



In November 2022 we launched a survey about the emotional mood of teachers and youth workers in Latvia and Bulgaria.

Here is the summary of the results:

Age and experience

65 answers were collected in Latvia.

60% of the respondents were aged over 50 years, and 24.6% were from 41 till 50 years old. This clearly reflects Latvian reality, most of our teachers are in age 40 and 50 plus. A lot of respondents were reflecting about pension age, and how would be the situation in their pension age. Youth workers, though, were younger. The work experience also correlates with the common age, 89.2% of all the respondents have been working over 10 years in the field (at school). In Latvia, if one becomes a teacher, most probably he or she will spend the whole life in the same school or at least in the school sector in general.

Gender

We have almost 91% of females in this sector. Youth workers are more often men, but the majority of teachers at schools are women.

Geography

We had most respondents from villages and small towns, as also our aim was to reach out to teachers and youth workers with geographical obstacles. Most of the schools were for 100 till 300 students, that is counted as middle size schools in Latvia. Huge schools, like more than 1,000 people, basically are just in the capital or these are technical schools. The good news is that also in villages we have middle size schools, it is possible to find very small places in Latgale, where students come from many other villages around.

Language

Most of our respondents speak several languages, and it was very interesting to compare which languages one speaks at home, and which languages he or she speaks at work. Mainly teachers and youth workers speak Latvian at work, some can also afford speaking several languages, for example English, especially in the capital and big cities. Besides Latvian, Russian was used at work in schools only, if the teacher actually teaches Russian language. Same was about Polish language at the Polish school. At

home, however, there is a bigger variety of languages, often people speak both Latvian and Russian at home, also Latgalian dialect is present in Latgale region. The level of English is not so good, if the teachers do not need to teach it. Youth workers though are better in English. I tried to put the tolls on the same slide here because it was interesting to see that English skills are not on a very good level, as you see one and 2.

Young people's mood

We were surprised to notice that the teachers and youth workers think that young people's mood is quite good: mostly 3, 4 out of 5. It could be felt also, that teachers tried to highlight that those young people that exactly they work with, feel even better than the rest.

The central aspect of young people's worries in Latvia were future, and it is the future of the country, the future of the world, the future of our region. The topic of future appears in terms of what to do after the school, where to study. Other worries named were studies - both the future studies, as well as now during, the school process.

Also, central topics were war and economic situation due to the war. A little bit less, but still there were worries about the relationship. It was also surprising to notice that some teachers don't feel good with their students, there is a problem in relationship in between them - conflicts, misunderstandings. Sometimes, also some teachers presumed that the students don't worry about anything at all having lack of interest in anything.

Support to young people.

Quite a lot of things were mentioned as the support available in schools. Most of the schools have school psychologists, and also other specific workers, support staff, social workers, career specialists. What was really nice to notice that it was not said that all the supporters are just formally available somewhere far, but that actual meetings are happening, for example, with school psychologists, professionals, etc. Several people mentioned also projects and activities, and even named some particular projects that made sense and had a positive effect on students' mood, like "Labbūtības ceļakarte" ("The well-being map" - the project that was introduced last year by Latvian National Agency, and continues also this year). So, there with time going, one could feel that the efforts are done to make the students's mood better, and they help.

Teachers' and youth workers' emotional mood

There was a very clear sharp difference between teachers' and young peoples'emotional mood when comparing.

Similar worries and topics were repeated by teachers, as they were mentioned for the students. But also many times the problems with the workload and worries about the future were mentioned, and it really felt that these worries are huge. Additional things that appeared were health, often mentioning burnout, and also a lot of worries "who I am in my profession? Do I do the quality work or not?"

Support to teachers and youth workers

Between the lines a bitterness could be recognised because of the comparison, that there is various support for students, but almost nothing for teachers.

What is available is just talking to colleagues, even though a lot of respondents also mentioned that the relationship among colleagues sometimes is not that good. Comparing the availability and support of the school psychologist, it was clearly marked, that students have meetings and activities with school psychologists, but when it comes to the teachers, the psychologists are available somewhere far, but "who would go them". Some people mentioned they participate in support groups, but mostly there is not even a clear understanding what a support group can be. In total, 74% respondents said they work in a stress environment, 74% have also experienced the burnout, and often as the main reason for it was mentioned the shocking workload.

Teachers' workload

Reading how many hours teachers are supposed to work, and how many hours they work in reality, in most of the cases teachers work double. Some people were also explaining that it feels that difficult, not just because of the amount of hours, but also because the teachers cannot turn off their work when they come back home. The second reason is that there are too many diverse tasks, and new things are coming all the time, and teachers cannot say "no".

Teachers' stress

There is a pressure of communication, problematic communication with students, because teachers feel that the students are not motivated, not interested, behave bad, and that is why the teachers lose energy, too. Many are looking for methods, and how to impress their students, how to work with them creatively. The stress situation gets worse because of all these diverse tasks and changing requirements; many teachers mentioned the school reform. So, teachers feel pressure from different sides: students, parents, school administration, also some sudden checks from the ministry and the ridiculous documentation that no-one understands and does just for doing. Moreover, there is uncertainty: because of the school reform and the change in programs, as well as about the political situation connected to the economic situation. Having war going on in front of our eyes, many teachers were mentioning the problems with the salary, the worries about the health and the upcoming pension. There is also a worry about the language, that was much expressed mostly but not only by those who work as Russian language and literature teachers "I am afraid I will lose my job".

Almost all the respondents had all possible stress symptoms, not just emotional very much physical expressions: a lot of anger and irritation, problems with sleeping, headache, tensions, problems with breathing, shaking hands, tiredness, being dizzy, fainting.

Dealing with stress

The key answer on what is the teachers' solution to cope with stress, was "nothing", so most of teachers just give up and continue, in a better case some say "okay, we'll try to think positively". Luckily, some of the teachers meet with colleagues, spend time with family, listen to music, go in the nature, meditate. Most of the respondents, however, say they just follow the flow, not managing to do sports, to go out for a walk, or even to go out of the building for some minutes to breeze during the day.

Emotional intelligence is not a very much known concept. Some have heard or know about neurographica and meditation, but do not really apply.

Teachers' participation and self-development

Most of the respondents attend from one to 3 additional courses during the year, and if one attends something, so clearly the same people also answer that they apply new methodology in work with their students. So it makes sense to participate.

Emotional mood of teachers and youth workers in Bulgaria

Respondents

We have reached 86 respondents. 79% of them were women. The majority of them were people over 41 years old, 45% were in the age group of 50 plus.

Emotional mood of young people

The emotional state of young people in Bulgaria in general is very similar to the situation in Latvia. It is mainly in the middle, so neither good or bad, also the teachers said that the young people they work with feel better than the rest.

Young people's worries

The main worry mentioned was the future: they worry about money, about income, career, about security in life in general, the career choices, but also about popularity in everyday life - so, they also think about others, other people's opinion and approval matters. As the 3 main most common topics for young people the following were mentioned: food, shopping, fun, social media, games, music. 20% mentioned the social issues and the future: work, career, financial success. Also alcohol and drug problems were named. Then comes also nature, clean environment, human rights and discrimination. And, of course, both relationship and friendship also appear in the answers.

Teachers' and youth workers' stress

Despite the first self-assessment, where most of the respondents said they are alright, 80% of the respondents stated they are working in a high stressful environment. Around 60% have experienced the burn out. The symptoms are very similar to the ones of the colleagues in Latvia, also high blood pressure, lack of attention, slow reaction, work without interest.

Causes of stress

The majority of the answers are that teachers work much more than 40 hours a week. Also, there is a trouble in the school system, which is not clear to the teachers: the lack of coordination, a lot of tasks given and not related to real competences, a lot of paperwork, a lot of urgent reports, the innovations in the education and the school reform, unplanned inspections. There is a stress, doubts that they are not performing well academically, problems with students' discipline and motivation. There are also problems in relationship: conflicts with parents, colleagues, competition in the team, the supervisor attitudes, general tensions in work environment. It is also about the development in general and inability to achieve a goal due to reasons beyond our control.

Coping with stress

Unfortunately, the majority also said they are not dealing with the stress. Among other answers were outdoor activities, cultural activities, spending time with friends, positive thinking or humour and music. Some mentioned neurographica. As other possible solutions were named limited communication with toxic people, breathing exercises, classical music, coffee, and so on. Many take part in support groups, but unfortunately, 45% answered they do not get any support at all. What helps is conversations, and sharing with friends and colleagues informal meetings outside the school environment, team building, games, training, etc. Instead, the teachers confirm that the students do get a lot of support in schools: from school psychologists, class teachers, outdoor games, celebrations, sports activities. The teachers said they know quite a lot of techniques, for coping with stress, such as yoga, reading exercises, music, nature, sleeping sports - but this is actually used by 44% partially or 36% rarely.

There is knowledge of social and emotional intelligence, but "is there actually time to follow all the manuals"?