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3/5



Roots and wings

The power of youth participation

Roots and wings

The power of youth participation

Web-site: three-half.ngo
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Civil Society Organization “3.5 PERCENT”, founded in 2022 in the city of Mukachevo, focuses on youth policy development, the protection of youth rights, and increasing youth participation in civic life at both the local and national levels.
The organization actively advocates for the interests of young people, aiming to expand their opportunities for self-realization and promote conditions for their full integration into society.
Since its inception, “3.5 Percent” has implemented a range of projects, including research and initiatives aimed at identifying and addressing key issues faced by youth.

2025

This project is implemented by NGO 3.5% with the financial support of the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe.

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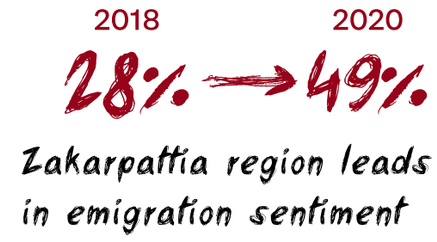
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CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

The Transcarpathian region is one of the least densely populated and at the same time ethnically diverse regions of Ukraine. According to estimates, the population of the region is approximately 1.24 million people [1] (2021), of which 788,100 are rural and 463,400 are urban. In terms of national composition, about 80% of the region's population is Ukrainian, and 20% is minority (Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, etc.). The region borders four European countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania) and, accordingly, has a multinational population, which leads to a high level of social mobility.

However, the cultural diversity of the region and its proximity to EU countries are not only distinctive features of the region, but also factors that exacerbate migration trends.



Youth migration is an extremely pressing issue for the Zakarpattia region in the context of globalization, demographic crisis, and war. According to sociological studies, Transcarpathia ranks first [2] in terms of the migration sentiment index. **Compared to 2018, the proportion of people who have at least considered emigration has increased** from 28% to 49% [3] in 2020. After the full-scale invasion, these sentiments have only worsened. According to available data, the number of young people in the region has decreased from 388,700 in 2015 to 346,900 in 2022 [4].

[1] https://carpathia.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/21/Economics/regional%20development%20strategy%20until%202027.pdf

[2] https://sau.in.ua/app/uploads/2025/02/ratinglab_lwbi_2.0_2024_ua-press-1.pdf

[3] https://dif.org.ua/article/analitichniy-zvit-za-pidsumkami-opituvannya-v-zakarpatskiy-oblasti

[4] https://inmol.org/region/zk/?utm

The migration sentiments of young people in Transcarpathia are mainly shaped by the following factors:

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT. The population is accustomed to living within borders, knows foreign languages, and traveling to neighboring countries has been a tradition. The geographical location of the region makes it a “gateway” for labor migrants. Historical ties with Europe contribute to the fact that Transcarpathian youth do not experience “culture shock” when moving to the West. For example, for Slovaks in Ukraine [5], there is a Slovak school in Transcarpathia, television and radio programs are broadcast in Slovak, Slovak folk dances are performed, and traditions are honored. For Hungarians in Ukraine, there is also a Hungarian institute [6], numerous Hungarian gymnasiums and schools, libraries, a museum, a cultural center, a children's art school, and the only Hungarian theater in Ukraine. In summary, it can be said that these factors together create an environment in which young people can and want to seek a better life outside their native land.



[5] https://www.ukrainer.net/slovaky/

[6] https://www.ukrainer.net/uhortsi-ukrainy/



METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to determine how the participation of young people in the Transcarpathian region in public life affects their migration intentions, in particular their desire to leave Ukraine.

Main objectives of the study:

1. **To analyze the level of civic engagement among young people** in the Transcarpathian region and their participation in civic organizations, volunteer initiatives, and other forms of civic activity.

2. **To identify the migration attitudes of young people in Transcarpathia,** in particular their motivation for leaving and their attitude towards emigration, and to assess the relationship between the level of youth involvement in public life and their desire to remain in Ukraine or, conversely, to move abroad.

3. **To investigate the key value orientations of young people** in the Transcarpathian region, in particular what they consider important in life, what factors shape their social identity and sense of belonging to the community, and what their ideas are about a "good future" in their own country and community.

The study was conducted in several stages:

- Since the study was conducted at the regional level, local youth centers, spaces, and hubs were involved in the initial stage to ensure more effective work and communication with our target beneficiaries. A total of 10 youth centers, spaces, and hubs located in various communities in the Transcarpathian region joined the collaboration.
- The next stage was data collection. An online survey and focus group discussions were conducted to collect data. The online survey was conducted from June 1, 2025, to June 30, 2025, with the target audience being young people aged 15-30. The questionnaire was distributed among students in grades 9-11, and anyone interested could also complete it via a link.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among students in grades 9–11 in schools and youth centers, spaces, and hubs. A total of nine FGDs were conducted, with 240 participants. Participants were recruited using the convenience method — through invitations based on the research team's connections in the community under study. All FGDs were audio recorded with the consent of all participants.

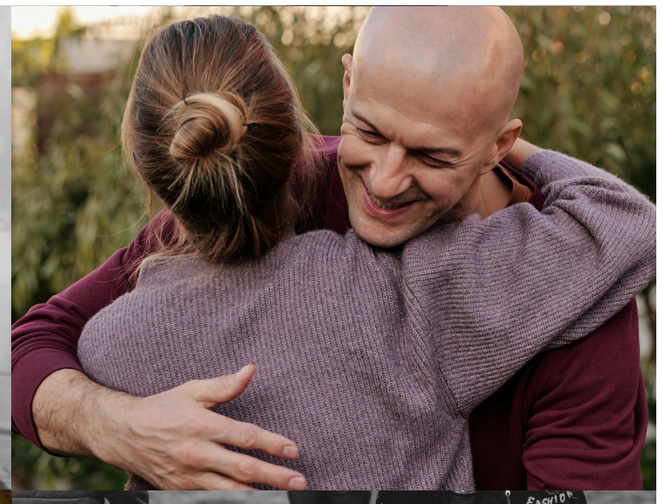
Among the most discussed topics were:

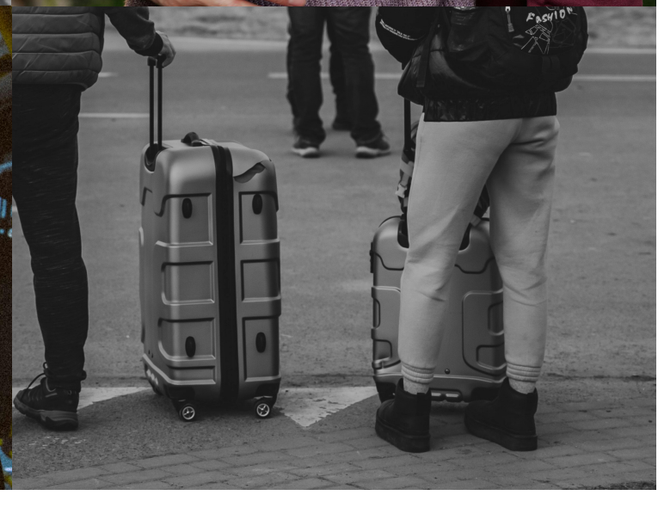
1. What factors influence young people's decisions to stay or leave the country?
2. What motivates and demotivates young people to become actively involved in community activities?
3. Opportunities for young people

§ CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

FAMILY AND CULTURAL TIES. Transcarpathia has deep cross-border ties: many families have relatives in neighboring EU countries. The presence of “footholds” abroad (parents or siblings who already work in Europe) greatly facilitates the resolution of everyday issues for young people who are planning to join them. Thus, 17–23% [3] of Transcarpathians surveyed have relatives who have moved abroad permanently, and 40% [3] have relatives who have worked abroad for a long time. These communities create “migration chains”: it is easier for young people to respond to the experiences of others and decide to settle where someone they know has already been.







ECONOMIC FACTORS. The weak local labor market pushes some young people to look for work outside the region or Ukraine. In 2021, Transcarpathian region ranked 16th [7] in the rating of socio-economic development of Ukraine's regions.

In terms of finance, based on five indicators (monthly and quarterly) that characterize local budget revenues and the financial performance of enterprises in the regions, Zakarpattia ranks 23rd [7]. This indicates low business activity, limited investment attractiveness, and insufficient development of small and medium-sized businesses.

Overall, low rankings are an alarming sign, indicating the need for more active regional economic policy, stimulation of entrepreneurship, improvement of conditions for investors, and a review of approaches to the use of budget resources.

The employed population aged 15–70 in Transcarpathian region as of 2021 was around 483,500 people [8] (52.8%), which is one of the lowest indicators in the country. Unemployment (11.1%) [8] and wages (12,100 UAH [8]) are average for Ukraine.

These indicators testify to the region's weak economic potential and lack of advantages over most regions of Ukraine. These factors encourage some young people to seek employment outside the region or Ukraine, which increases labor migration.

52,8%

The employment rate among the population aged 15 to 70 in Zakarpattia is one of the lowest in the country

[7] https://ndc-ipr.org/media/posts/presentations/Моніторинг_СЕР_10_01_2022.pdf

[8] https://zak.dcz.gov.ua/sites/zak/files/infofiles/1.1.sytc_rp_ta_diyalnst_zakosz_08_2022.pdf

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. Although there are several universities and colleges in Zakarpattia Oblast, the level of educational infrastructure lags behind that of its western neighbors. Access to prestigious universities in other countries opens up broader prospects for Zakarpattia youth: Poland [9], Hungary [10], the Czech Republic [11], and Slovakia [12] regularly accept students from Ukraine on preferential terms (without the External Independent Testing and National Multidisciplinary Test, etc.), with the main requirement being knowledge of the language (Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian). For applicants from Transcarpathia, this is a great opportunity to get a free education in Europe, since due to the ethnic characteristics of the region, many people use two languages in everyday life — Ukrainian and one of the above-mentioned foreign languages. Upon completion of their studies, universities offer better employment opportunities.



[9] https://mojaedukacja.com/bezkoshtovne-navchanna-v-polshi

[10] https://www.education.ua/news/2023/11/30/navchannia-za-kordonom-vstup-do-universytetiv-uhorshchyny/

[11] https://europortal.biz.ua/evropa/chehija/vstup-do-universytetu-chekhii.html/amp

[12] https://education.allinc.biz/ua/16-besplatno.html

§ CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

“The number of requests for Ukrainians to study abroad has increased by 30%

— Oleksandra Kovalskaya, CEO of Divis Shyreshe **[13]**

"If we compare the data for the first quarter of recent years, in 2023, 1,600 requests were received, in 2024, 2,500 requests, and in 2025, 3,100 requests. Thus, we see a 24% [13] increase in the number of requests to study abroad compared to 2024 and almost double compared to 2023" - explains Oleksandra Kovalskaya, CEO of Divis Shyreshe.

In 2024, there were approximately 250,000 secondary school graduates. According to estimates by Mykhailo Vynnytskyi, Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, in his interview with New Ukrainian Shool [14], 174,000 entered higher education, approximately 35,000 entered college, and the remaining 20,000 either left the country or entered the labor market.

[13] https://osvita.rayon.in.ua/news/809268-vidtik-abiturientiv-za-kordon-rist-kilkosti-zapitiv-na-navchannya-ukraintsiv-za-kordonom-dosyaglo-30

[14] https://nus.org.ua/articles/grantova-systema-ob-yednannya-universytetiv-vstup-do-aspirantury-j-inshi-zminy-u-vyshhij-osviti-rozmova-iz-zastupnykom-ministra/

QUALITY OF LIFE AND SOCIAL SERVICES. Young people assess quality of life through the prism of family and social ties: if there are no prospects in a village or town (due to low wages or a lack of dormitories and good schools), they are more inclined to leave. In addition, Europe promotes youth culture: leisure activities and travel, which attract active young people. Social networks and mobile internet exacerbate the feeling of "backwardness": young people in Transcarpathia see their peers in the Czech Republic or Slovakia, where it is easier to find work and higher incomes and standards of living, which increases their desire to leave.



Another problem in the region is the absence in most communities after the decentralization reform of a developed city as the center of the territorial community, which causes a certain shortage of resources and gaps in socio-economic development, in particular - low level of teaching in schools [15] in mountainous or rural areas and a lack of any information about opportunities for mobility, employment, and overall development for young people, which causes a huge outflow of young "talent" from the region.

For example, in 2024, Transcarpathian region ranked 23rd out of 24 [16] in the results of the national multi-subject test.

[15] https://osvita.ua/school/rating/93085/

[16] https://osvita.ua/school/rating/93112/

§ CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

An analysis of youth participation in public life in the Transcarpathian region generally reflects nationwide trends with certain regional characteristics. For example, by the end of 2023, more than 400 youth councils had been established in Ukraine (at least 120 of them in 2023). Thus, Transcarpathia, where 14 councils have been established, 11 of which [17] are active, is at approximately the level of proportional participation, given the small population of the region.

According to national research on "The Impact of War on Youth in Ukraine" [18] only 2% of young people are members of civil society organizations in 2022, 43% of young people are only aware that such organizations exist in Ukraine, while more than a third (37%) are unaware of them. Youth participation in civil society institutions over the past 12 months has also been quite low: the majority of respondents (70%) did not participate in any of them.

Over the past decade, Transcarpathia has seen a gradual increase in civic engagement. Following the decentralization reform (2015), communities received their own budgets and resources to support civic initiatives. In particular, in 2023, the regional military administration reported on more than 20 new youth centers and spaces [19] in various communities in Transcarpathia and a "large number" of trainings, forums, and summer schools for young people. Initiatives often originate at the local level, ranging from self-organized youth councils in united territorial community to community movements based in schools and universities.

[17] https://u-lead.org.ua/news/372#:~:text=У%20Закарпатській%20області%20створено%2014,до%20всіх%20процесів%20суспільного%20життя

[18] https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-04/Вплив_війни_на_молодь_в_Україні_дослідження.pdf

[19] https://carpathia.gov.ua/news/v-uzhhorodi-vidbuvsia-kruhlyi-stil-na-temu-rehionalna-prohrama-molod-zakarpattia-na-2021-2025-roky-stan-ta-perspektyvy

§ CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

Despite the significant role of human capital in the context of Ukraine's reconstruction, the development of civil society, especially youth policy, in the Zakarpattia region still does not receive sufficient attention and support from both regional and local authorities. This is evidenced, in particular, by the absence of references to youth and youth initiatives on the agenda of recent meetings on the revision of the region's development strategy until 2027 [1]. A 2022 study on the state of youth policy in the Transcarpathia region, developed by USAID Goverla [20], notes that "communities lack targeted programs aimed at youth development. Usually, these issues are included in the sphere of education and sports, respectively, with communities focusing on supporting gifted youth and sporting events involving young people." This creates considerable room for advocacy for youth civil society organizations, which illustrates the youth civil sector's lack of awareness of advocacy and participation tools and, most importantly, their lack of knowledge about the opportunities they are deprived of due to the exclusion of youth from the current agenda.

The Zakarpattia Region Development Strategy 2027 makes no reference to youth or youth-related initiatives.

[20] https://decentralization.ua/uploads/attachment/document/1229/Стан_молодіжної_політики_у_Закарпатській_області.pdf

[21] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36544560/

§ CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

Theoretically, it can be assumed that active civic participation strengthens young people's "attachment" to their community or country. In psychology, the concept of "rootedness" [21] has become widespread as a factor that reduces the intention to emigrate: a strong sense of belonging to one's place of residence and a broad social network of opponents make leaving less attractive.

In particular, studies show that strong social ties and a sense of place attachment are negatively correlated with intentions to migrate, and the presence of a broad social network reinforces these ties. The general trend of these studies was as follows: active involvement of young people in community projects, volunteering, and local self-government is associated with a decrease in emigration intentions.

For example, the study "Reasons to Stay: A Review of Community-Led Efforts to Generate Rootedness [22]" conducted among young people in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, showed that local community initiatives that create platforms for youth education, employment, and civic participation increase their confidence in the future of their community and reduce their intention to leave. If young people believe they can influence events at home (for example, by participating in community decision-making), they feel less need to seek change through emigration.

A strong attachment to the local community and extensive social ties reduce the appeal of emigration.

[22] https://cmsny.org/publications/reasons-to-stay-a-review-of-community-led-efforts-to-generate-rootedness/

The study "**Defining, Measuring, and Increasing "Rootedness" in the High Migration Context of Honduras [23]**" found a weak correlation between income and the desire to stay. Accordingly, economic factors (namely income) are not decisive for the factor of "rootedness" because even with increased income, the sense of attachment and intention to stay does not always increase independently. Psycho-emotional factors, such as programs that integrate young people into decision-making processes, programs that encourage open dialogue and youth engagement, are decisive factors in shaping "rootedness". According to the study, respondents who feel accepted in their community believe that members of their community will help them in case of difficulties, feel that their community is their real home, and agree that there is a good future for them and their families in Honduras, have lower migration intentions than those who do not feel this way. The biggest difference is observed for the last two variables: 37.8% **[23]** of those who consider their community to be their real home have migration intentions, while among those who do not feel this way, the figure is 49.4% **[23]**. Similarly, 32.1% **[23]** of those who agree that there is a good future in Honduras have migration intentions, compared to 46.5% **[23]** of those who disagree.

You can find case studies on how countries engage young people in public life in the appendices.

Ultimately, international experience confirms the thesis that the implementation of policies and measures that motivate young people to be active and give them real leverage in their communities encourages young people to see value in creating a future at home rather than abroad.



[23] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23315024241259768

§ METHODOLOGY

Another intermediate stage was the training of employees of youth centers, spaces, and hubs that participated in the study. The aim of the training was to explore existing models of communication and youth engagement with a view to further improving them, taking into account the specificities of individual communities.

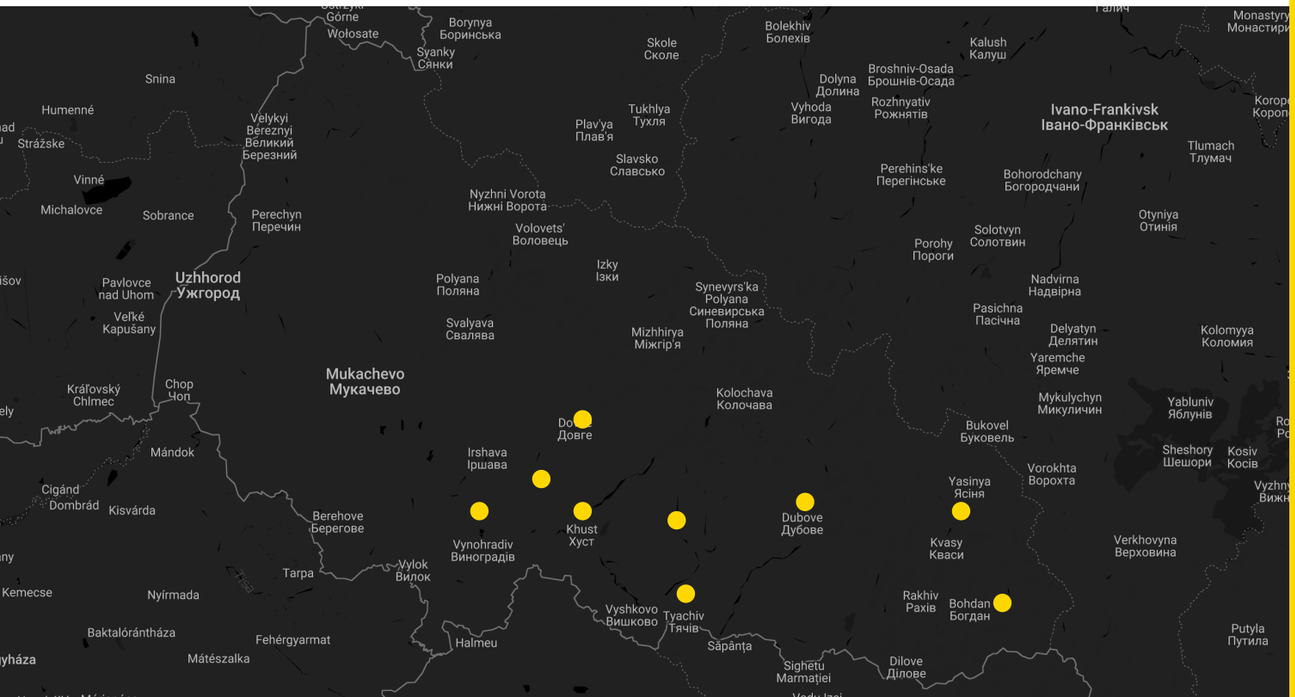
The final stage was a secondary analysis of secondary research data on youth engagement in public life and their intentions to leave the country. These studies showed a positive correlation between increased youth engagement and decreased migration sentiments. Country cases and their practices regarding youth participation in community life were also analyzed. This made it possible to formulate recommendations and methodologies suitable for Ukrainian realities, in particular for the Transcarpathian region.



ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

In order to study the needs, motivations, and attitudes of young people in the Transcarpathian region toward civic engagement, self-realization, and opportunities in the region, an online survey was conducted from June 1 to June 30, 2025. The target audience of the survey was young people aged 15–30 living in nine territorial communities (TC) of Transcarpathian:

- Tiachivska TC
- Khustska TC
- Bogdanska TC
- Zarichanska TC
- Bilkivska TC
- Dovzhanska TC
- Bushtynska TC
- Iasinianska TC
- Dubivska TC



THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY WAS TO:

1. Determine the level of awareness and degree of participation of young people in youth spaces, volunteer and community events.
2. Explore motivational factors and barriers that influence youth involvement in local initiatives.
3. Identify emigration sentiments, the desire to move abroad, and factors that may encourage young people to stay in Ukraine.
4. Assess awareness and experience of participation in grant and exchange programs, as well as the main channels for obtaining information about such opportunities.
5. Determine young people's perception of their own role in the country's reconstruction, their level of belief in their own influence, and the skills they expect to need for successful self-realization.

SURVEY RESULTS

2,040 participants took part in the online survey, of whom 64% were women and 36% were men (Fig. 1). The largest age group of respondents was 14-18 years old (85%) (Fig. 3), mainly schoolchildren (82%) (Fig. 3).

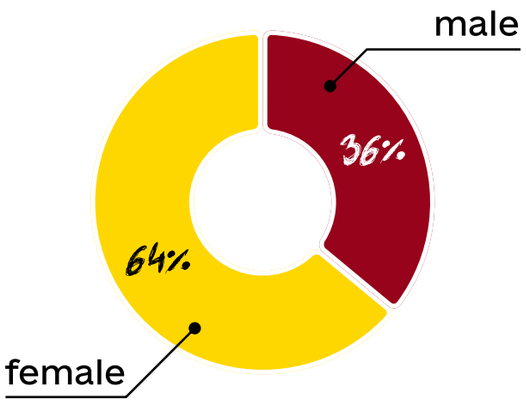


Fig. 1
Gender of respondents

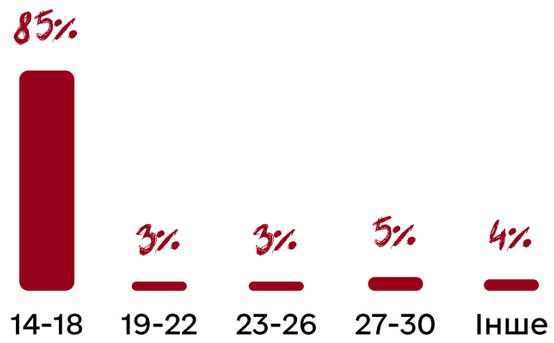


Fig. 2
Age of respondents

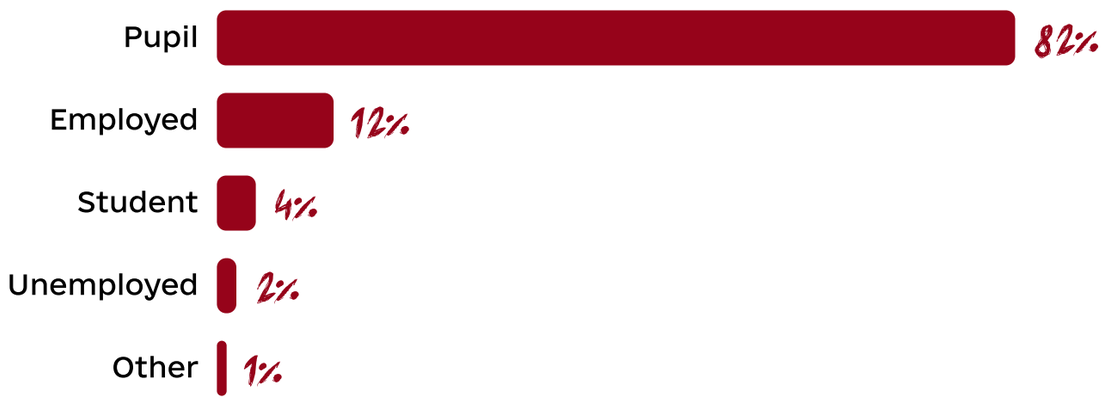


Fig. 3
Status of respondents

Level of awareness and degree of participation of young people in youth spaces, volunteer and community events

82% of young people are aware of the existence of youth spaces and organizations in their communities, while 18% have never heard of such initiatives. Among those who are aware, 34% visit youth spaces, while the remaining 48% are aware but have not visited them (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4
Have you heard about youth spaces or organizations in your city/community?

§ ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

The answer to this question allowed for multiple responses. The most popular responses from respondents about why they don't attend events organized by youth centers, spaces and hubs were: **no time - found in 33% of responses, not interesting - 24%, programs or events don't match my interests - 17%** (Fig. 5).

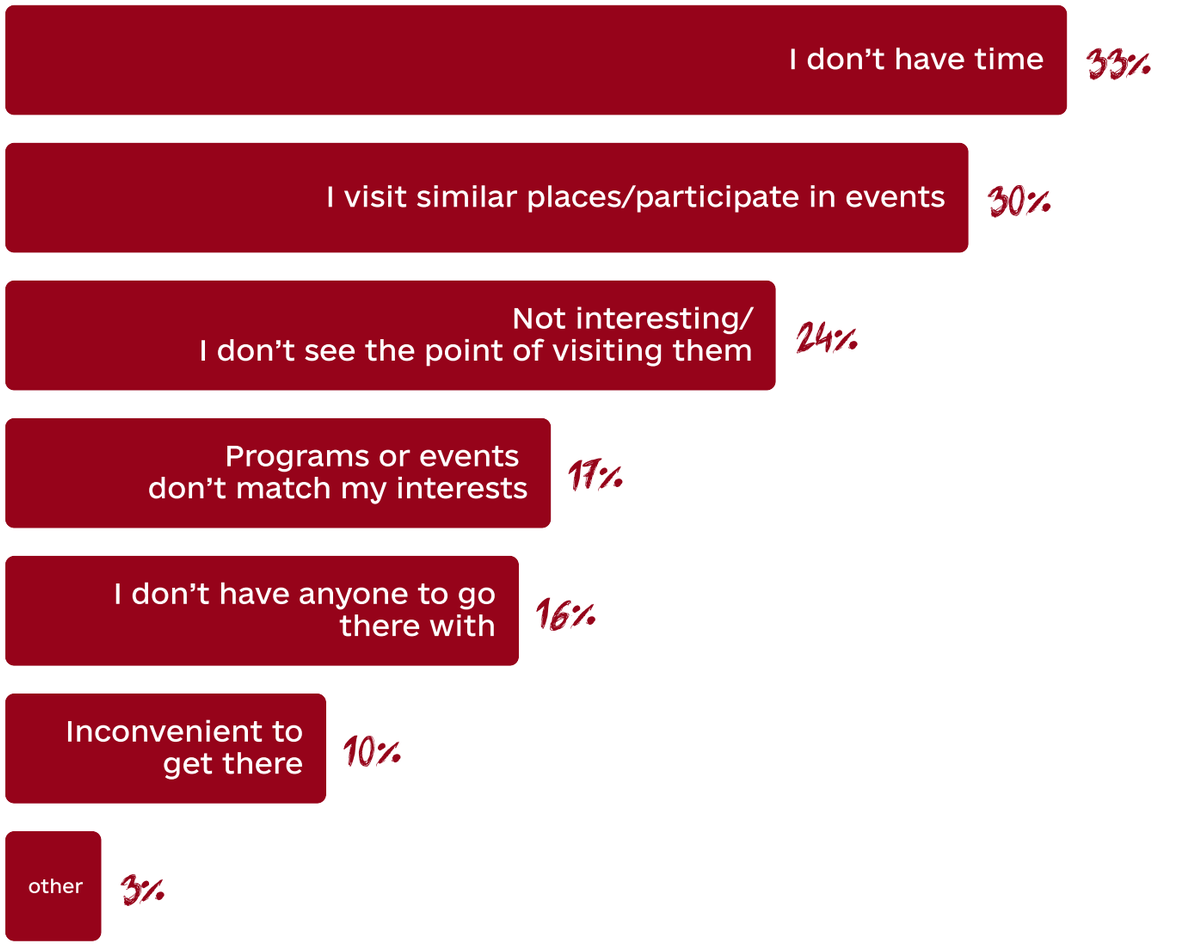


Fig. 5
Why youth don't visit youth centers



Youth engagement in civic activity

49% of respondents did not participate in any events during the past year. Among those who participate, the most popular forms of engagement are volunteering, participation and organization of events (trainings, conferences, forums, lectures, etc.), and participation in youth councils (Fig. 6). Among those who participate in events, 61% believe that the skills and knowledge gained there will help them in their future careers.

When youth were asked about skills they would like to acquire, one-third skipped this question, another third gave unclear answers or wrote "don't know." Among those who responded, the most popular answers were soft skills (communication, leadership skills, public speaking, etc.), foreign language learning, financial literacy/"earning money," and the IT sphere.



§ ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

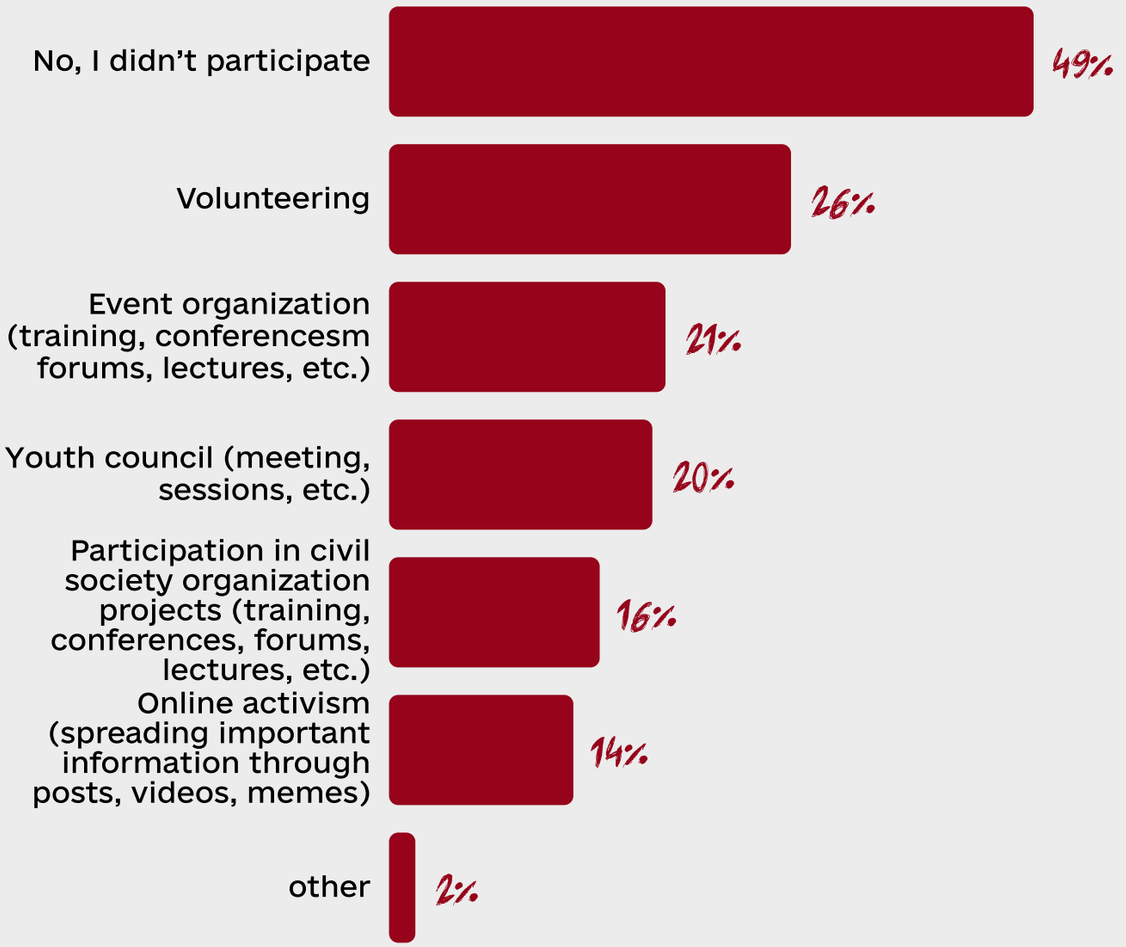


Fig. 6
Events respondents most frequently participate in

Youth engagement in civic activity

To the question "how, in your opinion, can youth be encouraged to participate more actively in public life?" multiple answers could be selected. The most popular options were: clear understanding of how this affects career and development, more information about opportunities and events, and more support from local authorities/schools/universities (Fig. 7).

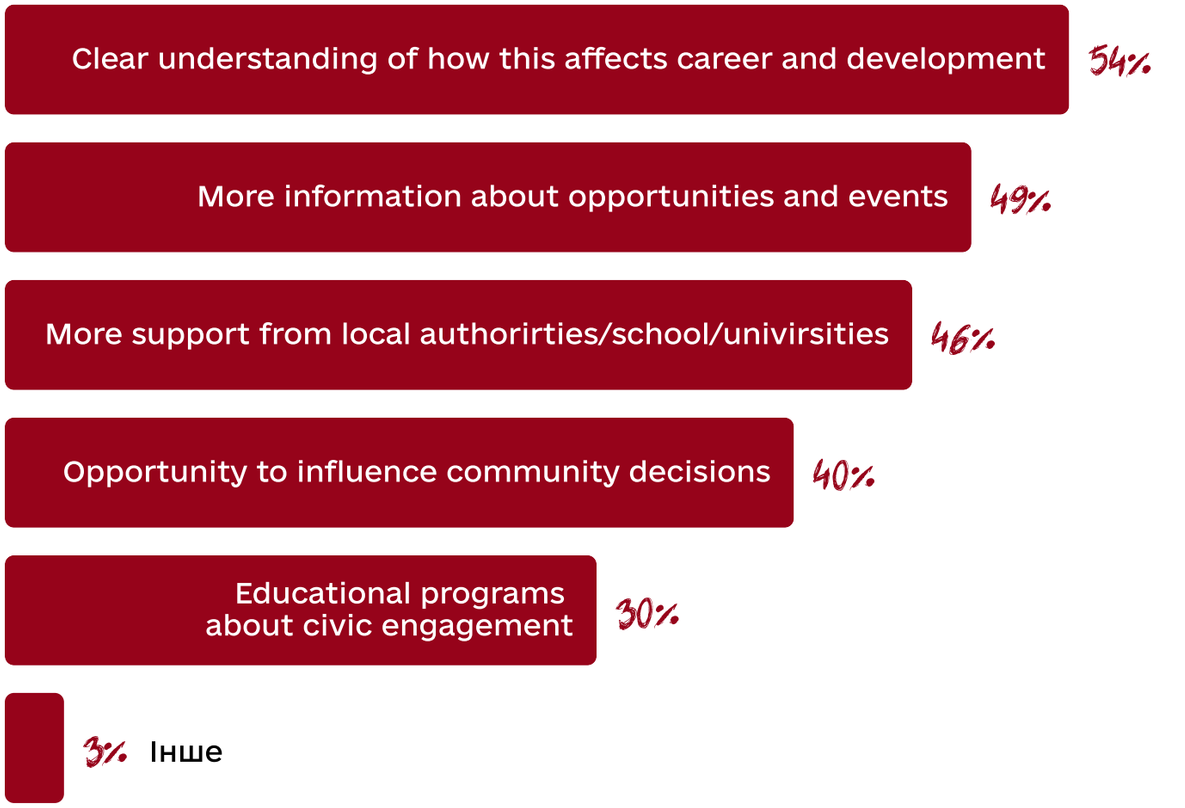


Fig. 7
How to encourage youth to participate in public life

§ ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

In the open question "what, in your opinion, are the main barriers to youth participation in public life in your city/ community?" respondents believe the most frequent barriers are lack of motivation or interest, disbelief that my participation will change anything, lack of free time (studies, work, etc.) (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8
Main barriers to participation in public life

§ ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

Migration Intentions

Among respondents, 70% have considered leaving the country and 30% have not. Comparing intentions to leave among those who visit youth centers, spaces and hubs versus those who don't: among visitors, 34% have considered leaving and 66% have not, while among non-visitors - 72% and 28% respectively (Fig. 9).

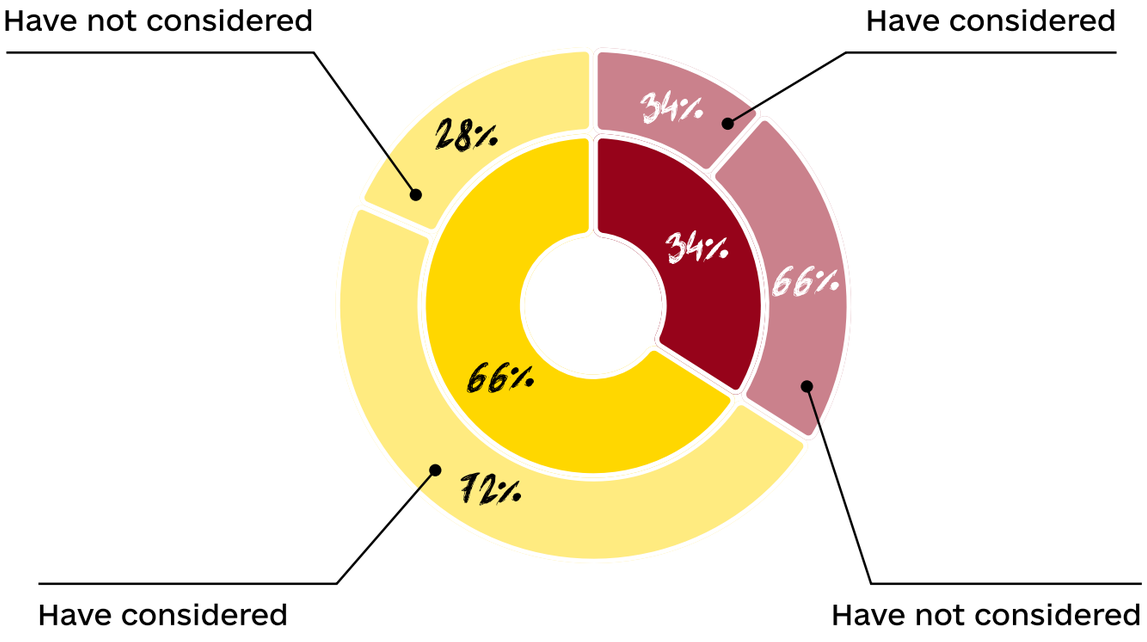


Fig. 9
Comparison of migration intentions between those who visit youth spaces, centers and those who don't

The most popular reasons for leaving that respondents cite are higher standard of living, better opportunities for self-realization, and seeking better employment (Fig. 10).

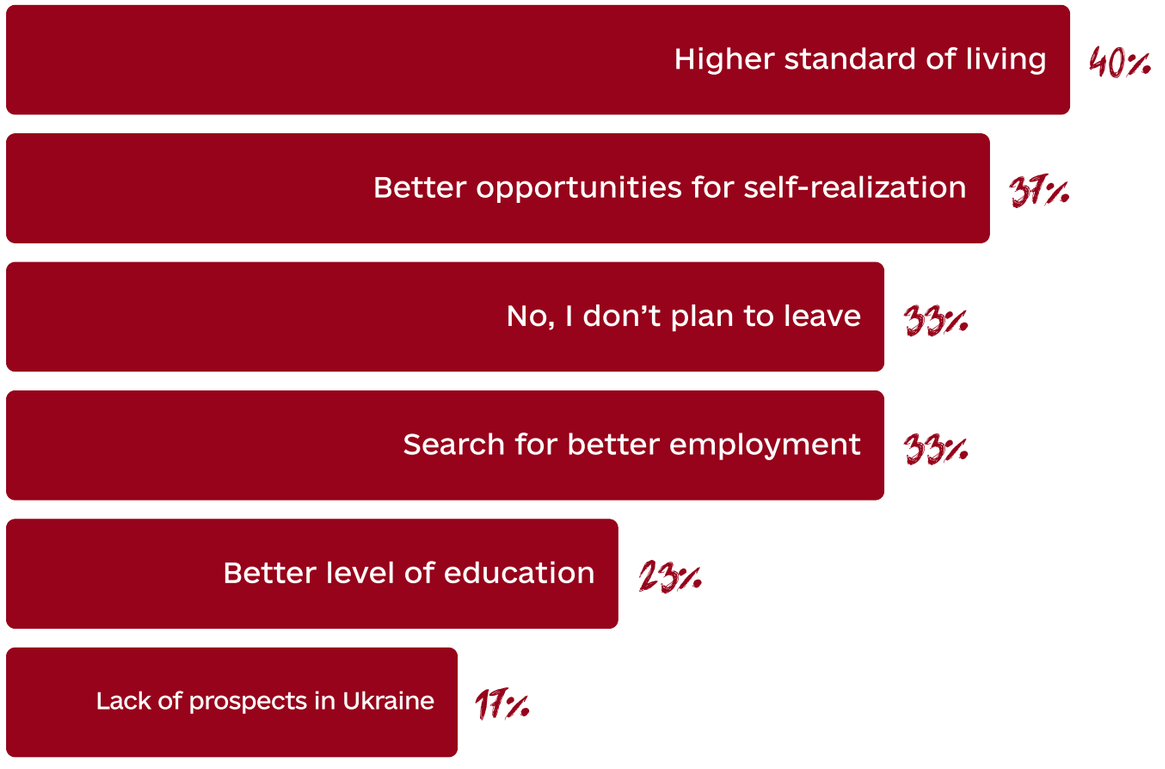
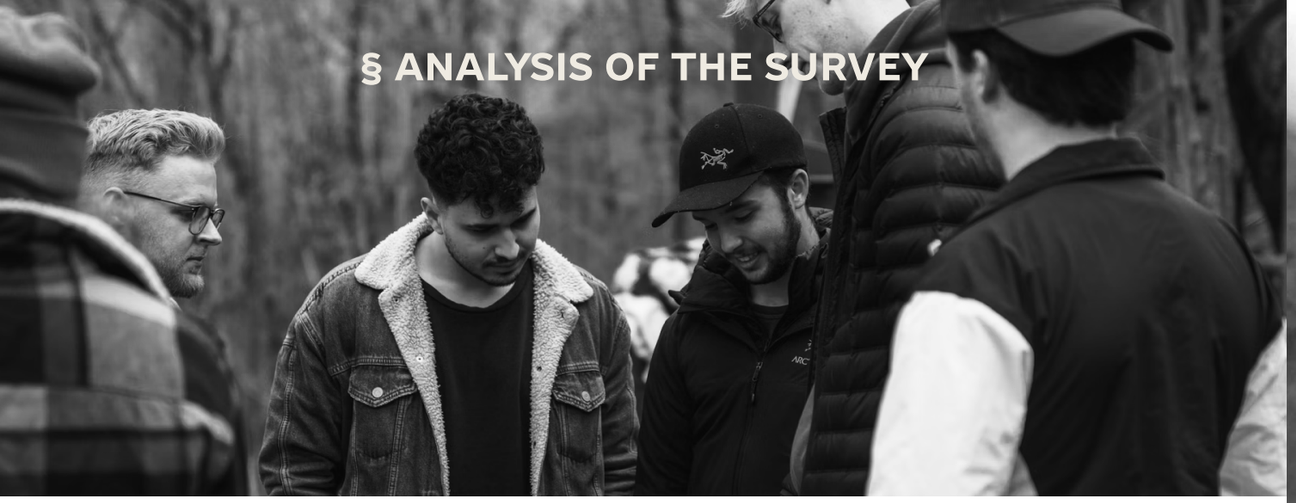


Fig. 10
Reasons for leaving the country



§ ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

When asked what could change your mind about leaving the country, respondents most frequently answered: end of war, family and friends, competitive salary, opportunities for self-realization. 76% (Fig. 11) answered that more opportunities for self-realization in Ukraine, including through civic activity, could influence their intentions to emigrate.



Fig. 11
Impact of self-realization opportunities on migration intentions



Awareness of opportunities and experience participating in grant and exchange programs

Only 18% of respondents believe there are sufficient opportunities for youth in Ukraine, 58% answered "would like more," and 23% believe there are insufficient opportunities in Ukraine (Fig. 12). **Among those who answered "would like more" and "insufficient opportunities," 79% had not heard about the Ukrainian Youth Fund, Erasmus+, education grants and other youth programs, and 16% had participated/tried to participate in such programs** (Fig. 14).

10% of respondents don't know where to look for youth opportunities. The most popular means of searching for opportunities is Instagram - 59%, Telegram, Facebook, other (friends, TikTok, etc.) (Fig. 13).

Do you believe there are sufficient opportunities for youth in Ukraine

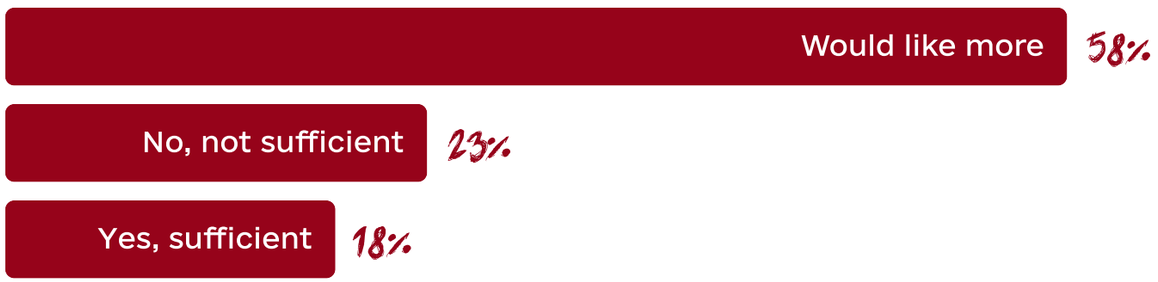


Fig. 12
Are there sufficient opportunities for youth in Ukraine?

§ ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

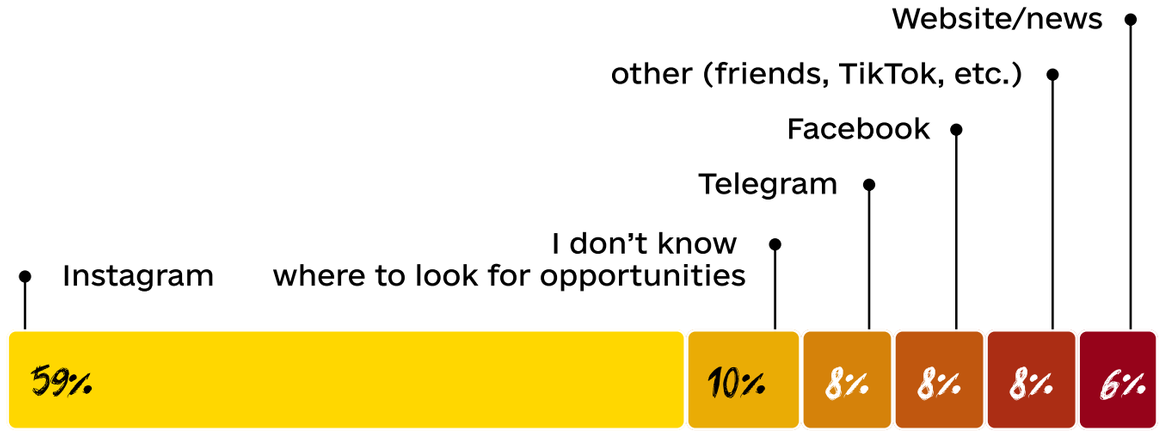


Fig. 13
Where do you most often learn about opportunities?

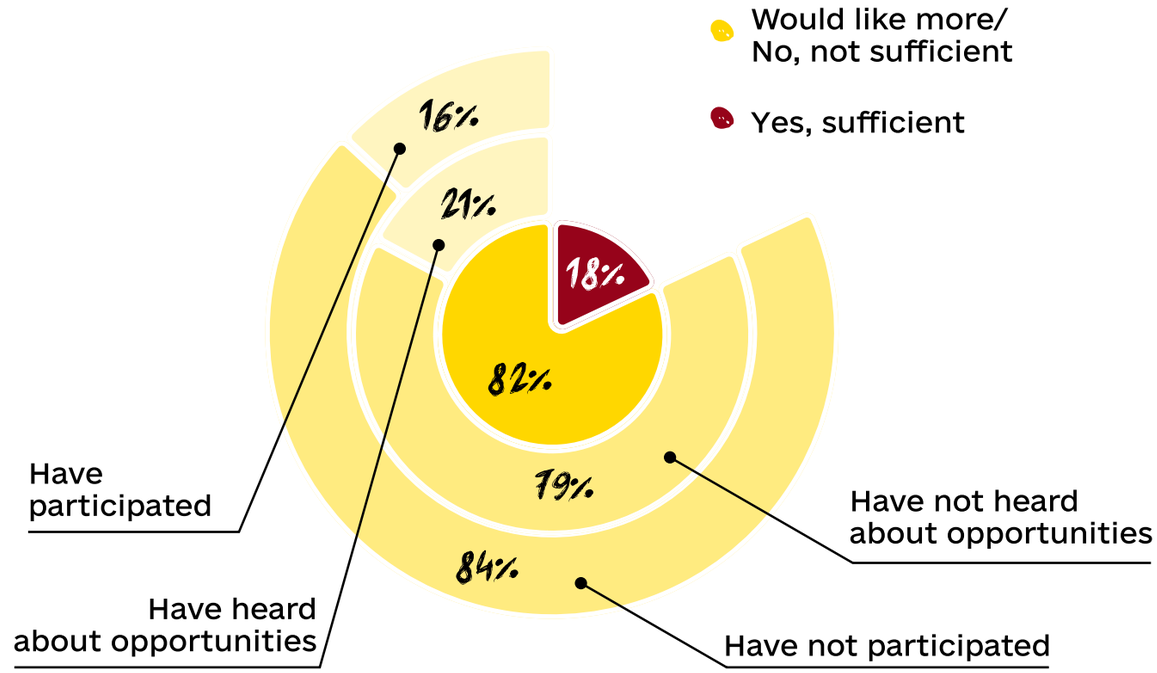


Fig. 14
Awareness of Ukrainian Youth Fund, Erasmus+, education grants and other youth programs among those who believe there are insufficient opportunities in Ukraine

Youth perception of their role in country reconstruction, level of belief in their own influence

51% believe youth should play a key role in country reconstruction (Fig. 15), and only 26% feel they can influence Ukraine's future (Fig. 16).

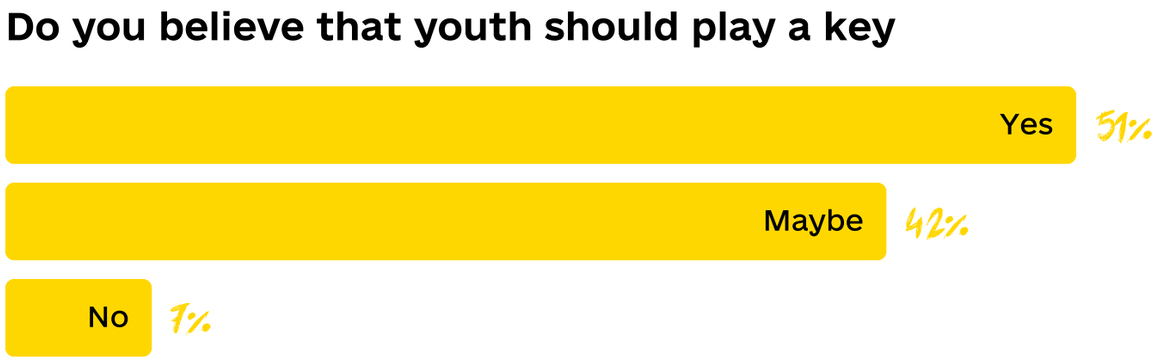


Fig. 15
Role of youth in country reconstruction

§ ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

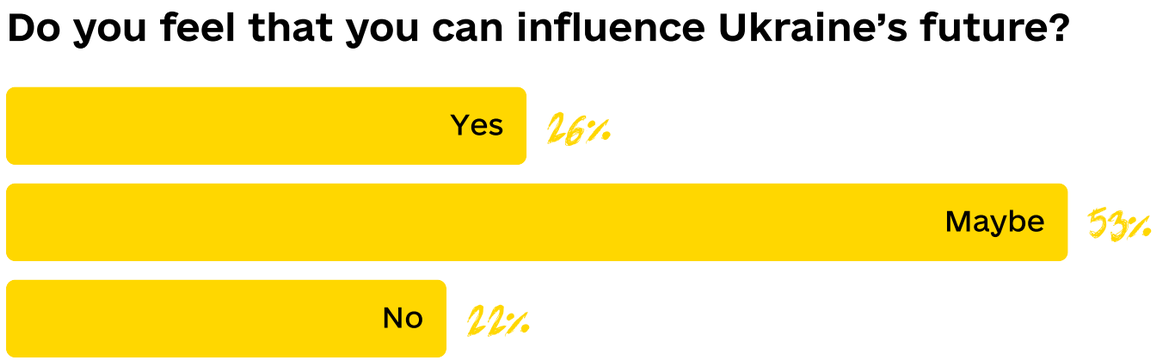


Fig. 16
Sense of personal influence on Ukraine’s future

The survey results create a comprehensive portrait of Zakarpattia Oblast youth as a socially sensitive, ambitious, yet simultaneously confused group searching for development opportunities. The majority of respondents are schoolchildren aged 14-18, indicating a focus on a generation that is only forming its civic orientations.

Youth recognize their important role in country reconstruction, but often don't believe in the real impact of their own actions. This gap between expectations and self-assessment is an important sign of the times: the generation has potential for action but needs support, recognition, and examples of effective influence.

Overall, the survey demonstrates that Zakarpattia youth are not indifferent, but rather disoriented. They seek space where they are heard, where they can acquire relevant skills and see real results from their efforts. In these trends lie not only challenges but also opportunities for change.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION RESULTS

Migration intentions. Why youth want to emigrate

What motivates and demotivates youth to engage in active civic participation

Opportunities for youth

These topics will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Migration intentions. Why youth want to emigrate

Among youth who participated in focus group discussions, an ambivalent attitude toward emigration is observed.

One of the determining factors in forming migration moods among youth has been the general atmosphere of anxiety caused by the war. Focus group participants indicated that direct observation of events and realities accompanying wartime affects the desire to leave the country. This particularly concerns boys who feel psychological and social pressure related to military service risks, future instability, and limited opportunities for safe development.

"Currently, youth's thinking is influenced by what we see around us - the realities of war. And honestly, many young people, especially boys, don't want to be here"

(10th grade student)

§ MIGRATION INTENTIONS

Many consider the possibility of studying abroad, particularly due to the belief that education quality there is higher. At the same time, a significant portion of respondents don't associate these plans with permanent relocation but rather see foreign education as temporary experience, after which they intend to return.

"Actually, I haven't thought about leaving permanently. For a short period for education yes, because I believe education there is of higher quality. But then I plan to return"

(youth space visitor)

§ MIGRATION INTENTIONS

Focus group participants emphasized two interconnected factors when discussing migration moods. First, many see significantly broader career advancement opportunities abroad - from access to specialized professions and modern internships to participation in international projects. Second, respondents feel uncertainty about their future in Ukraine: economic instability, socio-political challenges, and limited prospects strengthen the desire to consider studying or working abroad as a real alternative.

"Right now it's somehow difficult to envision my future in Ukraine. I plan to emigrate, but if the war ends, I would of course want to return"

(10th grade student)

"...low salary levels that are hard to live on here. Abroad they pay appropriate salaries, there's opportunity to work and earn so you can save, but here you need to collect penny by penny"

(youth center visitor)

§ MIGRATION INTENTIONS

On the other hand, FGD participants believe that the decision to relocate is also influenced by various psychological and material barriers. Stress from relocation, lack of local support (without relatives or acquaintances in the new environment), the adaptation process, and different language make this step a difficult challenge, even for those planning to emigrate.

At the same time, many participants emphasized that the Ukrainian environment, despite widespread narratives from childhood that "it's bad here," doesn't lag behind neighboring countries in terms of living standards or educational opportunities.

"...I want to leave because of the war, but it's a big stress load for me to relocate"

(youth center visitor)

§ MIGRATION INTENTIONS

"From childhood we were told that it's bad here, difficult to study, no work, and you need to emigrate abroad because conditions are better there, although if you compare the countries that our region borders, they don't differ much in living standards from Ukraine. But over time you realize that in Ukraine you can also get good education and find decent working conditions"

(youth center worker)

"I don't want to emigrate, but I've thought about living in another country, but everything there is so different - different mentality. You still need to settle in there, you need a lot of money, make new acquaintances. If you have relatives there, that's great. I would go abroad somewhere to rest"

(10th grade student)

§ MIGRATION INTENTIONS

« ...the low level of salaries here makes it hard to make ends meet. Abroad, you get paid fairly, there are opportunities to work and earn enough to save something. But here, you have to count every penny.»

(visitor of a youth center)

Focus groups showed that war has become a powerful catalyst for migration moods: security uncertainty and fear of conscription push many young people to seek a more stable environment abroad. At the same time, the desire for quality education and modern professional opportunities encourages considering emigration primarily as a temporary step - for studying or internships.

Simultaneously, discussions reflect awareness that opportunities for self-realization exist in Ukraine: obtaining higher education, developing soft skills, and building careers in one's home community where it's easier to form social connections.

Therefore, the ambivalence in responses is not a symptom of confusion but an indicator of strategic combination of external and internal priorities. This means that youth support programs must consider both the desire for short-term foreign projects and the need to develop local conditions - from ensuring security to strengthening civic and professional infrastructure.



What motivates and demotivates youth to engage in active civic participation



The results of focus group discussions show that young people's motivation to engage in civic activities is shaped at the intersection of personal interests, a clear understanding of the processes, and expected outcomes. Young people want to get involved in initiatives — but only if they clearly understand what is expected of them, what skills or experience they will gain, and that their participation truly matters.

One of the central barriers proved to be the complexity and lack of transparency in communication: announcements and event notices often contain words that are unclear to the general public, especially youth without experience participating in similar activities. This creates internal resistance - fear of appearing incompetent, not fitting into the environment, or being put in a situation where "they'll ask something and I don't know." Young participants emphasized that it's important for them to see examples of people they trust and hear from them in simple words: what exactly is happening, what needs to be done, and why it's not scary.

"For youth to participate, you need to show by personal example that there's nothing scary here. I think when they [youth] read announcements and see many new words they don't understand, they lose the desire to attend these events because they might ask something there that I don't know. Today's youth need simplicity."

(youth center worker)

At the same time, youth clearly articulate the need to understand what they will receive as a result: practical skills, experience, contacts, employment advantages. Many note that participation is only possible when you see personal benefit - not necessarily material, but concrete.

"If I attend some event, I would like to know what this can give me in the future, what I can get there, what skills"

(youth space visitor)

§ WHAT MOTIVATES AND DEMOTIVATES YOUTH

Interest can also be sparked by simple social motivation - when a friend tells you that at an event it's "fun, interesting, there's coffee and snacks," and this atmosphere of community creates trust. Personal stories, live examples, and demonstration of "how it really is" are much more effective than formal invitations.

"To attract more of my friends, I like to tell them in detail what we do here [in the space], how cool, fun, and useful it is here. There's cappuccino and snacks"

(youth space visitor)

At the same time, respondents mentioned material incentives, such as gym membership discounts for active volunteers. Such examples work, especially in the initial stages of engagement. However, they are not the main motivation - if there's no real participation and experience value behind it, interest fades.

Among key demotivational factors, participants named invisibility of results. Youth note that often their initiatives remain without support from authorities or are not implemented. In such cases, even high initial motivation quickly changes to feelings of powerlessness and despair.



Another factor reducing participation was academic pressure. High school students, particularly graduating classes, emphasized that studies take up practically all their time, and their environment - teachers, parents - put exam preparation first. Due to this, civic activity is perceived as something optional that can be postponed "for later."

"Many school-age youth face the fact that they worry about finishing school. And they [children] think about how to pass the NMT and other exams because they're told their future depends on it, not about attending some event, etc."

(10th grade student)

§ WHAT MOTIVATES AND DEMOTIVATES YOUTH

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

Focus group discussions showed that youth in communities don't deny the existence of opportunities for development, learning, or active participation. However, the key problem lies not in their absence but in the lack of access to information about them. Therefore, the issue is not only creating new programs but also effectively communicating existing ones.



"Often youth don't understand what's being asked of them, what's being offered, and don't want to participate. And it happens that due to not knowing what these opportunities can provide, youth simply ignore them"

(youth space worker)

Young people spoke about a closed circle of awareness: usually those already involved in the relevant environment learn about opportunities - those who visit youth spaces, have connections in universities, or acquaintances who are themselves active. Due to this, often the same people use educational programs, do internships, or participate in projects. The rest of the youth, who don't have "entry points," remain on the sidelines - not because they don't want to, but because they don't know what and where to look for. It's especially difficult to find something relevant to one's interests if there's no systematic support or at least examples from the environment.



"Youth are not very aware and informed about their opportunities. In general, there are many, but most don't know where to look for them, especially to find something matching their interests"

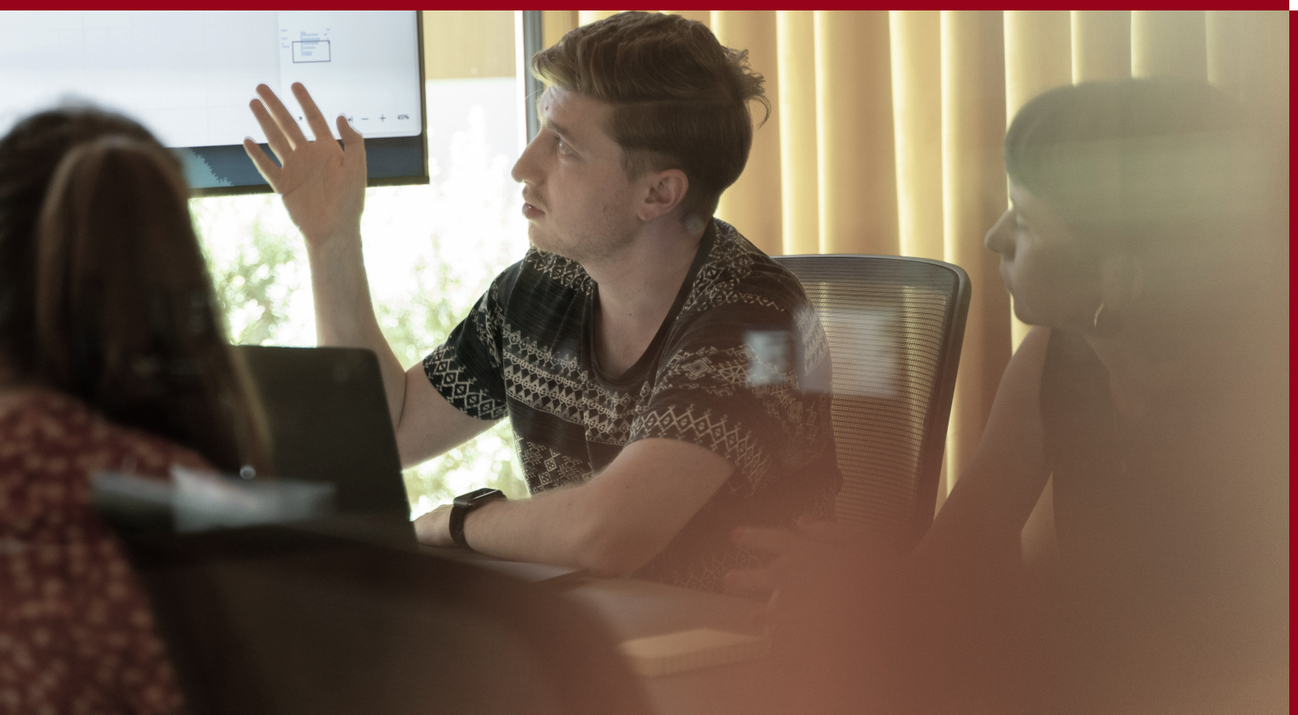
(11th grade student)



"Those who are well-informed are those who revolve in this environment, someone heard somewhere at university or from acquaintances, and often the same people use existing offers.

It seems to me that we need to work on communication, because maybe not all teachers know about these opportunities either, especially in rural areas. Opportunities exist but they don't reach everyone"

(youth center worker)



§ OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

There were also statements that many opportunities are perceived as something "distant." For example, international exchange programs like Erasmus+ are something non-obvious for Ukrainian schoolchildren, while in EU countries they have become a routine part of school and extracurricular life. Youth noted that it's important to involve them in such topics from an early age, forming awareness at the school stage - through regular presentations, meetings with program alumni, information sessions from local organizations or businesses.

"It would be great if people came to schools to talk about various opportunities, to instill involvement from a young age. Because for us, some opportunities like Erasmus are 'wow.' But in Europe, it seems to me, it's more popular, they offer it in schools. For them it's not something 'wow' - they just use it"

(youth center visitor)

§ OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

During discussions, participants concluded that communication should be two-way: on one hand - local authorities should more actively ask youth what they need; on the other hand - youth themselves must learn to clearly formulate their requests and demonstrate them. This means that to strengthen access to opportunities, it's important not only to inform but also create feedback mechanisms - surveys, meetings, open participatory budgets, cooperation with youth advisory councils.

"In our community we lack a park. Youth need a park where they can release their energy, 'hang out,' because in the park we currently have, you can't even walk dogs or sit on the grass"

(youth center worker)

"It's necessary that, like you came and asked youth what they need. Local authorities should also be interested in youth needs, allocate funds, involve businesses
...
On the other hand, we [youth] also need to think about how to show what we need"

(youth center worker)

Besides educational or volunteer opportunities, respondents drew attention to the lack of physical spaces in the community. Specifically, there were complaints about the lack of quality infrastructure for recreation - parks, open spaces where youth could freely spend time. Young people want to feel like part of a living urban space. The absence of such accessibility elements is perceived as evidence that youth in the community are not a priority audience for planning.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The study revealed deep social, economic, and cultural factors that form high migration moods among Zakarpattia Oblast youth. The region's historical openness to the outside world, low economic dynamics, feelings of instability during wartime, and limited local opportunities for self-realization contribute to youth's desire to seek a better life outside Ukraine. At the same time, a large portion of respondents don't exclude the possibility of return - youth don't want to escape but to find the perspective they lack at home.

Simultaneously, the study shows that civic activity and sense of community belonging have the potential to reduce emigration intentions. Youth involved in volunteering, local initiatives, and youth spaces demonstrate higher levels of belief in their own influence and greater desire to stay. The problem often lies not in the absence of opportunities but in weak access to information about them, unclear communication, and lack of support at the local level. Therefore, it's important to create an environment that supports youth not only with resources but also with trust, recognition, and dialogue.

1 FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- Develop and implement targeted youth policy that recognizes youth as a strategic community resource.
- Ensure continuous support for youth infrastructure (centers, hubs, programs), especially in rural communities.
- Create mechanisms for involving youth in local decision-making (consultations, participatory budgets, youth councils).
- Invest in local opportunities for youth education, internships, and employment.
- Form partnerships with business and civil society organizations to create youth self-realization programs.

§ RECOMMENDATIONS

2 FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (ESPECIALLY SCHOOLS)

- Integrate civic education and active participation skills into the educational process.
- Conduct information sessions about educational, volunteer, and exchange programs for students.
- Encourage students to participate in project activities, school initiatives, and social campaigns.
- Establish cooperation with students, graduates, activists – as role models.
- Create supportive environments in schools where youth aren't afraid to ask questions, try, make mistakes, and grow.



3 FOR YOUTH SPACES AND HUBS

- Pay attention to clear, friendly communication – speak simply, show by example, tell stories.
- Create an atmosphere of support and trust where youth aren't afraid to be newcomers.
- Work not only with active youth but seek new audiences – especially vulnerable or uninvolved.
- Implement practical activities that develop skills and give real results (portfolio, contacts, experience).
- Become a bridge between youth, authorities, and opportunities - help find, apply, implement projects.

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APPENDICES

Country case studies on youth engagement

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has a long tradition of engaging youth in volunteering and community projects. Specifically, the government initiated the "National Citizen Service" (NCS) program, which during summer unites thousands of 16-17-year-olds in volunteer camps and training sessions. According to government research by Alma Economics (2021), approximately 53% [24] of young Britons aged 10-20 participated in social actions or volunteer projects in 2019. For the British context, these indicators suggest that approximately half of youth are engaged in community initiatives - this constitutes a significant foundation for strengthening local connections.

Although there are few direct studies of the impact of civic participation on reducing emigration intentions specifically in British research (they currently pay greater attention to issues of social capital and inequality of access), general conclusions indicate that active youth motivated to act for their city or community are less likely to consider emigration as the only option for self-realization. Moreover, Britain no longer experiences excessive "brain drain" but rather receives immigrants, so stimulating participation here is more directed toward supporting social cohesion and trust.

[24] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/ 60f1a21f8fa8f50c6ef85052/ DCMS_youth_social_action_REA_-_Alma_Economics_final_report__accessible_.pdf

Germany

Germany operates a developed youth policy system aimed at active youth participation in public life. In 2019, the federal government adopted the "Youth Strategy [25]" (Jugendstrategie), designed to actively involve young people in all decisions affecting their lives. Specifically, government departments and local authorities fund youth councils, youth parliaments, and internship programs in civil society organizations. In 2023, in the National Action Plan "New Opportunities for Children in Germany," the government established new directions for youth policy development.

According to the OECD, countries like Germany have included the goal of expanding youth volunteering in their national strategies. Considering this, young Germans feel they can influence the outcomes of social development in their own country.

[25] https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/germany/43-strategy-for-the-social-inclusion-of-youngpeople#:~:text=The%20federal%20government%E2%80%99s%20cross,adults%20aged%2012%20to%2027

Ireland

Ireland long held the status of a country with high youth emigration, which caused public concern. According to the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), over 70% [26] of young people in 2022 considered the possibility of leaving for work or study, and 50% [26] of 18-24-year-olds stated they were generally ready to emigrate. This is precisely why the Irish government and civil society organizations began actively seeking ways to retain youth.

Regarding civic participation, Ireland operates numerous youth organizations: the National Youth Council, youth councils at cities and districts, leadership programs. Youth volunteering is also popular (school services, volunteer camps). One focus is education and involvement in political processes: for example, the "Vote at 16 [27]" campaign for lowering the voting age.

Although research doesn't directly prove that these measures immediately reduced the desire to emigrate, they show government intentions to engage youth, instill values of proactive participation, raise awareness of youth opportunities and their decisions' impact on the country's society.

[26] https://www.youth.ie/articles/time-to-go-a-study-of-youth-emigration-in-ireland/#:~:text=“Over%20the%20past%202%20years,emigrants%20is%20developed%2C”%20said%20NYCI’s

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