b>
Environmental issues	25.5	<b>42.6</b>	32.1	80.4	<b>2.3</b>
Political divisions	21.6	<b>61.0</b>	34.9	64.7	<b>2.7</b>
Low civic activity	31.0	<b>63.8</b>	22.3	28.2	<b>7.1</b>
Crisis of values	17.3	<b>37.1</b>	31.2	61.7	<b>15.9</b>
Low social activity among young people	33.7	<b>54.9</b>	22.1	29.6	<b>13.7</b>
Blocks to development opportunities	31.4	<b>44.9</b>	13.0	51.5	<b>6.2</b>

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

## Education

At the research stage, we divided educational issues into two separate issues: education as an institution (including issues related to the core curriculum, time schedule and teachers' salaries), and the education system as such (i.e. the way education is generally organized). However, this division was not reflected in the results of this study. The answers of the people participating in it overlapped in terms of both challenges related to education, which may indicate that the respondents consider the area of education to require a thorough, comprehensive change, including both the way it is organized, its mission and the scope of knowledge transferred.

89.2% of the surveyed activists indicate that education is the biggest problem in the country. Only 20.7% believe that education is a problem on a global scale,

and even fewer, 14.8%, believe that education is a problem on a European scale. This means that the respondents evaluate the Polish school extremely negatively.

This assessment is in no way dependent on the place of residence of young people. Both people living in small (93.3%) and big cities (90%) indicate that this is a particularly acute problem on a national scale. Importantly, only 1.7% of respondents do not perceive education as a problem.

The analysis of focus interviews allowed us to isolate the most important problems related to education, which were noticed by the respondents. The basic accusation is **the anachronism of the system**, which does not adapt young people to life in the modern world. The respondents point out that the emphasis is disproportionate to the realities:

**89.2%**  
of respondents  
perceive the education  
system as a problem  
on a national scale

*We are still relying on those 19th-century solutions, which have only moved forward since then, usually adding elements of history or mathematics or Polish (...) This is very clearly visible in the fact that when a person graduates from high school, technical school or something, he does not know what to do in adulthood. (EDUCATION1\_M1)*

According to them, the education system is also invasive and can significantly influence students' mental disintegration. **It promotes unhealthy competition**, bypassing important cooperation competencies.

*(...) I put a lot of pressure on my studies and grades, and this resulted in self-neglect, e.g. eating disorders, mental problems. I pushed my studies to stay ahead of the rat race. I didn't feel like this knowledge was useful. (...) Then I started to be active in the community and I explained to myself that I was developing better there than at school, I didn't go to online classes, and during my final exams I switched to individual learning and then I came back to life (EDUCATION1\_F8)*

An important element of the negative assessment of the Polish education system is **the lack of interest in the development of soft skills among female and male students**. According to the respondents, Polish schools do not pay attention to project work, the development of social skills, the subjectivity of students and cooperation. A symptom of this is, for example, poorly developed self-government in schools.

*(...) for example abroad, in English-speaking countries, in Germany, why are there better universities there? Because students animate their own lives, write papers together, and organize student activities. Why are our student governments so weak? Because at the earlier stages, local governments have such impaired competences that we are unable to learn how to manage a group or manage our time. That is why I am in favor of schools being for students, not only in the educational context, but also in terms of skills, including life skills. (EDUCATION2\_M1)*

Students feel the desire to "get out of the system." They are looking for solutions, and home education may be one of them. **The pandemic and the so-called distance learning**. Young people could organize their time to a greater extent,

and a different way of acquiring and implementing knowledge turned out to be beneficial to them to some extent – revealing the flaws and weaknesses of the system.

*The pandemic came and it turned out that school may work differently than we have been used to for decades, and that is why we now have a crisis with (...) many people go for home education, so this shows that more and more people prefer to teach at home rather than at school. It means that something is not working, because in a normal school it should be like that, you attend these lessons, but not in a way that someone forces you, but you get an education that develops you (...) (EDUCATION1\_M1)*

# Social inequalities

Another issue that respondents participating in the study indicate as a serious problem is social inequalities. According to young activists, this is a particularly important challenge on a global scale (83.4%). Only 20.7% of respondents believe that they are severe at the level of their town, and 41.9% that they are severe at the level of the country. Interestingly, social inequalities is not considered a problem by only 1.1% of surveyed women and as many as 12.2% of men.

Based on interviews with activists, we notice that the respondents consider **communication exclusion** as one of the most important elements of the topic of social inequalities. In their opinion, it is strongly related to other manifestations of inequalities and social stratification. They consider solving this problem a priority.

*I think that if the communication problem was solved, other problems – economic, educational and social – would really improve. People would be more mobile in terms of the possibility of working in another place, with better earnings, going to study, living somewhere else. These problems could simply be significantly reduced right away, because in most cases they are caused by something being far away, difficult to get to, and so on. (INEQUALITIES1\_M3)*

The survey also drew attention to **the needs of national minorities**, whose status in Poland is insufficiently regulated in their opinion. This is intended to deepen divisions and inequalities:

*(...) a perfect example are Belarusians, who have a hell of a difficult situation, and nothing is being done to make their life easier in Poland. There are much fewer of them than Ukrainians, so the costs (would be) much lower (...) (INEQUALITIES1\_M1)*

*One minority is not equal to another in Poland and there is no unification of what a minority is. Currently, these are Polish citizens who report that they are in some minority, either ethnic or national, but the problem is that the majority of minorities are not citizens with Polish citizenship, but e.g. with the Pole's Card, residence permit, etc. (INEQUALITIES1\_M1)*

The people we surveyed recognize the importance of social programs and the need for the state to support the poorest.

They especially see it as an opportunity to equalize opportunities for young people, giving them greater access to development opportunities:

*In countries where there is no aid at all, people who are poor will stay poor. How are they supposed to see a different perspective and gain experience? Even on such a trip, we meet people and gain experience. I think this also has a big impact on young people who are about to start their path. (INEQUALITIES2\_F7)*

**As many as 98.9%  
of surveyed women  
and 87.8% of men  
consider social inequality  
to be a problem**

## Poverty

Poverty is an important problem on a global scale – 83.4% of surveyed young activists believe so. However, only 15% of respondents consider it a problem in their own town – this is indicated by the responses of people living in the countryside, in small, medium and big cities, as well as the inhabitants of the capital. Only 6.3% of people living in rural areas consider it a problem on a European scale, but as many as 24.3% of people living in Warsaw.

## Consumerism

Another important problem for the people we surveyed is consumerism. As many as 81.8% of respondents consider it a particularly serious problem on a global scale. However, only 13.5% of people living in a small town and as many as 29.1% of people living in Warsaw consider it a problem at the level of their place of residence and immediate surroundings.

## Environmental issues

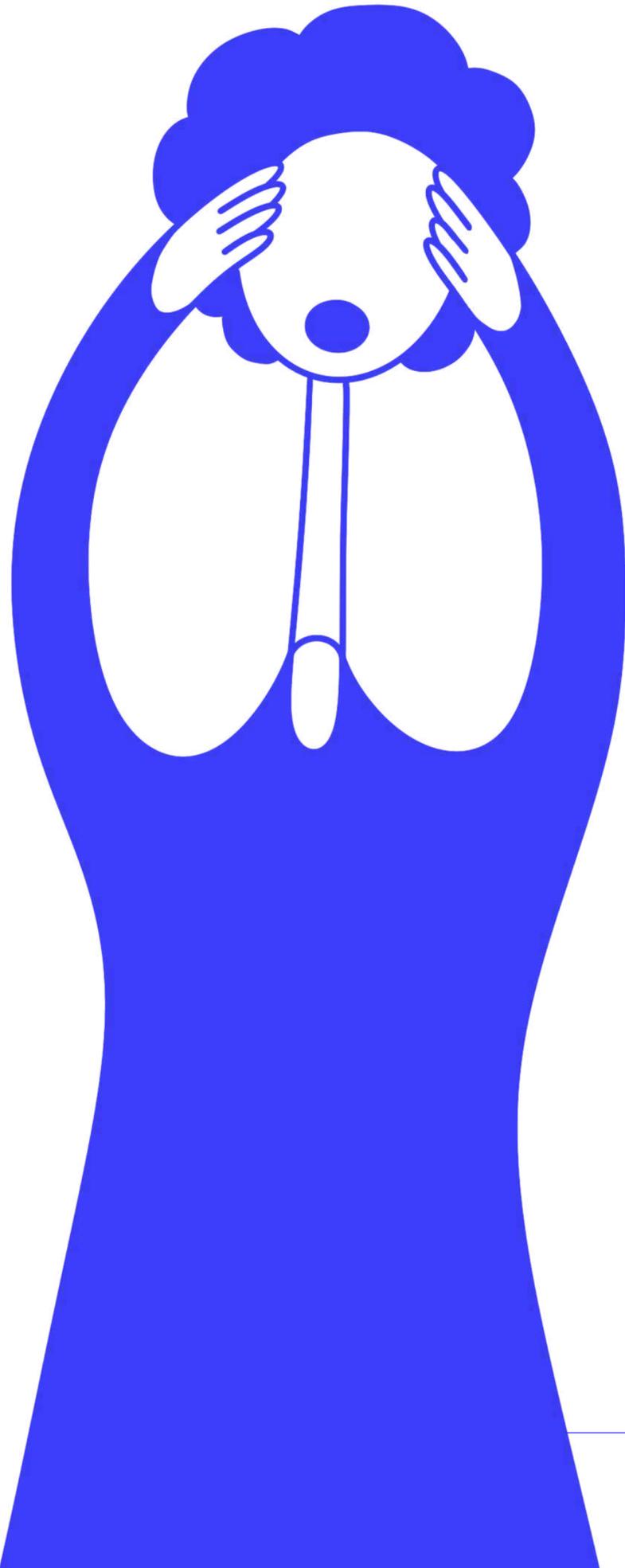
**80.4% of respondents consider it a serious problem on a global scale, but only 25.5% of them believe that it is a serious problem in their place of residence.** This is particularly problematic in terms of finding motivation for social action in the field of ecology - as we describe in the following chapters, young activists' sense of influence on global problems is very low, so perceiving problems from this perspective reduces the likelihood of their involvement in a given area.

## Political divisions

The last problem, as indicated by the people participating in our study, are political divisions. Interestingly, they are considered primarily a global problem (64.7%) and a national problem (61%). Respondents are much less likely to consider political divisions as a problem in their cities (21.6%) and in the European Union (34.9%).

Researchers believe that the development of technology and the increasingly important role played by social media in shaping politics are one of the reasons for the growing social polarization. They see the phenomenon of “information bubbles” as harmful:

*(...) well, despite everything, I think that this radicalization may be related to the fact that content comes to everyone, the algorithm suggests and rather suggests to him the content that he will read, or rather people want to be sure of their truth. (DIVISIONS\_M2)*



# Impact on problems

Author: Kaja Gagatek

young activists feel they have a strong influence on solving the problem of low civic activity, especially among their peers in the town and country

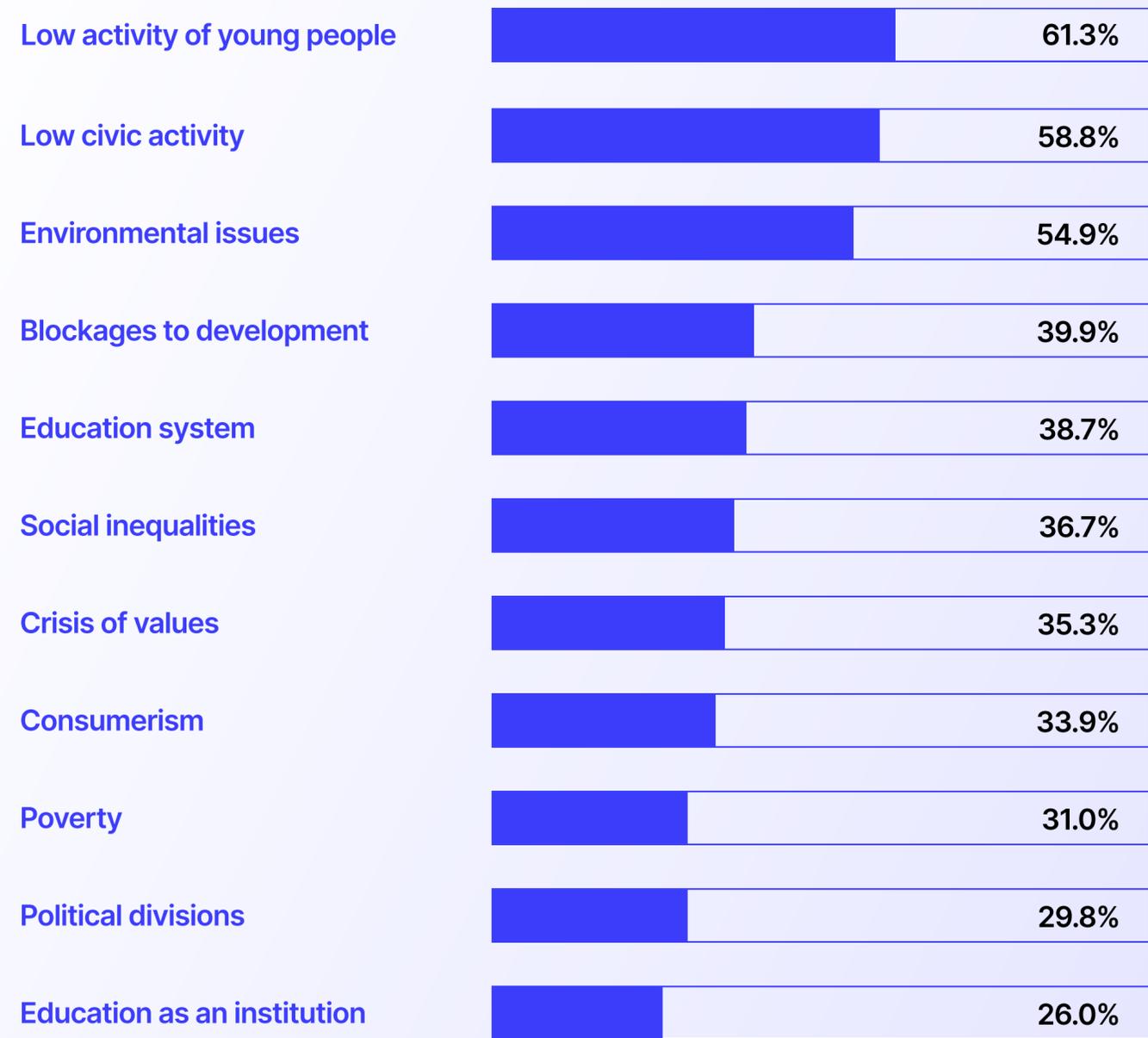
although the respondents generally do not feel they have a strong influence on solving challenges on a global scale, the largest part of them declares the possibility of facing climate problems

young male activists more often than female activists feel they can influence a problem related to deep political divisions

After the part of the questionnaire regarding the assessment of the importance of social problems at various scales, respondents answered the question "Do you think that you personally can contribute to solving any of the following problems on the scale of: your town, country, Europe, world?" Based on the answers provided, it can be generally concluded that young activists feel some kind of agency only at the local and, less often, national level.

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who feel they can contribute to solving selected social problems in their city, n=439

## Problems that young people feel they have an impact on in their place of residence:



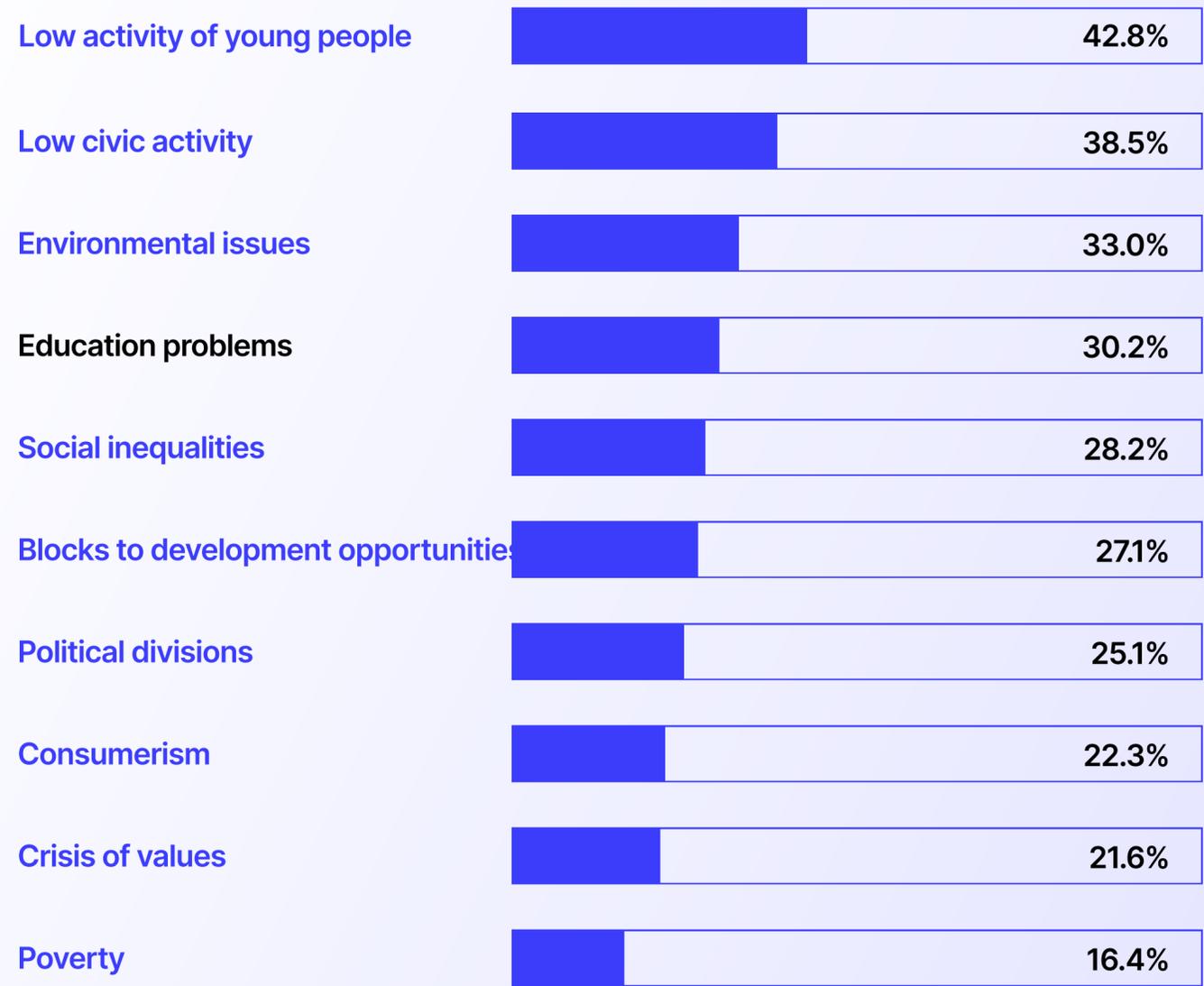
## Impact on a city scale

Almost 2/3 of respondents believe that they can help solve the problem of low youth activity in their town. More than half of the respondents believe that at the local level it also influences low civic activity in general (58.8%) and environmental problems (54.9%). A large proportion of young people also positively assess their influence on solving the problem of development opportunities being blocked (39.9%) and the defects of the education system (38.7%) in their city.

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who feel they can contribute to solving selected social problems on a national scale, n=439

## Problems that young people feel they have an impact on at a national scale



## Impact on a national scale

At the national level, young people's sense of influence on solving social problems can be assessed as generally lower than from a local perspective. Nevertheless, approximately 43% of respondents still feel empowered to improve the low activity of young people. Similarly to the local level, another problem they can influence is low civic activity in general (38.5%) and environmental problems (33%). Less than 1/3 of respondents feel responsible at the national level in terms of **generally understood problems related to education** (both the system and the institution as such – 30.2%) and social inequalities (28.2%).

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

## Conclusions

When formulating conclusions based on the answers provided, attention should be paid to the specificity of the question itself. Respondents assessed their sense of being able to contribute to solving specific problems. This means that the conclusions are based on their idea of their potential activities in a given area. Additionally, people rated their influence on all issues from a semi-open list – not all of them have to be areas of their daily activities or related to their interests. Therefore, when talking about impact, it is important to remember its potential.

People participating in the study feel that they can have a greater impact on problems in their locality than in their country. This state of affairs may be caused by, among others: greater opportunities for involvement, the specificity of the organizations in which respondents are associated, or the willingness to **take actions that produce visible and tangible results**.

Also worth attention are specific areas that people participating in the study believe they can influence. This is primarily due to the low activity of young people, which means that people participating in the study are best at acting for the benefit of their peers, especially in encouraging them to participate in civil society.

The second problem indicated by respondents is low civic activity in general, which proves even more clearly the desire to participate in a democratic, engaged society.

## Impact on a wider scale

Action on the scale of a continent, and even more so the entire world, seems to be achievable only from the perspective of a few individuals. An exception on a European scale are **environmental issues** – as many as 10.5% of surveyed people believe that they are able to contribute to solving them also at this level. On a global scale, the problem that our respondents can contribute most to solving is, according to them, the **crisis of values** – 8.9% of respondents declare their influence at this level.

An obvious translation of these declarations into reality is the interest of young activists in working in organizations dealing with ecology, especially those that follow a systemic approach to solving climate challenges. Organizations promoting a limited perspective on environmental impact do not seem to be interesting for young activists. This is a positive conclusion,

because such an approach proves a conscious approach to ecological challenges and the willingness to move away from anthropocentrism in favor of global and systemic solutions.

Another idea is the possibility of counteracting the crisis of values. This may mean the need to emphasize the values behind specific organizations. Values that are not hidden, but emphasized by social actors, can become the stimulus behind the decision regarding involvement.

## The impact of women and men

Women and men generally assess the level of their influence on solving the problems indicated in the questionnaire similarly. The exception, however, is the problem of **political divisions**. On a local scale, 28%, and on a national scale, 22.6% of women participating in the study believe that they can contribute to solving this problem. Men assess their agency in this area more favorably – 34.5% of young activists have the same opinion in the locality, and 30.4% of young activists in the country.

# Obstacles to action

**Author: Mikołaj Samborski**

**the greatest obstacle to young people's social activities remains the lack of interest in their problems and prospects on the part of national and local authorities; young people lack a sense of agency and subjectivity**

**a significant number of activists report a clear need to acquire professional, expert knowledge in the area of their activities, as well as to obtain support in the form of mentoring or training**

**a big challenge standing in the way of professionalization of the activities of young activists is the lack or insufficient access to financial resources to support them in implementing their ideas.**

In order to study the activism of young people after the pandemic, it became important to identify the most important obstacles that constitute a barrier to their social action. As we know, the road to introducing effective change in the environment is often bumpy. This chapter aims to interpret and explain the challenges that young activists have to face in their everyday activities. The questionnaire asked a semi-open question containing a cafeteria of 12 potential obstacles, developed by prof. Fatyga. In this part, we discuss 5 of them, which were the most frequently chosen answers.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents indicating selected phenomena as obstacles to their public activities, n=439

# What hinders young people in their activities

no not applicable yes hard to say

**Lack of interest in the problems of young people on the part of the state authorities**



**No financial outlays for activities**



**Lack of interest in the problems of young people on the part of local authorities**



**Lack of professional support**



**Lack of knowledge**



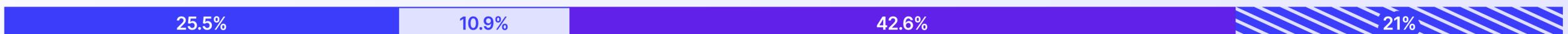
**Lack of interest in the problems of young people in my environment**



**Apathy**



**Conflicts in my environment**



**Internal problems of the organization**



**Mental features**



**My hobbies**



**Physical features**



Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

# Lack of interest in the problems of young people on the part of the authorities

The lack of support from people holding important decision-making positions is a factor that can effectively discourage even the most motivated groups of socially active people. Unfortunately, the problem most frequently mentioned in the study concerns this area. As many as 80.2% of surveyed people indicate this problem in the context of state authorities, and 71.8% – in relation to local authorities. More women than men declare that this problem is a significant barrier for them.

The analysis of focus interviews allowed us to identify what specific “allegations” young activists make against the authorities.

The first is the lack of real support and **the “illusory” nature of support activities**. This is most often manifested in the fact that although theoretically a given authority maintains structures aimed at supporting young people, in reality this is where their existence ends.

*Of course, the city is supposed to activate young people, so they are somehow interested, but it is very illusory because there are no consultations with these young people. There are no workshops for these young people and the program that is prepared for them is not seriously based on what the young people would like. Because there are no consultations, and when there are, very few people come because there is no good promotion. (AUTHORITY2\_F1)*

Another aspect that the respondents pay attention to is the issue of “**hitting a wall**”, i.e. the treatment of young people in an unequal and patronizing way by representatives of the authorities. They are not perceived as important, valuable partners for conversation and cooperation.

*(...) for example, when we were once at a consultation regarding the statute of the youth council, the director, who is the director of the entire department, said that if young people do not have higher education, they should not speak out. (AUTHORITY2\_F1)*

The respondents also drew attention to the fact that the authorities did **not sufficiently understand** the group of young people and that they did not prepare interesting

and engaging programs aimed at real and valuable activation of young people.

*(...) to be honest, there are probably few, at least in my opinion, decision-makers who actually support youth councils, or young people in general. Are there any grant programs or support for student governments? Something to get these young people outside? (...) There is no such support, and there is no such interest, i.e. simply listening to what these young people want. Some kind of response to these problems. In any form, because you can prepare a program, but if it involves posting on Facebook or Instagram, it has no effect at all. (AUTHORITY2\_F2)*

**80.2%**

**of young social activists consider the lack of interest of the state authorities in the problems of young people as a significant obstacle in their activities**

**71.8%**

**of young social activists indicated the lack of interest from the local authorities as an obstacle to their activities**



## Lack of knowledge

The lack of knowledge and skills not only limits young people's ability to act effectively, but may also result in an unsatisfactory level of performance. Meanwhile, as many as 2 out of 3 people surveyed declare that they consider this aspect to be an obstacle to their actions. **More women (69.2%) than men (56.8%) pay attention to this issue.**

**65.1%**

of young activists declare that lack of knowledge is an obstacle in activist activities

The respondents declare a problem related to the lack of hard, expert knowledge in the field of, among others: **legal, accounting or administrative knowledge.**

*We were establishing the foundation for a year. Like a year from the decision when it was made to the moment when it was correctly entered in the KRS [National Court Register]. A year has passed and I think I spent 1,500 PLN. It may not be a lot, but it came from our private budget, and we didn't have any sponsor or anything. Neither lawyers nor notaries, and it turned out that there were some mistakes. **Such legal knowledge was lacking.** (KNOWLEDGE1\_F6)*

*And it's just a pity that **there are not many such hard (skills) trainings**, because there is a lot of training in leadership, or even project management or marketing, and training in how not to break the law, or, for example, how to step by step set up a foundation, or how not to run into a hopeless notary... Well, it's very difficult and it's really a trial and error method. (KNOWLEDGE1\_F6)*

However, this is not the only type of knowledge that is missing. The surveyed people also indicate **a lack of ability to submit effective applications in grant competitions.**

*I've heard about some such applications and grants, but I've never done anything like that and I've never been involved with it. Well, for example, when I wanted to join a certain organization, (...) I wanted to join as a grant writer, but unfortunately, without this experience, no one wanted to accept me. (...) Where can I learn when everyone immediately demands experience from me? (KNOWLEDGE3\_F2)*

An important problem, which was also pointed out by the interlocutors in discussions about the lack of appropriate knowledge, is **the lack of preparation of young people for effective social activity in schools**, or even discouraging them from such activities.

*This young man has no knowledge of where to start and what to avoid on the activist path, because there is no guidebook that would make it easier, no training on how to take action, **nor the school organizes anything that encourages volunteering, and on the contrary.** I have heard many times from teachers at school at various stages of education that why do I need it, get involved in learning, not in social activities. (KNOWLEDGE4\_M1)*

# Lack of professional support

In our opinion, this is strongly related to the topic of lack of knowledge. As you might guess, the lack of professional support and mentoring means that young people often have to rely on their own trial and error, which is a time-consuming, less effective and demotivating process. It also requires a willingness to take more risks. Young, beginners involved in activism need mentors who introduce them to this world and advice on how to implement their ideas. Unfortunately, they often do not receive them – they do not even know where to look for them.

One aspect of the problem of lack of professional support is **the lack of mentoring**, i.e. organized programs or individual people who could support a young non-governmental organization and transfer their knowledge and experience to it in a systematized way.

*And then, of course, there are studies, there are various NGOs, but when it comes to NGOs, it is also very difficult to obtain such professional support, for example someone who will lead you by the hand and tell you where you can write a grant and how to write it. Where to apply? What are the formal issues like, how to settle the grant later? I miss it a bit (SUPPORT1\_F1)*

Another form of support that people who are at the beginning of their activist path lack is **the lack of training and systematic “onboarding”** in the organizations they join.

*We don't have such trainings, even another person from the foundation doesn't provide us with any training or integration, etc. Anything, I don't know, for example project management, risk management, some communication, something else... well, from time to time such training is needed, somewhere, somehow. And maybe that's what may be missing. (SUPPORT2\_F4)*

In the opinion of young activists, there is also a lack of training outside the structure of specific organizations. The surveyed people often drew attention to **the lack of various forms of training** that could introduce them to the world of implementing social activities from the perspective of various positions in the team. They clearly stated **that they were not only interested in leadership training** – because this is what is available. However, as young people say, not everyone needs and wants to be a leader.

*(...) in my opinion, there must be more widespread skills education. This is urgent and necessary. What is it like in Ireland, for example? People are taught various skills there. Not everyone is suitable for every role. Not everyone will be a perfect leader, but it may turn out that they have a more valuable role in the group (KNOWLEDGE4\_M1)*

*Each member of the group must complement and improve it. And this is the problem that **in activism, unfortunately, only the leaders are promoted** and not all the other people who create it are looked at. (KNOWLEDGE4\_M1)*

**65.6% of surveyed activists declare that the lack of professional support is an obstacle to their activities.**

## No financial outlays for activities

Another extremely important problem in the activist activities of young people is the lack of access to financial resources.

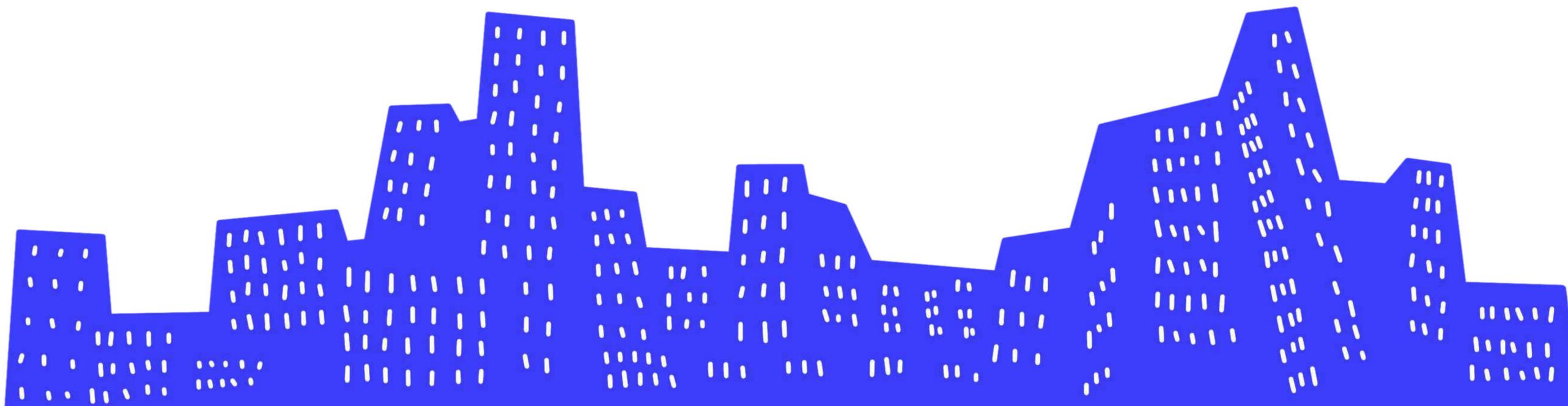
**This problem is identified as an obstacle to their activities by as many as 76.8% of the surveyed people.** Only 1/10 people declare that they do not consider this aspect an obstacle at all. We see a clear difference here between women and men. As many as 81% of women declare that they face this barrier, compared to 69.8% of men.

Regarding the lack of financing, respondents primarily point to **the problem of obtaining money from grants and the lack of other alternatives to obtain financing for social activities.**

*It is a great curiosity that there are grants, grants, grants, specifics, requirements. A long time ago, instead of making grants, they decided to organize a competition in Małopolska based on a project scholarship. Such money to start with. Regardless of the success of the project. And it turned out that no one spent that money on anything other than the project, and most of them were implemented. (OBSTACLES\_M1)*

*(...) the city announces that they were there to talk to the residents. And we met at a meeting and asked if the city would help residents write some grants? And the city itself said that, well, they actually use the foundation's help, so even the city of Wrocław itself does not feel competent in this matter. (OBSTACLES\_M3)*

**76.8%**  
**of the surveyed activists declare that the lack of financial output is an obstacle to their actions**



## Differences due to place of residence

As part of the analysis of the respondents' answers, it can be seen that various obstacles constitute a barrier to the activism of young people to varying degrees depending on their place of residence.

### Villages and small cities

Residents of villages and small cities particularly point to an important barrier, which is the lack of financial resources for activities (rural areas: 71.9%, small cities: 73.1%). They also draw attention to the problem of apathy and lack of interest in their problems by local authorities.

### Medium cities

In medium cities, problems related to lack of financial resources are even more visible (86.3%). Residents of these areas also particularly emphasize the lack of interest in their activities on the part of the authorities (local authorities: 74.5%, state authorities: as much as 88.2%).

### Big and very big cities

In larger cities, activists are more likely to report apathy (big cities – 70%, very big cities – 52.9%) and lack of knowledge (big cities – 78%, very big cities – 80.7%) as the main obstacles to taking social action. In the cafeteria, prof. Fatyga also foresaw questions about obstacles resulting from the individual characteristics of activists, both physical and character traits. This was a rarely chosen answer, but it was least common in big cities.

***In larger cities, activists are more likely to report apathy and lack of knowledge as the main obstacles to taking social action***

# Who supports activists?

Author: Julia Kelsz

activists can almost always count on the support of their peers, colleagues and friends, and to a lesser extent also their partners

a large number of young people active in society seek help from their family members, which is a positive result compared to the declarations of young people from several decades ago

politicians do not offer young activists adequate support

**93.2%**

of the surveyed activists declare that they can count on the support of their friends

**83.8%**

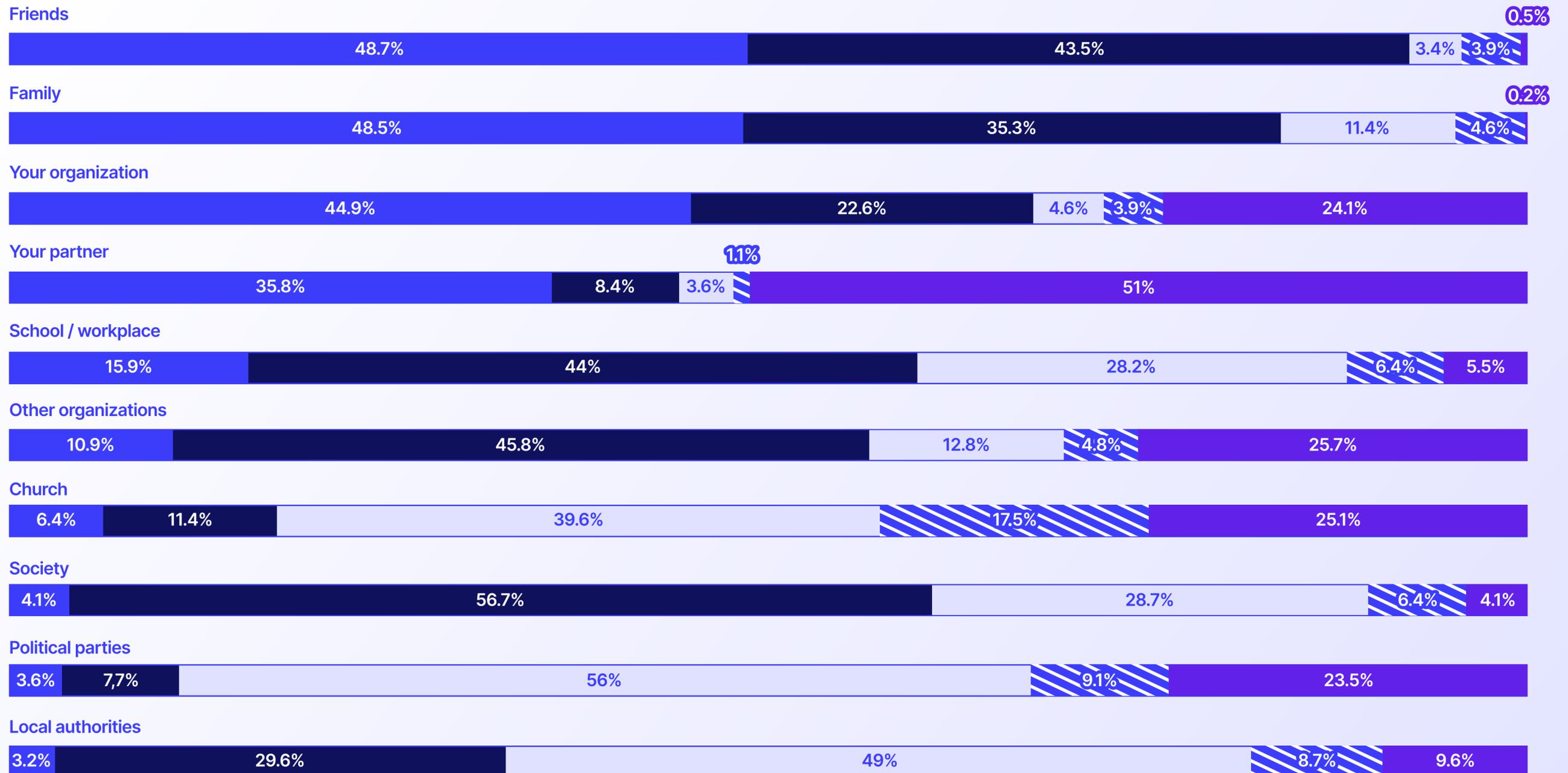
of the surveyed activists declare that they can count on help from their family members

Social activity can be burdensome not only in terms of time and competences, but also emotionally – considering the enormous importance of the problems that very young activists are trying to answer. Therefore, the vast majority of respondents indicate that they are looking for support from various types of institutions, entities or close people.

Figure 7: Respondents' answers to the question "Do you feel that in what you do in life you have the support of specific groups?" expressed as percentages, n=439

# Activists' sense of support from various groups

Do you feel that you have support in what you do in life from:



yes, always    from time to time    I do not need support    no    not applicable

Source: "Youth activism" study, conducted by the author

## Friends

The most reliable support for activists is provided by their friends – they can count on the help of this group always (48.7%) or even from time to time (43.5%). This is undoubtedly the group they turn to first and on whose help they rely the most. The situation is different only among young people living in rural areas – in this case, as many as 50% of respondents declared that they did not need support from friends at all. This result is drastically different from those occurring in larger agglomerations.

The respondents also separately assessed the support they received from their partners. The data primarily show that at the time of completing the questionnaire, **48% of young female activists and almost 60% of male activists were single.** Not only were the surveyed men less likely to be part of a partnership, but also, once they were in a relationship, they could count less on the support of their closest person – it was always available to 61% of activists in a relationship. In the case of women it is as much as 77%.

## Family

Secondly – after colleagues – help in difficult situations is provided to the group of people we studied by their family members. In general, as many as 4/5 young people can count on their help – always (48.5%) or sometimes (35.3%). This is an encouraging result, suggesting exceptionally warm relations between a group of young activists and social activists with their families, as also indicated by prof. Fatyga based on the results of the Twenty Statement Test:

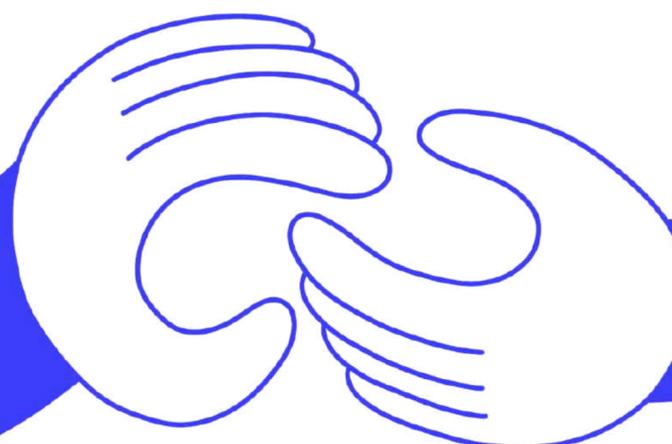
*(...) youth research in the last two decades of the last century indicated (...) a very critical attitude towards families of origin (especially towards fathers) and high levels of boys' withdrawal from family relationships (only the relationship with their mother was an exception) and frequent declarations that the respondents will arrange relationships differently in their own future families. In the current research (as in the one described here), it can be seen that a large group of teenagers (parents of contemporary young people) managed to change the type of relationship with their children, as evidenced by relatively numerous self-presentations and self-identifications with the family<sup>10</sup>.*

## Organization

The third most frequently indicated entity to which young people looking for support can go was their social organization. This indicates not only a missionary, professional, but also emotional connection with the teams within which activists conduct their activities. As many as 45% of respondents can always count on help from organizations, and from time to time – 22.6% of respondents.

## Insufficient support

From what side does the needed support not come? The answers of young activists in this regard are consistent with the obstacles they previously indicated in their everyday activities. Institutions related to power and politics fare the worst – as many as 56% of respondents indicate that they cannot count on the support of political parties. 49% of activists who completed the questionnaire do not receive the help they need from local authorities.



<sup>10</sup> 1 Fatyga, B. (2023). Wyniki TST (Twenty Statement Test) oraz deklarowane typy działań w badaniu młodych osób aktywnie angażujących się w życie publiczne w Polsce. Warsaw - Milanówek. Appendix No. 2 to the report. (Translated from Polish)