

**The effects and  
outcomes of European  
Solidarity Corps  
2021/2022 (RAY SOC) in  
Estonia**

2024



The study was commissioned by the Estonian National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps at the Education and Youth Board (Harno) in Estonia.

Praxis is an independent, non-profit think tank that aims to support policy-making based on analysis, research and participatory democracy.

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# Glossary

**The European Solidarity Corps (ESC)** is an EU programme primarily aimed at supporting communities and fostering a more inclusive society, notably by offering volunteering and solidarity project opportunities for young people. Organisations and youth groups can seek funding for [local solidarity projects](#) through the programme. Funding for [volunteering projects](#), where young people participate, is exclusively available to organisations. ESC also featured work and traineeship projects from 2018 to 2020, but as of 2021 through 2027, this type of activity will no longer receive funding.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Erasmus+** is the European Union's (EU) programme for 2021-2027, which funds transnational projects, including in the youth field. In the field of youth, Erasmus+ supports young people's participation and entrepreneurship, strengthens the quality and internationalisation of youth work and promotes the development of youth policy. In the field of youth, funding is provided for [youth exchanges](#), [youth participation activities](#), [mobility of youth workers](#) and the development of the youth field through [large-scale cooperation partnerships](#) and [small-scale partnerships](#).

**RAY Network** (Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes) is made up of Erasmus+ national agencies and their research partners in more than 30 countries. The RAY Network coordinates the RAY MON survey, which was the basis for this analysis, as well as other monitoring and analysis activities of EU youth programmes.

**RAY SOC** is a research project of the RAY network focusing on the experiences of participants and project teams in European Solidarity Corps projects.

**Volunteering** is an activity type of the European Solidarity Corps in which young people aged 18-30 can take part in both short (two weeks to two months) and long-term (2-12 months) volunteering. Volunteering can take place individually or in a group, and there are both local and international projects. Until 2018, this type of activity was also known as the European Voluntary Service (EVS).

**Local Solidarity Projects** are a type of European Solidarity Corps activity in which a project is initiated and implemented over a period of 2-12 months by at least five young people aged 18-30 who want to make a difference in their local community. The young people receive administrative support from an organisation, but young people themselves are responsible for the actual project activities.

<sup>1</sup> [https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/european-solidarity-corps-guide_2020_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/european\\_solidarity\\_corps\\_guide\\_2021.pdf](https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/european_solidarity_corps_guide_2021.pdf)

**Project team members** are the young people, youth leaders, youth workers, trainers and other people involved in the project in a managerial, preparatory or organisational role.

By **programme priorities**, we mean the four horizontal priorities of the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ programme addressed in the RAY SOC study: Diversity and Inclusion, Digitalisation, Sustainability and Participation. Until 2021, Prevention, Promotion and Support in the Field of Health was also a priority of the Solidarity Corps programme. Projects under the programme are expected to deliver results aligned with these priorities, and at the funding application stage, project teams must also identify which priorities the planned activities relate to.

**Youthpass** is a certificate of participation and competences acquired in both Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects. Youthpass can also be used to guide reflection and self-analysis processes.<sup>3</sup>

**Eurodesk** is an international youth information network. In Estonia, there is a Eurodesk partner in almost every county, whose role is to advise young people and youth workers on international learning opportunities and to participate in events related to education and career planning.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youthpass.eu/et/about-youthpass/about/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://eeagentuur.ee/projektitegijale/rahvusvahelise-noorteinfo-vorgustik-eurodesk/>

# 1. Introduction

The European Union's youth programmes offer opportunities for young people in Estonia to participate in various international and local non-formal learning projects. From 2018, the European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme, which was previously part of Erasmus+, was continued under the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), which focuses on both volunteering and solidarity projects. The general objective of the programme is to increase the participation of young people and youth organisations in accessible and high quality solidarity activities in order to strengthen solidarity, democracy, cohesion, European identity and the civic participation of young people.<sup>5</sup> The Solidarity Corps will support national solidarity projects, where a group of at least five young people work together to make a difference in their community, and volunteering projects, where young people have the opportunity to volunteer for 2-12 months in a country and organisation of their interest (often a community or a youth centre, school or kindergarten).

This survey is mainly based on the data from the RAY SOC survey in Estonia, conducted by the RAY network, i.e., it reflects the experience of participants who:

1. were from Estonia, regardless of the country in which the project took place or the National Agency (NA) that funded it, or
2. took part in projects funded by Erasmus+ ja Euroopa Solidaarsuskorpuse agentuur (Estonian NA), regardless of the country in which the project took place.

Additionally, we used data collected from participants in the final reporting of solidarity projects (Participant Reports) and the RAY SOC transnational dataset which included all data from volunteering participants collected in RAY SOC, regardless of the funding NA. This allowed us to compare the experience and evaluations of Estonian participants with the average evaluations of all countries' RAY SOC participants (programme's transnational average).

Based on these datasets, we analysed the effects and outcomes of ESC in the Estonian context. This provides feedback to participating organisations and to the Estonian NA and contributes to evidence-based youth policy making. In this study, we explored the effects of ESC projects on participants, organisations and local communities, the competences developed by participants through the projects and the accessibility of projects for youth with fewer opportunities.

<sup>5</sup> [https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/european\\_solidarity\\_corps\\_guide\\_2023\\_en.pdf](https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/european_solidarity_corps_guide_2023_en.pdf)

## 2. Methodology

We used two different datasets for the survey. For volunteering, we used RAY SOC survey data from projects which took place in 2021 and 2022. For solidarity projects, we used data from Participant Reports collected in the final reporting of the solidarity projects.

In total, there were 81 ESC projects supported by the Estonian NA in 2021 and 2022. Table 1 shows the projected number of participants in both volunteering and solidarity projects.

	Number of funded projects		Projected number of participants	
	2021	2022	2021	2022
<b>Volunteering</b>	10	10	130	214
<b>Solidarity projects</b>	27	34	143	179

Table 1. Estonian NA-funded projects and participants 2021/2022. Source: Estonian NA.

*Note:* As of March 2024, two volunteering projects have been cancelled, i.e., the project activities have not been carried out and no funding has been awarded. The numbers of participants in the table are estimated by the applicants at the time of submission of the project application. As the reporting for all projects is not yet finalised, it is not yet possible to provide exact figures for participant numbers.

### 2.1. Volunteering projects - RAY SOC survey

#### Sample

A link to the online questionnaire was sent to participants at least two months after the end of the project and the questionnaire could be completed in 29 different languages. Only participants who had given their consent to their contact details being used for research purposes were contacted.

The RAY SOC survey is meant for participants and project teams of the European Solidarity Corps projects. Due to low number of respondents, we decided to exclude the follow groups' RAY SOC data from the analysis: solidarity project participants, project team members (irrespective of activity type) and participants of networking activities. Hence, in this study, **we only used RAY SOC 2021/2022 data from participants in volunteering projects.**

Table 2 shows RAY SOC response rates and sample sizes for the different types of ESC activities.



	Invitations sent		Total respondents		After data cleansing	
	Projects funded by Estonian NA	All projects (transnational dataset)	Projects funded by Estonian NA	All projects (transnational dataset)	Estonian NA-funded projects and participants from Estonia	All projects (transnational dataset)
<b>Solidarity projects</b>	80	4330	16	640	11	470
<b>Volunteering projects</b>	159	11 897	56	3471	56	3080
<b>Project team members</b>	55	2589	11	731	6	503

Table 2. RAY SOC 2021/2022 survey response rates in the Estonian dataset and in the transnational dataset for the whole programme.

It should be kept in mind that the numbers of invitations sent reported in Table 2 describe the RAY SOC datasets used, but with some uncertainties, for two reasons:<sup>6</sup>

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, invitations to respond to the survey were sent in 2021 and 2022 also to people whose projects were cancelled, postponed or who were unable to participate in activities due to pandemic restrictions or illness. Due to the lack of technical capacity for programme reporting, it is not possible to accurately estimate the number of such cases, but the RAY network decided to reduce the estimate of the number of invitations due to this. Therefore, the table above reflects a 20% lower number of invitations compared to the number actually sent out.
- The numbers of invitations sent only include data on participants in projects funded by the Estonian NA. However, the RAY SOC dataset included participants from projects funded by the Estonian NA as well as participants from Estonia.

### Survey instrument and procedure

The RAY SOC questionnaires were based on the RAY MON questionnaires from previous survey cycles, which were also sent to participants in Solidarity Corps and European Voluntary Service projects in previous years. However, in the current 2021/2022 survey cycle, a separate RAY SOC survey was conducted to investigate the experiences of participants in ESC projects, and both the wording of questions and the scales have changed significantly. In the RAY SOC survey, project participants and project teams filled in different questionnaires, although several questions overlap. The questionnaires consisted mainly of multiple-choice questions and Likert-type scales, with some open-ended questions. The survey procedure foresaw that participants and project team members were contacted by e-mail inviting them

<sup>6</sup> Research projects on the research-based analysis and monitoring of the European youth programmes (RAY-MON & RAY-SOC). Monitoring Surveys 2023. National Response Rates. Estonia. Version 20240301 [unpublished working document]

to fill in a questionnaire on a specific project. The invitation included the name of the project, the dates and country of the project and a URL with a personal code for the survey. Respondents completed the questionnaire in the Limesurvey<sup>7</sup> environment.

There were six different modules in **the volunteering questionnaire** (Table 3). All participants were presented with four identical modules with the same questions, while two of the modules were randomised or depended on whether the respondent participated in a solidarity project or in volunteering. For the priorities of the programme, the questionnaire included four parallel modules: (1) Participation, (2) Diversity and Inclusion, (3) Digitalisation and (4) Sustainability. These were also randomised: each participant answered questions related to only one of the priorities.

Opening module (4)			
Thematic module: Participation (7)	Thematic module: Diversity and Inclusion (7+1)	Thematic module: Digitalisation (6)	Thematic module: Sustainability (7)
Solidarity projects impact module (11)	Volunteering impact module 1 (10)	Volunteering impact module 2 (10 Qs)	
Reflection module (10+1)			
Youthpass module (2+2)			
Closing module - respondent's background data (14+2)			
Total questions: 48+5	Total questions: 47+6	Total questions: 46+5	Total questions: 47+5

Table 3. Structure of the questionnaire. Questionnaire for participants in volunteering and solidarity projects. Number of questions per module in brackets.

## 2.2. Solidarity projects - solidarity project final reporting

### Sample

We analyzed data from the final reports (Participant Reports) of solidarity projects funded by the Estonian National Agency in 2021 and 2022. The dataset for these projects comprised questionnaires completed by participants from 50 different solidarity projects, totaling 243 responses

### Survey instrument and procedure

At the end of ESC projects, all beneficiary organisations must complete a final project report, which provides details of the young people who have participated in the project and describes

<sup>7</sup> <https://survey.limesurvey.org/>

the project activities. In solidarity projects, the core group members of the project also complete a [Participant Report](#), a questionnaire containing questions about the project experience. The questionnaire is completed in the EU Survey online environment and can be completed in different official languages of the European Union. It is also possible to save the incomplete questionnaire while filling it in and return to it later. Completion of the questionnaire is compulsory for all participants, i.e., until all participants have submitted a participant report, the NA will not be able to process the final report of the project and make the final payment of the project grant. A web link to the participant report will be sent automatically to the participants immediately after the end of the project or as soon as the beneficiary organisation has entered the participant's details in the reporting environment. <sup>8</sup>

### **Analysis**

We used descriptive statistics to analyse data from both RAY SOC and the final reports of solidarity projects. The RAY SOC data was provided by the RAY network to the research team after data cleaning. In the graphs, we also report the 95% confidence interval, which means that there is a 95% probability that the actual value of the parameter that is being investigated falls within the given range.

<sup>8</sup> <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=33529446>

## Respondents' background

This chapter describes the profile of the respondents, which gives an overview of the profile of the participants that made up the survey sample. Moreover, the background data of the respondents allow a better understanding of the accessibility of ESC activities.

### 2.3. Gender

The majority of volunteering participants were female, both among the Estonian participants and in the programme overall (Table 4). Female participants are also more numerous in solidarity projects.

	Volunteering (EE) %	Volunteering (transnational av.) %	Solidarity projects %
Female	71,4	68,5	66,8
Male	19,6	26,6	33,2
Other	8,9	4,9	-

Table 4. Gender breakdown of respondents. RAY SOC - *Do you identify as...?* In the final reports of solidarity projects, the gender of the participants was reported by the project team for all members of the core project group.

### 2.4. Area of residence

More than 70% of participants in volunteering projects in Estonia were young people living in urban areas. Less than a fifth lived in rural areas or villages. Transnational data from the programme also show similar patterns.

	Volunteering (EE) %	Volunteering (transnational av.) %
a big city	26,8	34,2
the suburbs or outskirts of a big city	3,6	9,0
a town or small city	50,0	37,9
a country village	8,9	14,9
a farm or home in the countryside	10,7	4,0

Table 5. Breakdown by area of residence. *Which of the following phrases best describes the area where you live?*

## 2.5. Level of education and educational background

Figure 1 illustrates that among volunteering participants in Estonia, those with a general secondary education make up the largest proportion (38%). Conversely, within the program as a whole (transnational average), individuals with a bachelor's degree are the most prevalent (40%). Collectively, those with higher education represent 46% of volunteering participants in Estonia (transnational av. 64%).

Due to changes in the Solidarity Corps programme and methodological differences in the RAY surveys, the results of the 2021/2022 survey cycle should be compared with the previous ones with caution, but the data suggest that the proportion of participants with higher education has decreased in Estonia: in the previous three survey cycles (2015-2020), 59% of European Voluntary Service participants had a higher education degree.<sup>9</sup>

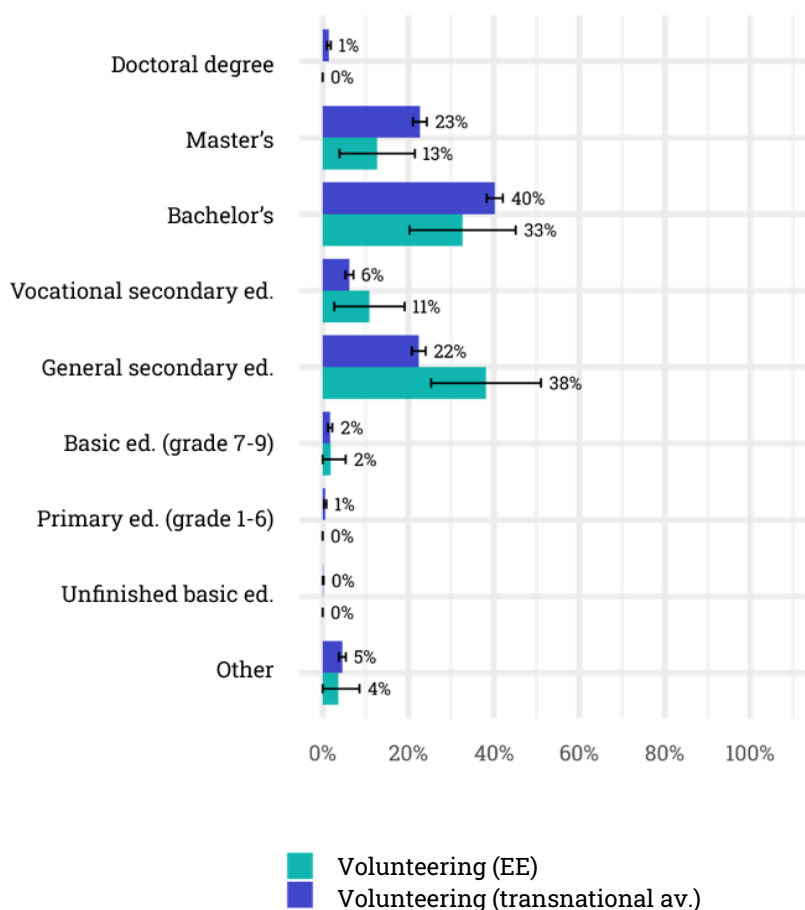


Figure 1. Level of education of respondents. *Which of these is your currently completed level of education?*

<sup>9</sup> Salu, J., Haljasmets, K., Aps, J., Akkermann, C., Kaldmaa, K., & Pedjasaar, M. (2021). Erasmus+: Euroopa Noored programmi tulemuste ja mõju-uuring. Analüüs uuringutsükli 2015/2016, 2017/2018 ja 2019/2020 põhjal. Stories For Impact OÜ & Haap Consulting OÜ. [https://euroopanoored.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RAY-MON-EE-analuusiraport\\_Final-19.02.21.pdf](https://euroopanoored.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RAY-MON-EE-analuusiraport_Final-19.02.21.pdf)

Of the Estonian participants in volunteering projects, a third come from families where the mother/female guardian has a higher education and just over 40% from families where the father/male guardian has a higher education degree (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

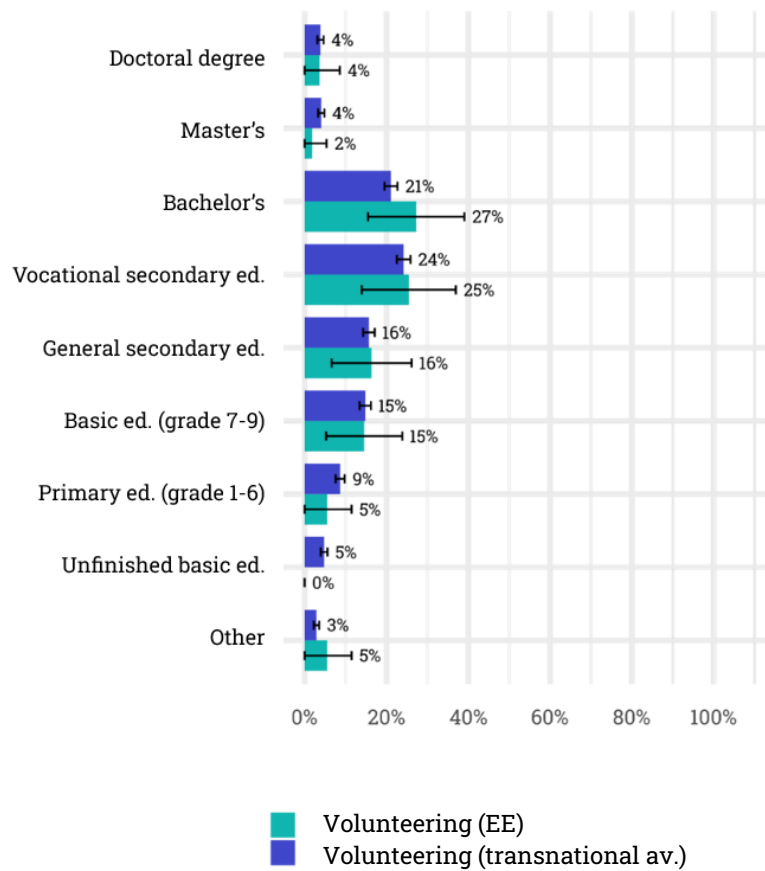


Figure 2. Educational background of volunteering participants – mother's/female guardian's education level.  
*What is the highest level of education your mother/female or legal guardian has completed?*

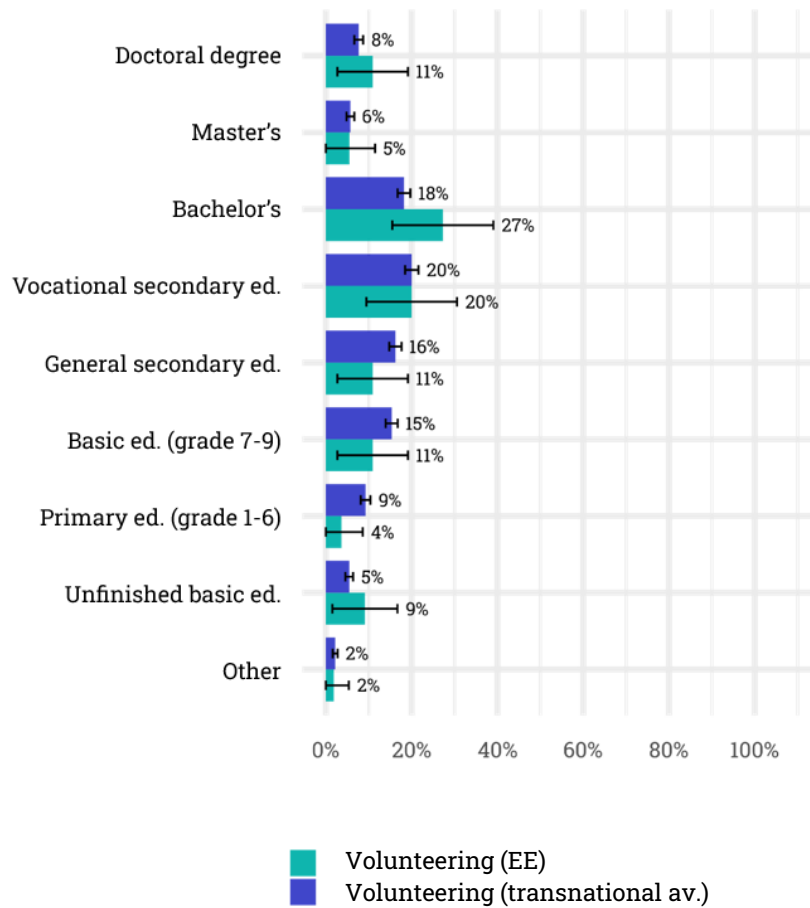


Figure 3. Educational background of volunteering participants – father’s/male guardian’s education level. *What is the highest level of education your father/male or other legal guardian has completed?*

## 2.6. Employment status

Volunteering projects can be short term (two weeks to two months) or long term (2-12 months). It can therefore be expected that many participants will have to take a break from their current job or studies for at least some time because of the project. Unfortunately, the RAY SOC Estonian data does not allow investigating what participants were doing before the volunteering project because of translation issues.<sup>10</sup>

The Estonian-language questionnaire of the RAY SOC primarily addresses the employment status of respondents during their volunteering projects. However, the results indicate that some respondents likely considered their employment status before starting the volunteering project. For instance, participants who had selected English as the questionnaire language might have included their pre-volunteering employment status. This mixed interpretation of

<sup>10</sup> *Which of the following descriptions apply to what you have been doing in the months leading up to the project?* was the question’s wording in the English-language questionnaire. However, the Estonian-language questionnaire deviated from this significantly, asking respondents about what they had been doing *during* the project.

this question is evident from the fact that over 30% of participants in Estonia and over 40% internationally did not indicate their involvement in volunteering (Figure 4).

The proportion of people in paid jobs among volunteering participants was 18% in Estonia and slightly lower at 13% across the programme. Compared to the transnational average, fewer respondents in the Estonian dataset reported being unemployed at the time of their participation in the project.

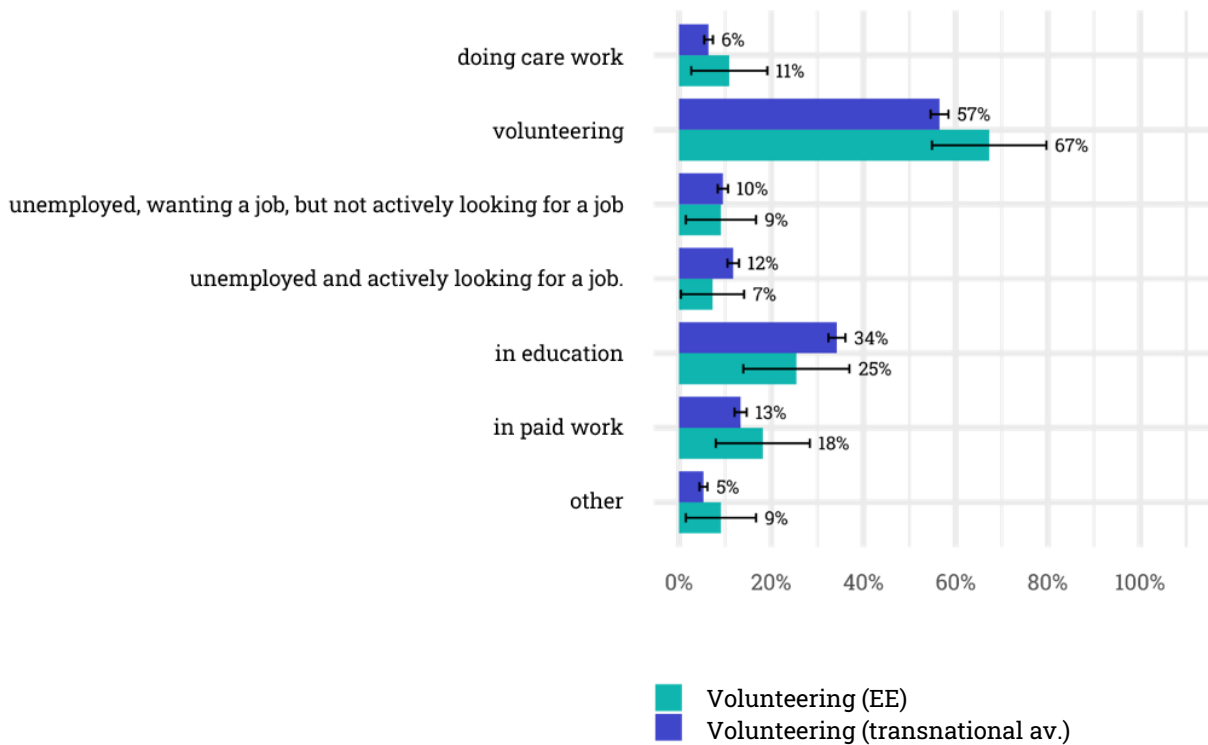


Figure 4. Employment situation of participants - volunteering. *Which of the following descriptions apply to what you have been doing in the months leading up to the project?*

Participants in solidarity projects were asked about their employment status at the beginning of the project in the final participant report. The results show that students (37%) and young people in full-time employment (26%) were the most common participants in solidarity projects.



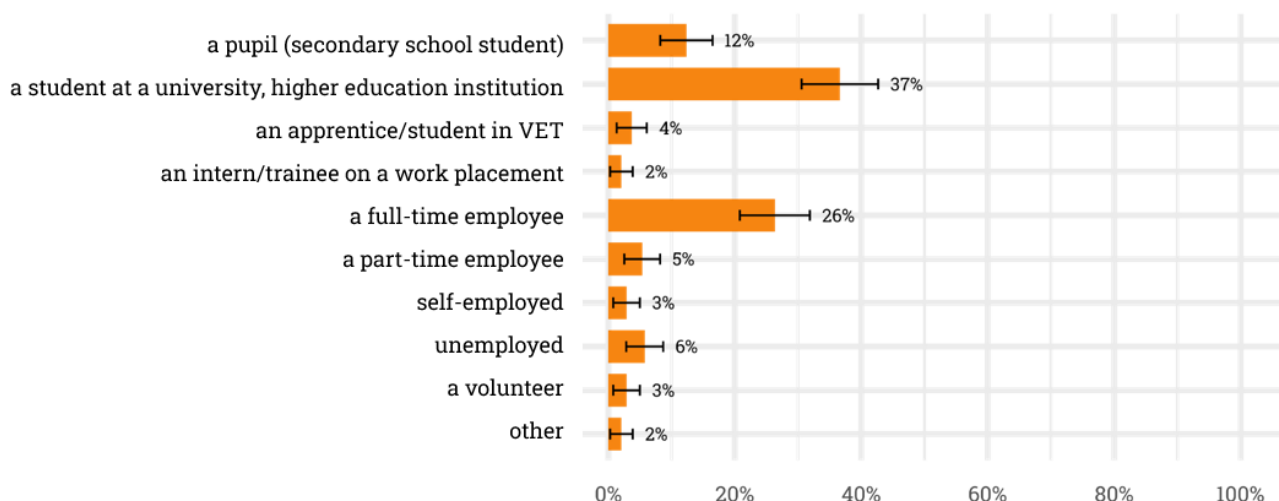


Figure 5. Employment situation of participants - solidarity projects. *At the start of your Solidarity Project, you were mainly...*

## 2.7. Minority group affiliation

We classify respondents who agreed that they would self-identify as belonging to a discriminated group as part of a minority group. Furthermore, respondents were asked to specify the basis on which their group faces discrimination. Among Estonian volunteering participants, minority groups constituted 24% of the total (transnational av. 27%). Figure 6 illustrates that the largest segment of minority volunteering participants, both in Estonia and across the program as a whole, comprises young individuals who identify themselves as belonging to a minority based on their sexuality or disability.

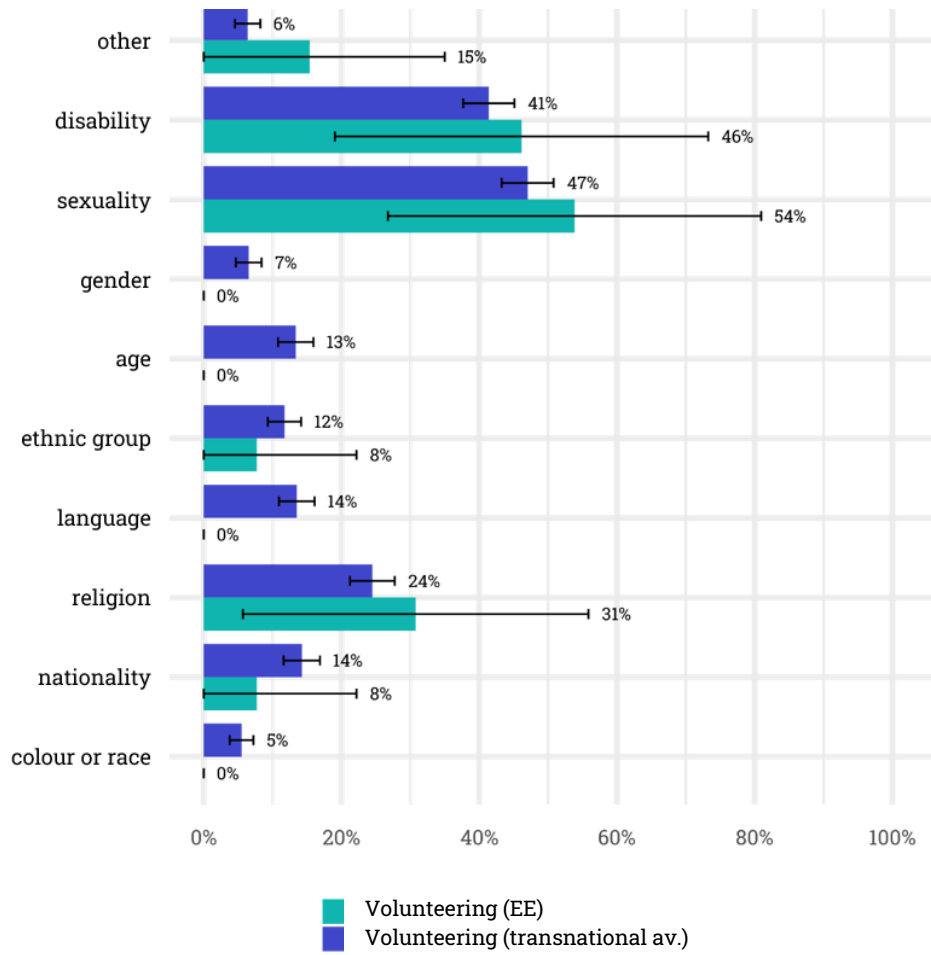


Figure 6. Minority participants. *Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against?* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=13 for this question.

## 2.8. Young people with fewer opportunities

RAY SOC survey respondents were asked to indicate whether and what barriers they perceive they need to overcome to reach their full potential. This allows an assessment of how accessible the programme's activities are to young people with fewer opportunities. **The share of participants with fewer opportunities is higher (54.5%) among volunteering participants in Estonia than in the programme as a whole (transnational av. 42.1%).** The highest proportion of young people with fewer opportunities in volunteering projects perceive obstacles in their lives due to not having enough money, both in the Estonian context and across the programme (Figure 7).

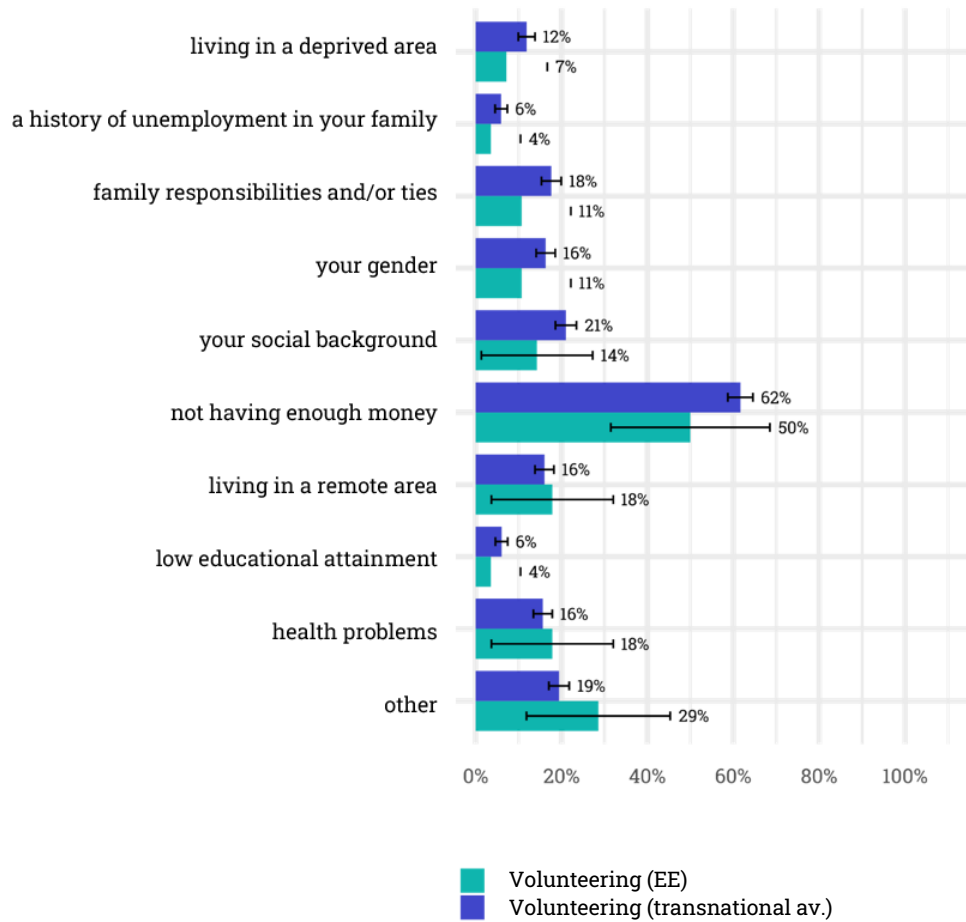


Figure 7. Youth with fewer opportunities. *Would you say that you are faced with barriers to achieve your full potential? – yes/ Are these barriers related to..* (multiple choice). Share of participants with fewer opportunities (%).

In the participant reports, solidarity project participants were asked to indicate which of the underlying barriers to fewer opportunities they experience in their lives. Figure 8 thus shows the proportion of all respondents for each barrier. The highest proportions of young people in

solidarity projects experience fewer opportunities due to geographical (46%) and economic (40%) barriers and health problems (41%).

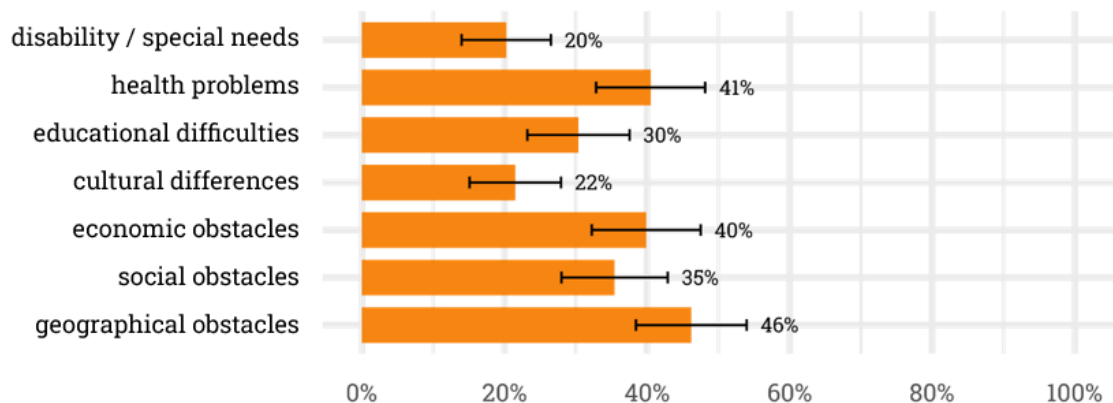


Figure 8. Participants with fewer opportunities - barriers experienced in life (multiple choice). *Do you consider that in your life you faced at least one of the following barriers, putting you at a disadvantage compared to other persons of the same age, status or ability...*

## 2.9. Previous participation in EU youth programmes

The findings indicate that a considerable portion of volunteering participants have prior experience in similar EU projects. Among Estonian participants, 42.9% have previously participated in other similar EU projects, with the figure being 34.4% across the programme (transnational av.). It is important to note that young people may have participated in other types of projects, such as youth exchanges, in the past. Unlike other activities within Erasmus+ Youth and ESC, repeated participation in volunteering is restricted. In individual long-term volunteering projects abroad, each young person has a one-time participation opportunity. While short-term volunteering before long-term volunteering is allowed, projects must not overlap in time, and the combined duration of different volunteering projects must not exceed 12 months.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [https://europanoored.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/european\\_solidarity\\_corps\\_guide\\_2024\\_en.pdf](https://europanoored.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/european_solidarity_corps_guide_2024_en.pdf)

### 3. Effects of projects

This chapter first looks at participants' overall satisfaction with the project and their motivation to join the project. Moreover, the chapter examines how participation in Solidarity Corps projects develops participants' knowledge, skills and attitudes. The development of participants' competences is an important objective of the programme.<sup>12</sup>

#### 3.1. Participants' motivation and satisfaction with the project

##### Motivation to participate in the project

Figure 9 shows that the most frequently mentioned reasons for joining volunteering projects were learning something new (82% Estonia; 85% transnational av.), meeting new people (70% Estonia; 80% transnational av.) and developing language skills (59% Estonia; 68% transnational av.).

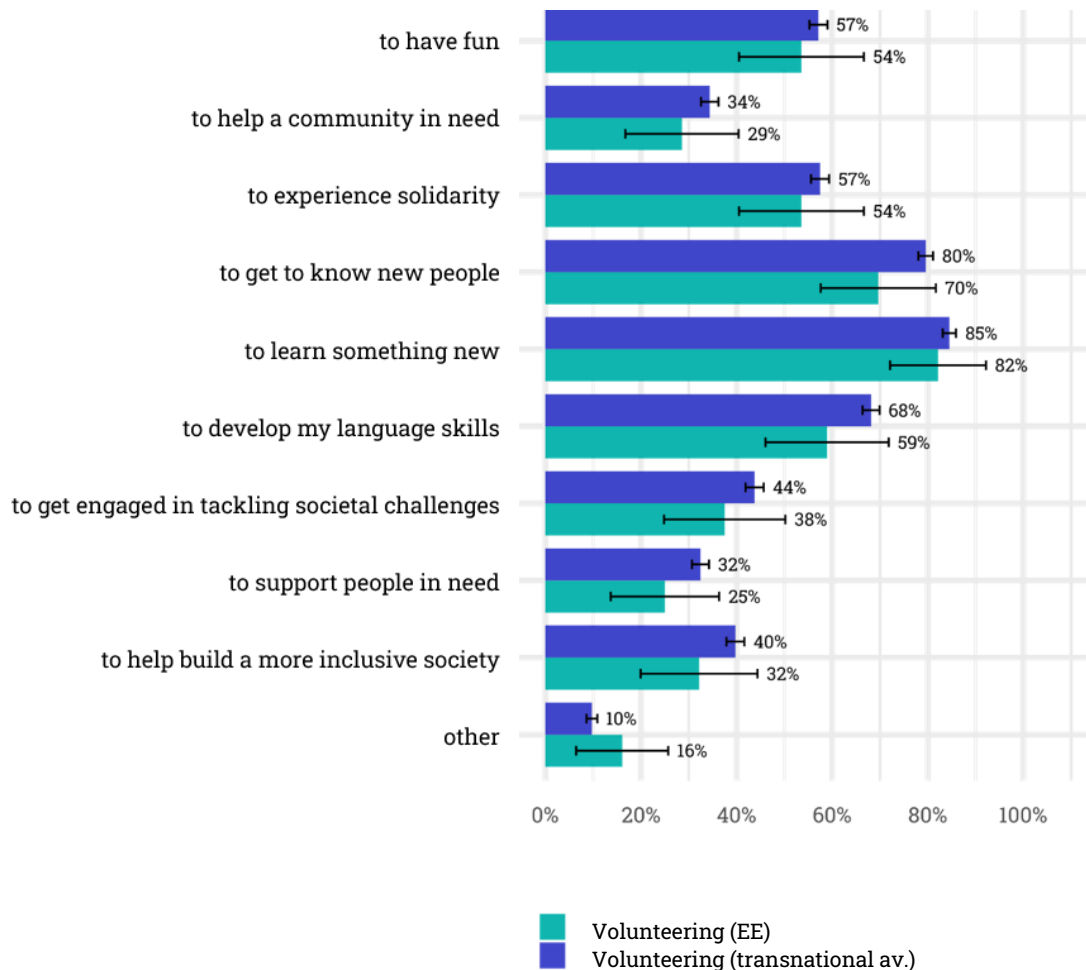


Figure 9. Participants' motivation to join the project (multiple choice). *My reasons for taking part in this project were ...*

<sup>12</sup> [https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/European\\_solidarity\\_corps\\_guide\\_2024\\_en.pdf](https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/European_solidarity_corps_guide_2024_en.pdf)

The least common motivation for volunteering was to help a community in need, to support people in need and to help build a more inclusive society (Figure 9), but even these factors were mentioned by 25-32% of respondents in the Estonian dataset. The biggest differences between the Estonian and the transnational average can be observed in the areas of developing language skills and meeting new people, both of which were mentioned slightly less often by Estonian participants than on average in the programme.

**Overall evaluation of the project experience**

Participants in both volunteering and solidarity projects perceived their project experience as positive. In the RAY SOC survey, volunteering participants were asked to give an overall rating of their project experience on a five-point scale, with the points of the scale marked with emojis (Figure 10). Figure 11 shows the distribution of respondents' ratings: 43% of Estonian respondents (transnational av. 55%) rated their project experience with a maximum 5-point score. Both the mean rating of Estonian respondents ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ,  $95\% \text{ CI} = 4.08; 4.49$ ) and the mean rating of the programme transnationally ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ,  $95\% \text{ CI} = 4.29; 4.36$ ) suggest that participants perceive their volunteering project experience as quite positive.



Figure 10. Scale for the overall rating of project experience. The leftmost emoji - "1", the rightmost - "5".

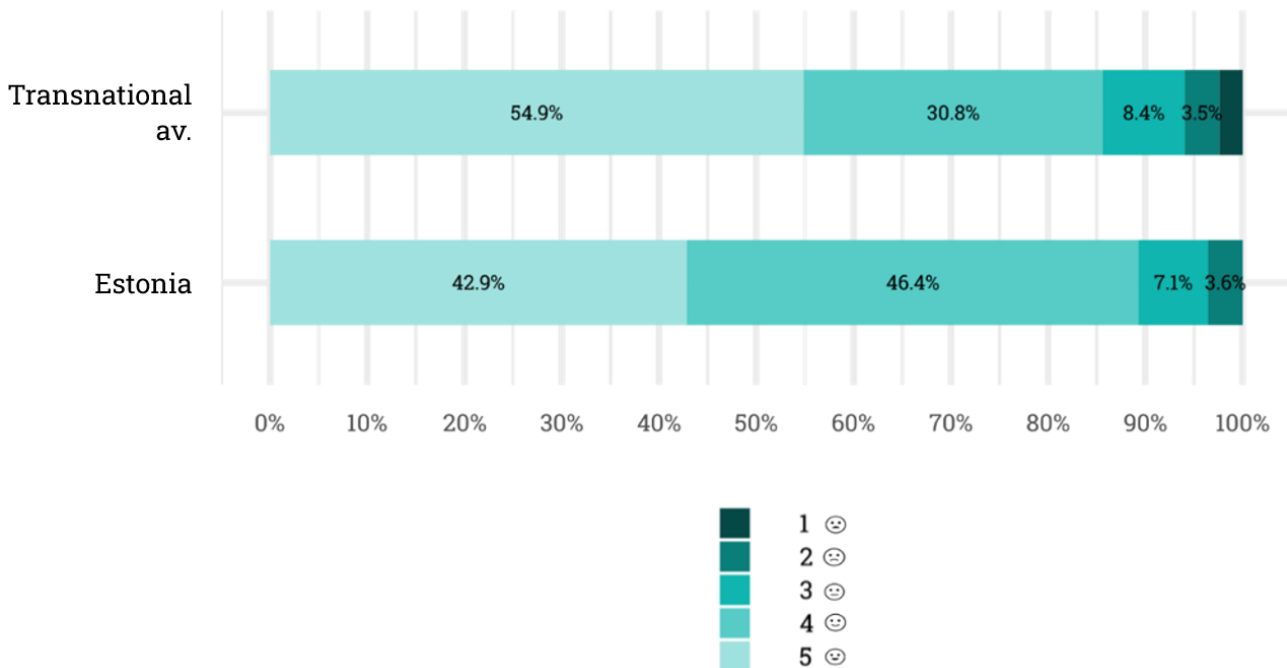


Figure 11. Volunteering participants' general evaluation of the project experience. *Overall, my project experience has been... Pick a smiley that represents your experience best.*

The participants in solidarity projects rated their satisfaction with the project on a five-point scale in the final report questionnaire, and these results also suggest that participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with the project experience (M = 4.54, SD = 0.66). In the solidarity projects' final reporting, a total of 94% of respondents indicated satisfaction with the project ("rather satisfied" or "very satisfied"; Figure 12).

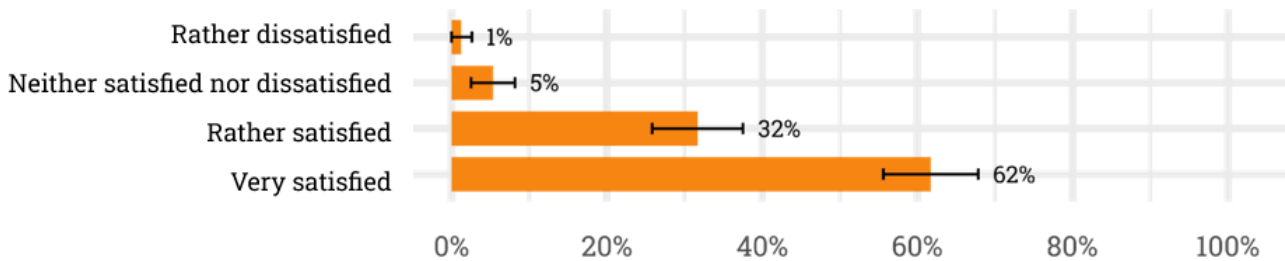


Figure 12. Participants' satisfaction with the project experience in solidarity projects. *How satisfied are you with your European Solidarity Corps experience?*

Furthermore, in the RAY SOC survey, volunteering participants were asked to rate the meaningfulness of the project, how easy it was for them to afford to participate in the project and how easy it was for them to express themselves fully in the project. In none of these aspects are there great differences between the Estonian participants' ratings and the transnational averages. Out of those three evaluated aspects, participants gave the highest ratings to the meaningfulness of the project (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Participants' evaluation of their project experience. 0 - *not at all easy/not at all*, 10 - *very easy/very*

Volunteering participants were also asked whether the project extended their networks (Figure 14). A smaller proportion of Estonian participants perceived the project as having had an impact on the expansion of their networks (64% ('agree' or 'agree strongly')) than in the programme in general (transnational av. 79% 'agree' or 'agree strongly').

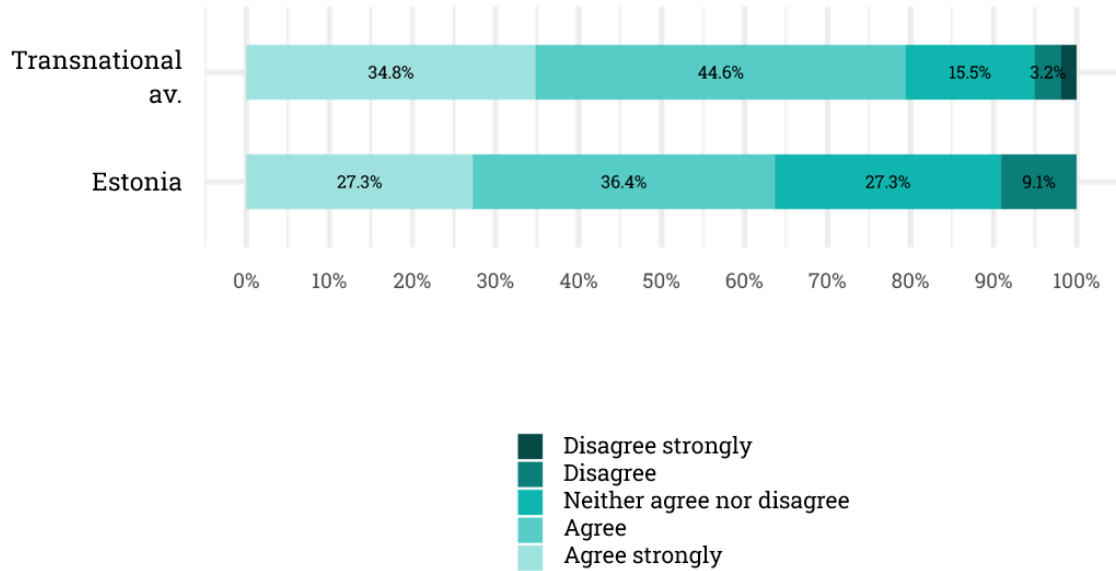


Figure 14. Impact of the project on participants' networks - volunteering. *Estonia* - Estonian dataset, *transnational av.* – programme’s transnational average. *The project has extended my networks meaningfully.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=11 for this question. In the transnational dataset, "strongly disagree" was indicated by 1.9% of respondents.

In the RAY SOC questionnaire, volunteering participants were asked which three words describe their project experience. Figure 15 (Estonian dataset) and Figure 16 (transnational dataset) show the words mentioned the most.







Figure 16. *Thinking back to the project, which three words describe your experience best?* - volunteering participants (transnational dataset).

### 3.2. Effects of participation on knowledge, skills and attitudes

The following chapter focuses on the perceived effects of ESC projects on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of participants. In the case of the solidarity projects, we will also look at the perceived impact of the projects on the educational and professional development of the participants.

### 3.2.1. Volunteering

#### Knowledge

The RAY SOC volunteering questionnaire asked respondents to indicate all the topics they learned about in the project (Figure 17).

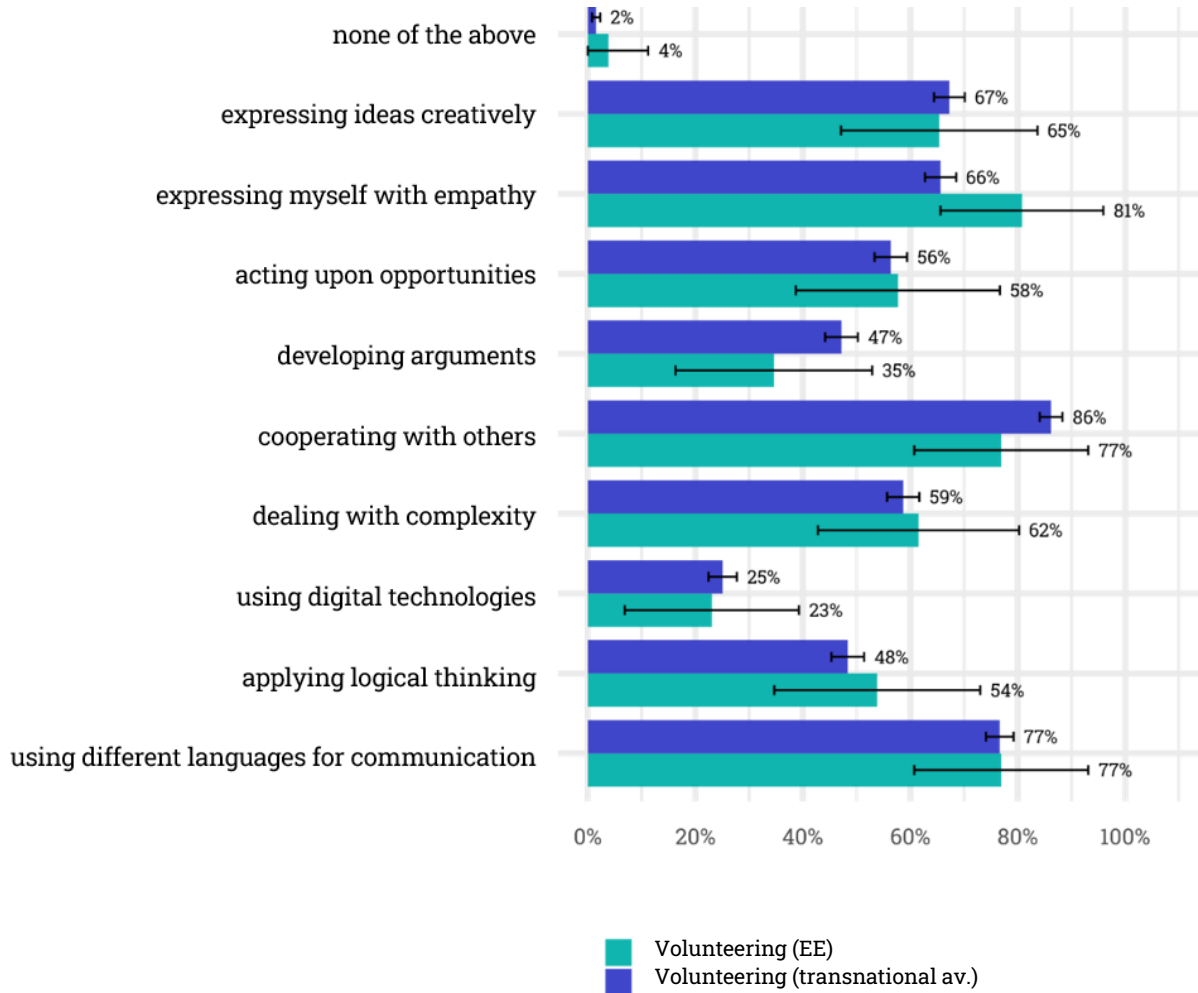


Figure 17. Knowledge developed in the project. *In the project, I learned something about ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question is n=26.

Estonian respondents most often mentioned learning about expressing themselves with empathy (81%), cooperating with others (77%) and using different languages for communication (77%). Using digital technology was less frequently mentioned (23%) compared to other topics.

#### Skills and attitudes

Volunteering participants were also surveyed about the skills and attitudes they acquired during the project. Among various skills and attitudes, the influence of projects on the ability to cooperate in a team is notable, as fewer respondents reported development in this aspect

(see Figure 19). Specifically, 18% of respondents across the program and 27% of Estonian respondents disagreed that the project enhanced their ability to cooperate in a team (Figure 19).

Among the various skills and attitudes examined in this survey module, participants perceive the project's positive impact most prominently on their ability to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Estonia 100%, transnational av. 90%; see Figure 20). Additionally, the majority of participants gained greater awareness of the competences they wish to develop further (Estonia 81%, transnational av. 85%; see Figure 18).

Furthermore, 77% of Estonian participants enhanced their critical thinking and reflection skills (transnational av. 81%; see Figure 21). However, fewer respondents reported improvements in their ability to tackle societal challenges (Estonia 62%, transnational av. 76%; see Figure 23) and to interact with policy- and decision-making (Estonia 36%, transnational av. 70%; see Figure 22). Based on Estonian data, 39% of respondents expressed actively standing up for solidarity after the project project (transnational av. 57%; see Figure 24).

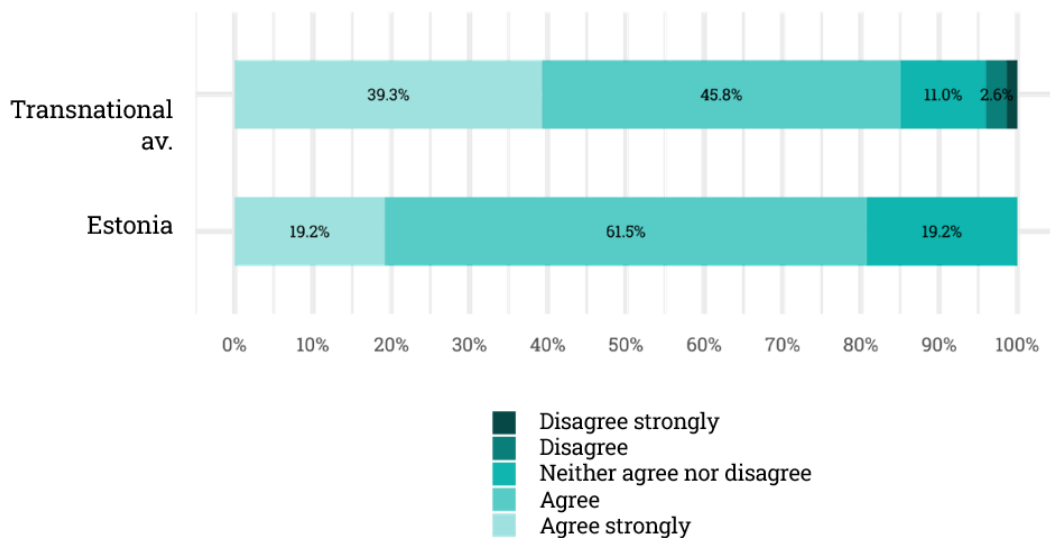


Figure 18. *Through the project I have become aware which of my competences I want to develop further.* **Note.** In the Estonian dataset, n=26 for this question.

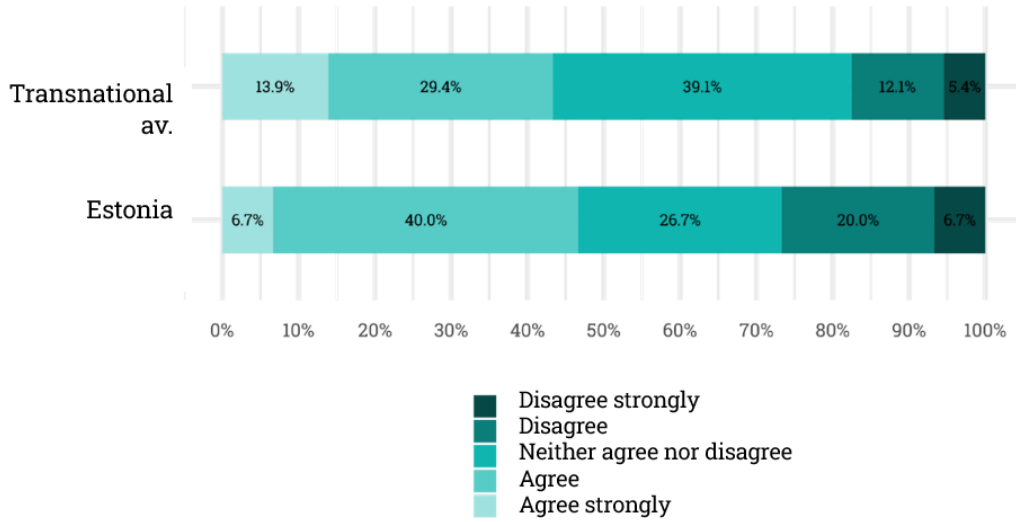


Figure 19. *Through the project I improved my ability to cooperate in a team.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=15 for this question.

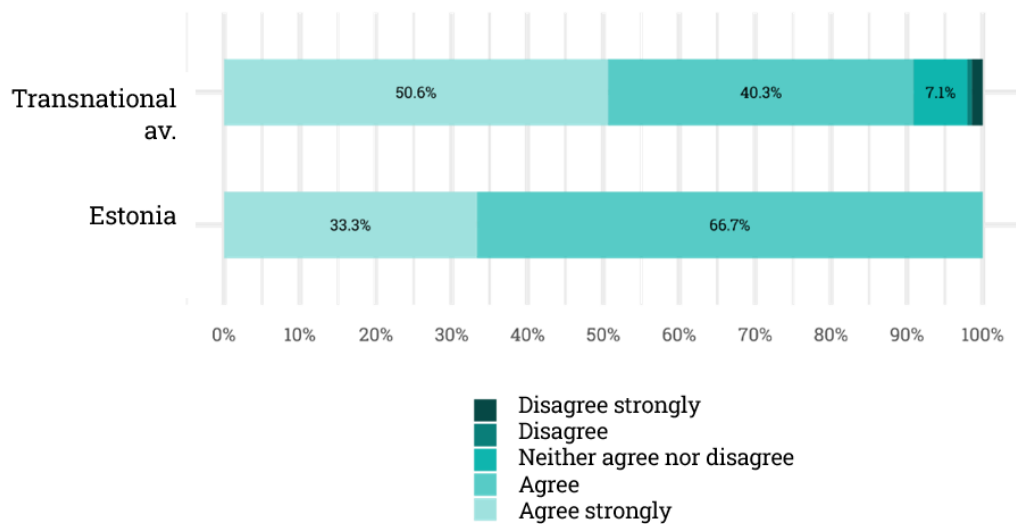


Figure 20. *Through the project I improved my ability to get along with people who have a different cultural background.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=15 for this question.

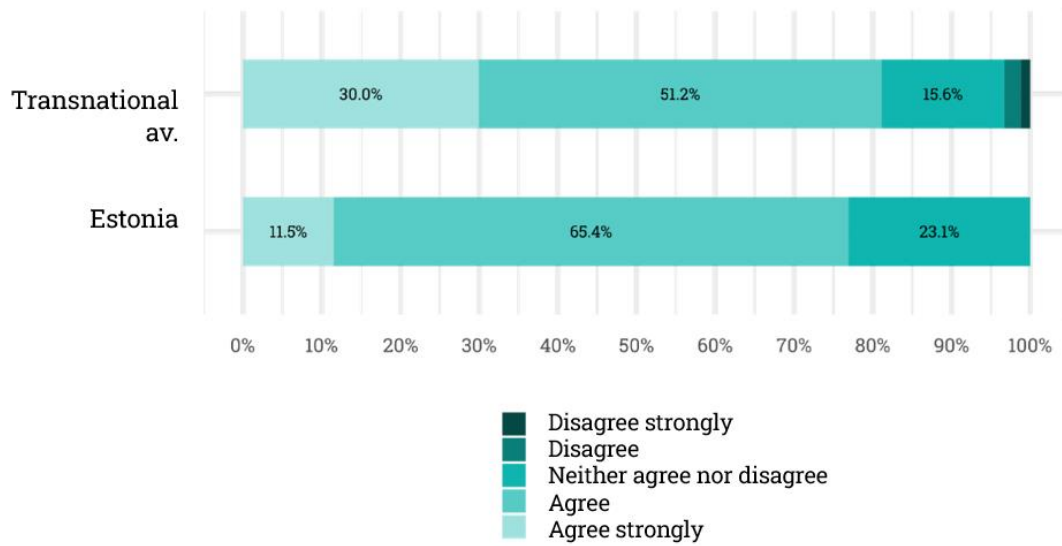


Figure 21. *Through the project I improved my ability to reflect and think critically.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=26 for this question.

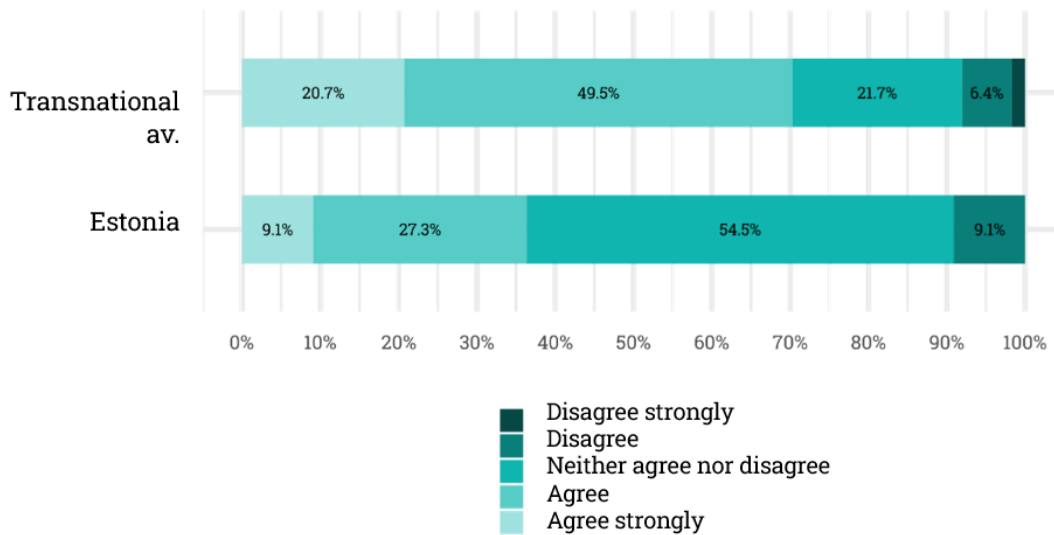


Figure 22. *Through the project, I improved my ability to interact with policy- and decision-making.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=11 for this question.

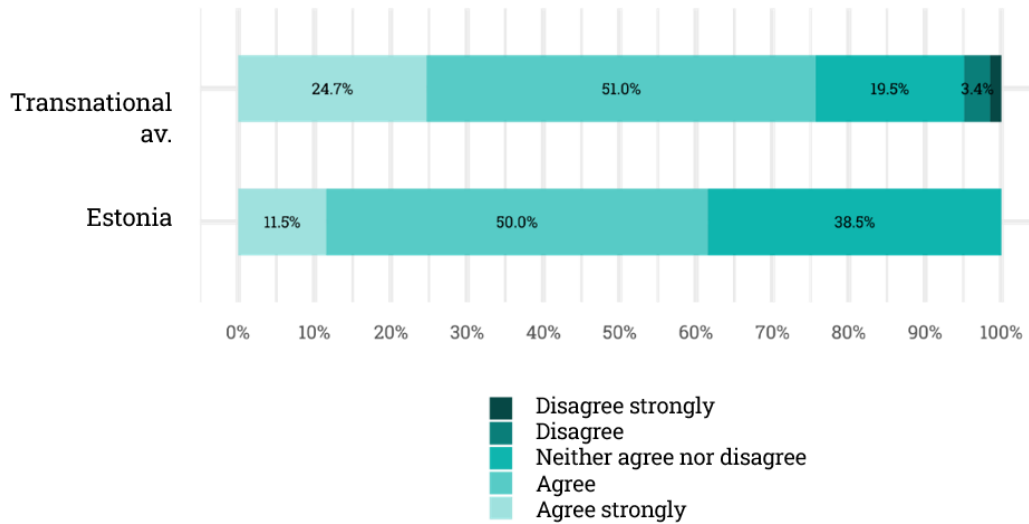


Figure 23. *Through the project I improved my ability to engage in tackling societal challenges.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=26 for this question.

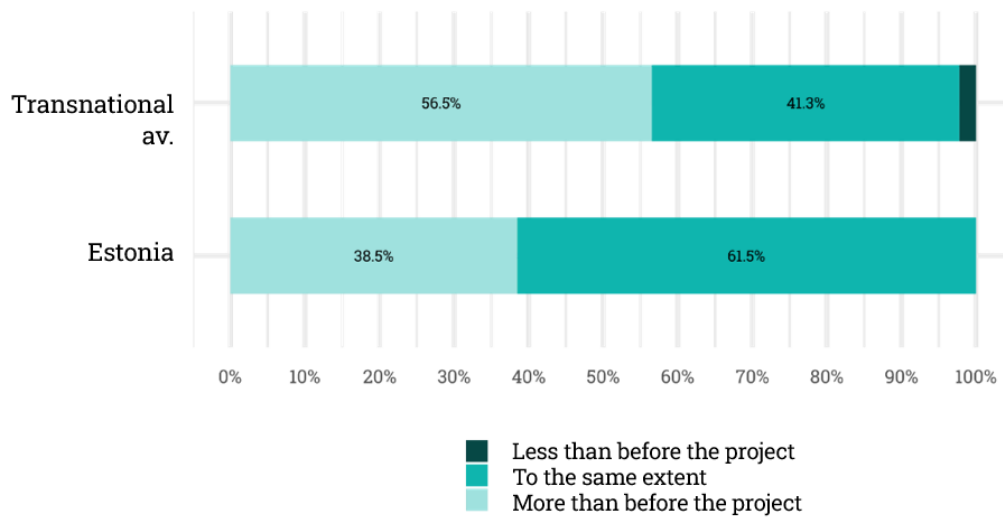


Figure 24. *After the project, I actively stand up for solidarity ....* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=26 respondents to this question.

### 3.2.2. Solidarity projects

#### Key competences

Figure 25 shows the ratings of the participants in solidarity projects on the key competences developed through the projects. The majority of respondents perceived that they improved their ability to cooperate in teams (78%), plan and organise tasks and activities (78%), find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills) (72%) and the ability to develop an idea and put it into practice (70%).

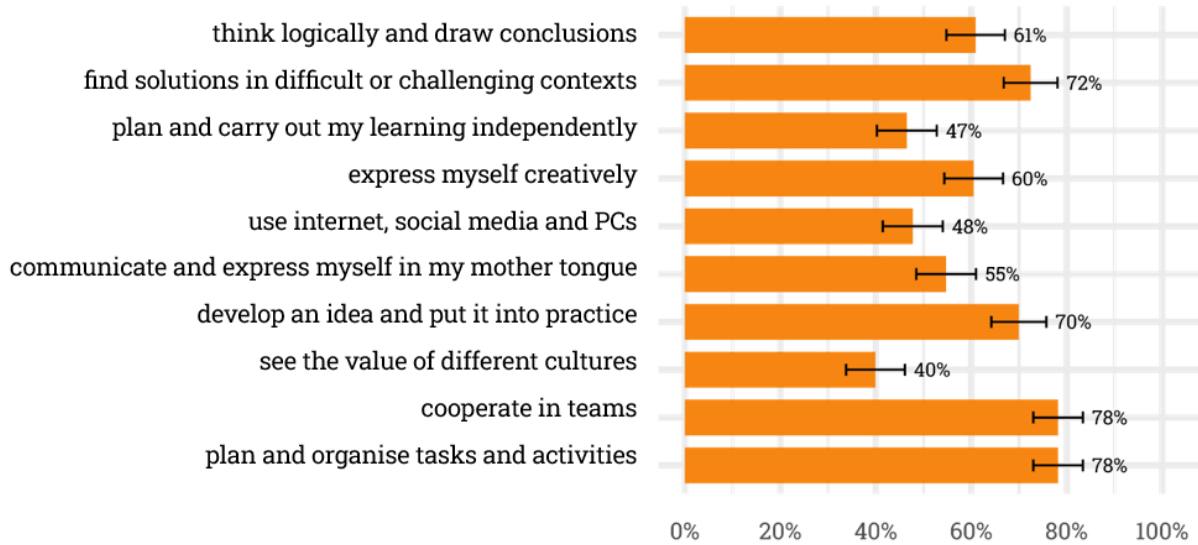


Figure 25. Key competences developed through the project - solidarity project participants. Multiple-choice question. *Through my participation in this activity I learned better how to...*

### Skills and attitudes

The questionnaire in the final reports of solidarity projects asked participants about the skills and attitudes developed during the project. The highest proportions of respondents perceived an increased self-confidence (72%), a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses (72%), an improved ability to adapt to and act in new situations (69%) and increased open-mindedness and curiosity about new challenges (69%). Less frequently, participants mentioned the impact of the project on their interest in European topics, their sense of feeling European and their awareness social and political concepts like democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, civil rights. However, it is noteworthy that, even for these themes, the project was perceived as having had an impact by almost a third of the respondents.



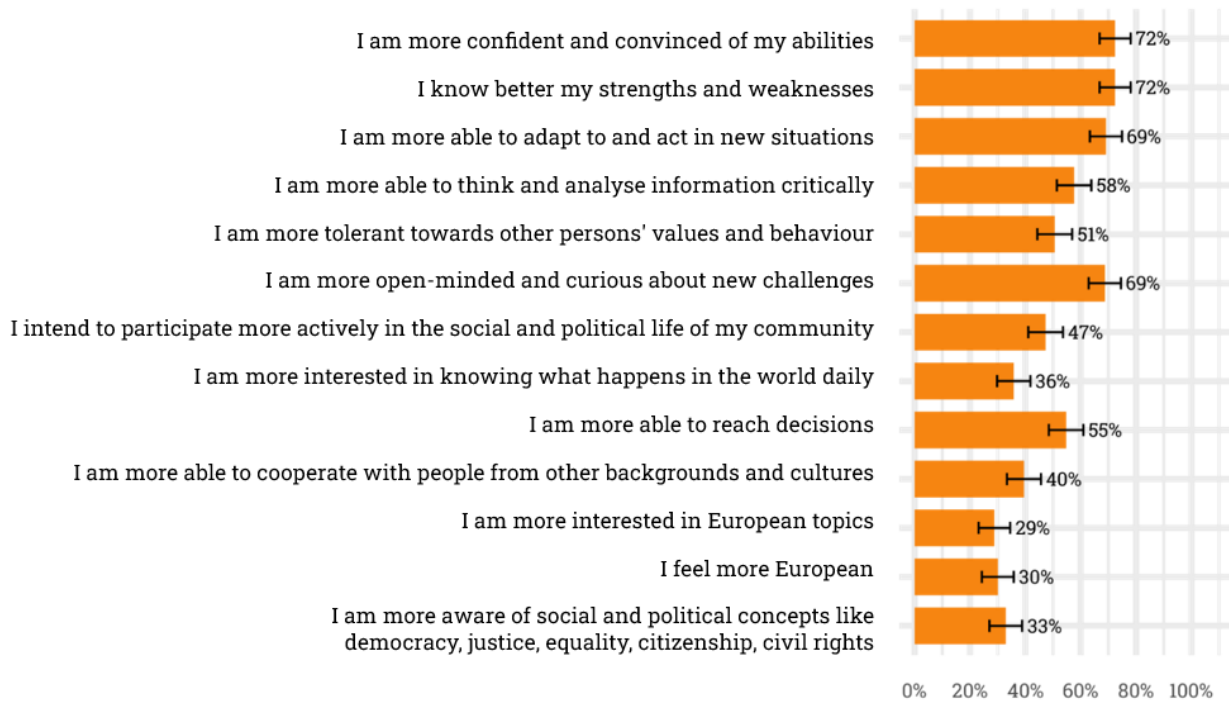


Figure 26. Skills and attitudes developed during the project - solidarity project participants (%). Multiple-choice question. *After having taken part in this activity...*

Solidarity project participants evaluated the effects of the project on their educational and professional development in the final reporting questionnaire, and the results show that respondents most often indicated that they gained additional skills and knowledge that will be useful in their future career/jobs (69%). Also, more than half of the respondents perceived a higher readiness to pursue further education or training (58%), and nearly half of the respondents (49%) indicated that the project had given them a clearer idea of their professional goals (Figure 27).

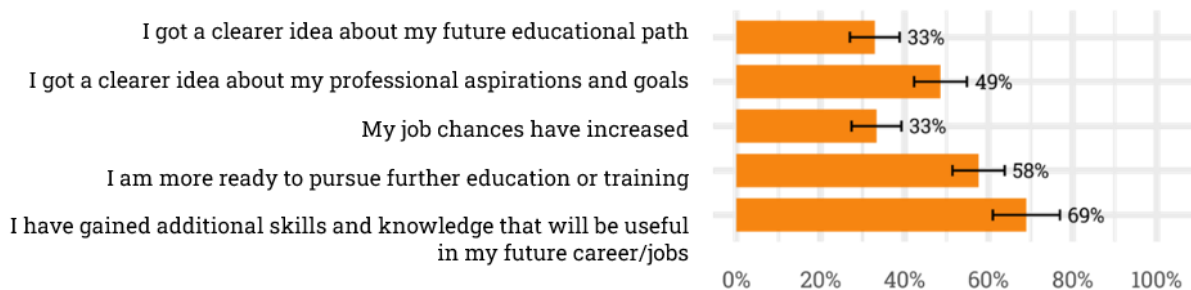


Figure 27. Impact on educational and professional development of participants - solidarity project participants. *Thanks to this European Solidarity Corps activity...*

## 4. Projects' alignment with programme priorities

The data collected through RAY SOC also provide information on the extent to which ESC projects address the programme priorities of diversity and inclusion, participation, sustainability and digitalisation. The RAY SOC questionnaire investigated both the extent to which projects developed competences related to the four programme priorities, and the extent to which participants felt that each priority was reflected in project implementation. As the programme priorities are covered in the RAY SOC survey, but not in participant reports of the final project reporting (data source for solidarity projects' participants), the **following chapter will focus only on volunteering projects.**

Participants were asked to assess the degree to which keywords associated with the programme's priorities reflected the project they participated in. According to Figure 28, the most significant contrast between the average ratings derived from the Estonian dataset and the program's transnational average lies in the sustainability of the projects, with Estonian participants giving slightly lower ratings in this regard. Furthermore, both in Estonia and across the program as a whole, projects were less likely to be perceived as digital, compared to other keywords.

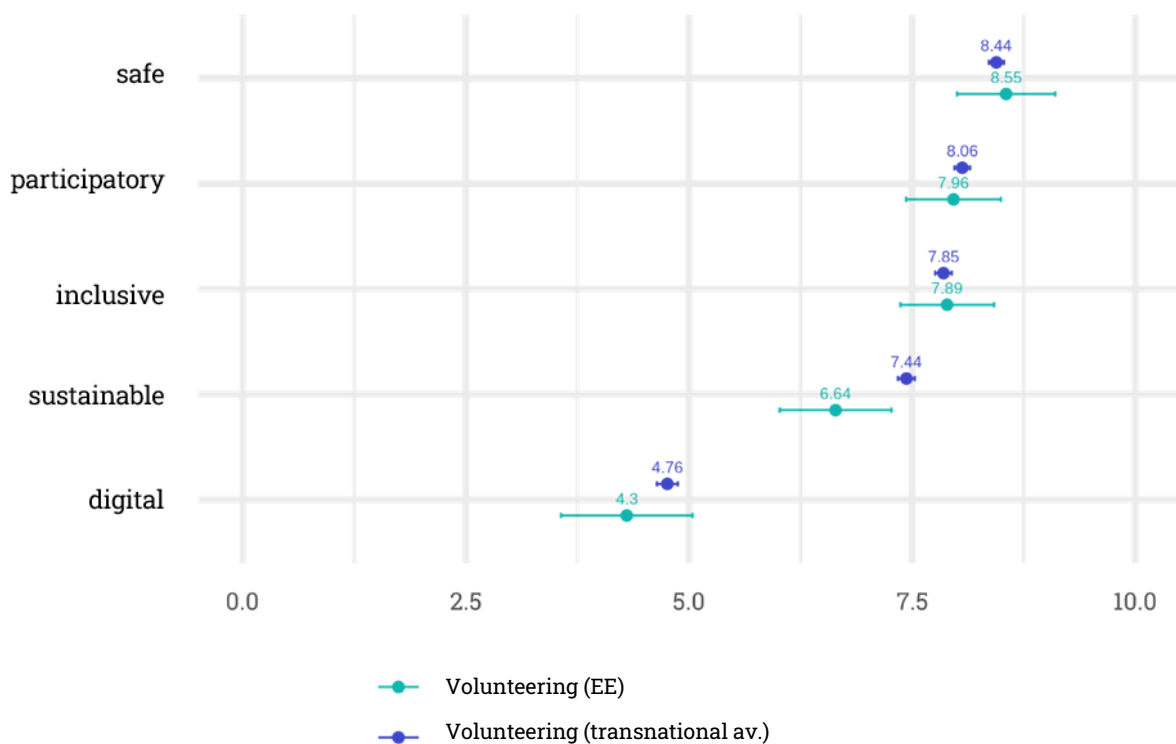


Figure 28. *The project, overall, was ...* (average ratings on a scale of 0-10)

## 4.1. Participation

### 4.1.1. Effects on participants

#### Knowledge

The RAY SOC survey asked volunteering participants about what they learned about youth participation in the project. Among Estonian respondents, the most commonly selected topics from the first list (Figure 29) were learning about actively contributing to Europe, participation in civil society, and how the EU works. Additionally, from the second list of topics concerning youth participation (Figure 30), the most often selected topics were inclusion and empathy.

Here and in the following sub-section on programme priorities, it should be noted that due to the randomised presentation of the survey modules on the four priorities, only about a quarter of respondents answered each module. Also, due to the generally rather small number of respondents in the Estonian dataset, the results here only reflect the perception of a few respondents.

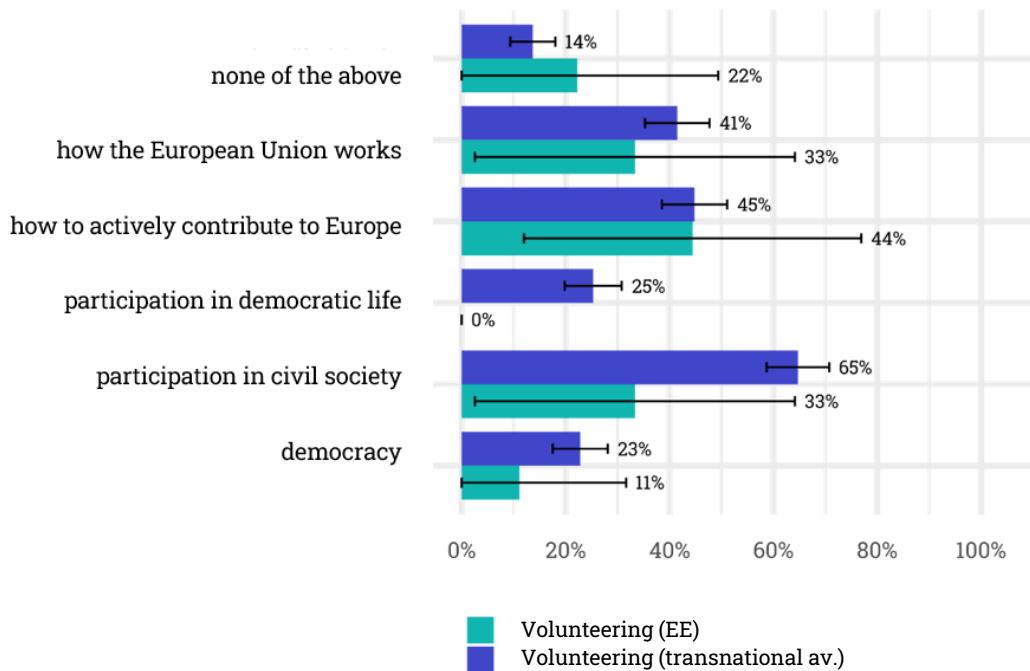


Figure 29. Development of young people's knowledge on participation in volunteering projects. *Through the project, I learned something new about ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=9 respondents to this question.

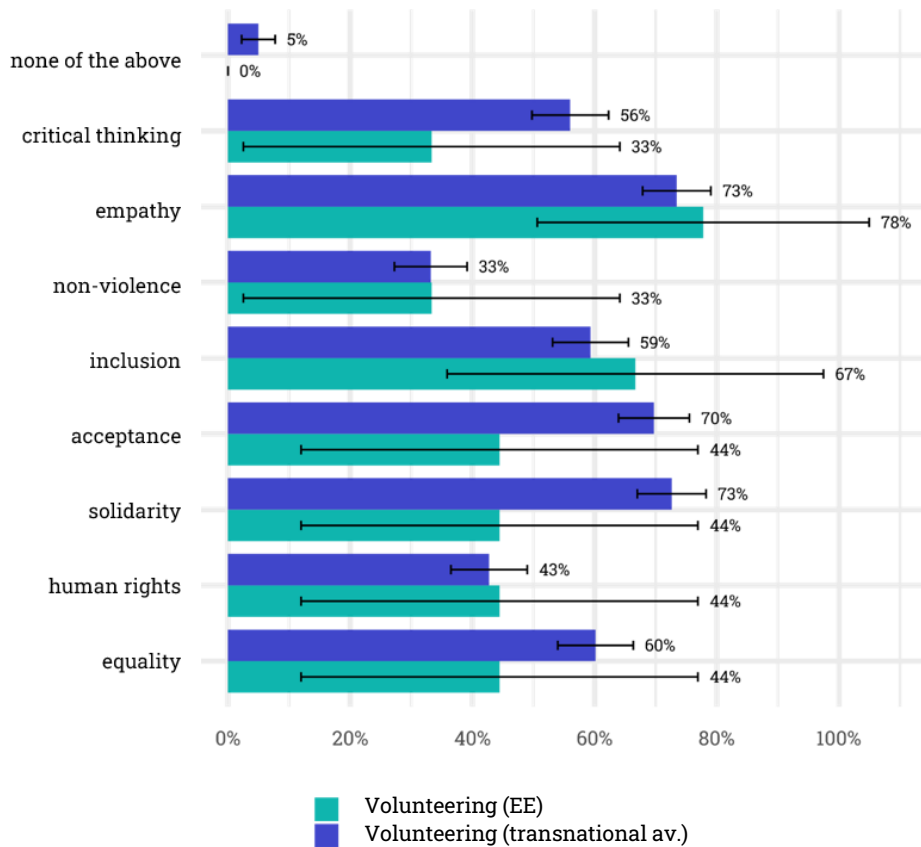


Figure 30. Development of young people's knowledge on participation in volunteering projects. *Through the project, I also learned something about ...* **Note:** In the Estonian data set, n=9 respondents to this question.

### Behaviour and attitudes

The following graphs illustrate the impact of volunteering projects on participants' attitudes and behaviour regarding participation. The results suggest that projects have the clearest impact on young people's interest in contributing to their local community.

Both among Estonian participants and in the programme in general, more than a third of respondents indicated that they volunteer more after the project than before. More than half of both Estonian respondents and respondents programme-wide are more interested in contributing to the local community after the project. Increased interest in participating in democratic processes was perceived by 68% of Estonian respondents (transnational av. 45%).

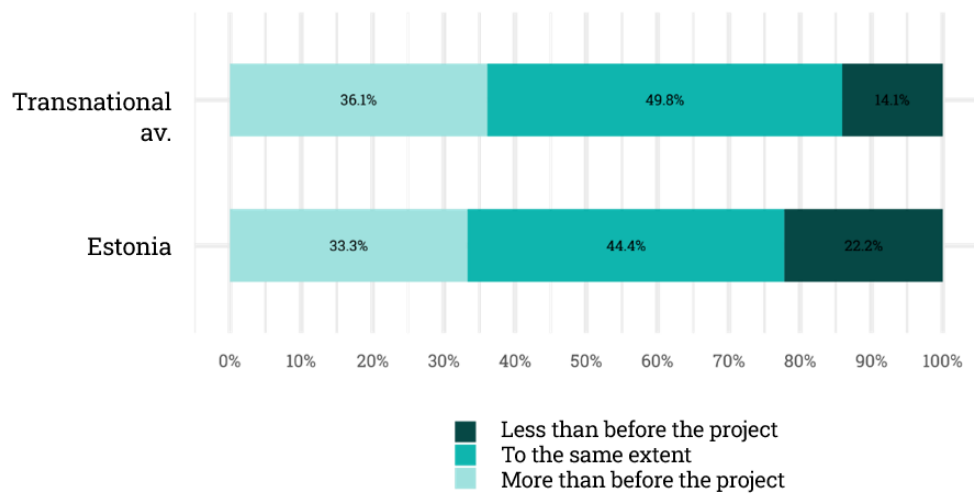


Figure 31. *After the project, I volunteer ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question was n=9.

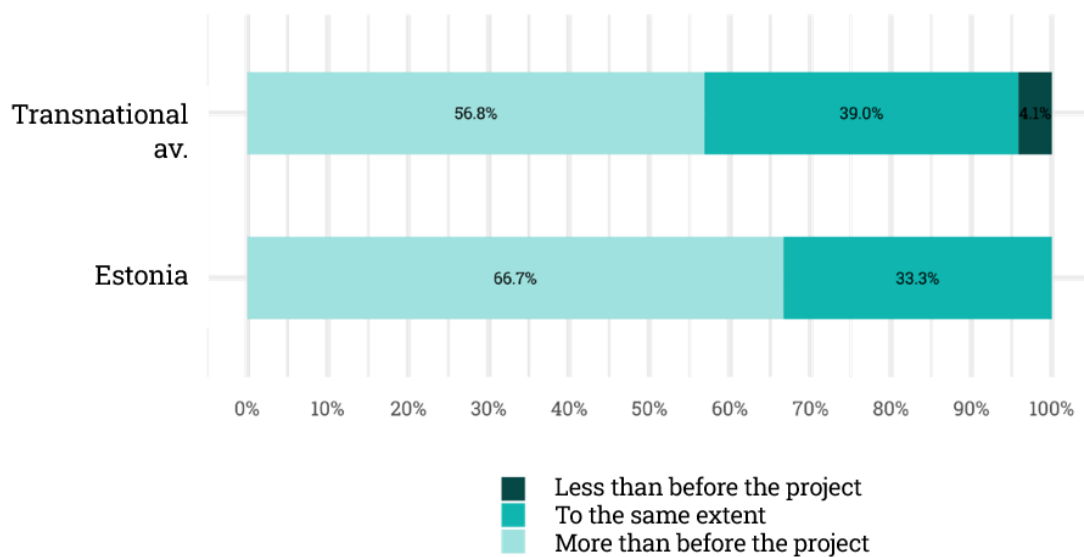


Figure 32. *After the project, I am interested in contributing to my local community ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question was n=9

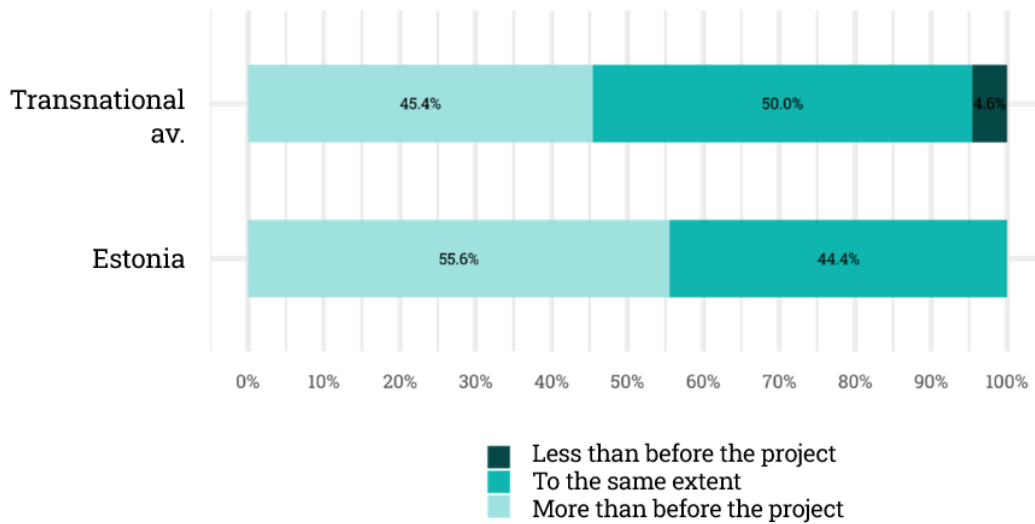


Figure 33. *After the project, I am interested in participating in democratic processes ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question was n=9.

Volunteers rated their sense of closeness to Europe before<sup>13</sup> and after the project on a scale of 0-10 (0 - "not at all close", 10 - "very close"). There are no significant differences between Estonian participants' and the transnational average ratings of the programme, and the results suggest that participants perceive the projects as reinforcing their sense of closeness to Europe.

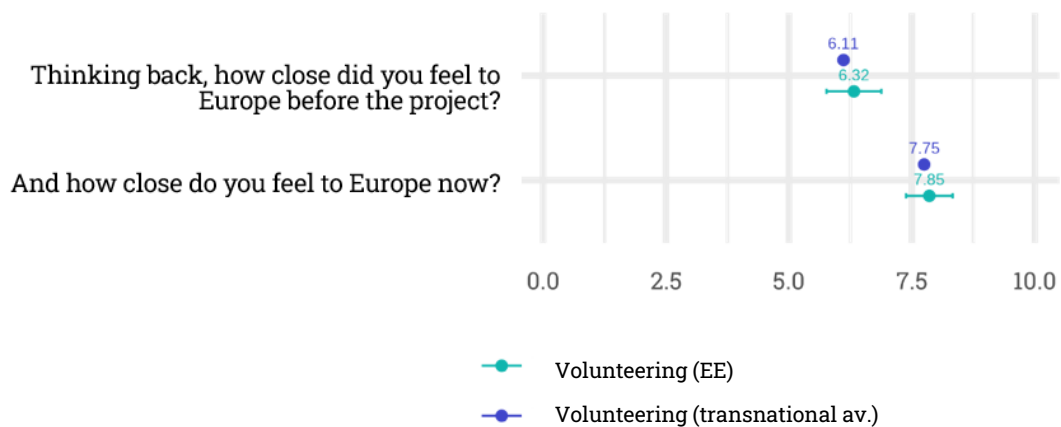


Figure 34. Perceived closeness to Europe before and after the project - volunteering participants.

<sup>13</sup> All participants completed the questionnaire after the project, i.e., the "before" assessment was retrospectively given by

### 4.1.2. Priority reflected in project implementation

78% of the volunteering participants in Estonia (transnational av. 83%) felt that they could contribute their ideas and views to the project ("agree"/"agree strongly"). The vast majority were also satisfied with the way their ideas were taken into account in the project (89% Estonia, 76% transnational av).<sup>14</sup>

## 4.2. Diversity and inclusion

### 4.2.1. Effects on participants

#### Knowledge

Based on both the Estonian dataset and the programme's transnational dataset, it can be said that of the diversity and inclusion-related topics covered in RAY SOC survey, participants learned most about diversity, solidarity and European values (Figure 35). From the second list of themes on diversity and inclusion in the survey the most frequently mentioned themes were empathy, acceptance and critical thinking (Figure 36).

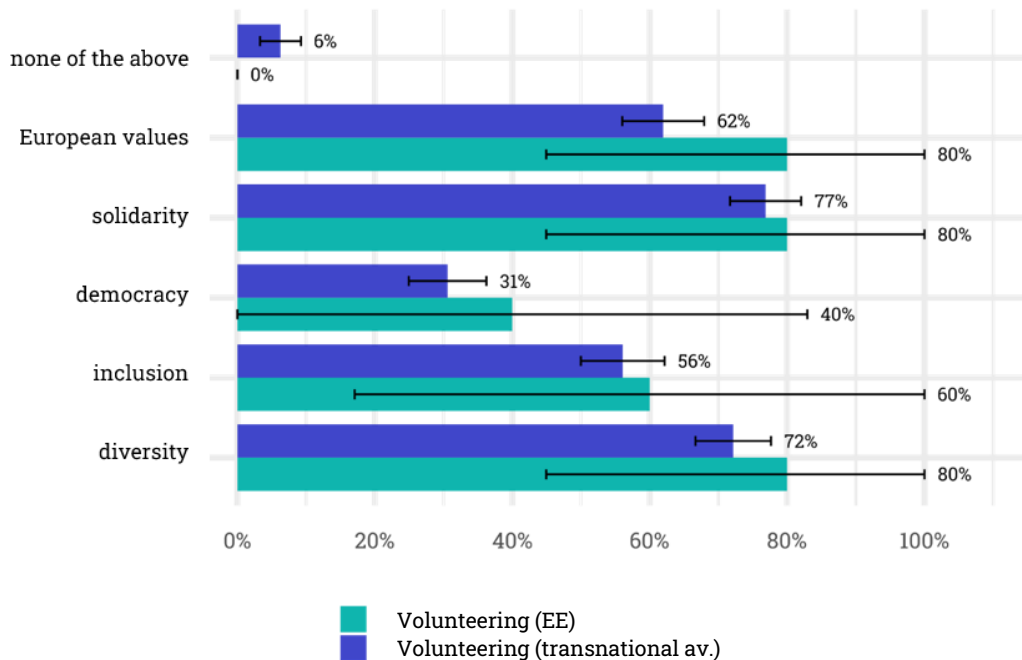


Figure 35. Development of knowledge on inclusion and diversity in volunteering projects. *Through the project, I learned something new about ...* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, n=6 respondents to this question.

<sup>14</sup> In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to these questions was n=9.

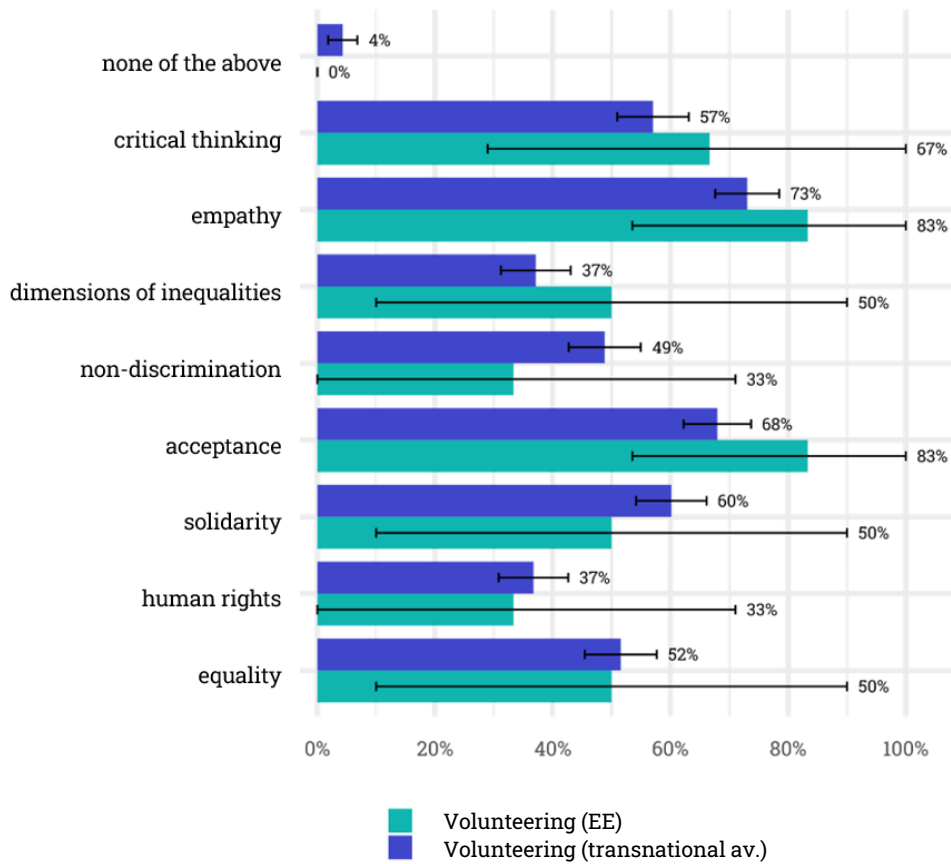


Figure 36. Development of knowledge on inclusion and diversity in volunteering projects. *Through the project, I also learned something about ...* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, n=6 respondents to this question.

### Behaviour and attitudes

Of the attitudes and behaviours related to inclusion and diversity in the RAY SOC survey, volunteering projects had the clearest impact on participants' ability to stand up for their rights: according to the transnational average, over 60% of respondents perceived themselves as actively standing up for their rights after the project (Figure 39). According to the transnational averages of volunteering participants, 57% of respondents actively supported diversity after the project (Figure 37), and 50% of respondents perceived the impact of the project to the extent to which they combat discrimination and intolerance after the project (Figure 38).



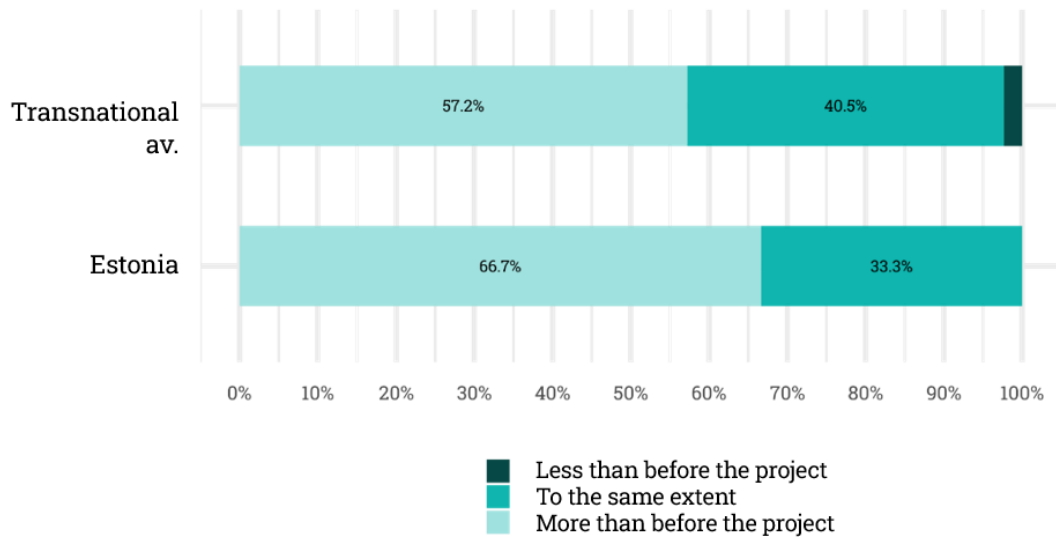


Figure 37. *After the project, I actively support diversity ...* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, the number of respondents to this question was n=6.

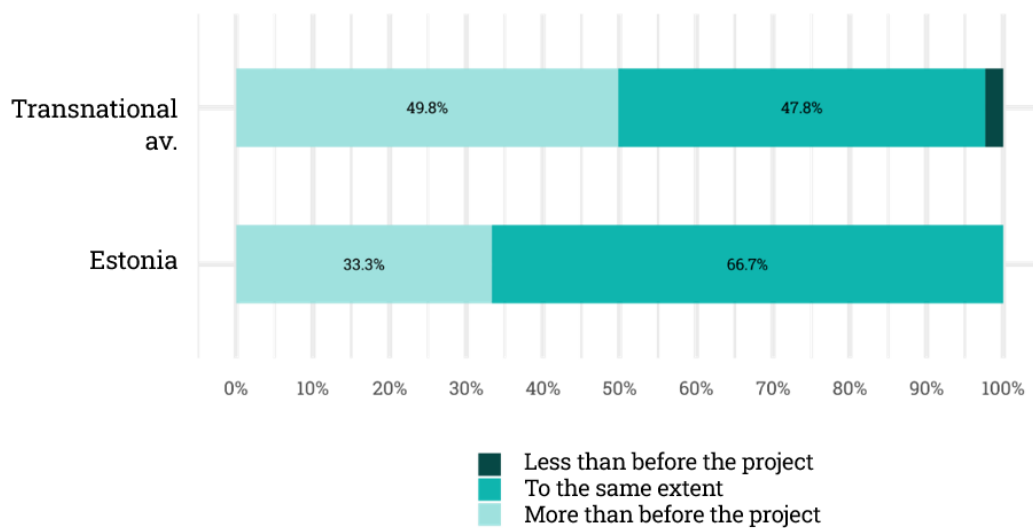


Figure 38. *After the project, I actively stand up against discrimination and intolerance ...* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, the number of respondents to this question was n=6.

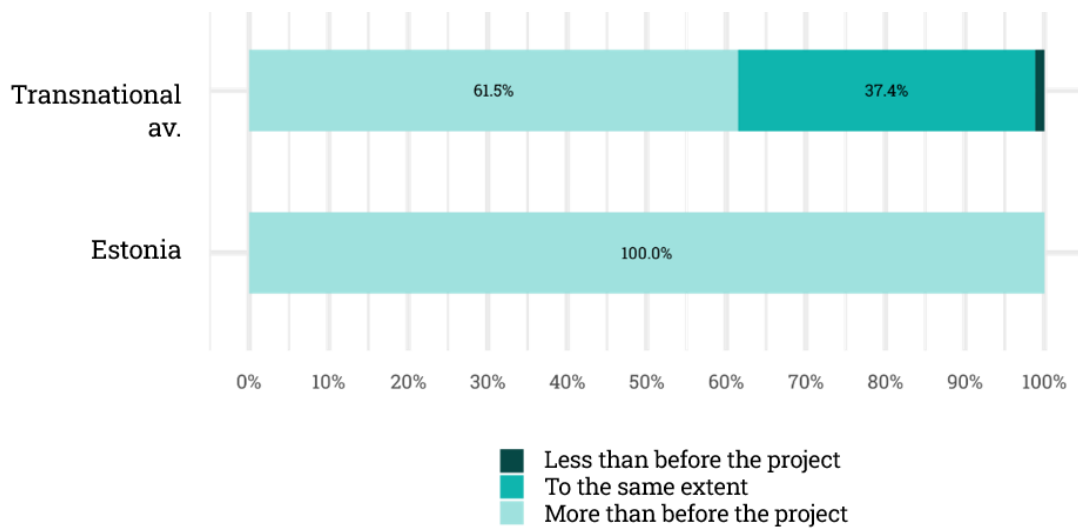


Figure 39. *After the project, I actively stand up for my own rights ...* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, the number of respondents to this question was n=6.

### 4.2.2. Priority reflected in project implementation

To examine the implementation of the priority of diversity and inclusion in project organization, respondents were asked about their sense of integration into the project. According to the Estonian dataset, 33% of participants ("agree"/"agree strongly"), while 85% according to the transnational dataset, felt well integrated into the project. Additionally, participants assessed whether they observed or encountered any barriers to inclusion in the project. Figure 40 indicates that, on average across the program, nearly two-thirds of volunteers who encountered or noticed obstacles felt that these obstacles were overcome during the project.

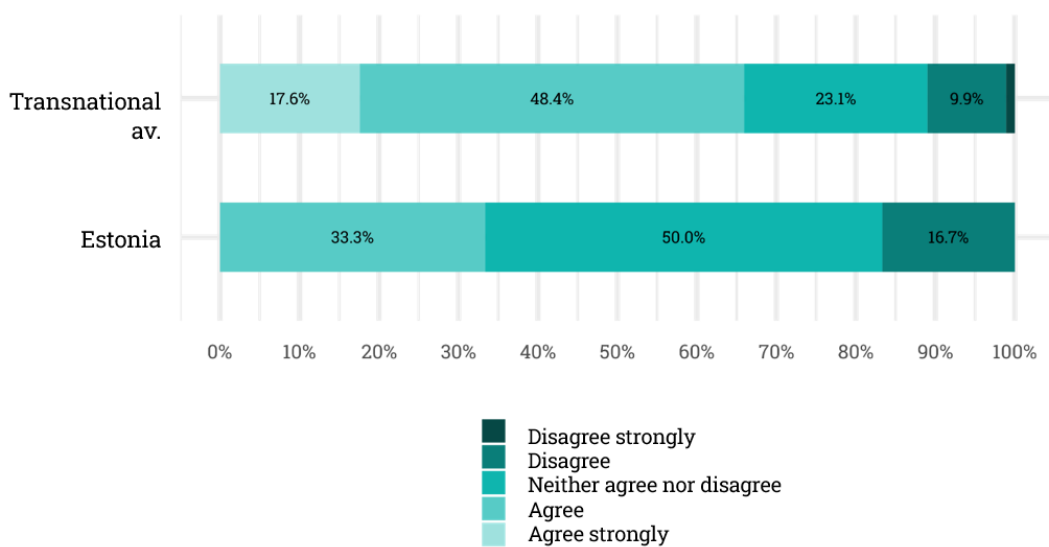


Figure 40. *In the project, we managed to overcome these barriers.* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, n=6 respondents to this question.

## 4.3. Digitalisation

### 4.3.1. Effects on participants

#### Knowledge

Participants most frequently reported problem solving (75%) and learning about communication and collaboration (80%) from the first list of digitalisation-related topics covered in RAY SOC,<sup>15</sup> according to the program's international average ratings (Figure 41). Regarding the second list of topics in the context of digitalisation (Figure 42) participants most often reported learning about solidarity, acceptance, and critical thinking, as per the transnational averages of the programme.

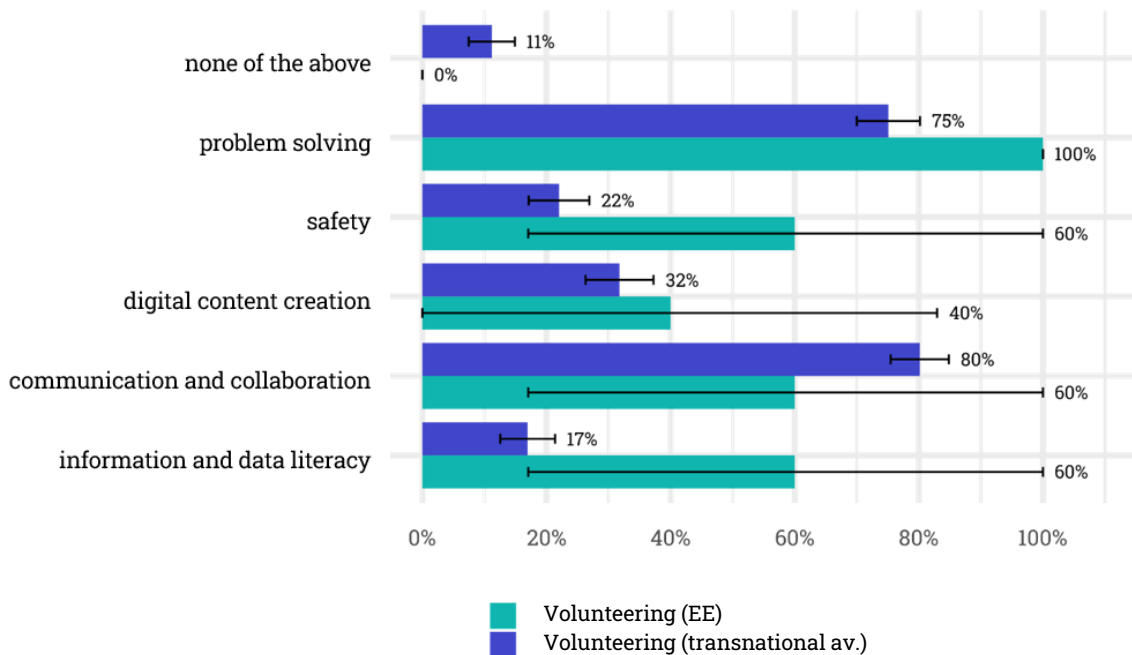


Figure 41. Development of digitalisation-related knowledge in volunteering projects. *Through the project, I learned something new about ....* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=5 respondents to this question.

<sup>15</sup> Prior to the questions on digitalisation-related knowledge, it was specified in the RAY SOC questionnaire that the following questions would be about digitalisation related to the project, so the more general topics listed in the figures can be interpreted in the context of digitalisation (e.g. digital safety or digital communication and collaboration). At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that respondents may still have had a broader understanding of the topics covered in these questions of the survey and may have answered accordingly.

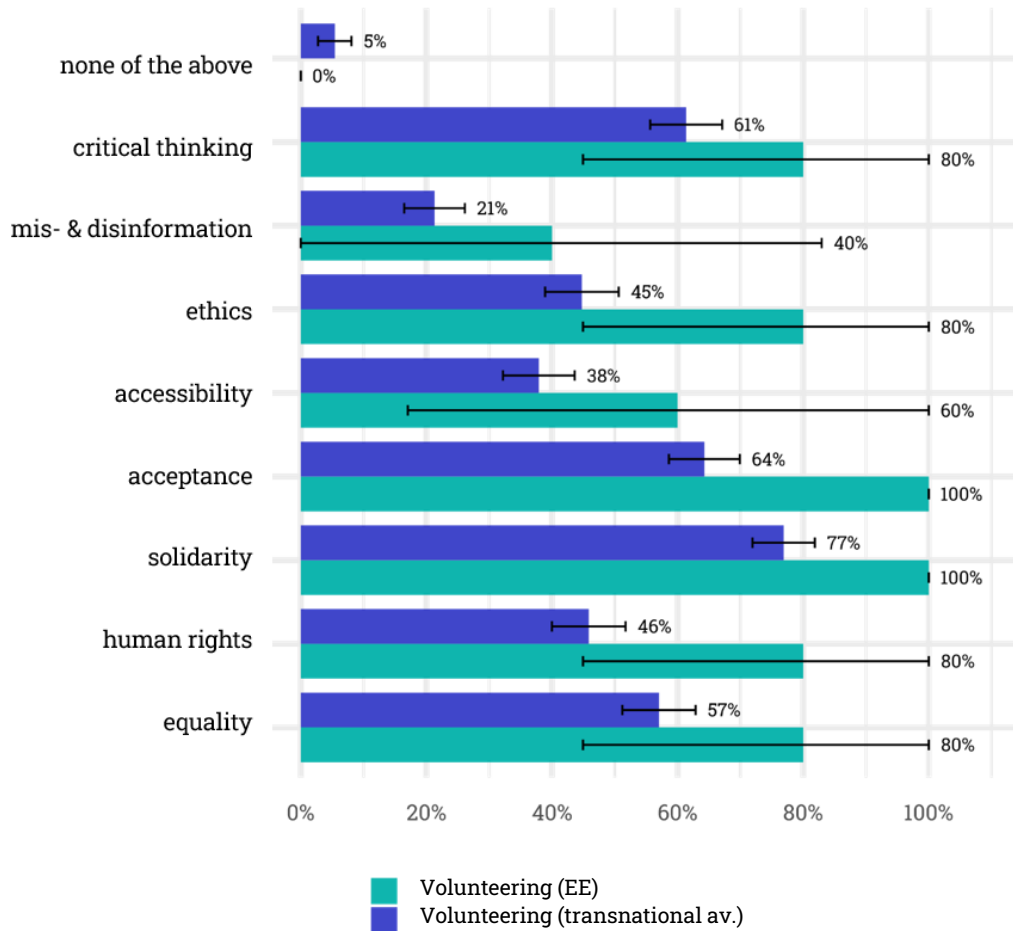


Figure 42. Development of digitalisation-related knowledge in volunteering projects. *Through the project, I also learned something about ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=5 respondents to this question.

**Behaviour and attitudes**

In the context of EU youth programmes, digital well-being refers to the ongoing impact of digital technologies and processes on people's mental, physical and emotional health.<sup>16</sup> According to the transnational averages, the vast majority of volunteering participants do not believe the project has influenced their ability to take care of their digital well-being. (Figure 43).

<sup>16</sup> <https://participationpool.eu/resource-category/digital-transformation/digital-well-being/>

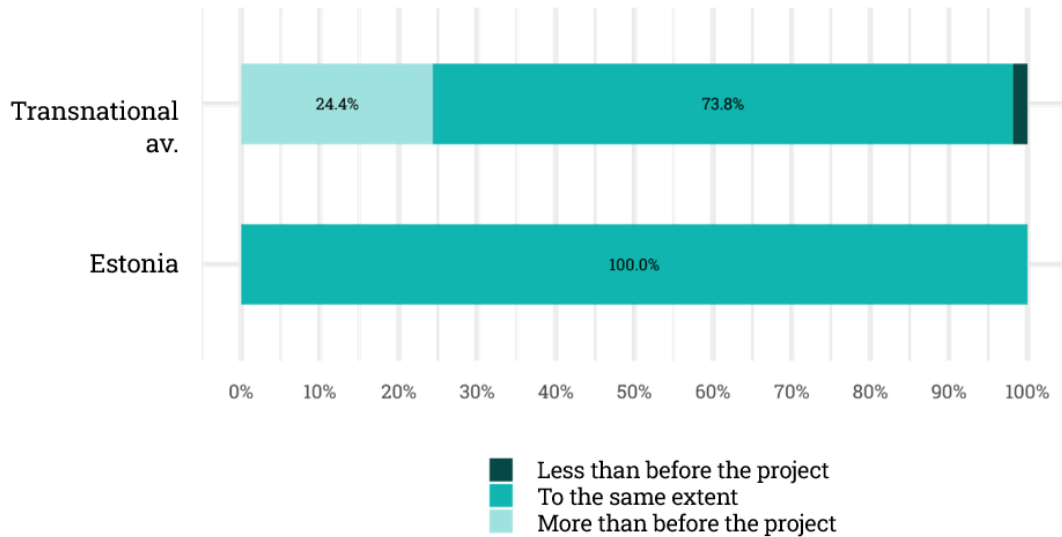


Figure 43. *After the project, I am able to take care of my digital wellbeing\*...* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, the number of respondents to this question was n=5

### 4.3.2. Priority reflected in project implementation

According to the ESC programme's transnational average ratings, 55% of respondents were satisfied with the way digital spaces were used in the project and 47% of respondents were satisfied with the way digitality was reflected in the project (Figure 44 and Figure 45).

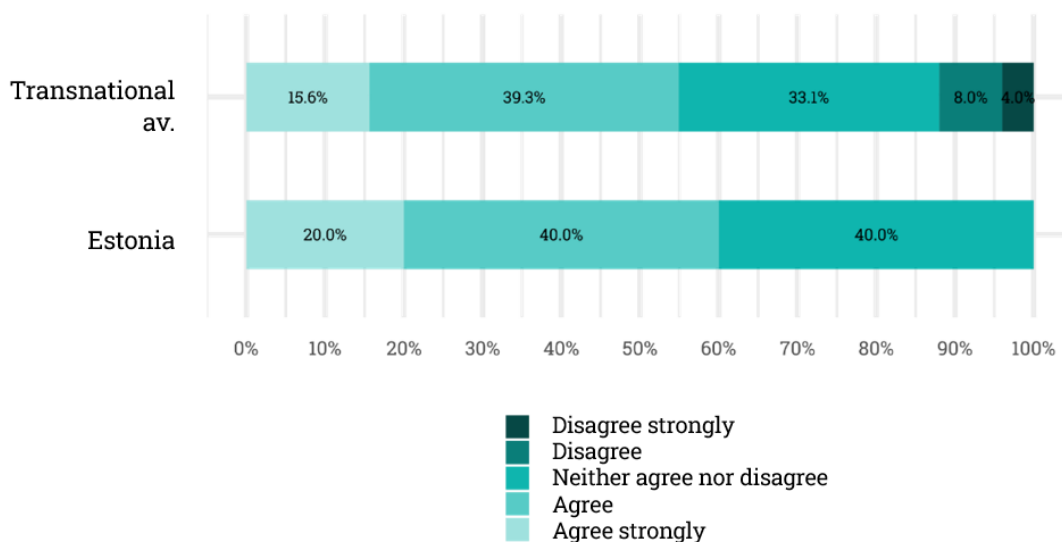


Figure 44. *I was satisfied with how the project used digital spaces.* **Note:** In the Estonian sample, n=5 respondents to this question.

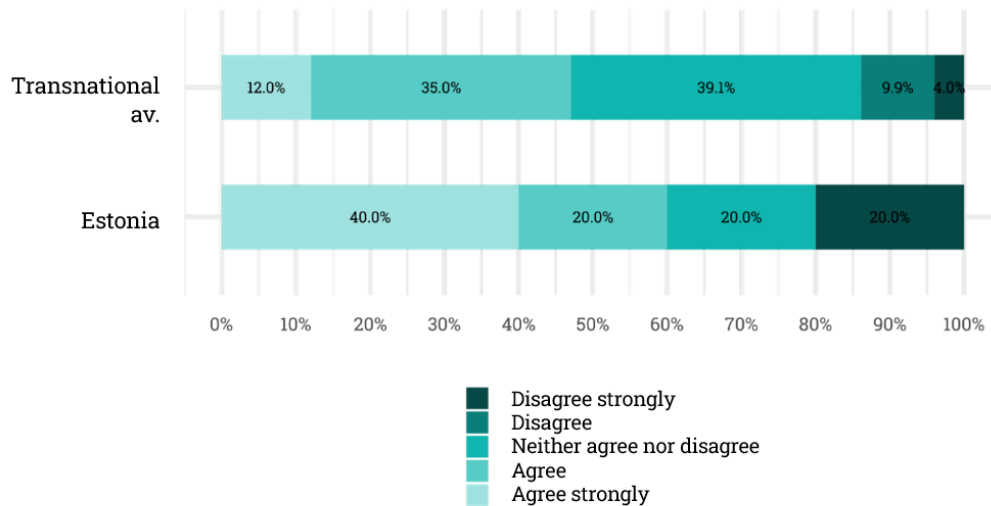


Figure 45. *I was satisfied with how we reflected on digitality in the project.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=5 respondents to this question.

## 4.4. Sustainability

### 4.4.1. Effects on participants

#### Knowledge

The transnational average ratings of volunteering participants suggest that through the projects, the participants learned the most about sustainable development from a social and environmental perspective (Figure 46).

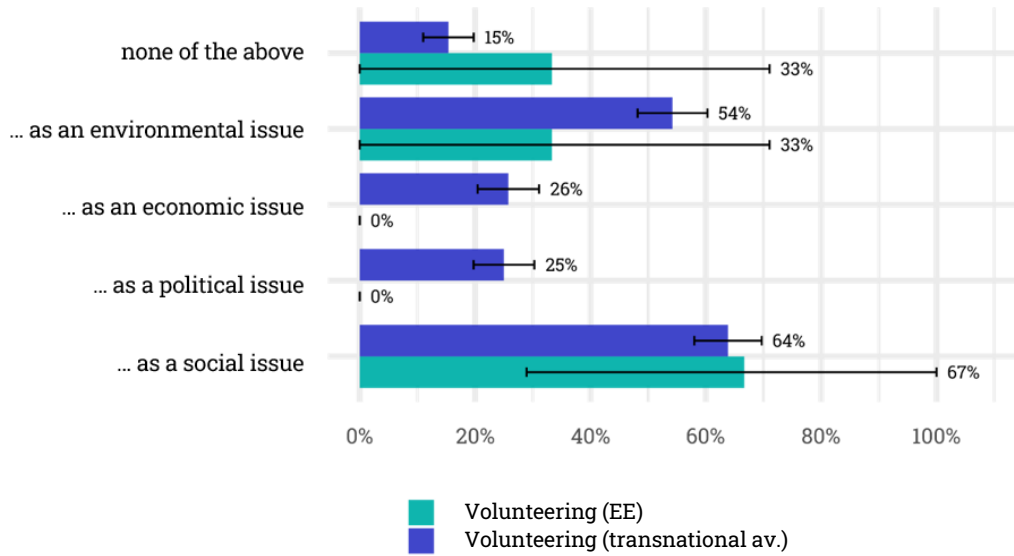


Figure 46. Development of sustainability-related knowledge in volunteering projects. *In the project, I learned something about sustainable development ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question was n=6.

Of the other themes explored in the context of sustainability, participants in the project most often reported learning about solidarity, acceptance and equality (Figure 47).

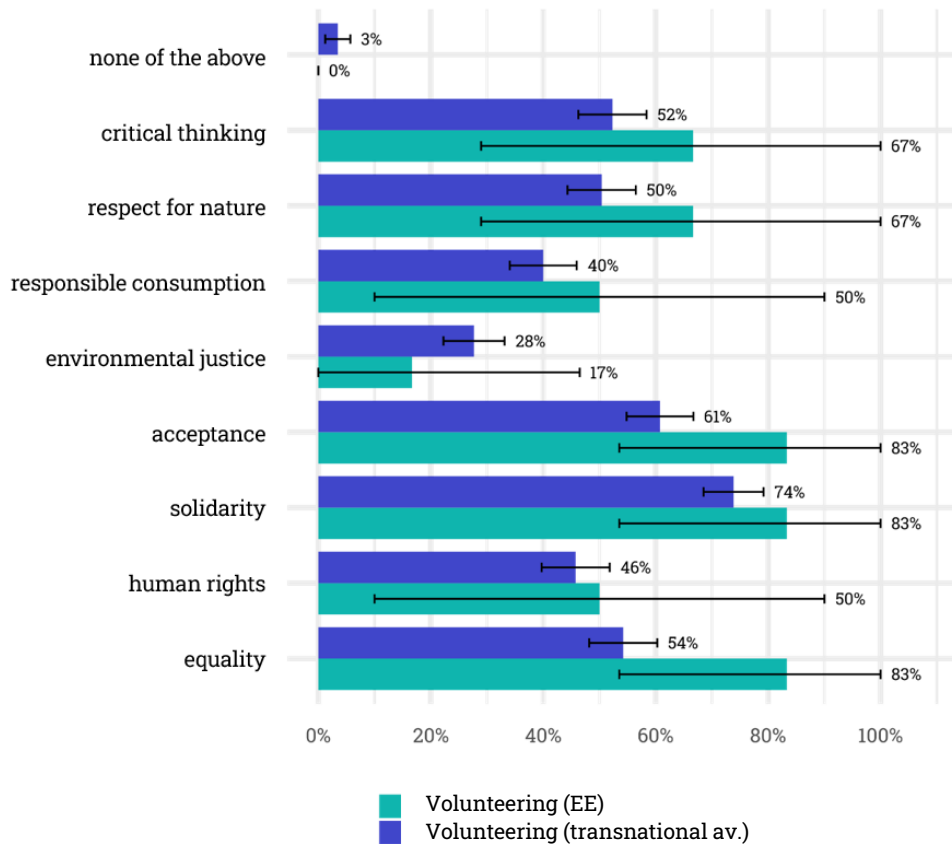


Figure 47. Development of sustainability-related knowledge in volunteering projects. *Through the project, I also learned something about ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=6 respondents to this question.

### Behaviour and attitudes

ESC transnational averages suggest that volunteering projects generally increase participants' sensitivity of towards environmental issues. 63% of respondents (transnational av.) found that the project made them more sensitive to environmental issues (Figure 48), 43% indicated that after the project they actively contribute to environmental sustainability in their everyday life (Figure 49), and 38% reported actively pushing for environmental sustainability in the society more after the project (Figure 50). Moreover, 24% reported pushing for environmental sustainability in politics more after the project than before (Figure 51).

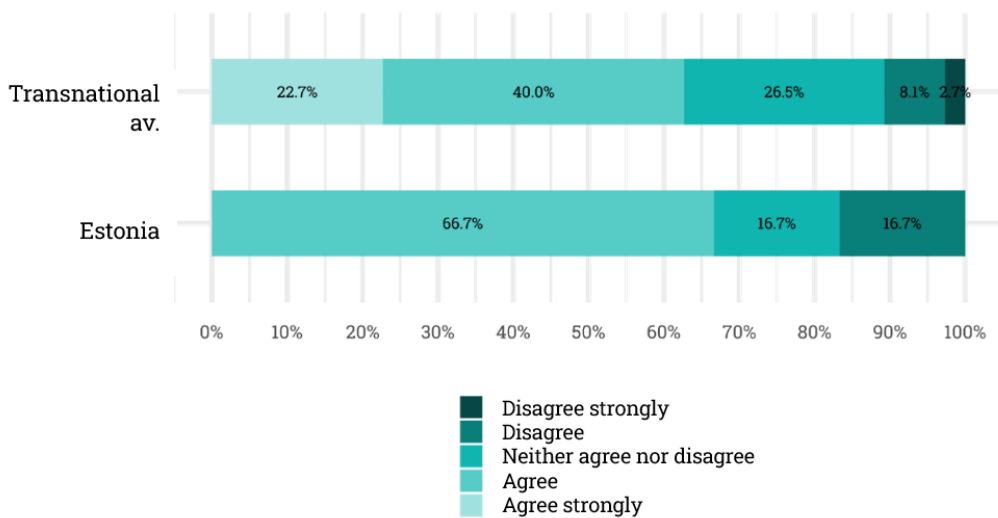


Figure 48. *The project has made me more sensitive towards environmental issues.* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, n=6 respondents to this question.

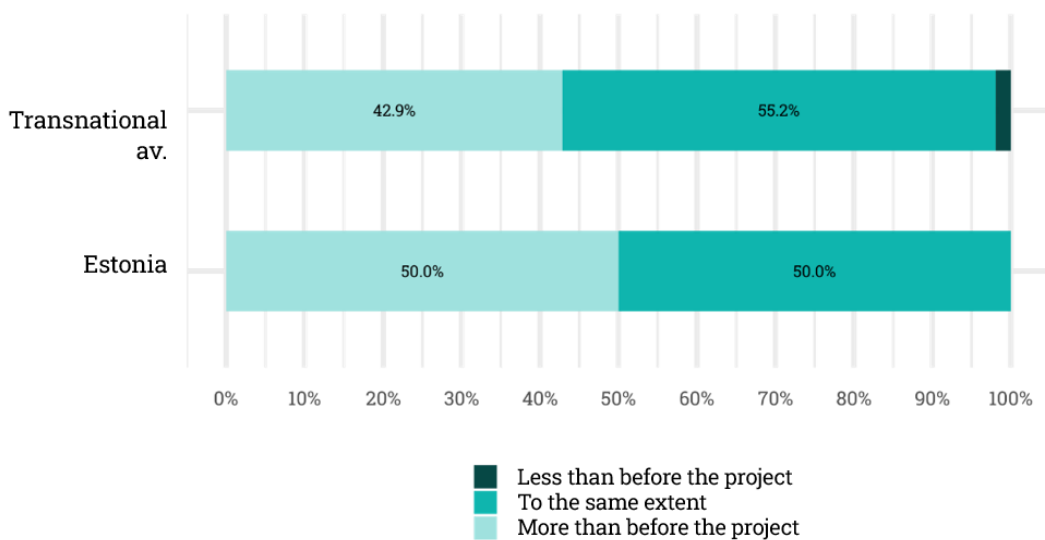


Figure 49. *After the project, I actively contribute to environmental sustainability in my everyday life...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question was n=6.



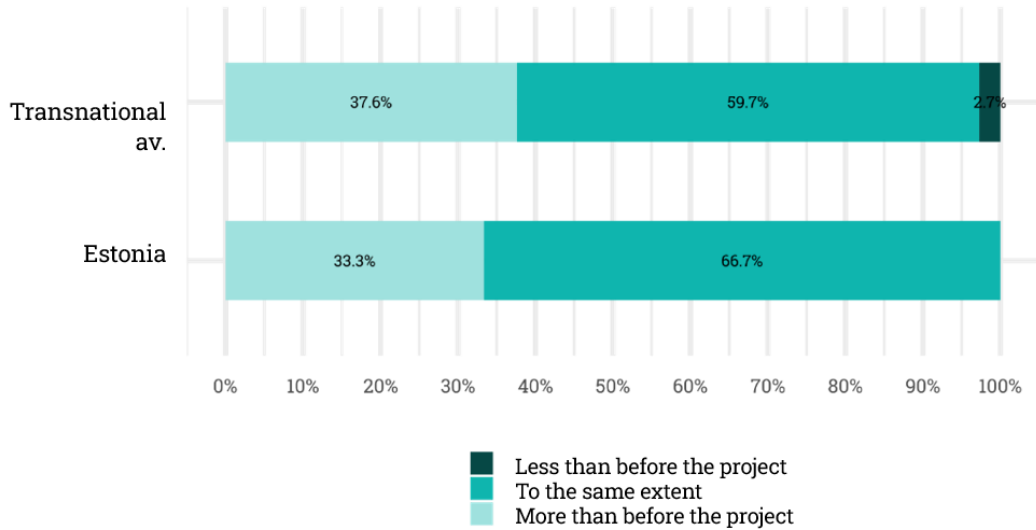


Figure 50. *After the project, I actively push for environmental sustainability in society ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question was n=6.

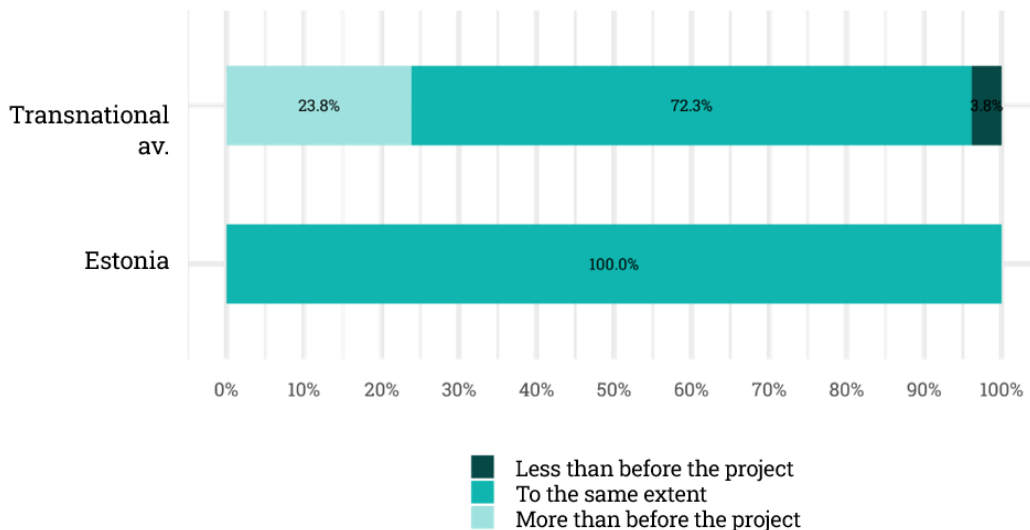


Figure 51. *After the project, I actively push for environmental sustainability in politics ...* **Note:** In the Estonian dataset, the number of respondents to this question was n=6.

### Priority reflected in project implementation

Volunteering project participants were asked how sustainable they considered the project to be. Among Estonian participants, 67% believed that the project could have been more sustainable. According to the program's transnational average, 43% of respondents shared this view ("agree" or "agree strongly").

## 5. Effects on local communities

This chapter focuses on the effects of the projects on the local communities involved. On a scale from 0 to 10, volunteering project participants were asked to rate how actively the local community was involved in the project and how well was the project received by the community (Figure 52). There is no significant difference between the average ratings of Estonian participants and the transnational averages of the programme, and the results suggest that, in general, participants rated community involvement and their attitude towards the project positively.

Solidarity projects' participant reports also addressed the projects' effects on the local community, asking respondents whether they perceived any positive changes in the community as a result of the project. **Among solidarity project participants, 95% perceived that the project created positive changes in the target community.**

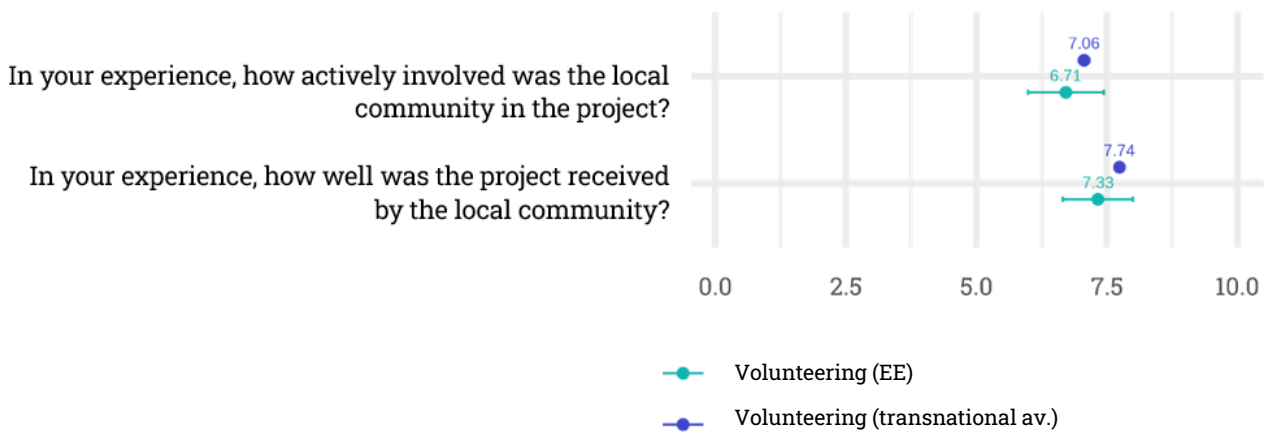


Figure 52. Effects on local communities - volunteering projects participants' responses.

## 6. Project implementation

### 6.1. Learning about the project opportunity

The primary source for volunteering project participants to learn about the project opportunity was through friends (32% in Estonia, transnational av. 29%). Nearly one-third of Estonian participants discovered the project through social media and organisations. Participants' responses show that SALTO Centres, mentors, Eurodesk, and the National Agency played a minor role in informing young people about ESC volunteering opportunities, both within Estonia and across the program.

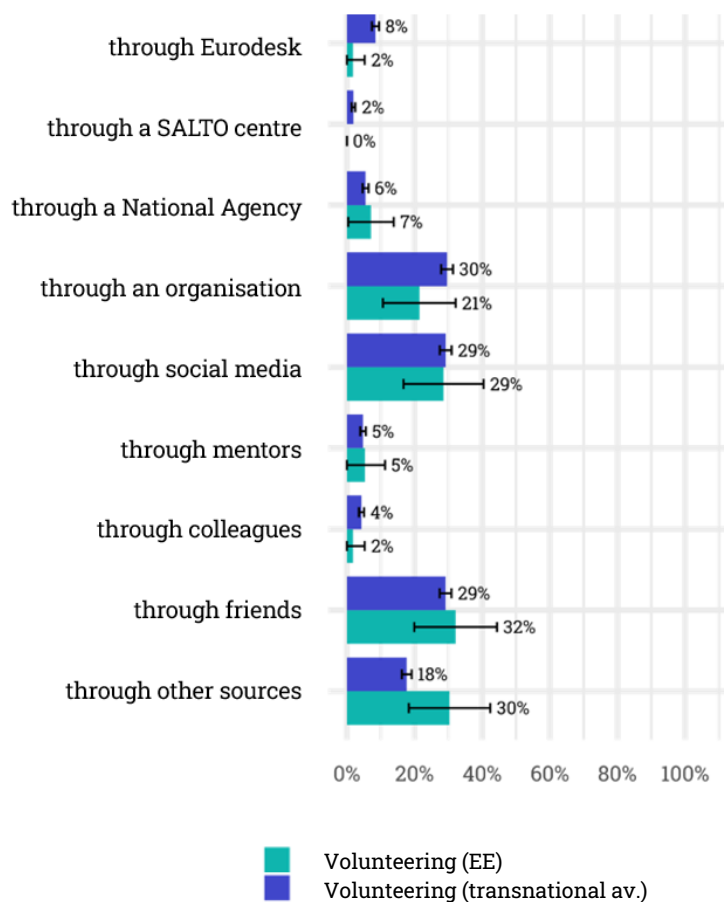


Figure 53. *I got to know about the project ...* Share of respondents (%), multiple choice.

## 6.2. Youthpass

Most ESC volunteers who responded to RAY SOC survey reported receiving a Youthpass at the end of the project (Table 6). In solidarity projects, Youthpass seems to be less common, with less than half of the participants receiving a youthpass or other certificate of competences at the end of the project. At the same time, the RAY SOC results on volunteering projects show that 82% of Estonian respondents who have received a Youthpass (transnational av. 80%) have never used it to prove their competences (Figure 54).

	Volunteering (EE)	Volunteering (transnational av.)	Solidarity projects
Yes	66%	72%	45%
Not yet, but I am expecting to receive one	20%	17%	-
No	14%	10%	55%

Table 6. Youthpass at the end of the project. RAY SOC - *Did you receive a Youthpass certificate as part of the project?* Solidarity projects' participant reports - *Have you received a certificate, diploma or document that describes and validates the competences acquired during your European Solidarity Corps activity (i.e Youthpass, Europass)?*

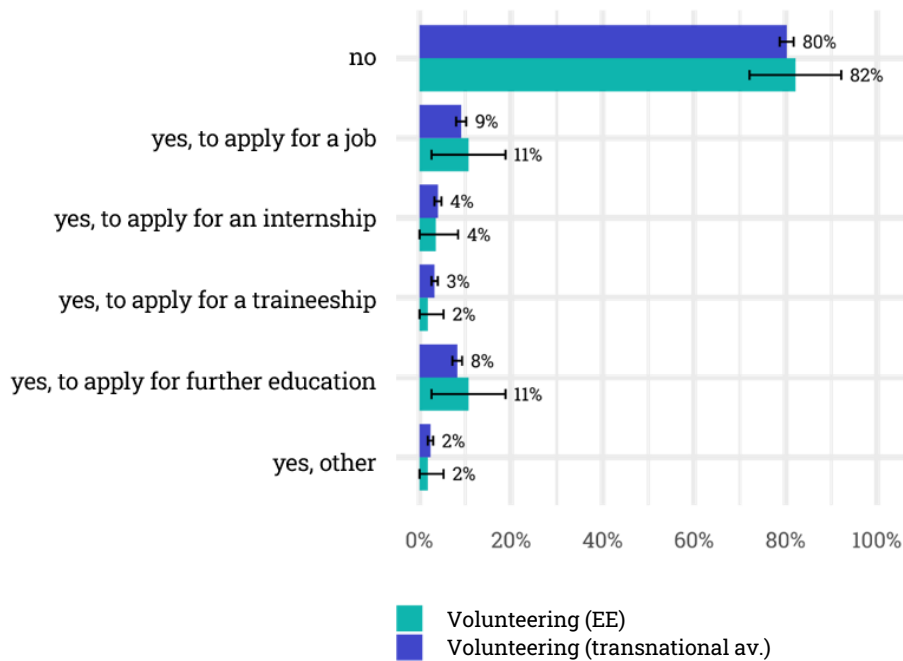


Figure 54. Using Youthpass - volunteering. *Have you ever used a Youthpass certificate?*

## 7. Summary and conclusions

### 7.1. Key findings

#### Volunteering

- The majority of participants in volunteering projects were female, accounting for 71.4% respondents in Estonia and 68.5% overall in the programme.
- More than 70% of Estonian respondents were young people living in urban areas. Less than a fifth of respondents lived in rural areas or villages.
- Among Estonian respondents, there were less young people with a higher education than on average in the programme (46% in Estonia, compared to transnational av. 64%). A third of Estonian participants come from families where the mother/female guardian has a higher education and over 40% from families where the father/male guardian has a higher education.
- 18% of Estonian volunteers were in paid employment (transnational av. 13%) and 25% were in education (transnational av. 34%). Compared to the programme's transnational average, there were slightly fewer unemployed young people among Estonian participants.
- The share of young people with fewer opportunities is higher in Estonia (54.5%) than on average in the programme (42.1%).
- 42.9% of Estonian participants have participated in similar EU projects before (transnational av. 34.4%).
- The most common reasons for joining a volunteering project are the desire to learn something new (82% in Estonia; 85% transnational av.), to meet new people (70% in Estonia; 80% transnational av.) and to develop language skills (59% in Estonia; 68% transnational av).
- Among Estonian participants, a smaller proportion of respondents perceived the project's impact on the expansion of their networks (64% "agree" or "agree strongly") than according to the transnational average of volunteering participants (79% "agree" or "agree strongly").
- Volunteering projects' participants reported developing knowledge the most in the following areas: expressing oneself with empathy (81%), cooperating with others (77%)

and using different languages for communication (77%). Compared to the other surveyed topics, learning about using digital technologies was reported less (23%).

- Compared to other skills and attitudes, the impact of projects on the ability to cooperate in a team stands out, with fewer respondents reporting the development of this skill. 18% according to the transnational average and 27% of Estonian respondents disagree that the project developed their ability to cooperate in a team.
- Volunteering participants perceive digitality less reflected in the projects than other programme priorities.
- The findings indicate that participants believe projects have an impact on their attitudes and behavior towards contributing to the local community. Specifically, over one-third of respondents, among both Estonian sample and according to the transnational average, reported volunteering more after the project than before. Also, more than half of both Estonian respondents and respondents from the entire transnational sample expressed increased interest in contributing to the local community after the project compared to before.
- The results suggest that participants perceive the projects to increase their sense of closeness to Europe.
- 78% of the volunteering participants from the Estonian sample (transnational av. 83% "agree"/"agree strongly ") felt that they could contribute their ideas and views to the project. The vast majority were also satisfied with the way their ideas were taken into account in the project (89% in Estonia, 76% transnational av. "agree"/"agree strongly").
- According to the transnational average, the vast majority of volunteers did not perceive the project's impact on their ability to take care of their digital well-being.
- Participants perceive volunteering projects to increase their sensitivity to environmental issues: 63% of respondents (transnational av.) found that the project made them more sensitive to environmental issues. Moreover, 43% (transnational av.) indicated that they actively contribute to environmental sustainability in their everyday life after the project, 38% (transnational av.) actively push for environmental sustainability in society and 24% (transnational av.) for environmental sustainability in politics after the project more than before.
- The most common ways of finding out about volunteering opportunities are through friends (32% Estonia, 29% transnational av.), social media (29% Estonia, 29% transnational av) and through an organisation (21% Estonia, 30% transnational av.).

- 66% of Estonian participants received a Youthpass at the end of the project (transnational av. 72%), but 82% (transnational av. 80%) of those who received a Youthpass have never used it to prove their competences.

## Solidarity projects

- Two thirds of participants in solidarity projects identified as female.
- In terms of employment status, students (37%) and young people in full-time employment (26%) were the most common among participants. 12% of the participants in solidarity projects were secondary school students.
- The highest proportions of young people in solidarity projects experience fewer opportunities due to geographical (46%) and economic (40%) barriers and health problems (41%).
- The key competences the most frequently reported to be improved through the projects were the ability to cooperate in teams (78%), plan and organise tasks and activities (78%), find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills) (72%) and the ability to develop an idea and put it into practice (70%).
- From the skills and attitudes surveyed, participants in solidarity projects most often reported improving their self-confidence (72%), understanding of their strengths and weaknesses (72%), the ability to adapt to new challenges (69%) and open-mindedness and curiosity about new challenges (69%). Less frequently, participants mentioned the impact of the project on their interest in European topics (29%), on their sense of feeling European (30%) and on their awareness of social and political concepts such as democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, civil rights (33%).
- From the perspective of participants' educational and professional development, participants perceived the project's impact most on their readiness to pursue further education (58%). Almost half of the respondents indicated that the project gave them a clearer idea of their professional goals.
- 95% of participants in solidarity projects felt that the project created a positive change in the local community.

- In solidarity projects, the Youthpass is less common than in volunteering: less than half of the participants in solidarity projects received a Youthpass or other certificate of competences at the end of the project.

## 7.2. Conclusions

This analysis focused on European Solidarity Corps projects in 2021-2022. The aim was to identify the effects of Solidarity Corps projects on participants, participating organisations and local communities, the competences developed by participants in the projects and to evaluate accessibility of the programme's activities. For volunteering projects, we used Estonian data from the RAY SOC survey, i.e., responses of participants from Estonia or from projects funded by the Estonian NA. For solidarity projects, we used data collected from participants during the final project reporting (Participant Reports).

**Participants in volunteering projects reported their experiences as meaningful and positive. The findings suggest that ESC volunteering has the potential to enhance young people's community involvement beyond the duration of the project.** One notable impact of these projects is on the attitudes and behaviors of young individuals towards contributing to their local communities. Over a third of respondents (both in the Estonian and transnational sample), stated that they volunteered more after the project compared to before.

While the data from the RAY SOC survey doesn't allow for an evaluation of how positive project experiences influence volunteers' actual volunteering behaviour in their home countries, previous surveys have shown Estonia as a country where international volunteering is more popular than domestic opportunities<sup>17</sup>. Unlike some other countries like France, Estonia lacks a national volunteering program to support long-term volunteering within the country. Therefore, ESC volunteering plays a significant role in the volunteering landscape in Estonia. However, it is essential to further examine what lessons can be drawn from ESC volunteering projects to make domestic volunteering opportunities more accessible and appealing to young people in Estonia, especially considering their increased motivation to contribute to the local community after participating in ESC volunteering.

**Participants primarily perceive the impact of local solidarity projects as contributing to their personal development. However, the influence of solidarity projects on the European dimension and the values associated with the program's overarching objectives is comparatively less pronounced.** While nearly three quarters of participants in solidarity projects perceived the project's positive impact on self-confidence and understanding of their

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2020). Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities, Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/346359>



strengths and weaknesses, about one in three respondents perceived the project as having had an impact on their sense of European identity and learning about EU values (e.g., democracy, justice, equality). Of course, this is also a significant proportion of respondents, but it is clearly fewer than for the other surveyed skills and attitudes.

It is crucial for solidarity projects to embody EU values, as they need to align with the overarching goals of the programme: fostering cohesion, solidarity, democracy, and European identity. Previous research has identified a concern within ESC regarding the varying and sometimes unclear understanding and acceptance of its core value - solidarity - across different European countries.<sup>18,19</sup> The limited reflection of other EU values in Solidarity projects might also stem from these conceptual challenges.

It is important to note, however, that among volunteers, learning about diversity, solidarity and European values in the projects was reported by the majority of respondents, both in the Estonian context and according to the programmes transnational averages. **Thus, the lower reflection of EU themes may also be due to the local dimension of solidarity projects.**

The proportion of young people with fewer opportunities among participants in the Estonian sample exceeds the transnational average of the programme. However, evaluating the degree to which the programme's goal of including young people with fewer opportunities has been achieved is difficult due to the absence of a clear, measurable benchmark. A recent study examining the implementation and challenges of the European Solidarity Corps<sup>20</sup> also noted the absence of a measurable target for the inclusion of such young people. Additionally, stakeholders interviewed in the aforementioned study identified significant issues related to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, including a lack of suitable projects and limited involvement of specific disadvantaged groups.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, future studies utilising RAY SOC data could benefit from focusing on the experiences of young people with fewer opportunities. However, since this approach would only capture the perspectives of those who have already participated in the programme, it would be beneficial to also involve young people with fewer opportunities who have not yet participated. This broader approach would help identify and address barriers relevant in the Estonian context, considering that the programme's high entry threshold has been previously highlighted as a significant obstacle.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RAY-SOC\\_Programmatic-Study\\_20231004.pdf](https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RAY-SOC_Programmatic-Study_20231004.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2020). *Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities*, Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/346359>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RAY-SOC\\_Programmatic-Study\\_20231004.pdf](https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RAY-SOC_Programmatic-Study_20231004.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*