The bright side,

or on prosocial engagement of children and youth, both off- and on-line

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List of issues

Photo: halfpoint (Canva.com).

Introduction

When we talk about a young person's positive activity as a social being, we are primarily referring to: firstly, their functioning within the family or among peers; secondly, prosocial behaviour, i.e. voluntary actions aimed at benefiting others (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989; Morris et al., 2011; Steinbeis, 2018), and thirdly, civic engagement, i.e. the contribution that a person can make to society. Such contributions can be both behavioural (e.g. civic participation) and related to various forms of cognition (e.g. civic knowledge, civic skills) and socio-emotional functioning (e.g. a sense of civic duty or responsibility; Boyd and Dobrow, 2011).

These activities will be the focus of this chapter. We assume here, in line with current theory and research, that young people's functioning nowadays takes place simultaneously on- and offline, and that these worlds intermingle. Therefore, while looking at the different aspects of children and young people's positive functioning in society, we will also be analysing the manifestations of their digital engagement – be it civic, altruistic or voluntary.

Resilience – prosocial behaviour as a protective factor

Resilience theory helps to understand why some young people who are exposed to multiple risks do not suffer negative health or social consequences and, contrary to expectations, grow up successfully. The concept of resilience encompasses compensatory and protective models that explain how ongoing positive factors help adolescents in overcoming risks. Such factors that are protective and foster resilience in adolescents include a supportive school environment, effective parent-child communication and meaningful extracurricular classes. Constructive use of leisure time during adolescence, such as extracurricular or after-school classes and prosocial activities (also in social media), contribute to positive development. Such activities enable adolescents to acquire psychosocial competences and practice leadership, teamwork and decision-making, develop autonomy and foster discovering their identity (Ostaszewski, 2020). The topic of resilience resulting from positive social engagement of young people was extensively discussed by Pyżalski (2017) in the previous edition of the report *Children count*.

Let us only recall that prosocial behaviour or behaviour that is directed at benefiting others is one of the behaviours that is the most important for the collective goals of coping with a difficult situation (Crone and Achterberg, 2021). Behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic is a good example of this, as studies have shown that prosocial individuals were less likely to put others at risk during the pandemic – they were more prone to adhere to the physical distance rule, stay at home when feeling ill, or wear face masks (Campos-Mercade et al., 2021). Prosocial behaviour develops and evolves during adolescence, and prosociality is shaped by social experiences (Blakemore and Mills, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic is far from being the only crisis that today's generation has to face, others include growing socio-economic inequality, war and climate change. Social ties during adolescence are an important resilience factor that has been shown to reduce stress and fatigue during, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic; in turn, engaging in prosocial acts of kindness can strengthen those ties (Crone, Achterberg, 2021). Research has revealed **a link between prosociality and psychological well-being in adolescents** (Hui, Ng, Berzaghi et al., 2020), which is extremely important in the context of this report.

In children and adolescents, performing acts of kindness is associated with improved well-being, but additionally also – and this distinguishes it from other pleasure activities (e.g. outings) – with increased peer acceptance. This, in turn, is a key educational goal, as it is associated with a variety of important school and social outcomes, including a reduced likelihood of being bullied (Layous et al., 2012). Peer acceptance provides children and young people with a buffer of safety in difficult situations and enhances coping skills.

Padilla-Walker et al. (2015) showed in a longitudinal study of the relationship between prosocial and problem behaviour conducted on a sample of 500 adolescents (mean age: 13 years) between 2009 and 2011 in the United States that the effects of prior prosocial behaviour towards family and strangers were a predictor of fewer problem behaviours two years later, while the results of prosocial behaviour towards friends were more diverse.

Civic engagement

One form of behaviour benefiting the society and youth activism is civic engagement, which, following UNICEF, we can define as "individual and collective actions in which people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general" (UNICEF et al., 2020, p. 6). Traditionally, this has taken the form of activities such as voting, attending meetings or celebrations of the communities concerned, contacting public officials, participating in protests, signing petitions or writing articles about one's community. Currently, there is an ongoing discussion on civic engagement taking the form of actions in participatory culture. Barrett and Pachi (2019) highlight that, while there has been a decline in civic engagement among young people in typical activities such as participating in elections or political rallies for many years, there is an increase in engagement in another form: young people are engaging in online advocacy actions, such as those initiated by Amnesty International and other such institutions. Developmental theory posits that young people engage in civic life in different ways, patterns of civic development vary across individuals, and experiences in this context can translate both to the stability and change of youth civic engagement (Wray-Lake and Shubert, 2019).

In a study conducted by Ballard et al. (2019) involving more than 20,000 adolescents (data from 13,014 respondents were eventually included in the analyses) showed that in terms of frequency of participation in civic activities, 45.21% of respondents participated in elections/voting, 30.03% engaged in volunteering and 3.62% reported participating in a rally or march.

Research on prosocial activities of children and youth since 2017

In the following section, we present the results of studies on social participation, civic engagement and social support of young people. Although most of the research focus on people between the ages of 18 and 25–29, there are also some which analysed younger groups (from 10–12 years of age) and therefore it is often difficult to compare results from different bases. Moreover, it is important to remember that social activity changes with age.

Involvement in civic organisations and social movements off- and online and interest in politics

According to a survey conducted by CBOS (2020), which every two years, starting from 1998, asks Poles whether they devote their free time to social activity in civic organisations such as associations, foundations, unions, chambers, parties, clubs, committees, movements, etc., involvement for the benefit of their community or people in need is declared by as many as 72% of school and

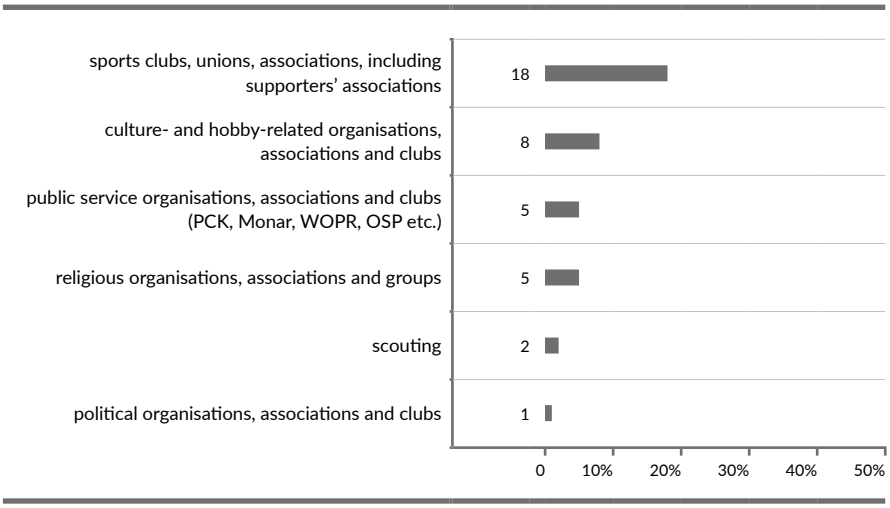
university students (56% of persons aged 18–24). When it comes to the involvement of Poles over 18 in youth organisations, i.e. scouting, youth clubs, unions and student associations, an increase has recently been noted – from 2.7% in 2012 to 5.2% in 2018 and 2020.

It is noteworthy that the researchers asked respondents about active participation in civic organisations and not about mere membership.

> The overall rate of social activity within organisations and associations is higher than in 2017, and in the long term, it can be seen that it has increased by 20 percentage points in 20 years. This allows us to conclude that there is an ever-growing interest among Poles in matters beyond their private lives, they try to act for the local community, influence the functioning of specific groups, associations or clubs, and contribute to solving social problems and helping those in need. [...] Engagement in organisations and social activity in general among Poles is favoured by such features as above-average religious commitment, higher education, significant professional position, relatively highest earnings and being a school or university student. (CBOS, 2020, p. 12)

The data collected in 2018 by CBOS and the National Bureau for Drug Prevention are slightly different (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Social engagement of young people aged 18–24 in 2018



Source: CBOS/KBPN et al., 2019.

The rates of interest in community organisations here are significantly lower than in the 2020 CBOS survey. This is probably due to the different age ranges – the 2020 survey included 18–24 year olds, whereas the 2018–2019 survey focused on students of junior secondary, secondary and basic vocational schools, i.e. young people aged 16–19.

Among the youth organisations of interest to young Poles, it is worth mentioning those affiliated to the Polish Council of Youth Organisations, which is:

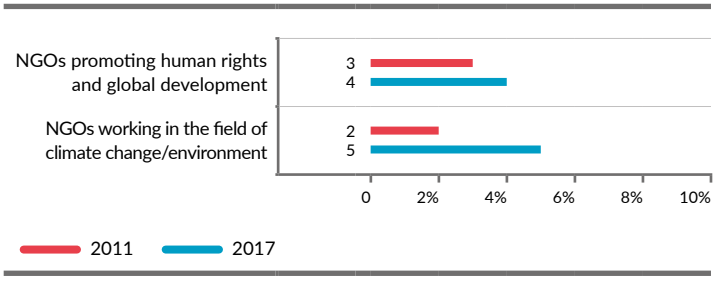
> a federation of non-governmental organisations representing the opinions and needs of young people in their dealings with decision-makers at national level. It is additionally the only organisation with the status of a National Youth Council, as defined by European law and international agreements. The federation currently has 30 member organisations gathering over 250,000 young people. (Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych, 2020)

These include, among others:

- Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego),
- Scouting Association of the Republic (Związek Harcersztwa Rzeczypospolitej),
- Young Democrats Association (Stowarzyszenie Młodzi Demokraci),
- Rural Youth Union (Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej),
- International Federation of Medical Students Associations (Międzynarodowe Stowarzyszenie Studentów Medycyny),
- European Students' Forum (Europejskie Forum Studentów, AEGEE Kraków),
- Union of the German Minority Youth (Związek Młodzieży Mniejszości Niemieckiej, BJDM)
- Youth Development and Integration Association (Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju i Integracji Młodzieży).

In research at the European level (European Commission et al., 2018), over a period of 6 years there has been a clear increase in interest in organisations promoting human rights and – especially – those working in the field of climate change. In the case of organisations promoting human rights, Poland ranks slightly below the average for the European Union (EU), where the average is 7% (the highest rates were recorded in Scandinavian countries). The situation is similar when it comes to organisations active in the field of climate change: in the EU countries, the average involvement is 5%, while in Poland it is 4% (compared to 9% in Sweden and Spain).

Figure 2. Participation of young Europeans (15–30) in non-governmental organisations



Source: European Commission et al., 2018.

When it comes to civic engagement and interest in politics, it often starts with an involvement in school student councils. A study by CBOS/KBPN et al. (2019) shows that in 2018 – just like in previous years – when asked about participation in school council elections, 20% of respondents answered that they took part each time when they were held and 19% answered that they participated, but not every year. There is a correlation between the type of school and participation in school council elections: the highest proportion of participants is recorded among students of general secondary schools and the lowest in basic vocational schools.

Interest in politics can trigger a desire to actively participate and solve common problems with other members of the community, so it is important to look at young people's political engagement. On average, more than half of young Europeans aged 15–24 declared a moderate or high interest in politics in 2016, and this percentage has increased since 2010 (European Commission et al., 2018). Contrary to the claim that young people are increasingly discouraged, the interest in political issues appears to be rising in Europe in recent years.

In Poland, it is worth to mention in this context youth local governments i.e. youth councils existing at the level of communes/cities, districts and provinces. The tasks of youth councils include, among others, giving opinions on draft resolutions concerning youth, participating in the development of strategic activities for youth, monitoring the implementation of strategic documents of a given territorial unit for the benefit of young people, undertaking activities for the benefit of youth, in particular in the field of civic education, in line with the principles defined by the unit's council (Journal of Laws – Dz.U. 2021 item 1038). In 2021, there were approximately 242 youth councils at local government units actively operating in Poland (Wyrzykowska and Zapolski-Downar, 2021). Yet another body is the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland at the Minister of National Education, which has been in operation since 2016. Its main tasks include expressing opinions, including making proposals on issues concerning children and young people in matters covered by the government administration department of education and upbringing, in particular presenting opinions on planned changes, including proposals for solutions. The term of office of the Council is one year (Ministry of Education and Science, 2021).

> *I can't imagine life without scouting. Although I can be exhausted by activities in the troop, I really enjoy being a part of it. I get a lot of support and understanding from its members who understand that it is not easy to combine scouting with school.*
>
> *15-year-old girl*
> *A quote from phone calls and emails to 116 111 Helpline for Children and Young People*

Young people prefer flexible forms of social participation, such as taking part in projects run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), participating in community initiatives and joining social movements. A report commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission et al., 2018) shows young people's preference for being active in NGOs or organisations dealing with local issues rather than political parties. On average, twice as many respondents participated in an organisation working to improve their local community than in a political party. Disillusionment with traditional and institutionalised forms of political participation can also explain why many choose to show interest in politics or express their opinions outside of formal institutions or organisations. To this end, the internet offers a wide range of opportunities for political communication, in which young people are leading the way. Online portals frequented by young people, such as online forums, chat rooms, social media and blogs, can serve the same basic function as institutional forms – a collective interaction

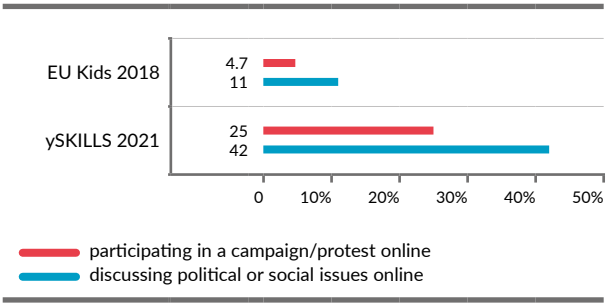
around shared interests. In this sense, they represent a great source of political and social engagement that young people have been quickest to recognise and use. For instance, the internet plays a significant role in facilitating interactions between young citizens and public authorities. New media also serve as a tool for expressing individual opinions on civic and political issues. In 2017, an average of 16% of young Europeans published their views and ideas online. In this comparison, Polish youth are involved a moderate level (about 13%) versus other European countries. The highest activity, above 20%, is recorded by Iceland, the UK or Sweden, and the lowest by Finland, Belgium, Austria and the Czechia (European Commission et al., 2018).

It is therefore worth highlighting that information and communications technology plays an important role in creating civic space for young people. The use of social media for civic engagement enables young people to bypass adults and reach broad audiences. While youth political engagement is often relegated to youth initiatives, such as poster competitions, digital media give more space for youth opinions in wider social movements. It is important to note, however, that while the very existence of digital technologies is a key enabler of youth civic engagement, these very same technologies and platforms can be significant deterrents or barriers to civic engagement (UNICEF et al., 2020).

For young people, the internet is first and foremost a primary source of information on issues of interest to them. The latest report "Teenagers 3.0" (NASK and Lange, 2021) shows that Polish youth is also guided by opinions on civic or social issues heard or read online – 9.5% of respondents rely on information obtained from the internet on social or political choices (in the case of parents, it was 7.4%). From the report "Youth in Central Europe 2020. NDI research project. Survey Results in Poland", prepared by the Institute of Public Affairs as part of the National Democratic Institute project, shows that 78% of respondents aged 16–29 use Facebook quite regularly or very regularly as a source of information on society and politics. This is followed by internet portals (e.g. Onet.pl, Interia.pl etc.) – 55%, private radio (e.g. RMF, Tok FM etc.) – 52% and private TV stations (e.g. TVN) – 51%. YouTube video blogs are also an important source in this respect – indicated by 48% of respondents (Institute of Public Affairs/ NDI, 2020).

However, the internet is not only a source of information, but also a space for civic activity. The Polish part of the EU Kids Online 2018 study (Tomczyk, 2019) showed that online civic activism is not of particular interest to young people. Only 4.7% of respondents joined a campaign/protest or signed an online petition at least once a week (or more often), and 11% discussed social or political issues online with others. The situation changed during the pandemic. The most recent research on this matter, conducted in 2021 as part of the ySKILLS project (Pyżalski et al., 2022), showed an increased interest in online civic participation among young people (aged 12–17). It was found that 28% of those surveyed had added or followed a political group on social media, 25% had participated at least once in protests or campaigns conducted online, and as many as 42% had participated at least once in a discussion or commented on social and political issues online. While there are no differences between genders in the first two categories, in the case of political discussions or online comments it can be indicated that boys did so more often than girls (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Online civic engagement of children and young people from Poland

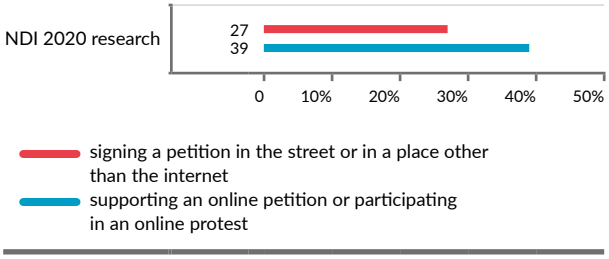


Source: Results from EU Kids Online 2018 and ySKILLS 2021 studies.

Similar data was obtained by the researchers of the aforementioned report "Youth in Central Europe 2020...", although the research sample covered a slightly broader age group (16–29). Signing a petition in the street

or in a place other than the internet was declared by 27% of respondents, while supporting an online petition or participating in an online protest – 39% (Institute of Public Affairs/NDI and Pazderski, 2020; Figure 4).

Figure 4. Civic engagement of Poles aged 16–29



Source: Institute of Public Affairs /NDI, 2020.

There is also the other side of this coin – while it is true that the internet makes civic activity possible for young people, on the other hand, it is itself becoming such an attractive space for functioning that it is crowding out other activities. According to the "Teenagers 3.0" study (NASK and Lange, 2021), when asked which activities young people could give up in order to be able to use the internet for longer, the answer concerning giving up social/charitable activities ranked high in eighth place (indicated by 13.2% of respondents), just after giving up sports, going to the cinema or household chores.

Volunteering and e-volunteering

Another important factor in the development of civil society is volunteering. By getting involved in projects aimed at solving current social problems, young volunteers initiate reforms but also develop a sense of belonging to their community. In addition, volunteering contributes significantly to the development of a young person's personal capital, for example by enabling non-formal education. The personal benefits of volunteering are numerous. It has been shown in research that volunteering helps discourage young people from dropping out of school and boosts their self-confidence, sense of social responsibility and level of psychological well-being. In addition, peer mentoring (voluntary mentoring by a young person who has lived through similar experiences) has been shown to be effective in helping young people at risk of exclusion (European Commission et al., 2018).

A report commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission et al., 2018) shows that there has been a significant increase in the level of participation in volunteering among Europeans aged 15–29 since 2011. In 2017, approximately 30% of young people aged 15–30 participated in volunteering activities in Europe. There are noticeable differences between countries, with several showing rates close to 40% (Germany, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands) while others record participation levels below 20% (Hungary, Finland and Sweden). Since 2011, young people's participation in volunteering has increased by more than 25% on average. The most significant increase took place in Greece and Poland (by 71% and 83% respectively). The youngest Europeans surveyed were the most likely to get involved, with a percentage of around 35% in the 15–19 age group. The data also shows that in 2017, almost 30% of surveyed young people from Poland declared to have participated in volunteering activities. Most young volunteers chose projects and services aimed at benefiting their local community. Since 2011, the proportion of young Europeans who have undertaken such activities has increased, especially in France, Denmark, Finland, Spain and Poland.

It is worth noting that, by participating in voluntary activities, volunteers can acquire skills and develop their personal or professional competences, but also improve their chances at subsequent levels of education or when applying for a job. In this situation, it is necessary for these activities to be formally recognised (e.g. through a mention on a school certificate or obtaining a separate diploma). The possibility of obtaining formal recognition of the personal and professional experience acquired is considered fundamental in encouraging young people to participate in volunteering. This is especially true for those who join volunteering projects not only because they want to contribute to society, but also because they see it as a way to improve their chances for further education or employment (European Commission et al.,

2018). Polish eighth-grade students receive extra points for their voluntary activities when applying for secondary schools. In the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 21 August 2019 on the recruitment to public kindergartens, schools, institutions and centres, paragraph 7 explicitly states that: "In the case of converting into points [awarded for achievements in social activity – author's note] the achievements in social activity, including work for the benefit of the school comunity, in particular in the form of volunteering [...] shall be rewarded with 3 points". This is an important aspect to bear in mind when analysing young people's social engagement. Of course, this does not mean that it is the only reason for young people's voluntary activities.

As Wyrzykowska and Zapolski-Downar (2021) note:

> In recent years, one can observe an increasing involvement of young people in the building of civil society or volunteering. This is certainly linked to a greater number of initiatives of a different nature that encourage this participation and can often be a first step towards bolder, broader actions. (p. 12)

An example of this is the olympiad initiated by the Zwolnieni z Teorii Foundation, which encourages school and university students, to carry out social projects in response to social problems of various groups. In the 2019/2020 school year, almost 20,000 students submitted an original social project, 4,285 participants became finalists and carried out a total of 846 projects. These included social campaigns, public events, charity fundraising or technology projects. Due to the pandemic, around 1,000 projects took an online form (Fundacja Zwolnieni z Teorii, 2022)

Volunteering can also take an online form.

> E-volunteering refers to a situation where the volunteering activity is based on the use of the internet. In the narrow sense, all stages of online volunteering take place entirely remotely: both the process of recruiting e-volunteers, onboarding them, carrying out tasks, motivating and maintaining the relationship, as well as evaluation and ending. In practice, however, there are a great many intermediate, hybrid forms: part of the activity is carried out remotely, but – as far as possible – the e-volunteer also has direct contact with the organisation for which they are working. (Fundacja Dobra Sieć et al., 2021, p. 6)

Possible e-volunteer activities include: (co-)creating websites, games or applications, editing newsletters, creating graphics, giving advice via

> *My parents had no idea about my interests, but when they found out about them, they were very angry. They took away my phone and forbade me to contact my friends. After all, there is nothing wrong with what I do – I play games, read comics, write books. My friends are OK, they understand me. I don't know what my parents have in mind.*
>
> *13-year-old boy*
> *A quote from phone calls and emails to 116 111 Helpline for Children and Young People*

the internet, translating texts, editing and proofreading documents, promotional activities and helping to organise online events (e.g. workshops, webinars). A study of Poland's largest e-volunteering platform TuDu.pl (initiated by the Dobra Sieć Foundation) shows that in 2020, people aged 28–39 years (43.8%) were primarily involved in e-volunteering, but 18–24 year-olds made the second largest group (27.1%; Fundacja Dobra Sieć et al., 2021).

Relations with the social environment and structural social support network

Social support plays an important role in difficult life situations (Ogińska-Bulik, 2013). One of the first authors to recognise the importance of social functioning (including support) and its impact on the behaviour of individuals in difficult situations was the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1897). He noted that social bonds have an important protective function for the human psycho-physical condition. Cobb (1976), on the other hand, drew attention to the link between social support and the health consequences of life stress: "Social support can protect people in crisis from a wide variety of pathological states: from low birth weight to death, from arthritis through tuberculosis to depression, alcoholism, and the social breakdown syndrome" (p. 300). In structural terms, social support refers to the existence of available social networks in which a person functions. It can be family, friends, colleagues, neighbours or people belonging to specific social groups. Research on the nature of structural social support has considered the effectiveness of support according to the size of the network, its density, cohesion and accessibility. The latter parameter was considered the most important by those surveyed (Sęk and Cieślak, 2004). Another important factor is the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the network, i.e. similarity or diversity in terms of age, gender, religion or adversity.

Available research identifies support from significant adults as a factor protecting young people from engaging in risky behaviours (Lipowski et al. 2016). The influence of social and family protective factors is reflected in the increased repertoire of personal resources available to adolescents and helps them cope with challenging situations. The previously mentioned resilience represents a process of positive adaptation to stressful conditions (Luthar, 2006).

The ESPAD (2020) survey conducted in 2019 shows that Polish adolescents enjoy spending time with their peers. Among teenagers aged 15–16, 71.7% declared that one of the forms of their leisure time was spending evenings with friends at least once a month. Those in the older group, i.e. aged 17–18, declared the same even more often, with as many as 81.3% of them indicating this form of spending time. Equally popular was going out with friends to a shopping mall (82.2% and 83.7% respectively). Peer

> *I've been through all sorts of difficult situations in my life and after all of that I would like to have a job myself in the future where I could help children. I already now try to support my younger siblings before stressful tests, for example.*
>
> *17-year-old girl*
> *A quote from phone calls and emails to 116 111 Helpline for Children and Young People*

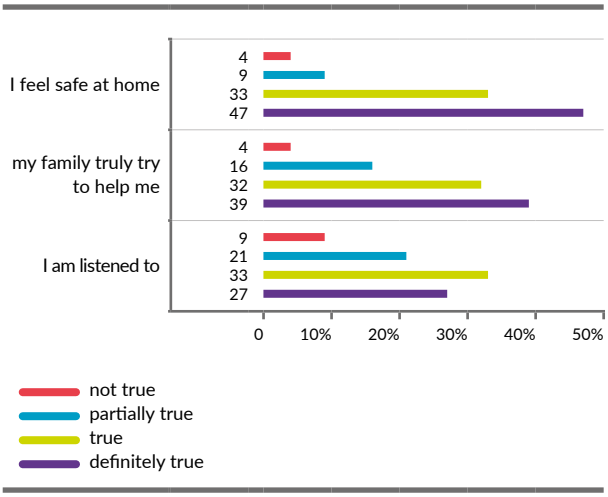
relationships are extremely important for young people, although it is worth noting, on the other hand, that as many as 11.5% of teenagers aged 15–16 and 6.5% of those aged 17–18 have never spent an evening with friends, and 6.2% and 4.6%, respectively, have never hung out with friends in a mall. This may be due to restrictions imposed by parents or choosing other forms of spending time with peers.

The 2018 CBOS/KBPN survey entitled "Youth" provides us with a little more information on this topic (CBOS/KBPN et al., 2019). The data shows that students were most likely to spend their free time with friends (57%) and with a boyfriend/girlfriend (40%). This was followed by the mother (24%), siblings (18%), classmates (15%) and the father (10%). Partners for conversation and discussion were most often friends (57%). Almost as many people declared that they were most likely to talk and discuss with their mother (31%) as with their boyfriend or girlfriend (29%). This was followed by classmates (18%), father (16%) and siblings (14%). Students answered that they most often seek recognition from their parents (mother: 57%, father: 42%). Less frequently, young people cared about approval from a boyfriend/girlfriend (27%) and friends (21%). The least frequent authority figures are siblings (8%) or classmates (6%).

Extremely interestingly, in 2018, more than half of the students surveyed (54%) reported spending significantly more time with friends offline than online, 17% were slightly more likely to spend time offline than online, and 18% said the shares of both options were equal. A similar scale was pointed out by Iwanicka (2020), who surveyed younger students – at the early school education level. Again, children in this group clearly emphasised that they preferred to spend time with their peers offline rather than online. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown temporarily changed these values, but still the online encounters were primarily a follow-up to peer relationships previously established offline.

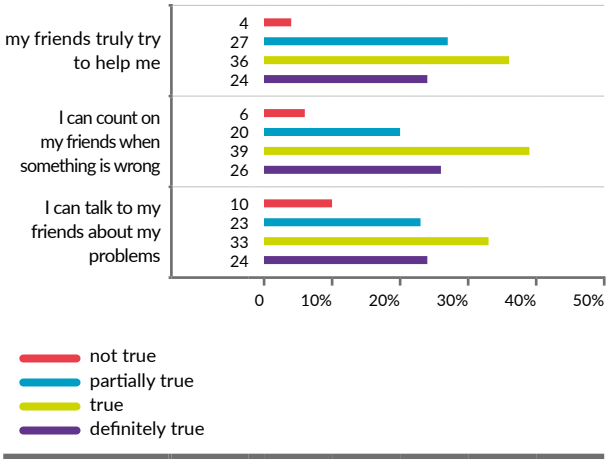
The previously mentioned ySKILLS study (Pyżalski et al., 2022) also looked at the structural social support network of children and adolescents aged 12–17. Children answered questions about perceived support received from peers (friends) and from family. Family appeared to be particularly important to the respondents in this respect (Figure 5–6).

Figure 5. Percentage of responses to the question: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your family?"



Source: Pyżalski et al. 2022.

Figure 6. Percentage of responses to the question: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your friends?"

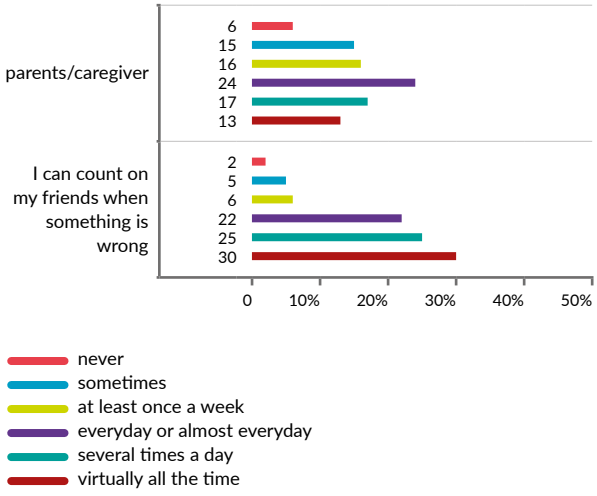


Source: Pyżalski et al. 2022.

It is worth noting in Figure 6 that children and young people have a sense of not being listened to – both within families and in peer groups.

In addition, students were asked about their online contacts (via instant messaging services such as Messenger, WhatsApp etc. or via email) with parents or caregivers and peers or friends. While family played an important role in the case of offline social support, peers lead the way in the case of online communication (and thus also online support). The research shows that children and young people are in contact with their peers almost all the time (Figure 7)

Figure 7. Online communication with parents/caregivers and peers/friends during the month before the survey



Source: Pyżalski et al. 2022.

This overview clearly shows how modern teenagers function: their online and offline activities strongly intermingle and, in many fields, complement one another.

Summary

It is difficult to sum up the social and civic participation of young people unequivocally. Although the studies cited in this chapter show a moderate but nevertheless clear increase in interest in such activities, they still rank at a low or very low level. Definitely the growing interest in opportunities for social engagement online is noteworthy. For this to be possible, it is necessary to develop the digital competences of children and young people. In this context, it is important to avoid restrictive measures (forbidding or limiting the use of digital media) in favour of proactive measures (encouraging their smart use).

Level of education, particularly in the area of digital competences, can be expected to affect young people's ability to make full use of new technologies to engage in social and political interactions. Indeed, research has documented the "digital divide", i.e. inequalities in the skills acquired and the type of activities performed even among those who have equal access to the internet. Nonetheless, new media are considered to lower the threshold for young people's social participation, and this should therefore be taken into account in order to fully recognise the civic and political engagement of today's youth (European Commission et al., 2018).

Among the many different concepts and frameworks of digital competences that a modern (including young) person should possess, in addition to the well-known DIGCOM 2.1 typology, my particular attention was drawn to the breakdown proposed at the World Economic Forum in 2016 by Park. It outlines eight digital competences that today's children should be equipped with: digital identity, digital use, digital safety, digital security, digital emotional intelligence, digital communication, digital literacy and digital rights. All of these make up what is known as digital intelligence (DQ; analogous to IQ – intelligence quotient), that is the social, emotional and cognitive skills which enable individuals to meet the challenges and adapt to the demands of digital life. One of the competencies identified by Park (2016), digital emotional intelligence, meaning the ability to empathise and form good interpersonal relationships online, is central to the considerations in this chapter (Walter, 2017).

In school education, digital media classes are largely limited to their use as tools for human intellectual activity. Curricula focus primarily on the use of devices and familiarity with software and applications. Recently, it has also become increasingly popular to support children's logical thinking and to encourage them to create media messages on their own, if only by familiarising children with coding (early programming). So slowly, the school is starting to

introduce students to activity, creativity and co-creation of digital cultural resources. This, in turn, marks a big step towards shaping responsibility for the global community (also in its digital dimension), which children are entering earlier and earlier today (Walter, 2017). Becoming a conscious part of the community, even if it is partly online, should itself be one of the goals of education and upbringing, all the more so as it is one of the factors of resilience and can prevent risky behaviour.

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