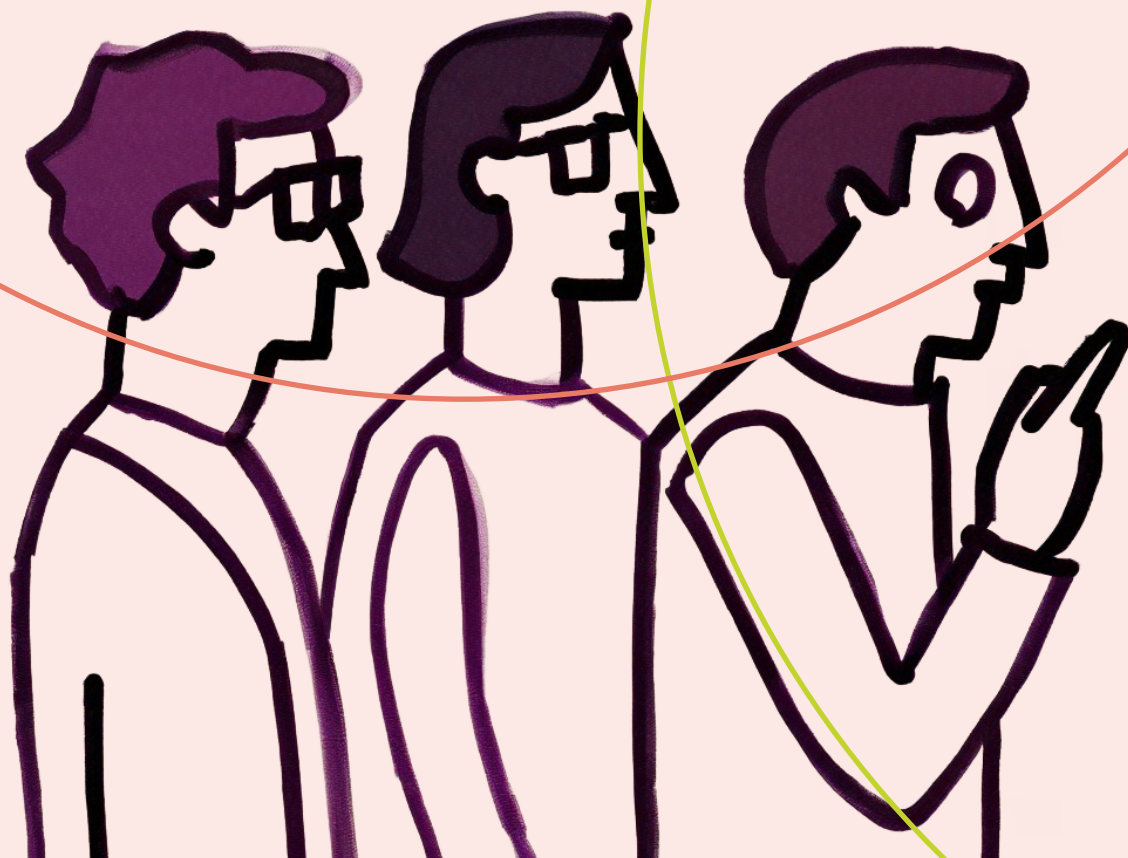


# VOICES OF HUNGARIAN YOUTH

AN ANALYSIS OF TWO DECADES  
OF OPINION TRENDS (2000-2020)



*Ádám Nagy, Gábor Harangozó and  
Matteo Dressler*



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## **Builders of Progress**

Builders of Progress is a FEPS-led series of research outputs that explore the key concerns and aspirations of young Europeans. It examines their opinions on a wide range of social issues, including (in)equality, climate change, political participation and the European Union. In the tradition of FEPS's previous Millennial Dialogue project, a major study is published every four years in which European youth are surveyed across many European countries. You can find the 2022 Builders of Progress survey here: <https://feps-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Builders-of-Progress-Europes-Next-Gen.pdf>.

Between these major outputs, we address important aspects highlighted in the surveys that deserve more attention and a more nuanced, often qualitative, analysis. This present publication is part of such a deep dive, investigating opinion trends among young people in Hungary.

The research findings of the Builders of Progress series stimulate debate and provide sound advice on how to shape a progressive future with and for young people.

More information on Builders of Progress can be found here: <https://feps-europe.eu/theme/youth-participation/>.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	6
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	8
<b>2. LIFE STAGES IN FLUX: DEPICTING THE SHIFTS EXPERIENCED BY HUNGARY'S YOUNGER GENERATIONS</b> .....	10
<b>3. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD: EXPLORING EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL FACTORS IN HUNGARY</b> .....	13
<b>4. VIEWS OF HUNGARIAN YOUTH ON ECONOMIC SATISFACTION, GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND PREVALENT CONCERNS</b> .....	16
<b>5. EXAMINING HUNGARIAN YOUTH SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY, POLITICAL INTEREST AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION</b> .....	20
<b>6. POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND NATIONALISM AMONG HUNGARY'S YOUTH</b> .....	26
<b>7. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	30
<b>ENDNOTES</b> .....	33
<b>AUTHORS, ABOUT FEPS &amp; PARTNERS</b> .....	35
About the authors .....	36
About FEPS AND PARTNERS .....	38

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy study summarises longitudinal data collected for the Hungarian government every four years between 2000 and 2020 and highlights key trends in the lives of Hungarian youth. It also provides recommendations for using European policy instruments to target some of the existing challenges.

## Education

The improvement in Hungary's education sector, as observed in the early 2000s, slowed and reversed by 2020. A declining desire for continued education among the youth, influenced significantly by social background, is evident. Children from less educated families face increasing challenges in progressing through secondary and tertiary education. To mitigate these issues, making use of initiatives like the European Structural and Investment Funds are recommended to lessen the impact of social background and foster a desire for learning at all educational stages.

## Employment, income and livelihood

While the perceived sufficiency of monthly income among the youth improved from 2016 to 2020, economic concerns remain high. Financial hardship and an unpredictable future topped the list of concerns in 2020. Employment rates for the 15-29 age group have improved, but the overall number of young people in this age group has declined, which could harm the Hungarian economy. Jobs requiring higher education, foreign language skills and digital skills have decreased, whereas jobs for older individuals with lower skill levels have increased. Structural mobility, not personal effort, accounts for the higher educational attainment among the youth compared to their parents. Promoting circular mobility through talent development programs is recommended to address these challenges, aligning with the European Skills Agenda and Youth

Guarantee, ensuring continuous learning and skills development.

## Inclusive society and democracy

Support for democracy among young Hungarians has risen, with two thirds favouring a democratic political system by 2020. However, there is division over whether democracy functions well in Hungary. Politically, young Hungarians identify as centrist, with increased liberal or left-leaning orientations since 2012. Despite growing nationalism fuelled by government rhetoric, a significant portion of the youth supports EU membership, with 49% believing the EU benefits Hungary.

To counter exclusionary nationalist views, awareness-raising programs on diversity and inclusion, empathy workshops, and exposure to different cultures are recommended. Programs like Erasmus and Erasmus+ could help increase cultural exposure. Collaborating with organisations countering the government's narrow national identity narrative and promoting media literacy is essential. Enhancing media literacy through the revised EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive and supporting independent media projects are crucial. This multi-faceted approach aims to foster open-mindedness, support independent media, enhance media literacy and combat exclusionary propaganda, contributing to a more inclusive future for Hungary's youth.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This policy study offers an analysis of the life stages of young Hungarians, as well as of their economic and educational conditions, general contentment, primary concerns, and participation in democracy. It uses public data that were collected from 2000 to 2020, and analyses data on young people that the Hungarian government tried to withhold or manipulate for propaganda purposes. Our policy study is particularly relevant for EU policymakers working on Hungary and for researchers studying European youth in a comparative context. Overall, this policy study serves as an important resource for gaining a deeper understanding of the perspectives of Hungarian youth.

Our work in this policy study draws on a large sample survey of Hungarian youth that has been conducted by the Hungarian government and affiliated research institutions every four years since 2000. The survey collects data from young Hungarians aged 15-29 and is representative of their age, gender, education, type of settlement and place of residence (district/town). The objective behind this survey is to understand the living situation of young people and to monitor their lifestyle changes to support decision-making, particularly in public policy. The survey's main added value is its tracking of young people's opinions over two decades. The government's 2020 Hungarian youth survey was conducted among 8000 young Hungarians and has a margin of error of 1.12%.<sup>1</sup> Until 2012, survey data were publicly available every four years. However, in 2016, and again in 2020, the government and affiliated research institutions withheld the data for an extended period, thus delaying public access to critical information. This was in violation of EU rules, as the research was financed by EU funds.<sup>2</sup> The situation is made more troubling by the fact that the authors of the government-led 2020 flash report withheld critical information (such as party preference and young people's political affiliations) that was previously published as a matter of

course. The flash report also provided dubious explanations for certain phenomena (such as the proportion of married couples) and even incorrect data (the number of children per family). The lack of independent peer review raises further concerns about misleading data, inaccurate conclusions, one-sided narratives and non-disclosure.<sup>3</sup>



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## **2. LIFE STAGES IN FLUX: DEPICTING THE SHIFTS EXPERIENCED BY HUNGARY'S YOUNGER GENERATIONS**

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## 2. LIFE STAGES IN FLUX: DEPICTING THE SHIFTS EXPERIENCED BY HUNGARY'S YOUNGER GENERATIONS

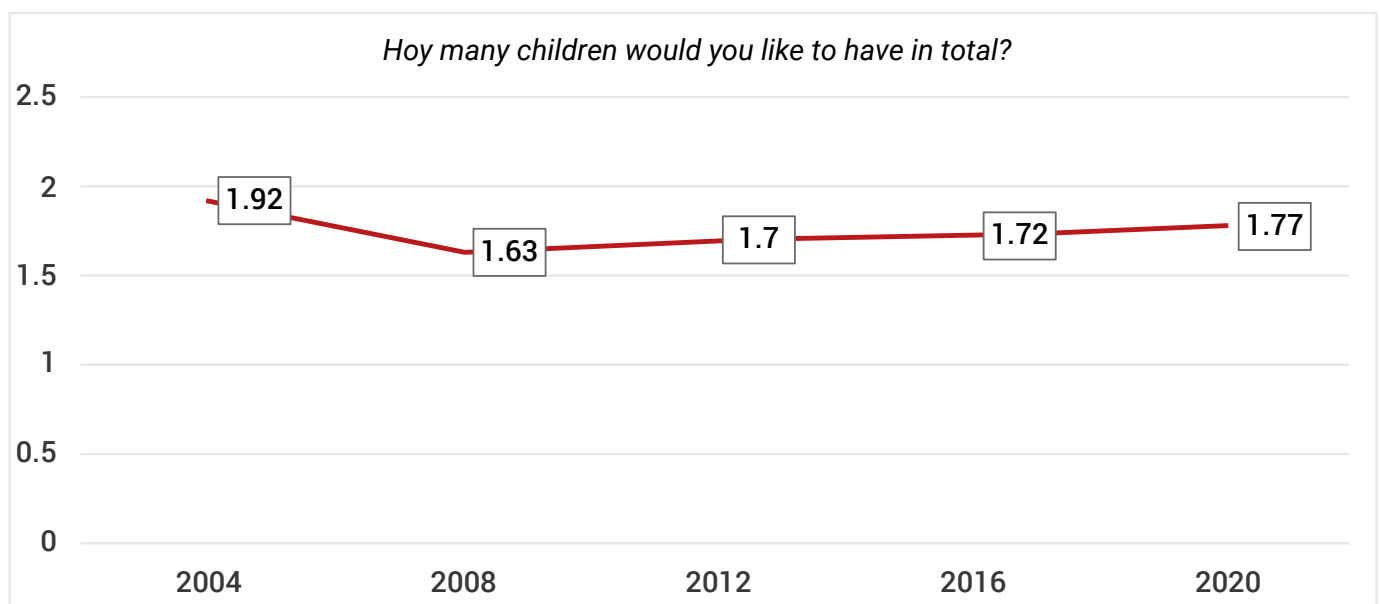
The data collected since 2000 show that the life stages of Hungary's youth, particularly young adulthood, have become longer; the boundaries between life stages have shifted; and associated "elements" have changed and merged. Today, young people are planning and implementing key elements in their lives later than in previous decades, and later than what is perceived by society. The majority of young people do not link adulthood to getting married, having children or moving into their own home: the low rates of these key events in a young person's life suggest that they will take place at a different stage of life, if at all. Instead, the 2020 data suggest that the majority of young people now identify completing their studies, making independent decisions on important issues, dating

and/or building a serious relationship, and earning their first money as the conditions for adulthood.

The data show that the proportion of single people aged 20-24 has increased. In addition, the rate of those being married aged 25-29 has fallen sharply (from 46% in 2016 to 27% in 2020) in favour of partnerships. Marriage is not a clear goal in future plans either: only 18% of young people surveyed in 2020 said they were planning to marry in the future, with three quarters (76%) of young people unsure.<sup>4</sup>

The longer period of being single or of cohabitation without marriage may also be part of the explanation for lower birth rates.<sup>5</sup> In 2020, a tenth of respondents (11%) did not want to have children,

Figure 1. Intention of young people aged 15-29 to have children.



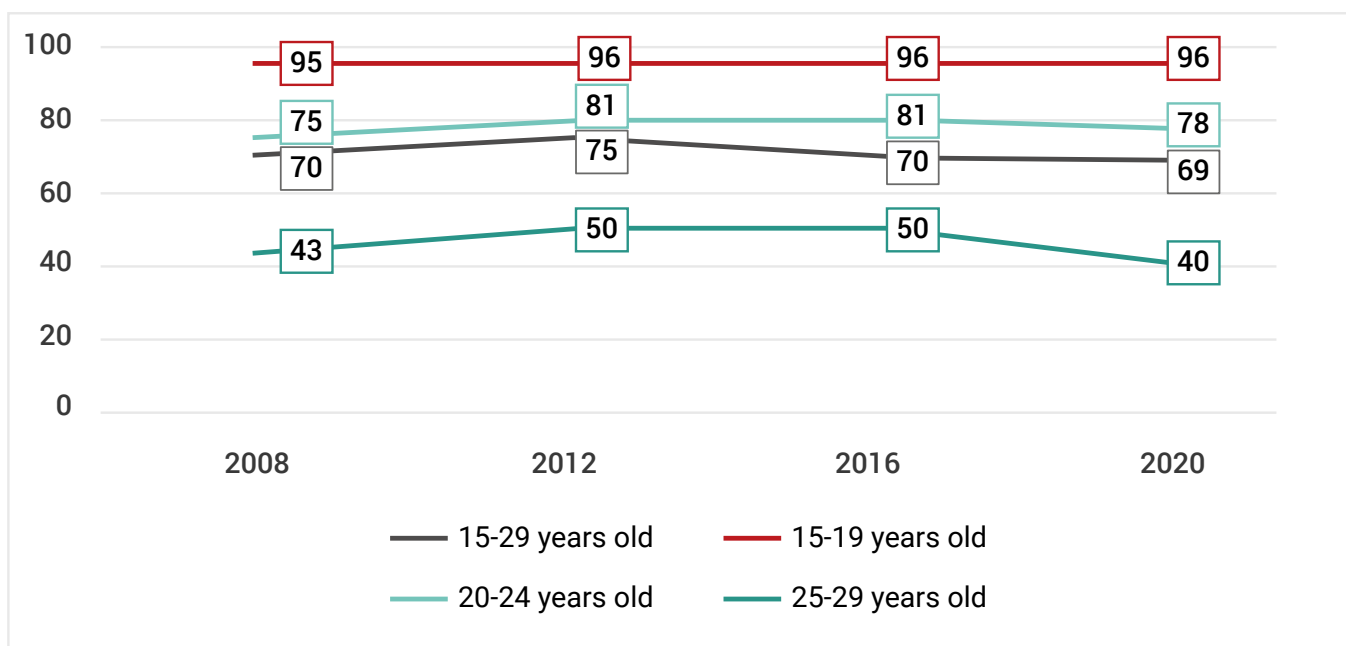
Additional information: N<sub>2004-2020</sub>=8,000.

while most respondents (46%) planned to have two children. Contrary to officially reported data, the average number of children planned for the 15-29 age group was below two, with only 1.77 children planned on average (see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> The number of children actually born is often lower than the number planned.<sup>7</sup> By 2020, the proportion of childless young people had risen further than in any previous survey since 2000, with 89% of young men and 81% of young women childless, and the proportion of those with two or more children steadily decreasing. The correlation between a person's financial situation and their decision not to have children, or to have fewer children, has persisted in every survey conducted since 2000. In 2020, the majority of respondents continued to cite their financial situation as the primary factor influencing their decision.<sup>8</sup>

in 2020 had increased from 26% to 30%. In the 25-29 age group, the proportion of those living independently rose from 48% to 56% over the same period. These figures seem especially interesting in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, according to available data from the USA, for example, led to an increase in young adults, particularly those in education, having to move back in with their parents.<sup>9</sup>

Another noteworthy change regarding the lives of young Hungarians is that the proportion of young adults living independently increased from 23% in 2016 to 28% in 2020 (see Figure 2). Compared to four years previously, the proportion of young people in the 20-24 age group who were living independently

**Figure 2. Distribution of young people living in parental households by age group in percent.**



Additional information: N<sub>2008-2012</sub>=8,000, N<sub>2016-2020</sub>= 2,000.

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# **3. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD: EXPLORING EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL FACTORS IN HUNGARY**

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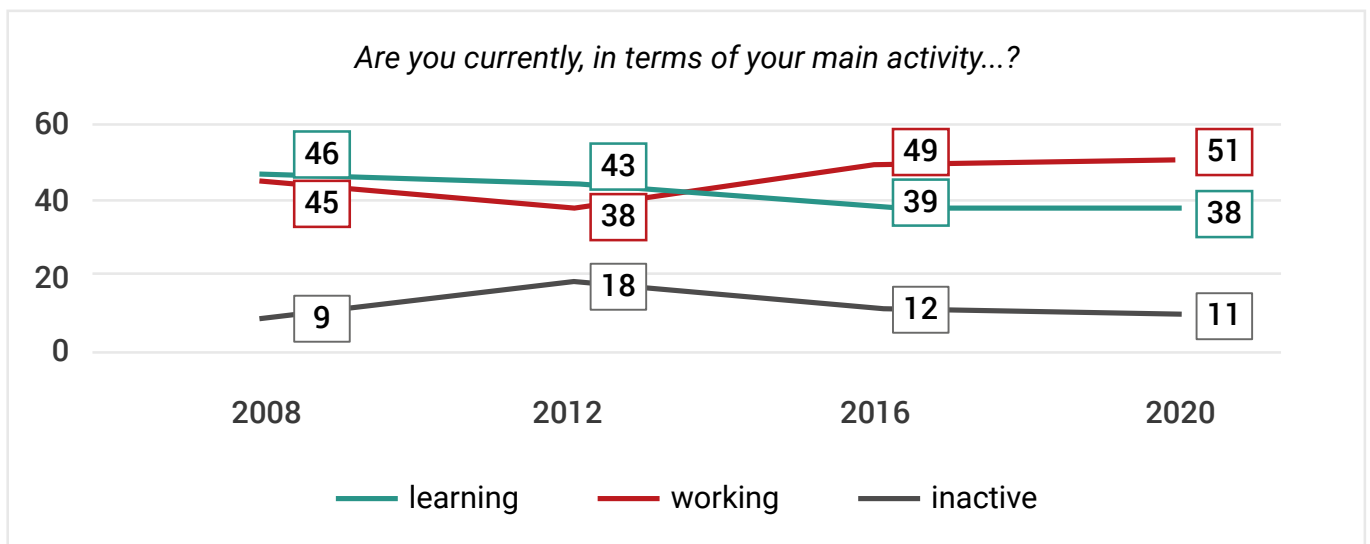
### 3. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD: EXPLORING EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL FACTORS IN HUNGARY

The future prospects of young people are significantly influenced by whether they have employment, whether they have completed their education or whether they are deprived of both. The rate of those who were neither in education nor in employment declined significantly between 2012 (18%) and 2020 (11%) (see Figure 3). Correspondingly, the decline in the proportion of young people in some form of education that lasted from 2008 to 2016 slowed in 2020. In 2020, more than a third of those aged 15-29 were in education as their primary activity.

This positive development is in line with the expansion of learning opportunities, which has led to a significant increase in the basic educational attainment of those aged 25-29 over the last 12 years, with the majority of the age group having a school leaving certificate in 2020.

However, the influence of young people’s origin on education remains problematic. The socio-cultural background of children, primarily the educational background of parents (both fathers and mothers), has a strong influence on the participation rates of young people in education, which type of school

Figure 3. Distribution of young people aged 15-29 by main activity in percent.



Additional information: N<sub>2008-2012</sub>=8,000.

they attend, and whether they start and finish higher education. While upward mobility of one level of education is possible within the Hungarian education system,<sup>10</sup> it remains relatively closed with low permeability. As a result, schools continue to reinforce social inequalities rather than provide equal opportunities for children from lower levels of the social hierarchy.<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to the situation of young people in the labour market, employment rates have improved in recent years. Whereas 38% said they were in employment in 2012, the rate was 51% in 2020 (see Figure 3). There are two main reasons for this. While the overall number of young people in employment and the number of jobs for young people has decreased, the total number of young people in Hungary has decreased even more significantly. Despite an increasing employment rate, fewer jobs are available for more educated younger people.<sup>12</sup>

Although there have been some positive developments in the education and labour market situation, young Hungarians do not consider their current financial income to be sufficient. In 2016, young people stated that an average monthly salary of €600<sup>13</sup> would be sufficient, compared to their actual median income of €500.<sup>14</sup> Four years later, they considered a monthly salary of around €860<sup>15</sup> as sufficient, compared to their actual median income of €740.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these differences between their actual median income and what young people consider sufficient income, the perception of the financial situation has improved for almost all subjective indicators between 2016 and 2020. The share of young people “living without problems” and “getting along well with your income” increased significantly between 2016 and 2020 (see Table 1). At the same time, the proportion of young people with financial problems every month or living in financial deprivation decreased over the four-year period. The level of subjective satisfaction with their current standard of living and current financial situation also improved between 2016 and 2020. In 2020, 51% of young people were satisfied with their financial situation and 59% with their current standard of living.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 1. Subjective assessment of financial situation in percent.**

Subjective assessment of financial situation	2016	2020
<b>Overall, how do you feel financially...</b>		
– living without problems	7%	10%
– getting along well with your income	47%	58%
– just about managing on your income	34%	27%
– having financial problems from month to month	10%	4%
– living with financial deprivation	2%	1%

Additional information: N2016-2020 = 8,000.

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## **4. VIEWS OF HUNGARIAN YOUTH ON ECONOMIC SATISFACTION, GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND PREVALENT CONCERNS**

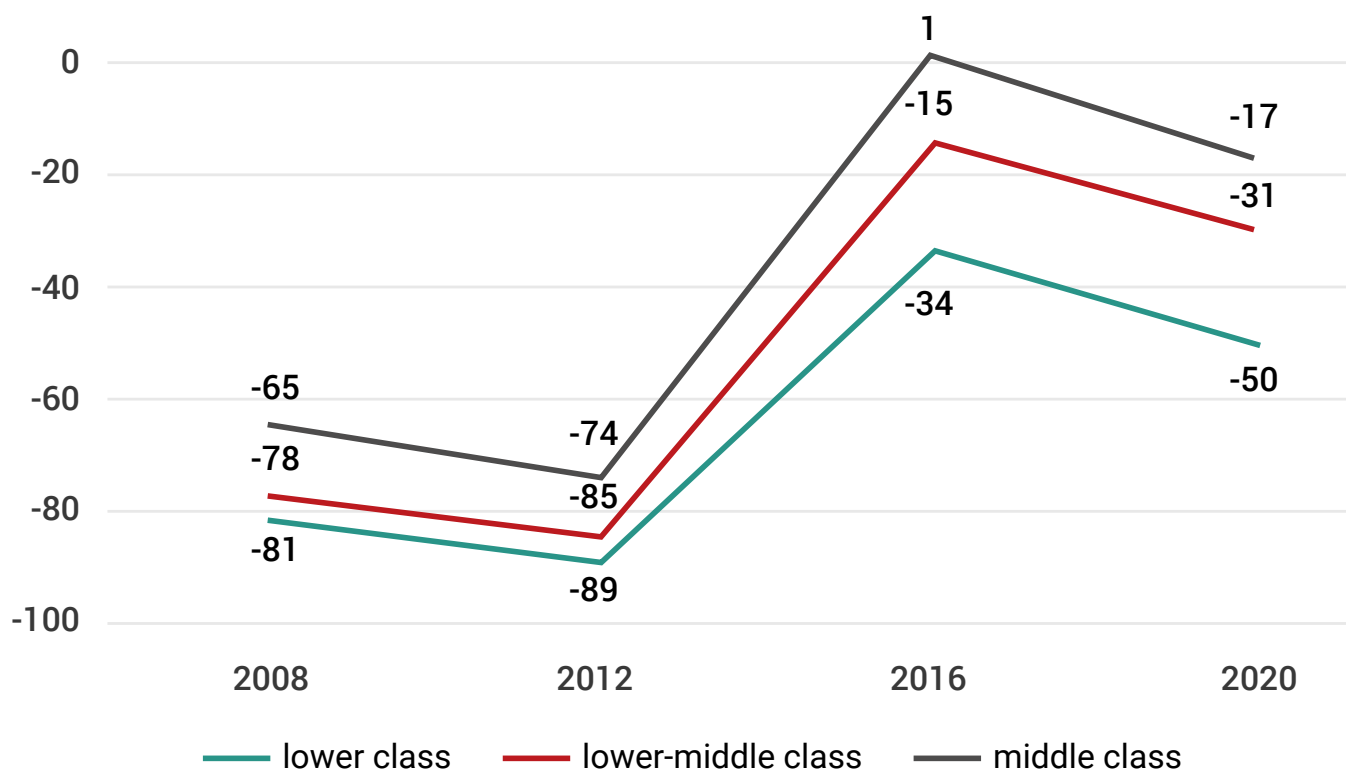
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# 4. VIEWS OF HUNGARIAN YOUTH ON ECONOMIC SATISFACTION, GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND PREVALENT CONCERNS

The improvement in young people’s personal financial situations described above does not translate into their general satisfaction or their positive assessment of developments in Hungary. In 2020, four in ten young people (40%) thought the country’s economic situation and international standing had deteriorated, 47% thought people’s living standards

had deteriorated, more than half (52%) thought the mood of the country’s population had deteriorated, and almost a third (29%) thought their own family’s financial situation had deteriorated.<sup>18</sup> In perspective, young people’s opinions on these points were clearly worse in 2020 than in 2016. Nevertheless, taking the long view since 2008, the overall satisfaction

Figure 4. Perception of the economic situation.



Social group self-classification (N<sub>2008-2020</sub>=8,000).

Additional information: Balance indicator, combining data on the assessment of the economic situation of personal and national scope. The responses presented in the graph were converted and correspond to a scale describing if respondents thought the situation had improved = +100 points or worsened = -100 points.



on these points has clearly improved, as shown by an index combining the values of the answers to all these questions (see Figure 4). Moreover, it is clear that financial background has a significantly negative impact on how young people evaluate the situation, with those from higher income groups having a more positive outlook than those from lower income groups.

As for young people’s main concerns, worries about an uncertain future and feelings of aimlessness gained prominence among respondents in the youth surveys carried out between 2012 and 2020, and their overriding worries about financial hardship, unemployment and impoverishment continued (see Table 2).

Despite young people’s current concerns and a rather negative assessment of the overall economic situation, the percentage of those who believe that Hungary is the best country in which to live has increased in recent years. The average agreement of those who consider Hungary the best country in

which to live has increased significantly over the last eight years from 3.2 in 2012 to 3.8 in 2020 on a scale from one to five. This is also reflected in the starkly increasing percentage of those who either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement: 41% in 2012; to 52% in 2016; to 63% in 2020 (see Figure 5).<sup>19</sup> This increase comes at the expense of the declining share of those who do not think Hungary is the best country in which to live, and those in the middle of the spectrum who do not have a firm opinion.

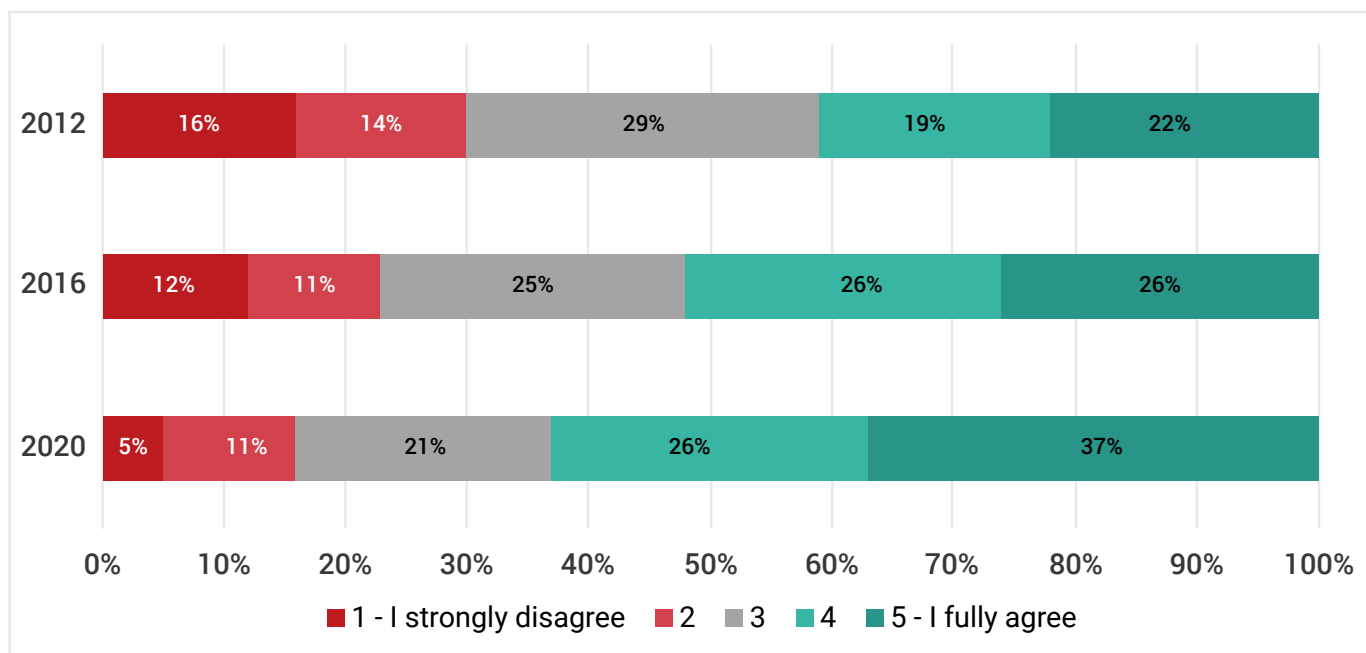
National pride is one possible reason why Hungary is increasingly seen as the best country in which to live, despite the overall economic situation being considered difficult. Between 2012 and 2020, the average value on a scale from one to five given by those identifying with the statement “I am proud to be Hungarian” increased from 3.9 (2012) to 4.1 (2016) and 4.2 (2020). In 2020, a total of 79% of young people said they either fully agree or somewhat agree with the statement “I am proud to be Hungarian”.

**Table 2. Ranking of the seven biggest concerns of Hungarian youth between 2000 and 2020.**

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
1	Unemployment, difficulty finding a job	Proliferation of drugs, narcotics	Unemployment, difficulty finding a job	A hopeless, uncertain future	Financial hardship, livelihood insecurity, poverty, impoverishment	Uncertainty, unpredictable future
2	Housing	Unemployment, difficulty finding a job	Lack of money, poverty, impoverishment	Unemployment, difficulty finding a job	Uncertainty, unpredictable future	Financial difficulties, poverty, impoverishment
3	Lack of money, low income	Hopelessness, uncertain future	Hopelessness, uncertain future	Insecurity	Aimlessness	Aimlessness
4	Proliferation of drugs, narcotics	Aimlessness, not knowing what they want	Insecurity	Aimlessness, not knowing what they want	Proliferation of drugs, narcotics	Lack of friendships, social gatherings
5	Poverty, insecurity	Spread of alcohol	Proliferation of drugs, narcotics	Lack of money, poverty, impoverishment	Spread of alcohol	Proliferation of drugs, narcotics
6	Increasing Inequality	Crime	Aimlessness, not knowing what they want	Proliferation of drugs, narcotics	Unemployment, difficulty finding a job	Unemployment, difficulty finding a job
7	Hopelessness, uncertain future	Housing	Crime	Crime	Crime	Crime

Source: Nagy, Á. (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020*, p. 375.

**Figure 5. How much do you agree with the following statement?  
“Hungary is the best country in which to live.”**



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# **5. EXAMINING HUNGARIAN YOUTH SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY, POLITICAL INTEREST AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

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# 5. EXAMINING HUNGARIAN YOUTH SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY, POLITICAL INTEREST AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

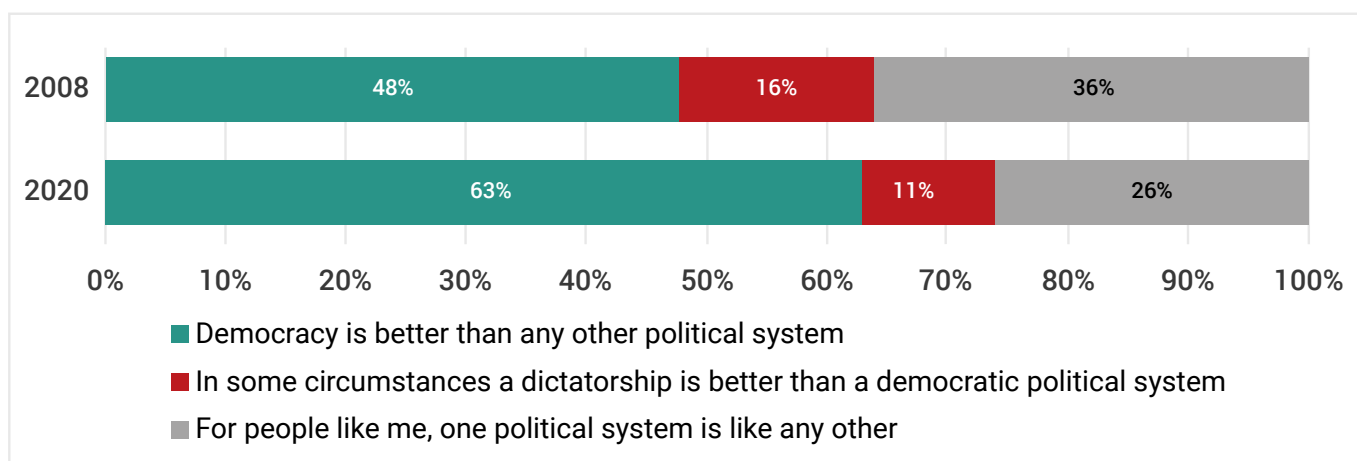
Support for democracy as the best political system has increased significantly since 2008 (see Figure 6). In 2020, a total of 57% of young people surveyed said they preferred democracy to all other political systems, an increase of 14% from 2008. Another indication of increasing support for democracy is the decline in the share of people who think that a dictatorial system is better than a democracy in some cases. In 2020, a total of 10% held this opinion, compared to 14% in 2008.

It is worth highlighting that the 15-19 age group has a disproportionately higher percentage of respondents who have no opinion (“I do not know”) on this topic (see Figure 7). This age group also shows the least

dissatisfaction with the current functioning of democracy in Hungary. Whereas the overall sample is split on whether they are satisfied (48%) or not (46%), 49% of the youngest age group are satisfied, compared to 39% showing dissatisfaction (Figure 8). Whether this has to do with their young age or perhaps the fact that they have not experienced a non-Fidesz government, and thus, have no direct experience with another government, would be a promising avenue for further investigation.<sup>20</sup>

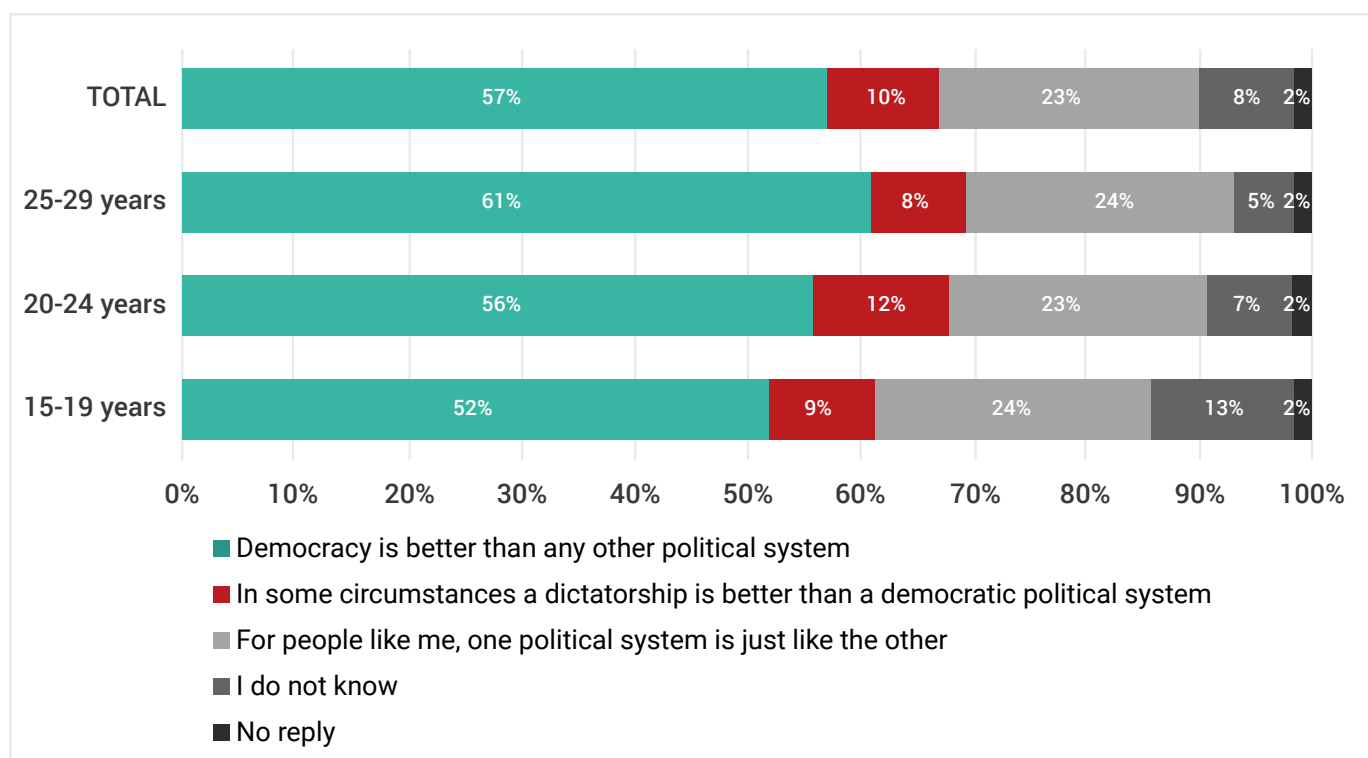
Having analysed young people’s general support for democracy and their level of satisfaction with its functioning, we now take a closer look at some of the dimensions that make up the functioning

**Figure 6. Perceptions of democracy: “Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion?”**



Additional information:  $N_{2008} = 1,668$ ;  $N_{2020} = 1,804$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ .

**Figure 7. Perceptions of democracy by age group:  
“Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion?”**



Additional information:  $N_{2020} = 2,020$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ .

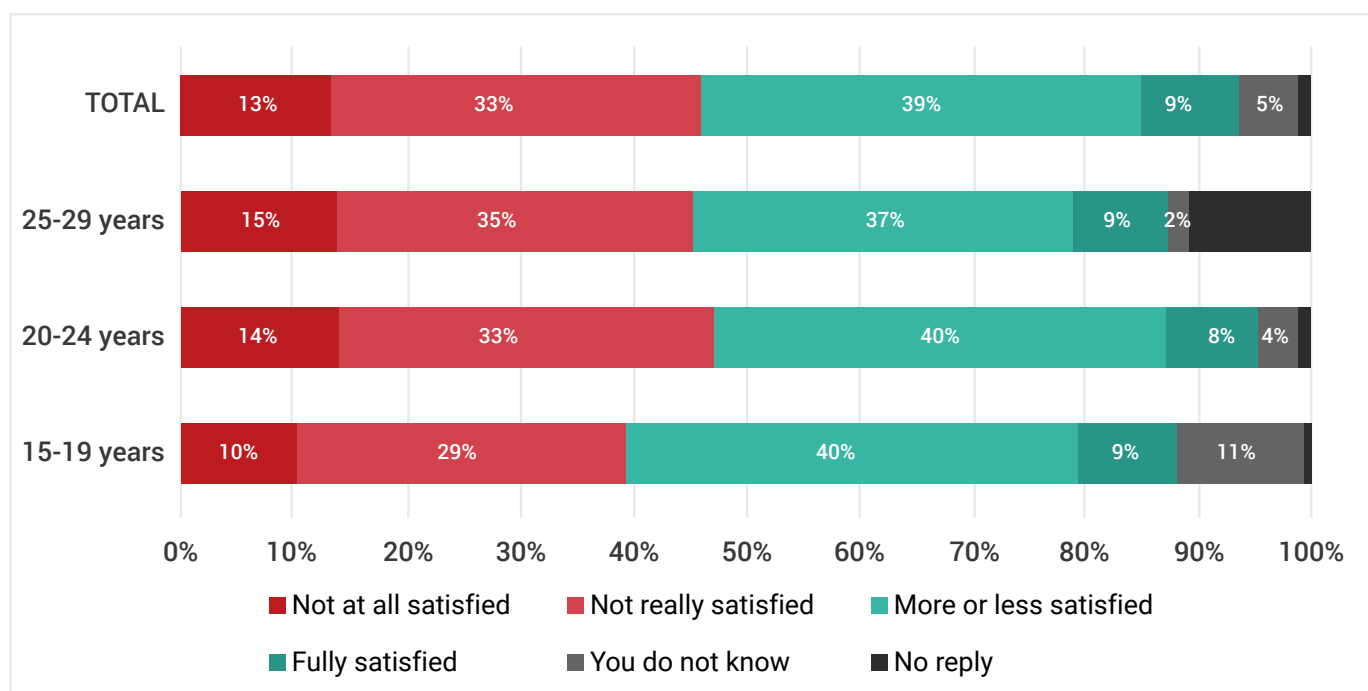
of democratic societies. Freedom of speech and expression are considered essential principles in democratic societies. In Hungary, it is critical to analyse young people’s opinions on this issue, as government actors have attacked and severely restricted freedom of expression in recent years.<sup>21</sup> The government-led surveys measured support for freedom of speech by stating, “a good livelihood is more important than freedom of expression”. Among young Hungarians, the prevalence of those who consider a good livelihood to be more important than freedom of speech and opinion (42%) is much higher than the proportion of those who disagree (19%) (39% no answer or answering “I do not know”). The prevalence of those who agree with this statement is particularly high among children of parents with lower levels of education, and this agreement decreases significantly with higher levels of education. After conducting a thorough analysis of the data, it is evident that there are no significant differences between the age groups regarding this

issue. Our observation therefore suggests that the habit of prioritising livelihood over freedom of speech is entrenched in Hungarian society.<sup>22</sup>

Political participation is another core tenet of democracy. For effective participation, individuals should ideally have a genuine interest in politics and be well-informed in order to make informed election choices. Against this backdrop, the Hungarian youth surveys address the question of the extent to which young Hungarians are interested in politics and the extent to which they participate in elections and other forms of civic engagement.

Interest in politics was low in all surveys between 2008 and 2020 (see Figure 9). Since 2020, however, there has been a marked increase in interest (albeit from a very low starting level). Whereas in 2012 only 7% of young people showed high or fair interest in politics, this percentage had more than doubled by 2020 (19%).<sup>23</sup> This growing interest is also

**Figure 8. Perceptions of democracy in Hungary by age group: “How satisfied are you with the functioning of democracy in Hungary?”**



Additional information: N<sub>2020</sub> = 2,020; p ≤ 0.05.

reflected among those who have no or only a very slight interest in politics. In 2012, the proportion of completely apolitical young people in the 15-29 age group was 49%. This proportion had fallen to 33% by 2020.

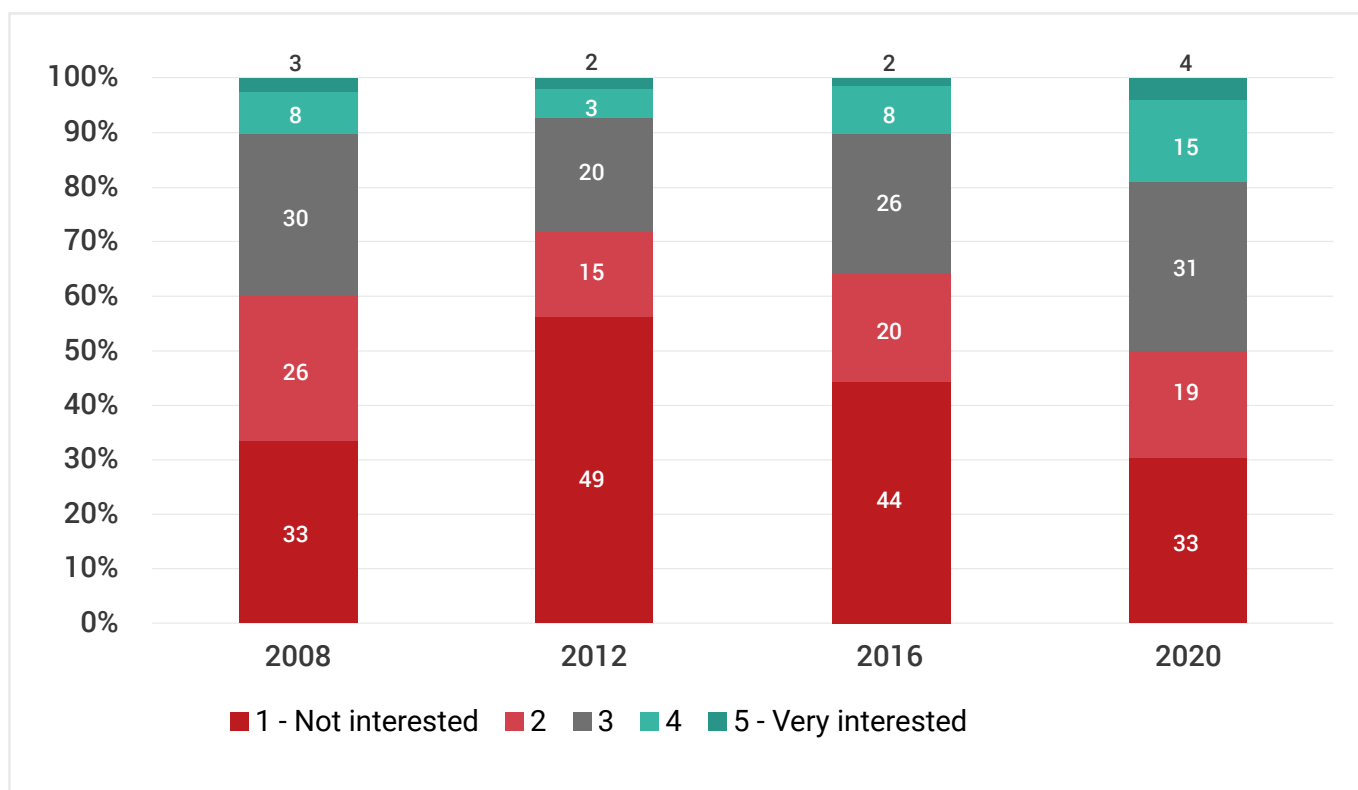
The increased interest of young Hungarians in politics may also be reflected in the rising percentage of young people who said they would (or were most likely to) cast their vote if elections were held (see Figure 10). While the percentage fluctuated between 2008 (57%), 2012 (54%) and 2016 (58%), it increased significantly to 64% in 2020. However, the fluctuations from year to year make it difficult to read too much into these data.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to participation in elections, civic engagement is an essential indicator of a country’s democratic culture. Analysis of the 2020 survey data shows that youth advocacy groups, such as student councils and parliaments, are not perceived as widespread and are unlikely to represent young

people effectively, leaving many feeling excluded from public affairs. Only 38% of respondents were aware of the existence of youth advocacy groups. This may be one factor explaining the very low numbers of Hungarian youth who stated that they have ample opportunity to have a say in local public affairs (2%), and the 22% who thought they had no opportunity whatsoever.<sup>25</sup>

Volunteering is primarily an avenue to engage in society and show solidarity. It can also enable youth to recognise their role in shaping society and to advocate for their interests. However, the rate of young people volunteering in Hungary seems low, as only 16% say they have already volunteered. Older OECD and Eurobarometer data from 2011 suggest that Hungarians are among those with the least experience in volunteer work when compared to their EU neighbours and other OECD states.<sup>26</sup>

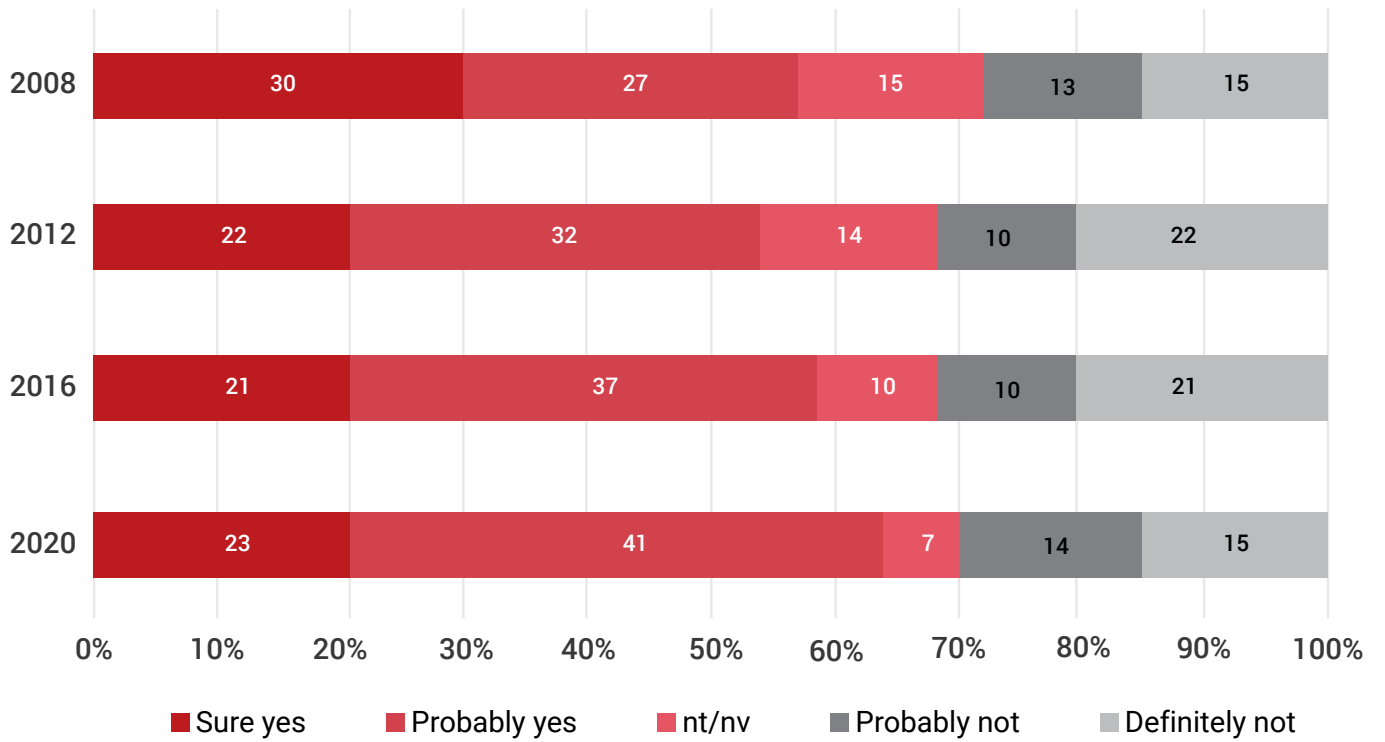
Figure 9. "How interested are you in politics?"



Additional information:  $N_{2008-2020} = 8,00$ .

Despite the low numbers, the survey data also show that most young people volunteering are motivated by intrinsic motivations (54%) rather than career advancement (22%). This is also reflected in the areas most popular for volunteering: the environment and animal welfare; social and health care; and the education sector. The religious and political fields are far less popular for volunteering.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 10. "If a general election was held this Sunday, would you go to vote (if you were eligible)?"





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# **6. POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND NATIONALISM AMONG HUNGARY'S YOUTH**

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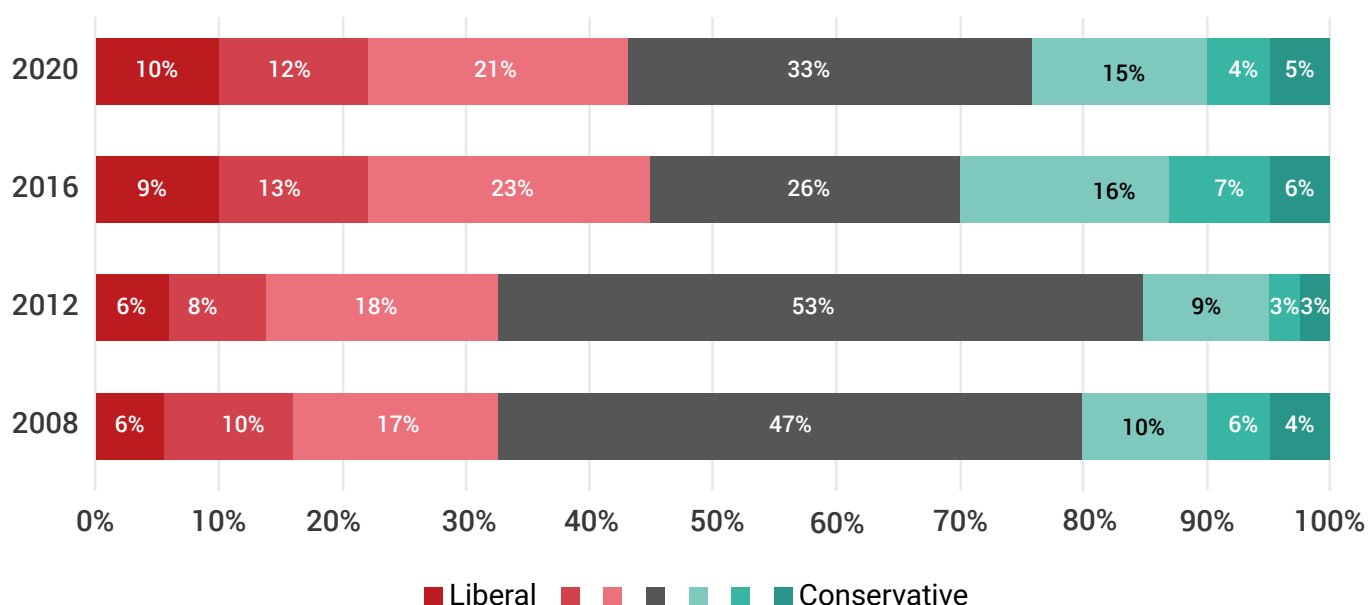
## 6. POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND NATIONALISM AMONG HUNGARY'S YOUTH

The question is not only of how young Hungarians identify with democracy and to what extent they participate in it and feel heard, but also of where they stand politically. In 2020, less than a tenth (9%) of young Hungarians defined themselves as very or fairly conservative (see Figure 11). More than a fifth (22%) considered themselves as very or fairly liberal, and seven tenths (69%) positioned themselves in the middle of the liberal-conservative scale (picking the middle value or just left and right of the centre). On the left-right scale, almost three quarters of young people (73%) also positioned themselves in the middle (or just left or right of it; see Figure 12). Meanwhile, 14% saw themselves as right wing and 12% as left wing.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to conservative and

illiberal government policies, we have witnessed a marked spread of a liberal and left political identity among young Hungarians since 2008.

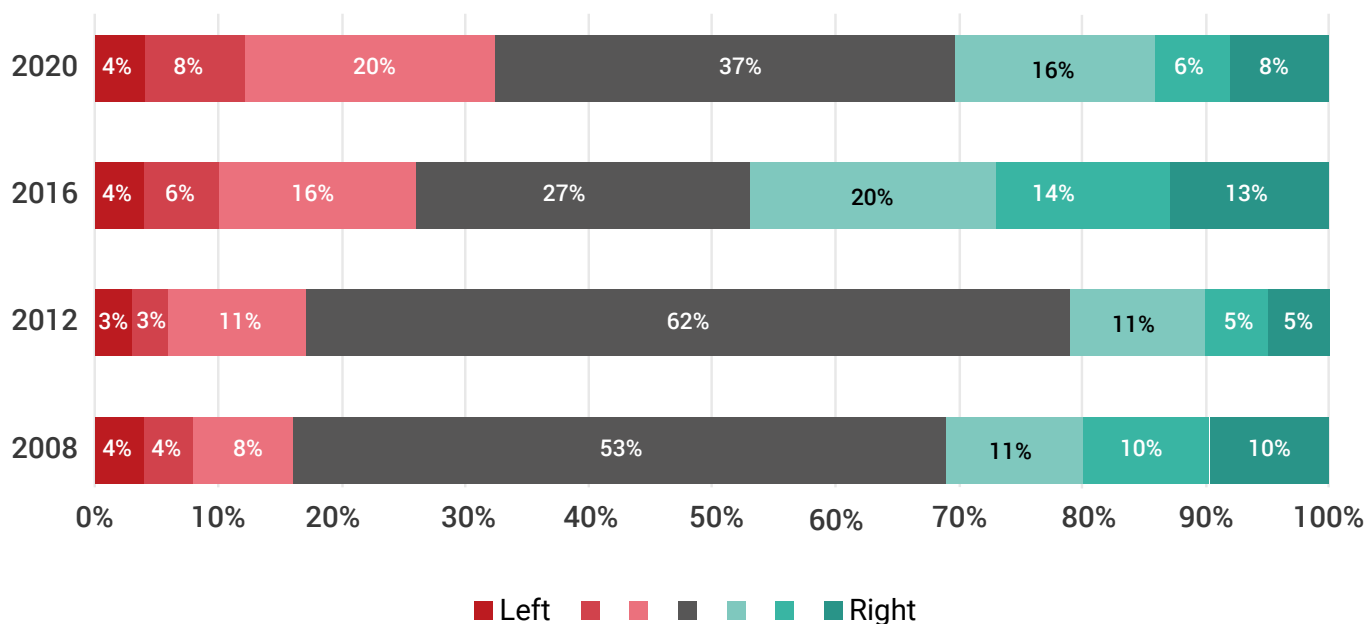
Despite an increase in liberal identity and increasing support for democracy,<sup>29</sup> it is also true that for nearly three tenths of young people, their social environment is characterised by religious-national-political-social homogeneity. They have limited openness to an inclusive society and a strong, negative attitude towards minority populations. More accepting attitudes are found among young people in the capital Budapest, those with higher education and those with higher social status.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 11. Changes in conservative-liberal identity, 2008-2020:**  
 “Please describe yourself using the attribute pairs (1 = liberal, 7 = conservative)”.



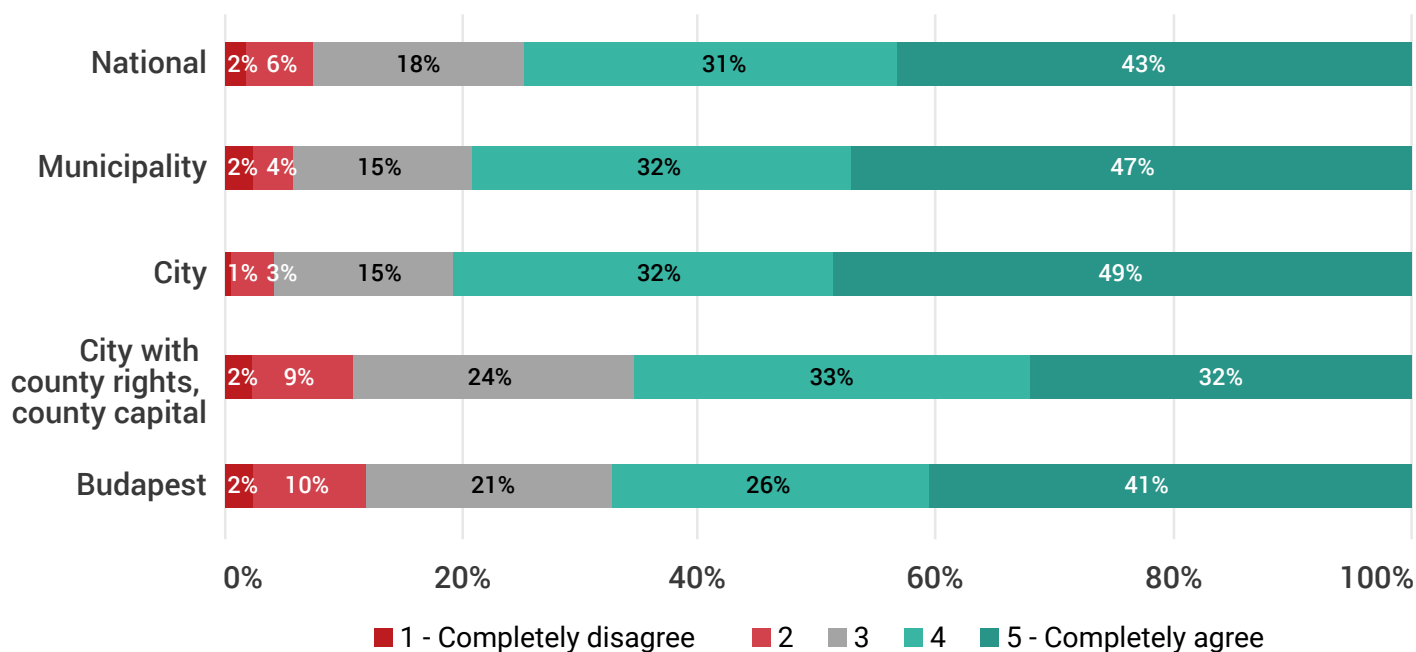
Additional information: N<sub>2008</sub> = 6,272, N<sub>2012</sub> = 8,000, N<sub>2016</sub> = 6,715, N<sub>2020</sub> = 7,865.

**Figure 12. Right-left identity changes, 2008-2020:**  
**“Please characterise yourself using the trait pairs (1 = left, 7 = right).”**



Additional information: N<sub>2008</sub> = 6,199, N<sub>2012</sub> = 8,000, N<sub>2016</sub> = 6,582.

**Figure 13. How much do you agree with the following statement?**  
**“In general, I like the Hungarian people better than other peoples.”**



Additional information: N<sub>2020</sub> = 7,961.

This negative, exclusionary side of nationalism is exemplified in data showing an increase in strong distrust towards other, non-Hungarian people. This attitude is reflected, for example, in the survey question, "In general, I like the Hungarian people better than other peoples". We find an increased average score of 4.1 points in 2020 compared to the score observed in 2012 (3.7) on a scale from one to five. Identification with Hungarians over others is most noticeable among young people in rural towns (81%) and villages (79%) and less pronounced in Budapest (67%) and county centres (65%) (Figure 13).<sup>31</sup>

Apart from the exclusive dimension of national identity, it can be observed that young Hungarians possess a strong sense of national pride and identity compared to their peers in Europe. In fact, according to the 2020 government-led survey data, 94% of those aged 15-29 "feel Hungarian", with only a 3% decrease compared to 2016. This contrasts with the average across the EU27, where 67% of those aged 15-24 and 68% of those aged 25-39 feel a strong sense of national identity.<sup>32</sup>

The percentage of young Hungarians who feel proud to be Hungarian has also increased. On a scale of one to five, the average rating went up from four in 2012 to 4.2 in 2016 and 2020. In 2020, 79% of young people either strongly or somewhat agreed that they were proud to be Hungarian, with only 6% entirely or somewhat disagreeing. These high levels of national pride among young Hungarians reflect their deep-rooted connection to their country.<sup>33</sup>

The backdrop of the third wave of Hungarian re-nationalisation may partly explain this slight increase in national pride and this favouring of Hungarians over others. This type of nationalism – rather than the previous national identity based on grievance – emphasises a sense of national pride and has been ingrained in government propaganda since 2010. The effect of this might well also be reinforced by the propagation of anti-migration nationalism.<sup>34</sup>

Despite all of this, and in contrast with the government's anti-EU propaganda, Hungarian young people are strongly pro-EU, with 49% saying that EU membership is beneficial or strongly beneficial for Hungary, and only 13% saying that membership is either completely or somewhat detrimental.<sup>35</sup>

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# **7. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

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# 7. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This policy study summarises longitudinal data collected for the Hungarian government every four years between 2000 and 2020, and highlights key trends in the lives of Hungarian youth. The provision of information is crucial given that the Hungarian government has manipulated data from the surveys for its own purposes – withholding, delaying or diluting it. The data can be of help for EU policymakers dealing with Hungary and for youth researchers studying comparative public opinion research in Europe.

## 7.1 Education

According to data presented in this policy study, the significant growth in Hungary's education sector seen in the early 2000s has since slowed down. Indeed, by 2020, this expansion had stalled and begun to contract. There is now a noticeable decline in the desire among young people to continue their education, and it is increasingly their social background that dictates their educational trajectories. The children of parents with less education are finding it increasingly challenging to progress through secondary and tertiary education. There is therefore now a pressing need to lessen the influence of a young person's social background and to foster a desire for continued learning across all stages of the education system. To address these challenges, EU initiatives such as the European Structural and Investment Funds can provide crucial support. The European Social Fund+ is designed specifically to reduce disparities in education and training, providing opportunities for disadvantaged groups, including those from less educated backgrounds.

## 7.2 Employment, income and livelihood

The data show that there is still a gap between actual income and what is perceived as a sufficient monthly income. The latter nevertheless improved significantly between 2016 and 2020, with fewer young people experiencing financial difficulties. Yet, this is contrasted by a relatively bleak outlook for the country's economic situation, and financial hardship and impoverishment remained among the top concerns for young people in 2020. Furthermore, young Hungarians' concerns about struggling with uncertainty and an unpredictable future have risen since 2016 and topped the list in 2020.

The survey data also show that the employment situation of young people is complex. Although the employment rate of the 15-29 age group has improved, the number of young people in this age group has declined. In other words, the data suggest that, while a higher employment rate for young people could be beneficial, the trend toward a declining number of young people in the labour market could harm the Hungarian economy. In addition, the number of jobs for young people with higher education, more foreign language skills and especially digital skills has decreased. By comparison, the number of jobs for older people with a comparably lower education and lower skill levels has increased. The significantly higher educational attainment of young people compared to their parents is almost exclusively due to structural mobility effects – changes in individuals' educational attainment due to shifts in society's overall educational structure, rather than personal efforts or abilities.

By contrast, circular mobility effects or mobility rotations hardly exist at all. This implies that in addition to structural changes, which may arguably be important in the Hungarian economy to match

the potential of its young population better, programmes to create the promotion of circular mobility are recommended. This would include talent development programmes that help individuals continually upgrade their skills and adaptability, better preparing them for the evolving job market. Such programmes would ensure that young, educated individuals are noticed in the job market, regardless of the shifting demands for skills. These recommendations align with the goal of the European Skills Agenda of upskilling and reskilling workers. They also align with the objective of the Youth Guarantee of ensuring that all young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Both initiatives can help foster an environment for continuous learning and skills development, which is critical for young people to thrive in today's job market.

### 7.3 Inclusive society and democracy

Another issue raised in the survey is democracy, which receives special attention from the European institutions due to Hungary's ever-deteriorating rule of law under the current government. Over the last decade, support for democracy has been rising in Hungary, so that in 2020 about two thirds of young Hungarians favoured a democratic political system, in comparison with 10% who preferred a dictatorial system. However, these young people are divided over whether democracy functions well in their country. The survey also highlights where young people locate themselves politically. The data show that young Hungarians have a centrist political orientation, with most identifying as centre-right, centre-left or in the middle of the liberal to conservative scale. However, there has been a sharp increase in young people identifying as liberal or left since 2012. Despite this trend, there is also a strong and growing nationalist orientation among some young Hungarians, with many preferring their fellow citizens over people from other countries. This exclusionary dimension of nationalism is fuelled by populist rhetoric from the government. Interestingly, young people's nationalist sentiment does not translate into low support for EU membership, as 49% of young Hungarians believe

the EU benefits Hungary, compared to only 13% who strongly disagree. Although this policy study cannot discuss young Hungarian views on the EU at length, other studies have already unpacked pro-EU and Eurosceptic attitudes in detail (see, for example, Biro-Nagy et al.<sup>36</sup> and Cannas et al.<sup>37</sup> for more EU-related preferences of young Hungarians).

Certain actions can be taken to address these exclusionary views, in an admittedly difficult structural context of shrinking space for civil society and free media. An exclusionary mindset could, for example, be mitigated through carefully crafted awareness-raising programmes. These could include education on diversity and inclusion, workshops on empathy and understanding, and exposure to different cultures and communities. Exchange programmes or programmes helping young people gain experience abroad in other EU countries could also help increase exposure to different cultures. These programmes already exist for more highly educated people (Erasmus), as well as for those without university education (Erasmus+ programme or the ALMA – aim, learn, master, achieve – programme).

In addition, resources and collaboration should be extended to organisations that counter the government's messaging and its promotion of a narrow and exclusionary national identity. At the EU level, initiatives like the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, which aims to promote diversity, tolerance and non-discrimination can be used to provide such resources. Moreover, it is essential to enhance media literacy among young people. This would enable them to analyse information critically and to understand information disseminated through predominantly government-controlled media. The implementation of the revised EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive is crucial in this regard, as it bundles efforts and resources to strengthen the role of media literacy. At the same time, it is essential to support the remaining independent media projects in Hungary, to ensure the provision of diverse and balanced information. This multi-faceted approach of promoting open-mindedness, supporting independent media, enhancing media literacy and combating exclusionary propaganda could

contribute to shaping a more inclusive future for Hungary's young population, despite a challenging political context.



# ENDNOTES

- 1 The Hungarian title of the survey is Magyar Fiatalok. Our policy study summarises the key trends identified in a 2022 analysis of young Hungarians' opinions that was published in an edited book: *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI) (A Lábjegyzeten Is Túl Magyar Ifjúságkutatás 2020) written in Hungarian by the following authors: Adrienn Bognár; Anett Bugyi; Zoltán Csizmadia; Dávid Erát; Anna Fazekas; Elek Fazekas; Mariann Fekete; Miklós Hajdu; Eszter Hamarics; Balázs Kerpel-Fronius; Lilla Koltói; Balázs Krémer; Béla Marián; Ádám Nagy (ed.); Márta Nárai; Szabolcs Nyiri; Johanna Heléna Stadinger; Viktor Szalóki; Péter Tóth; and Áron Varga.
- 2 The 2016 research results were, for example, only published in 2018 (Kovács, M. (2018) "Anyagi gondok nyomják a magyar fiatalok vállát". 24.HU, 14 August.); hence the title, *Outside the Margins*, of a book that we published in 2018: Nagy, Á. (ed.) (2018) *Outside the Margins - Hungarian Youth Research 2016* (Budapest: Excenter). Based on 2016 data, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the world of young Hungarians. It is now also available in the Hungarian Electronic Library. Despite a government-led flash report based on 2020 data being published in the summer of 2021 (Domokos, T., Z. Kántor, L. Székely et al. *Magyar Fiatalok 2020 – Gyorsjelentés* [Hungarian Youth 2020 – Flash Report] (Budapest: Társadalomkutató Kft)), full data were not released until a year and a half after they were collected. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to consider the data as readily available to the public.
- 3 Domokos, T., Z. Kántor, L. Székely et al. *Magyar Fiatalok 2020 – Gyorsjelentés* [Hungarian Youth 2020 – Flash Report].
- 4 Bognár, A. and D. Erát (2022) "Relationships and childbearing in the light of the results of the Hungarian Youth Survey 2020", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 14-31.
- 5 Of course, these are certainly not the only reasons, since marriage has become less of a prerequisite for having children over the past decades.
- 6 Contrary to the claims of the government-published Hungarian Youth 2020 Flash Report (Domokos, T., Z. Kántor, L. Székely et al. *Magyar Fiatalok 2020 – Gyorsjelentés* [Hungarian Youth 2020 – Flash Report]), which serve to justify the government's family protection measures, the projected number of children among those aged 15-29 is not 2.0 but 1.77.
- 7 Bognár, A. and D. Erát (2022) "Relationships and childbearing in the light of the results of the Hungarian Youth Survey 2020",
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Yu, A. (2022) "The adult 'boomerang kids' moving back to their parents". BBC, 10 February; Richardson, B. (2022) "Many young adults who moved back home during the pandemic still live there". Forbes, 30 August.
- 10 This refers to levels set out in the International Standard Classification of Education.
- 11 Nárai, M. (2022) "Must (should) learn? opportunities and differences in in the world of education and school life paths", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 32-58; Bugyi, A and Á. Varga. (2022) "Determinants of educational pathways and mobility opportunities", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 59-82.
- 12 Krémer, B., S. Nyiri and J. H. Stadinger (2022) "Disadvantageous advantages - the labour market situation of young people in 2020", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 83-133.
- 13 HUF 240,000.
- 14 HUF 200,000.
- 15 HUF 350,000.
- 16 HUF 300,000; Krémer, B., S. Nyiri and J. H. Stadinger (2022) "Disadvantageous advantages - the labour market situation of young people in 2020".
- 17 Csizmadia, Z. (2022) "The material situation of youth", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 134-161.
- 18 Marián, B. (2022) "Political and public opinions of 15–29-year-olds", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 219-258.
- 19 Combining values 4 and 5 in Figure 5.
- 20 Fidesz was in power between 2010 and 2020. It can therefore be assumed that the political memory of the youngest age group in this sample is limited before this time.
- 21 "MEPs: Hungary can no longer be considered a full democracy". European Parliament News, 15 September 2022; "Country report Hungary 2022". Freedom House website; "Hungary country report 2022". Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Bertelsmann Foundation.
- 22 Marián, B. (2022) "Political and public opinions of 15–29-year-olds".

- 23 Combining values 4 and 5 in Figure 9.
- 24 Marián, B. (2022) "Political and public opinions of 15–29-year-olds".
- 25 Kerpel-Frónius, B., Á. Nagy and E. Fazekas (2022) "Volunteering, citizenship, youth profession", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 349-364.
- 26 OECD (2011) *How's Life? - Measuring Well-Being* (Paris: OECD Publishing). DOI: 10.1787/9789264121164; Directorate-General for Communication (2011) "European Parliament special Eurobarometer 75.2: Voluntary work". European Parliament, 27 June.
- 27 Kerpel-Frónius, B., Á. Nagy and E. Fazekas (2022) "Volunteering, citizenship, youth profession".
- 28 The centre values were obtained by adding the median value and a value to the left and right, while the other values were calculated by adding the fringes of the spectrum (values 6+7 and 1+2).
- 29 We are aware that this marked increase in liberal self-identification is partly at odds with the clear preference for (economic) prosperity over freedom of expression described earlier – a starting point for further research and more detailed analysis.
- 30 Fekete, M. (2022) "Youth leisure time use - the last 20 years", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 259-290; Fazekas, A. and E. Hamarics (2022) "Values - priority, openness, inclusion, sensitivity", in Á. Nagy (ed.) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 189-218; Kerpel-Frónius, B., Á. Nagy and E. Fazekas (2022) "Volunteering, citizenship, youth profession".
- 31 Combining those who fully agree (5) and somewhat agree (4).
- 32 We recognise that the 2020 and 2016 Hungarian government-led surveys are not directly comparable to the 2021 European Commission data. However, even when we examine the European Commission's 2021 data only, it is clear that 87% of Hungarians identify with their nationality, compared to the EU27 average of 73% (not broken down by age), which underscores the strong national identity in Hungary and corroborates our argument. Becuwe, N. and O. Baneth (2021) "Special Eurobarometer 508: Values and identities of EU citizens". Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: 10.2760/206143
- 33 Fazekas, A. and E. Hamarics (2022) "Values - priority, openness, inclusion, sensitivity"; Kerpel-Frónius, B., Á. Nagy and E. Fazekas (2022) "Volunteering, citizenship, youth profession".
- 34 Boros, L. and Bozsó, H. (2016) "The perception of religious, national and European identity in the 2016 large sample survey", in Nagy, Á. (ed.) *Outside the Margins - Hungarian Youth Research 2016* (Budapest: Excenter), pp. 204-236.
- 35 Fazekas, A. and E. Hamarics (2022) "Values - priority, openness, inclusion, sensitivity"; Szalóki, V. and Kerpel-Frónius, B. (2022) "Identity and political values in new nationalism", in Nagy, Á. (ed.) (2022) *Beyond the Endnote - Hungarian Youth Research 2020* (Budapest: Excenter-SDI), pp. 162-188.
- 36 Bíró-Nagy, A., Á. Szászi and A. Varga (2022) "How much EU do Hungarians want? Pro-EU and eurosceptic attitudes in Hungary", *Policy Solutions*, 26 May.
- 37 Cannas, S. M. Dressler, C. Howard et al. (2022) *Builders of Progress: Europe's NextGen* (Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies).

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Gábor started his political carrier as the youngest socialist Member of the European Parliament in 2004. Since then, he has been commissioner of the prime minister responsible for social innovations and members of the Hungarian parliament, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and OSCE-Parliamentary Assembly for eight years. He was the president of the Somogy County party organization, vice chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs and chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Branch of the Socialist Party. In 2018, he decided to work on widening the background capacity of the party and the whole progressive opposition of Hungary and didn't run for the last election to become a member of parliament for the third time. Currently, he is the program director of the Institute of Social Democracy. Gábor was a special envoy for Program Writing of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) Bureau and a member of the Program Writing Committee of the Allied Opposition Parties. The latest party congress elected him as vice-president of the party. He is also responsible for international relations of the party as international secretary.



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