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# HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE BALTIC STATES

2018 COMPARATIVE STUDY:  
ESTONIA, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA

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# HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE BALTIC STATES

## 2018 COMPARATIVE STUDY: ESTONIA, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA

### General and organisational aspects

In the spring and summer of 2018, a survey was conducted in all three Baltic states based on a questionnaire developed in Estonia. This was the first time such a survey had been held in Latvia and Lithuania, and thus there was no comparative material for these two countries as there was for Estonia. In all three states, face-to-face interviews were held in the respondents' homes within the framework of an omnibus survey. The sample in all of the countries was representative with respect to gender, age, place of residence and type of settlement.

The study was conducted in Latvia by the research company Latvian Facts, and by Rait market research company in Lithuania. A total of 1013 interviews were conducted in Estonia, with 1010 in Latvia and 1000 in Lithuania. The target group was the general population aged 15+ in Estonia and 15-74 in Latvia and Lithuania. The results of the survey can be generalised to the entire population of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, respectively, with a margin of error not exceeding 3.09%.

The questionnaire in each country included a control question which listed a wrong choice as if it were a human right: a state guaranteed "right to average income guaranteed by the state" income. The same control question had been used in the two previous surveys conducted in Estonia, and provides important information about people's understanding of what human rights are.

The analysis of the results takes a disaggregated look at the responses of the majority population and other significant ethnic groups. But in this respect, there are significant differences among the Baltic states: there is

a substantial Russian-speaking population in Estonia and Latvia, while in Lithuania, the non-ethnic population comprises an almost equal number of Russians and Poles and a small number of representatives of other ethnic groups. For some questions, the sample of persons from other ethnic groups was too small to allow for the generalisation of their results, and these results are therefore not analysed separately.

## **The purpose of the comparative study was to:**

- identify what is understood by the term “human rights” in each of the Baltic states;
- assess respect for human rights in the Baltic states;
- determine the perceived problem areas for respect for human rights;
- identify sources of information and preferred channels of information for future reference;
- compare the results in the three Baltic states.

One of the central objectives of the study was to get an overview of the extent of actual human rights violations in the Baltic states, and also of problems which cannot be classified as human rights violations (these are mostly socio-economic issues) but which may be considered as such by some members of the population.

Other background information for the comparative study is provided in the first part of the report. A comparative view of the questions put to the respondents is provided below.

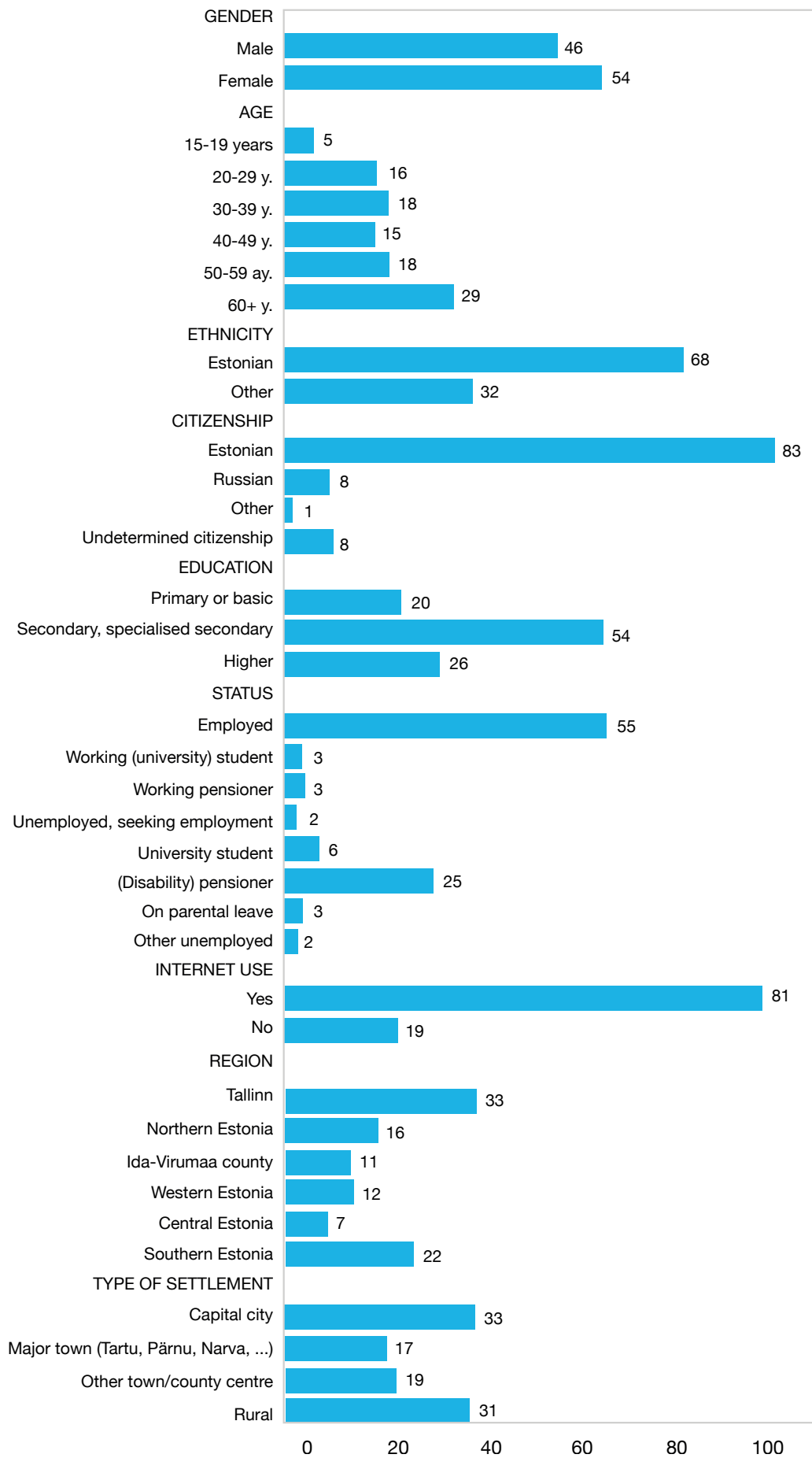


Figure 1. Structure of respondents in Estonia

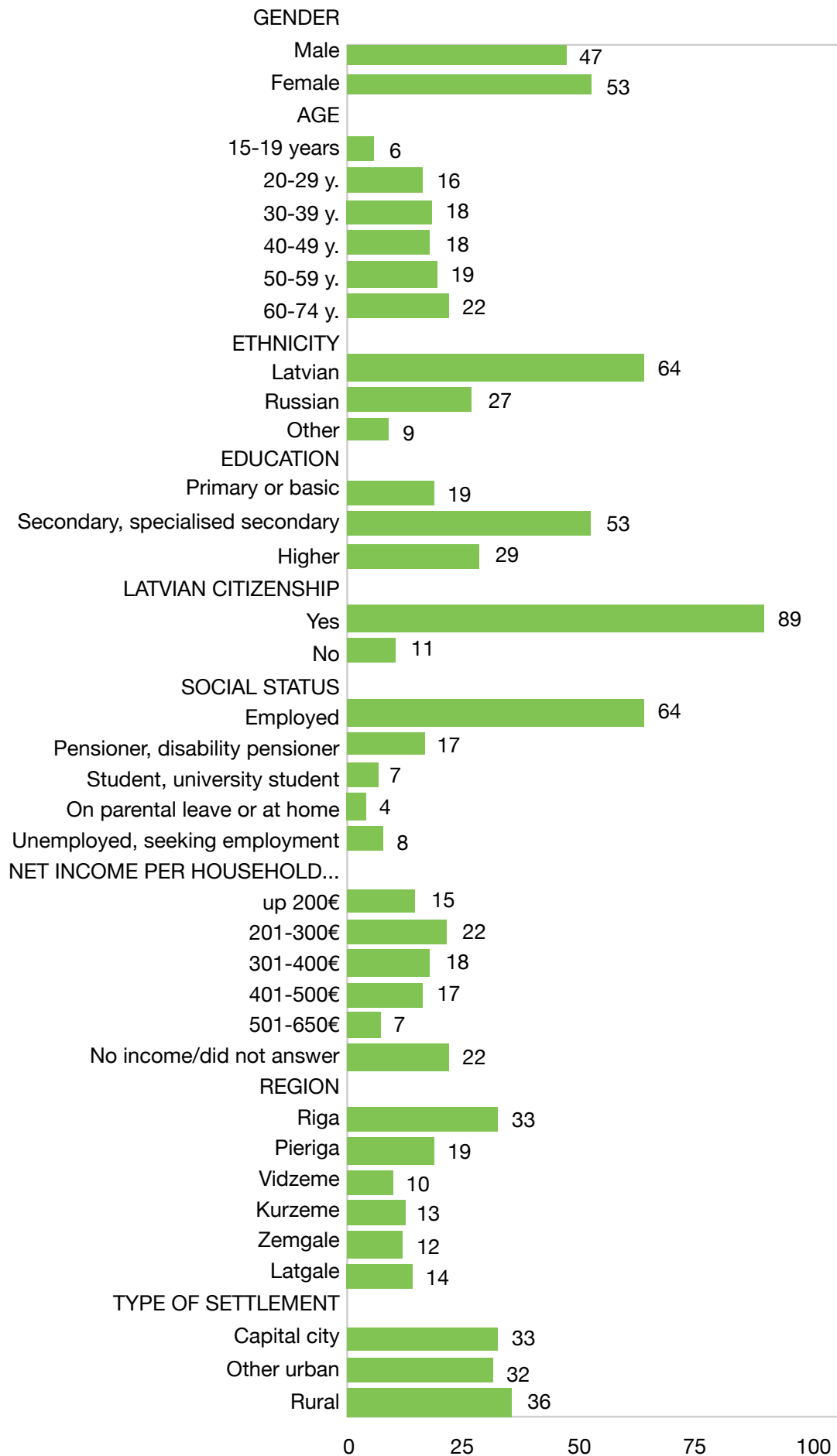


Figure 2. Structure of respondents in Latvia.

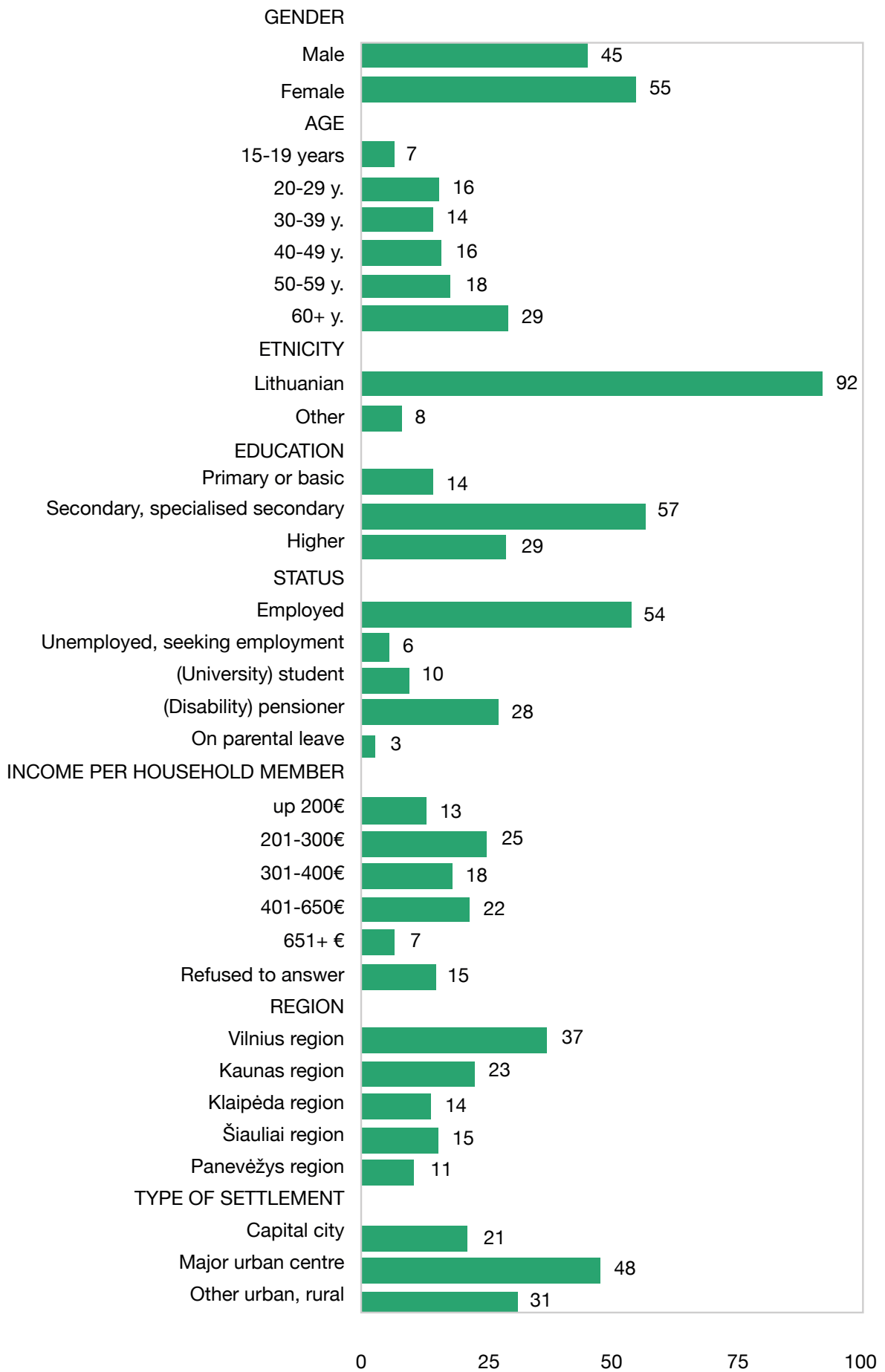


Figure 3. Structure of respondents in Lithuania.

# 1. WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

The interviews began with questions aimed at identifying the respondents' understanding of the concept of human rights: When people speak of human rights, what do you understand by this term? This was asked as an open-ended question without any options provided.

The most common responses were general in substance (see Figure 4). For the respondents in Estonia, human rights were above all associated with the right to life (10%), followed by free-dom, the right to autonomy (9%), freedom of expression (9%), the rights that people have more generally, and also laws (8%). The more frequent responses also included the right to work, fundamental rights and the right to education.

The right to life was listed as a response notably less frequently in Latvia and Lithuania. Yet more often than in Estonia, respondents in Latvia and Lithuania listed freedom and the right to decide over one's life (autonomy), which in substance is close to the right to life. Since above all young people in all three Baltic states answered this question this same way, then it can be concluded that the differences may be related to the introduction of the topic of human rights in school curricula. There were also other significant similarities between the answers of respondents in Latvia and Lithuania, where freedom, equality/equal treatment and people's rights and freedoms as well as laws were emphasised. Additionally, respondents in Latvia and Lithuania more frequently noted a dignified life and pay (7-8%), while in Latvia they also noted respect for the rights of others and obligations (9%).

In Lithuania, fewer people mentioned the right to work than in Latvia and Estonia, while in Latvia, respondents more frequently mentioned the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other UN norms.

There were also differences in the pattern of unanswered questions. Latvian residents were able to provide a somewhat greater number of responses, whereas in Estonia and Lithuania more respondents left the question unanswered. The



greatest variation was among those who were unable to answer: 42% of respondents in Estonia and 34% in Lithuania were unable to recall anything related to the term human rights or they were unable to put it into words. The level of abstractness of the question likely contributed to this result. In any case, this represents a rather significant part of society that has no need this. This topic is still somewhat foreign, as is demonstrated by the rather limited knowledge of human rights among most of the population.

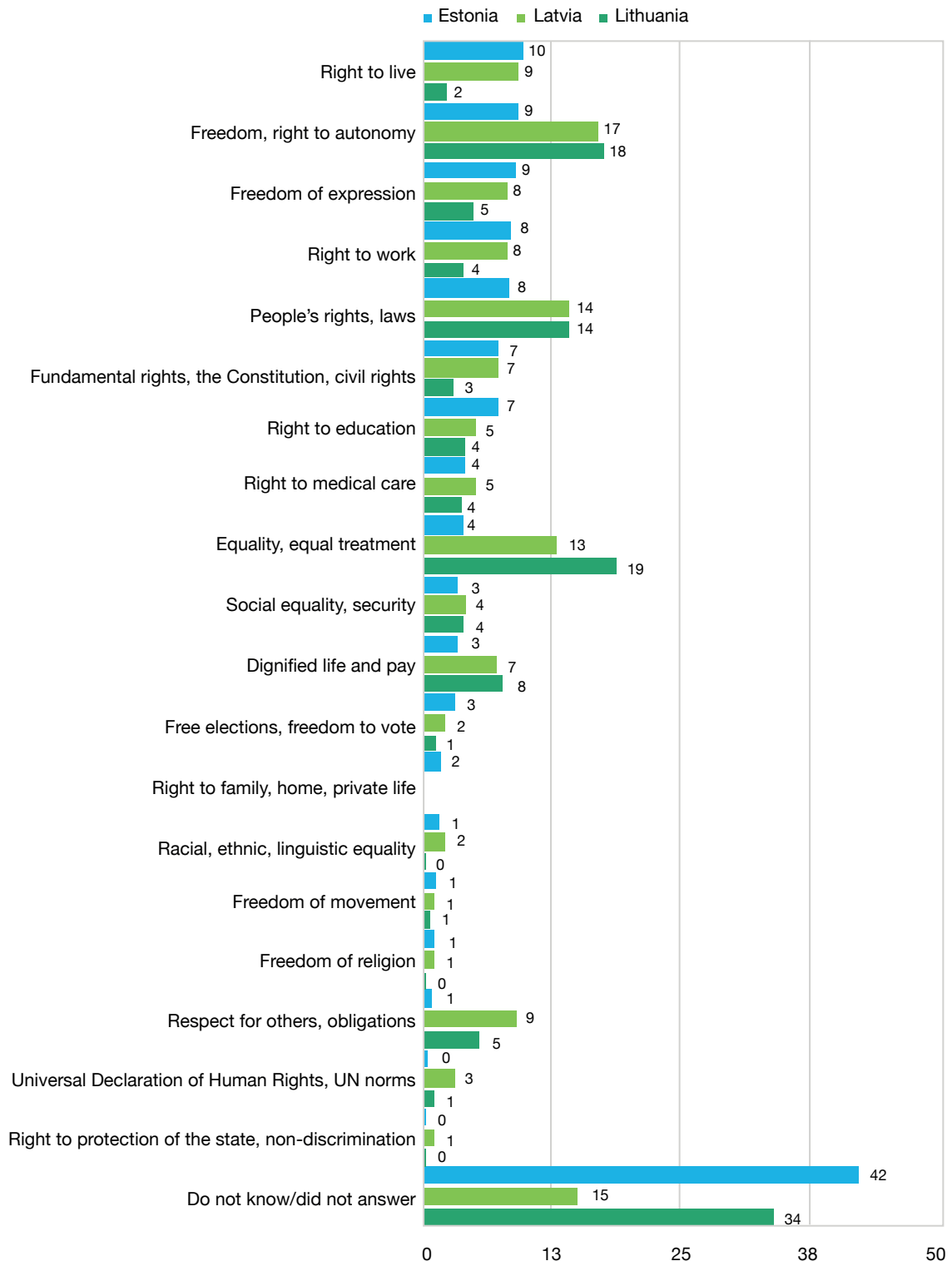


Figure 4. What are human rights?

## 2. ARE HUMAN RIGHTS RESPECTED IN YOUR COUNTRY?

It appears that there is less awareness of this topic in Latvia and Lithuania compared with Estonia, since 32% of Latvian residents and 26% of Lithuanian residents had no opinion on this matter. This is probably not due to a greater amount of human rights violations in these two countries, rather because in Latvia and Lithuania – where 35% and 26% respectively left the question unanswered, there is less awareness of this topic than in Estonia. This question was answered in the negative by 35% of respondents in Lithuania, 26% in Latvia and only 14% in Estonia, which confirms this assessment.

In both Estonia and Latvia, older persons, Russian speakers, non-citizens, pensioners and persons with low incomes were more critical about respect for human rights, as were respondents in some regions of the three countries: in Estonia, 52% in Ida-Virumaa county; in Latvia, 38% in Latgale; in Lithuania, 49% in Klaipeda and 47% in Panevežys.

In Estonia, young people aged 20-29 years (85%), ethnic Estonians, persons with higher education, employed persons, students, managers and specialists, and persons with higher incomes believe that the situation of human rights in Estonia is in order. The most unsatisfied respondents were among persons with Russian citizenship or undetermined citizenship and persons with a native language other than the official language (24%).

In Western Estonia (79%) and Northern Estonia (75%) the population is clearly of the opinion that everything is in order, as are persons living in Central Estonia (75%) and Southern Estonia (76%). Seventy-four percent of Estonian men and 72% of Estonian women answered that human rights are respected, while only 13% of male and 15% of female respondents answered that they were not. Persons with lower incomes and persons with lower levels of education were the most critical in this regard. The results in Estonia confirm that this topic is not of great concern as they do not perceive any significant human rights violations.

In Latvia, ethnic Latvians, young people aged 20-29, persons with higher education, persons living in urban areas, managers and specialists and persons with higher incomes responded that all is in order (55-61%). In contrast, Russian speakers, persons who work in the service industry and pensioners answered that the situation with human rights was not in order. Non-citizens (36%) and respondents from the Kurzeme region (46%) did not know how to answer this question. Respondents in the Vidzeme (59%) and Riga (55%) regions answered that all was in order.

Among men in Latvia, 49% believe that the situation with human rights is in order, as do 46% of women. Twenty-six percent of men and 27% of women answered “no” or did not know how to answer.

In Lithuania, the most critical responses were from persons aged 50-59 (44%), unemployed persons (52%) and persons with secondary education (39%). Students, persons with higher education and managers were also more positive in their views.

A total of 44% of non-ethnic-Lithuanians did not know how to answer this question. Men (37%) assess the situation more favourably than women (30%). The responses to this questions were quite remarkable in that the percentage of respondents who indicated each answer was more or less equal.

Respondents in the Šiauliai region (52%) answered that everything was in order, while 49% of respondents in Klaipeda and 47% of respondents in Panevežys answered in the negative. Residents of urban areas in Lithuania (40%) did not, however, know how to answer this question.

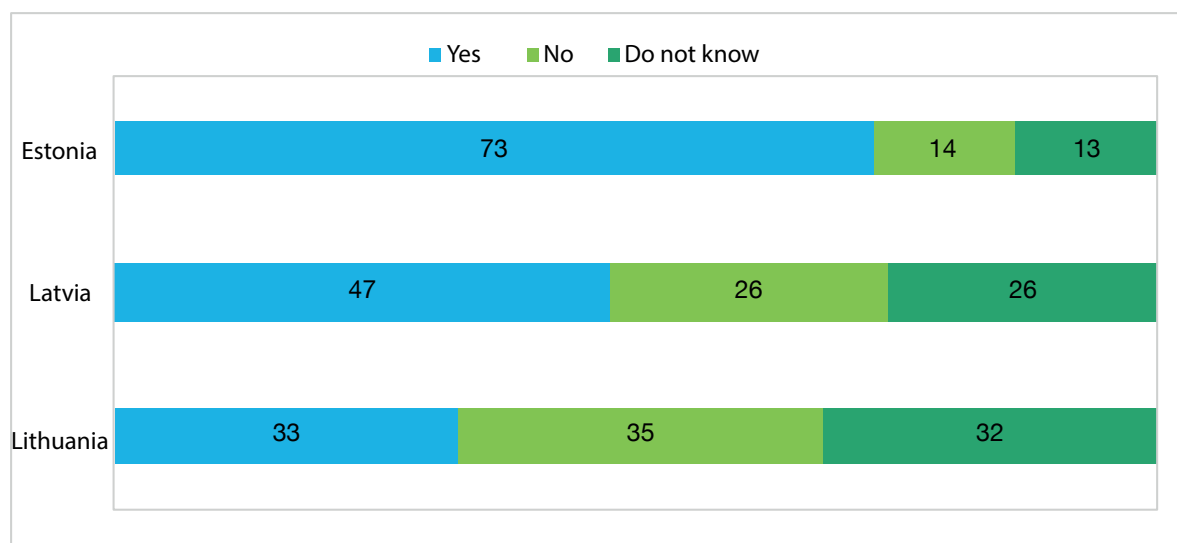


Figure 5. Are human rights respected in your country?

### 3. WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE VIOLATED IN EACH COUNTRY?

Respondents who answered that human rights were violated were asked to explain more specifically which specific human rights were violated. The responses given were spontaneous, i.e. freely expressed.

The surveys show that in all three countries, the most common answers related to a low standard of living, including low salaries and pensions. Respondents in Latvia and Lithuania listed these as examples of human rights violations twice as often as respondents in Estonia. These are not, however, directly human rights issues; these become human rights issues only if the state unjustifiably fails to create conditions for a dignified life, e.g. pensions that are below the subsistence minimum. In Estonia, these issues were common in the 2012 survey which was conducted during the economic downturn.

The second most significant topic in the Baltic states was inequality and discrimination, including at work.

The third largest group of issues were related to the so-called Russian questions which were characteristic of the responses of Russian speaking respondents in Estonia and Latvia. Issues relating to citizenship, education and language were emphasised, but these topics are not related to human rights.

In Latvia, these topics were followed by inequality at work, poor access to medical care and unequal treatment. In Lithuania, the next most frequently noted problem areas included access to medical care followed by victims rights' and unfair trials.

In Latvia, more respondents noted poverty, social inequality, the guarantee of children's and parents' rights and the right to housing than in Estonia and Lithuania. In Lithuania, failure to ensure the right to work was considered to be a comparatively greater problem.

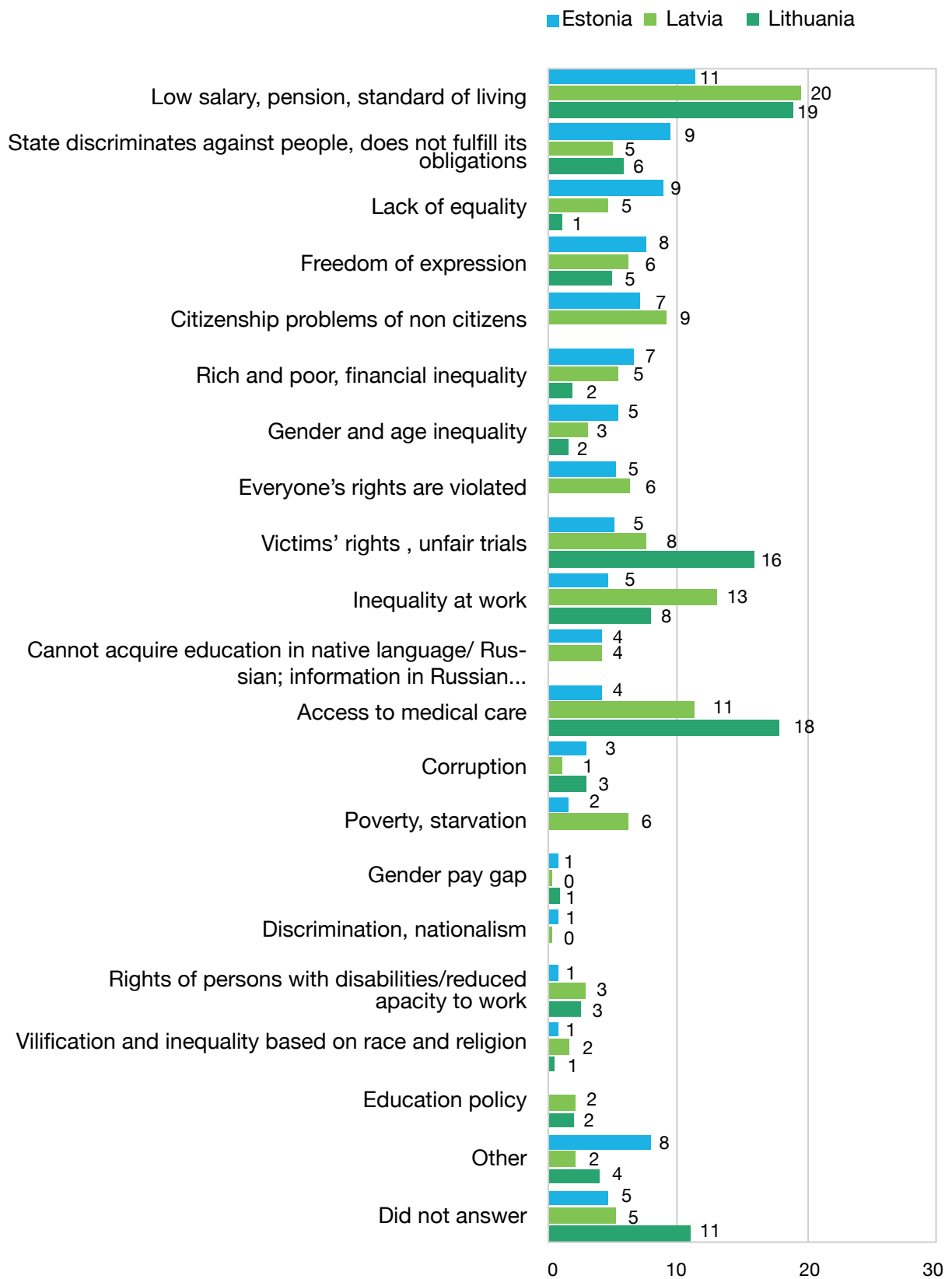


Figure 6. Which human rights are violated in your country?

## 4. HAVE YOUR HUMAN RIGHTS OR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF SOMEONE YOU KNOW BEEN VIOLATED IN YOUR COUNTRY?

Respondents who answered that human rights are not respected were asked a follow up question for more detail: Have your human rights or the human rights of someone you know been violated in your country?

Among the entire population, the share of respondents who believed they had some evidence of human rights violations was 6% in Estonia, 15% in Latvia and 15% in Lithuania, which is significantly lower than in the last survey. Thus it can be said that the opinions of the population in all three countries about human rights violations are rather general and are not based in fact.

Whereas in Estonia, 30-39 year-olds and persons with citizenship of the Russian Federation or undetermined citizenship and respondents from Tallinn and Ida-Virumaa county claimed that their human rights or those of someone they knew had been violated more than the average population, in Latvia and Lithuania there were no significant differences in the responses of persons with different backgrounds.

The Latvian results show that respondents who live in the capital, Riga, reported that their human rights had been violated less than average. In Lithuania, the most affirmative responses were recorded among persons aged 50-59 or relatively older persons.

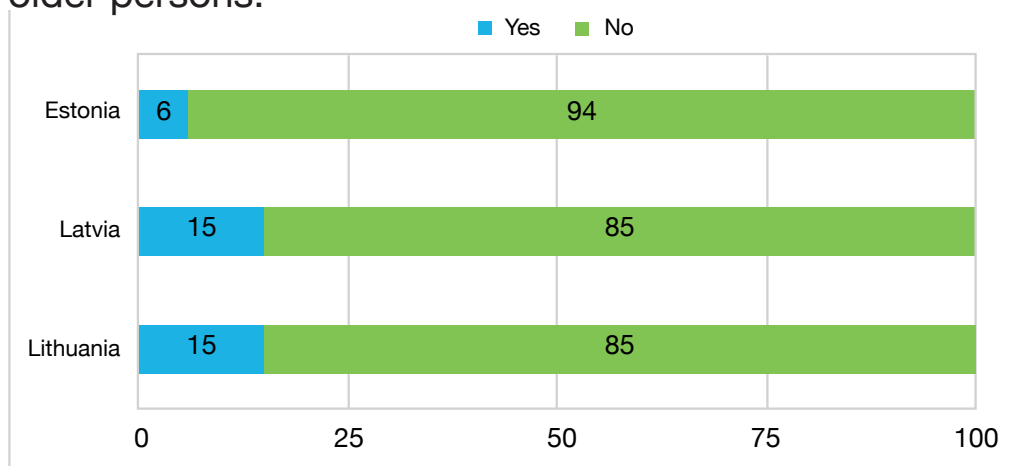


Figure 7. Have your human rights or the human rights of someone you know been violated in your country? N=all respondents.

# 5. VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE RESPONDENT OR SOMEONE HE OR SHE KNOWS

Respondents who answered that their human rights or the human rights of someone they knew had been violated were asked to describe the specific incident. Similarly as in Estonia, in Latvia, respondents most frequently noted inequality in the workplace followed by a low standard of living and the issue of citizenship for non-citizens. Latvian respondents were also most concerned by inequality in the medical system and problems with the justice system. Latvian residents also considered being paid illegally and the lack of official status for the Russian language as examples of human rights violations.

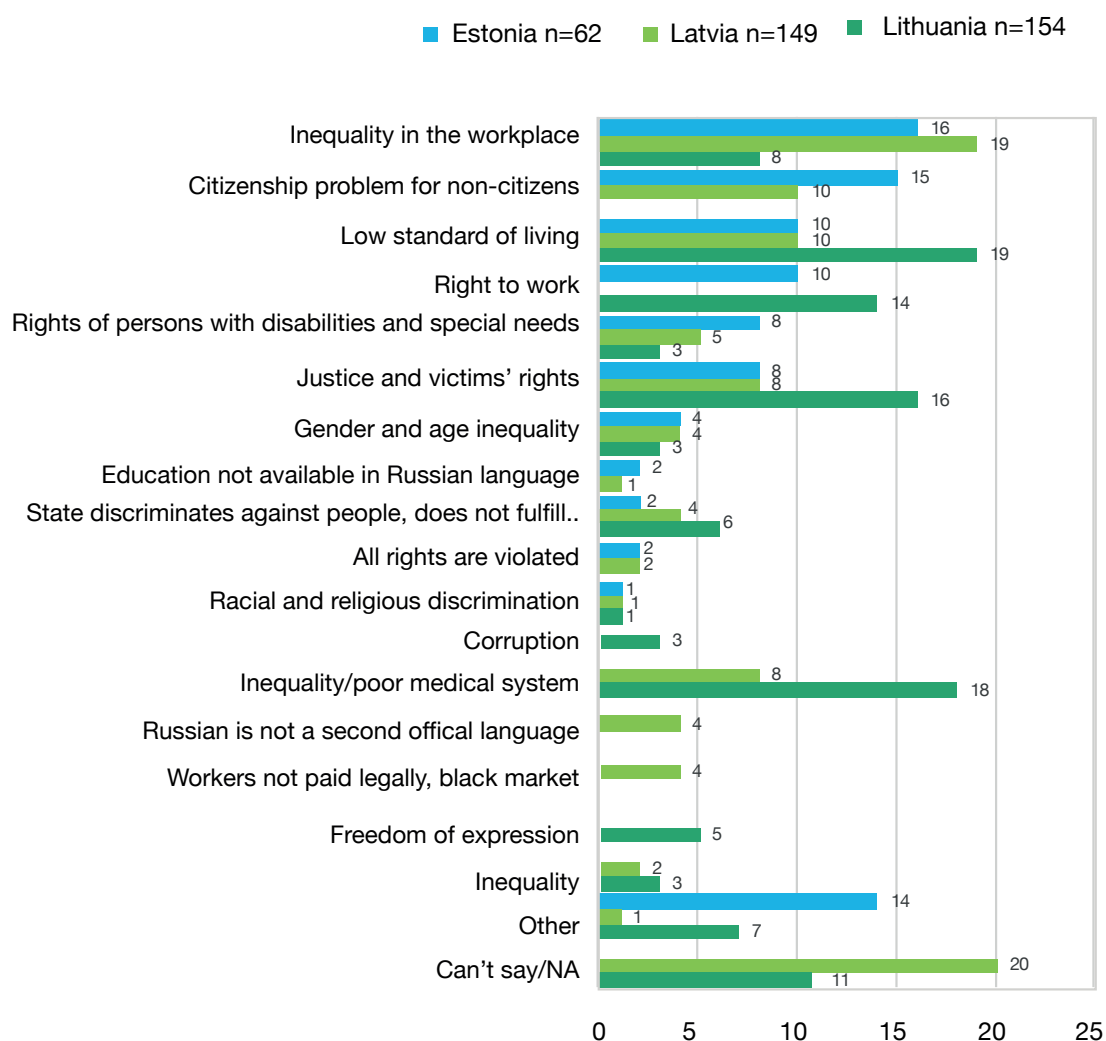


Figure 8. Human rights violations in the experience of the respondent or someone known to the respondent.

Lithuanians also erroneously mostly considered factors related to a low standard of living (low salaries and pensions, and difficulties in getting by) to be human rights violations (19%). The greatest problems were considered to be poor access to medical care (18%), issues related to unfair trials (16%) and unemployment (14%).

It can therefore be said that the results for this question were quite similar in Estonia and Latvia. In both countries the so-called Russian issues component was evident, which do not qualify as human rights issues but rather indicate the influence of propaganda. In all three countries there were a significant number of vague responses, and social problems were classified as human rights violations.



## 6. INSUFFICIENTLY GUARANTEED RIGHTS

This question was put to all respondents (including those who did not think there were human rights violations in their country) in a so-called assisted format where the respondent was asked to choose two answers out of a list. According to the responses of all respondents, the greatest human rights problem in the Baltic states is social inequality, an umbrella term under which other social problems and the stratification of society are categorised. In Estonia and Latvia, this is followed by the rights of persons with disabilities and racial, ethnic and linguistic inequality, while both were more frequently noted in Estonia. In Lithuania, this primary concern is followed quite equally by three different areas: ensuring the rights of children, the rights of persons with disabilities and age discrimination.

The response “there are no problems” was given most frequently in Estonia (9%), with 6% and 1% in Latvia and Lithuania, respectively. This likely also reflects how confident the respondents felt in discussing this subject.

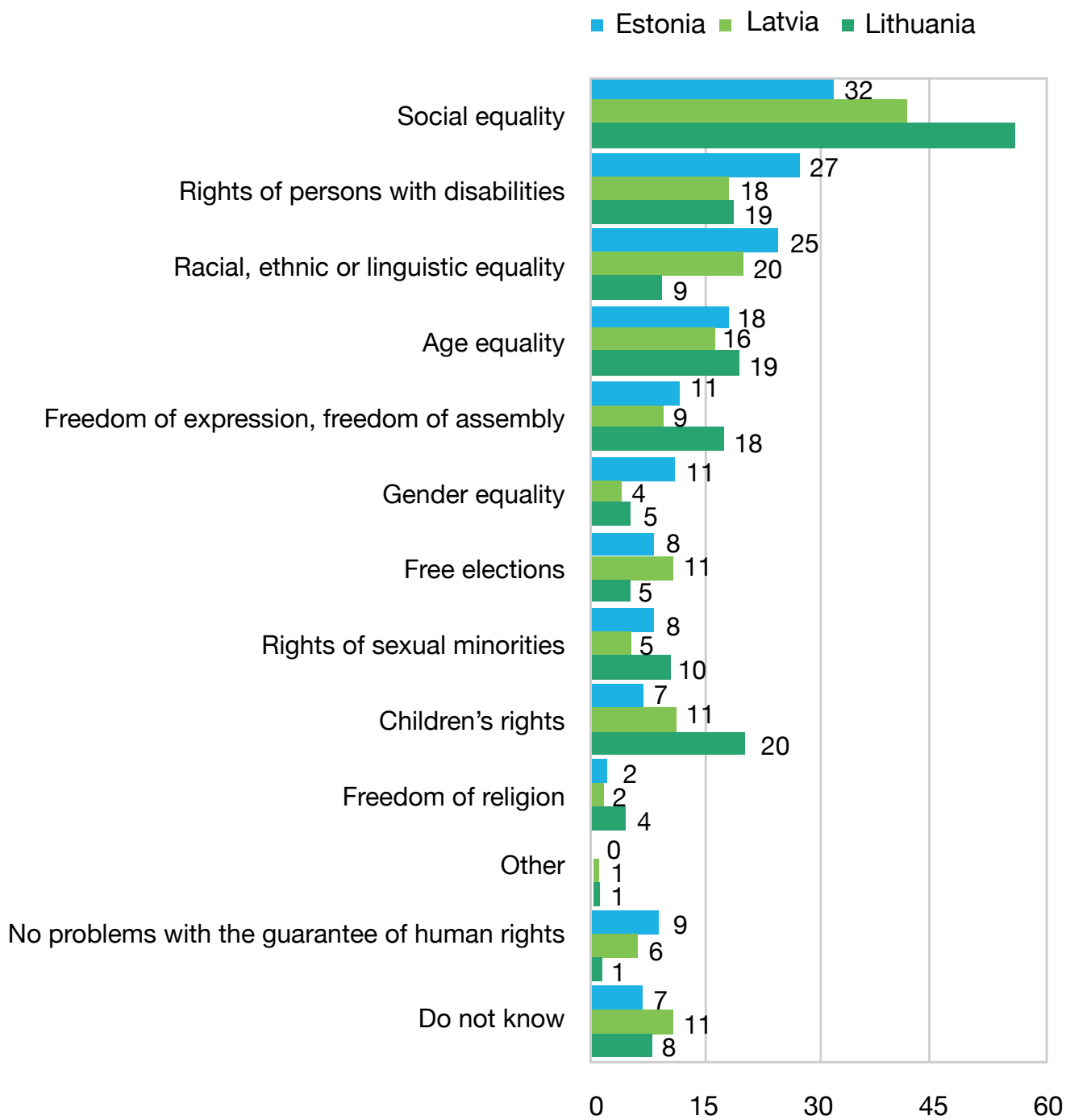


Figure 9. Insufficiently guaranteed rights.

# 7. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The primary sources of information on human rights for residents of the Baltic states are the media and the Internet. Compared to Estonia, the respondents in Lithuania indicated friends and family more, and school, university and the workplace less. Respondents in Latvia indicated more frequently that they had neither received nor looked for information on the subject (14%).

According to the Estonian Integration Monitoring 2017 report, Russian speaking residents of Estonia are within the sphere of influence of three different categories of media: local Russian language media, Russian media and to a lesser extent Estonian language media. An increasingly prominent role is played by social media, which is already the most important source of information for young people from the non-ethnic-Estonian population. This trend is also present in Latvia and Lithuania. The study “Virtual Russian World in the Baltics” demonstrated that 70% of ideological topics on social networks used by native Russian speakers are produced by 10% of their users. These pages are used to disseminate information aimed against the Baltic states and disinformation on citizenship issues.

Russian state propaganda continues to emphasise how the rights of native Russian-speakers in the Baltic states are violated and invents pseudo-human rights, which are not related to a person’s basic rights, e.g. the right to obtain the citizenship of a country without a language requirement, the right to communicate in another language in public/government authorities/agencies, the right to education in another language, etc.

In interpreting the results, it should be noted that while the Internet plays a significant role as a source of information, this may mean different websites and also social media. It is possible that people have also received false or inaccurate information on human rights issues from the Internet and social media.

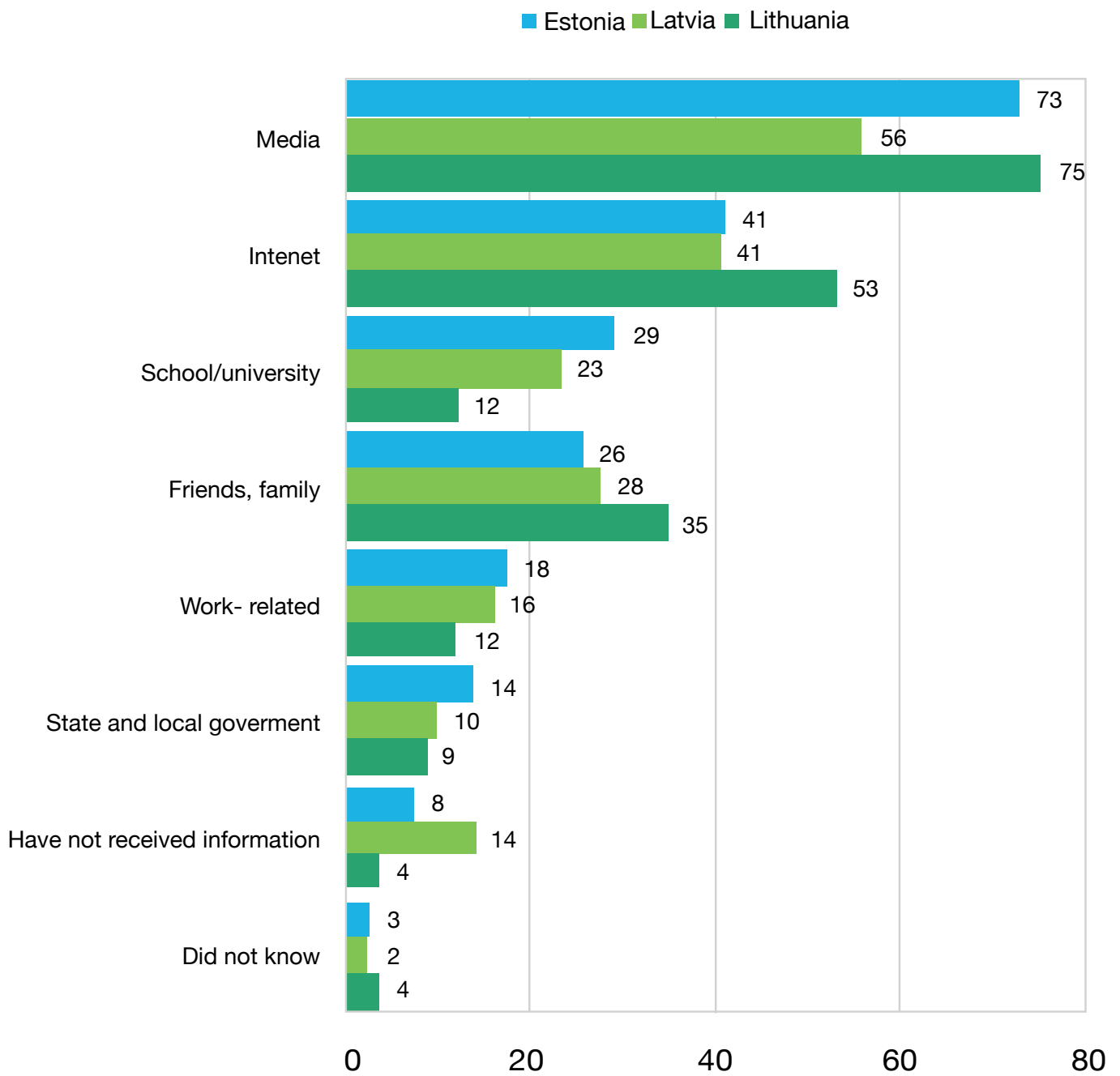


Figure 10. Sources of information.

# 8. SUFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION

The assessment of whether there is sufficient information was quite similar in all three countries. There was no sense of a lack of information, but it is also possible that some people did not consider the subject to be personally relevant or interesting. In comparison to Estonia, there has been somewhat less talk of human rights in Latvia and Lithuania. Among respondents in Latvia, 7% answered that there is very little information. Therefore it can be said that people in general feel that there is sufficient information which they can find if need be.

In Latvia, ethnic Russian respondents more frequently than average complained of a lack of information (according to 12%, very little information is available), as did non-citizens (17%). In Lithuania, a lack of information was not evident in any particular group surveyed, while younger persons were more likely to consider that the information available was entirely sufficient.

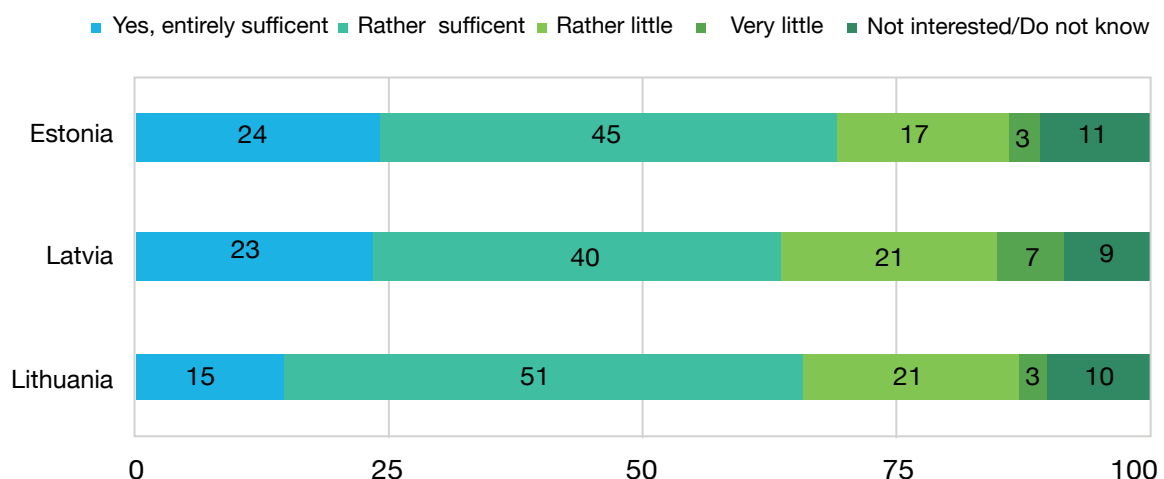


Figure 11. Sufficiency of information.

# 9. AREAS FOR WHICH THERE IS LITTLE INFORMATION

Respondents who thought that there was little information were asked to explain this choice with reference to particular areas. A significant share of respondents had trouble being more specific and just noted that they would like more information on all areas. Thus it would appear that human rights and their violation are not currently relevant topics, and there is no particular need for information on them.

In Latvia, compared with the other two countries, the respondents would most like to have more information on work-related rights, and least see a need for more information on laws and the Constitution. In Lithuania, there is a relatively lower perceived need for more information in Russian and relating to children's rights.

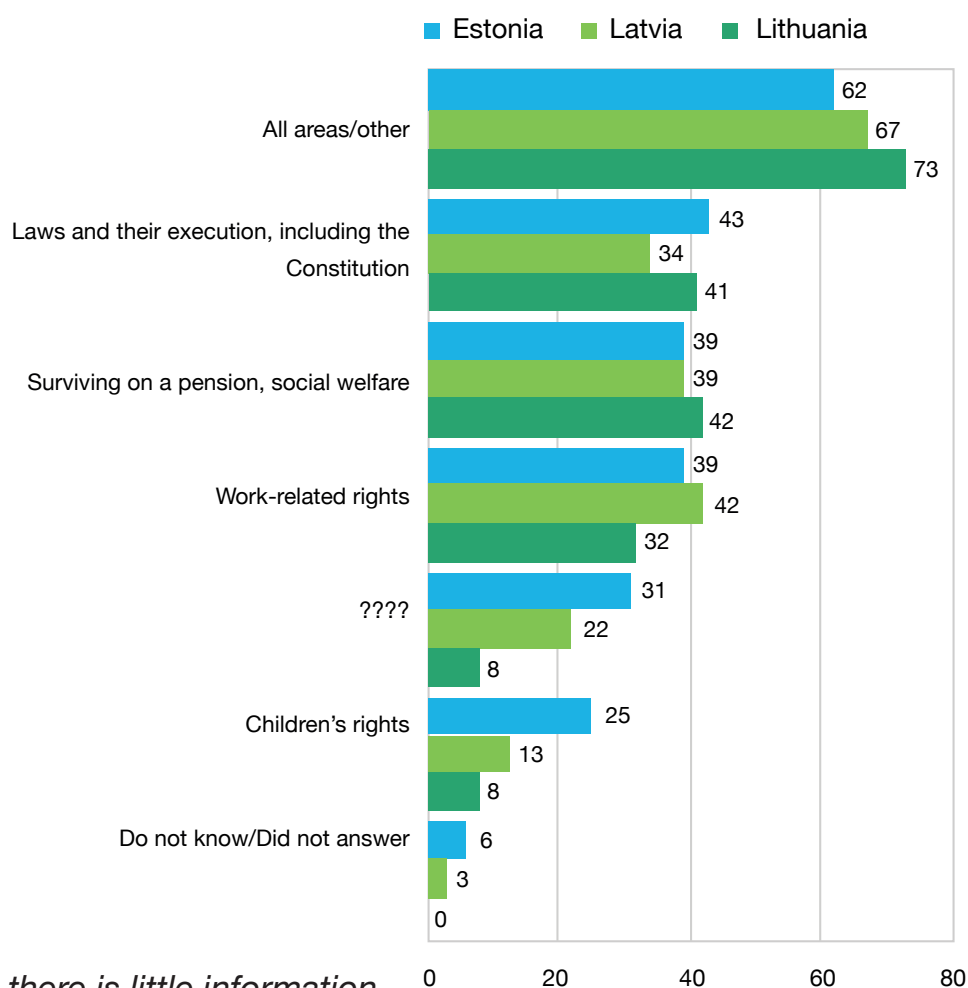


Figure 12. Areas for which there is little information.

# 10. PREFERRED CHANNELS OF INFORMATION

The habits of inhabitants of the Baltic states in searching for information are quite similar: the residents of all three states receive new information primarily from television, and are also willing to search for it on the Internet.

Respondents in Latvia look for information less often from newspapers, radio and school, while they would like to receive or search for information on the Internet more than respondents from Lithuania and Estonia.

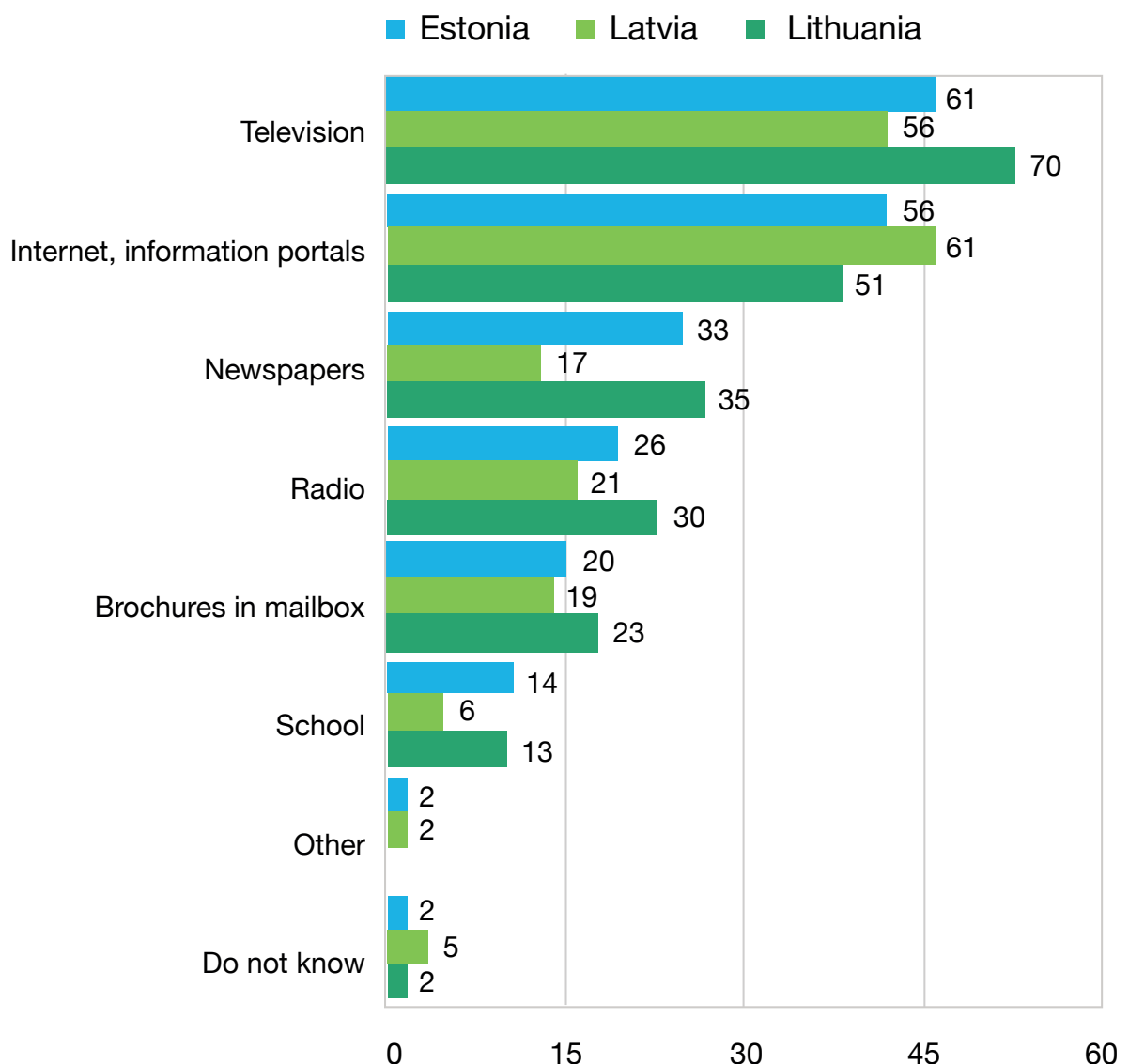


Figure 13. Preferred channels of information.

# 11. AWARENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Question: Which of the following rights do you consider to be human rights that are universal to all persons? Please choose 5 rights from the list that are most important to you.

With assistance, residents of the Baltic states have quite good knowledge of human rights, and no significant differences between the three countries were evident. Estonian residents best know the right to life, the right to equality before the law, the right to education, the right to work and the right to protection of personal data. Lithuanian respondents identified most frequently the right to social security, the right to holidays and the right to a pension, as well as the right to free medical care.

The Lithuanian respondents most frequently selected the misleading control question about a state guaranteed minimum income. Selection of this control question indicates a superficial understanding – respondents find it difficult to provide the correct answers, likely because they have had little exposure to this topic.



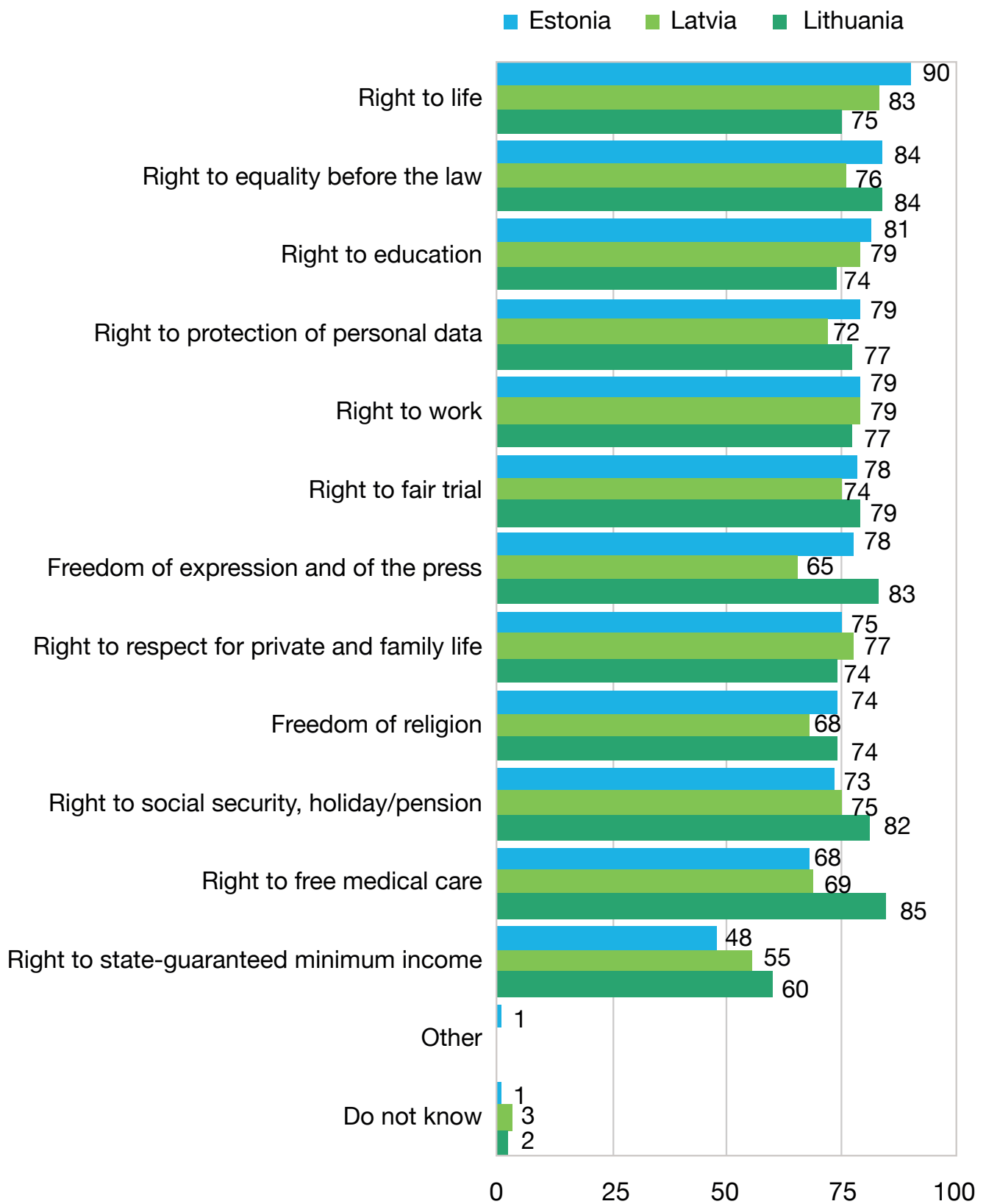


Figure 14. Awareness of human rights.

# 12. THE MOST IMPORTANT HUMAN RIGHTS

Participants in the survey were asked to choose the five most important human rights from a list. Estonian residents considered the right to life, the right to equality before the law and the right to free medical care to be of greatest importance. The top three responses in Latvia were the right to life, free medical care, and a tie between the right to work, the right to social security and the right to holiday/a pension. In Lithuania, the most frequent answers were free medical care, equality before the law and the right to social security/holiday.

It is noteworthy that Latvians and Lithuanians considered a minimum income guaranteed by the state, which was added to the list as a control question but is not a human right, twice as important as Estonians.

What is also interesting is that while people get a significant amount of information about human rights and human rights violations from the media, they do not consider freedom of expression or freedom of the press to be of great importance. This shows an inability to make broader associations and see the broader picture within the topic of human rights.

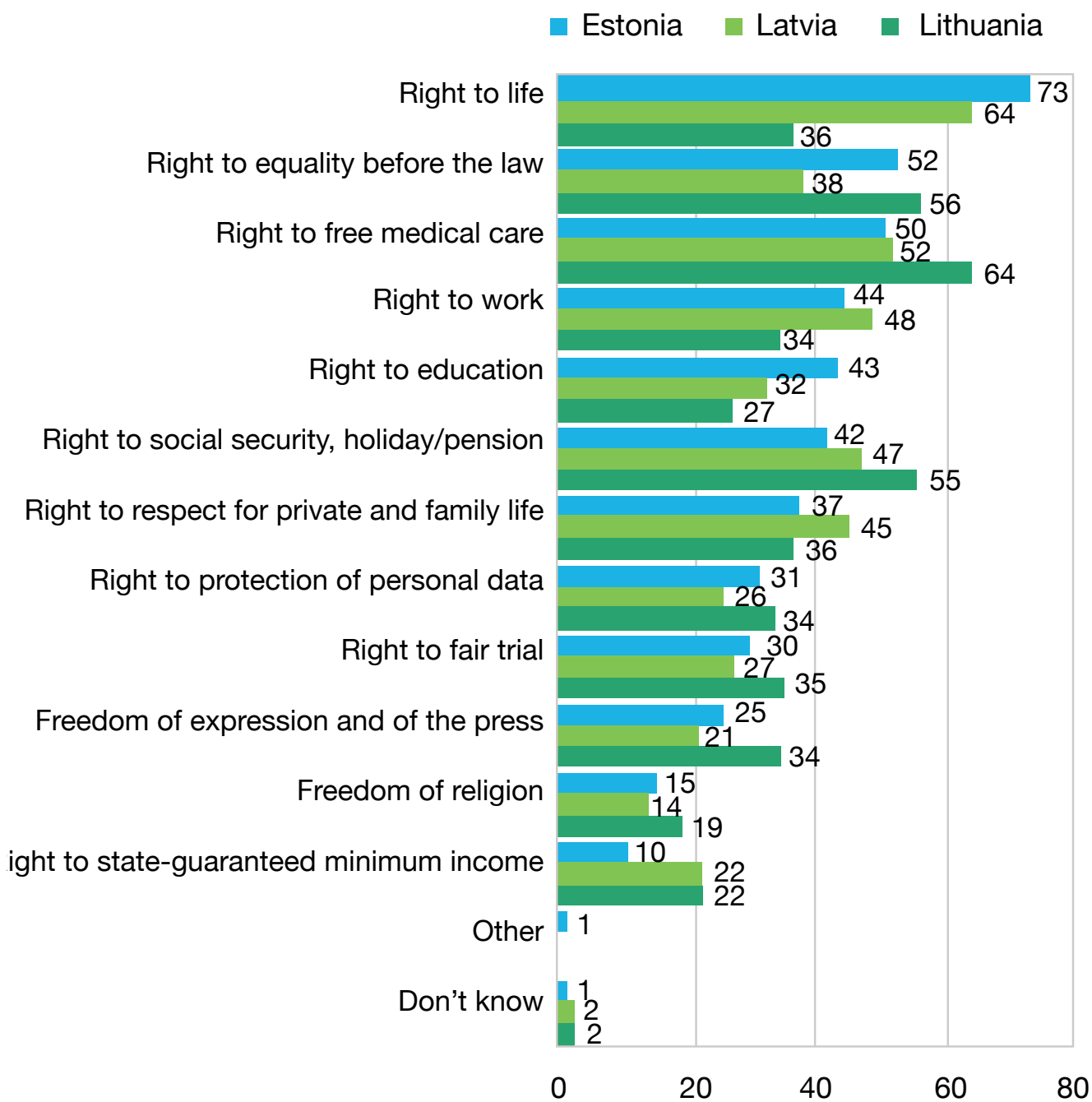


Figure 15. The most important human rights.

# 13. GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

To determine general attitudes, the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with five statements. Most of the statements were met by a similar response in the different countries. The attitudes of the respondents towards the topic of human rights were quite similar in the three Baltic states, although with some divergences. It is noteworthy that respondents in Lithuania considered human rights to be more important to them in their everyday lives, while Estonian residents best understood the benefit to everyone of ensuring human rights. Lithuanian citizens more frequently were in favour of having standards for public authorities. Awareness of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was lowest in Lithuania, although this did not differ greatly from the results in Estonia and Latvia.

The answer “human rights violations are a problem in some countries but not in ours” was chosen by 60% of respondents in Estonia, 27% in Latvia and 13% in Lithuania. These views are not coherent with the parts of the study that looked at specific incidents. This perhaps reflects a certain degree of suspicion that unfair or unequal treatment must nevertheless exist. Lithuanian respondents also indicated that human rights are important to them (77%), yet their answers to the previous questions demonstrated that they were not very knowledgeable about this topic.

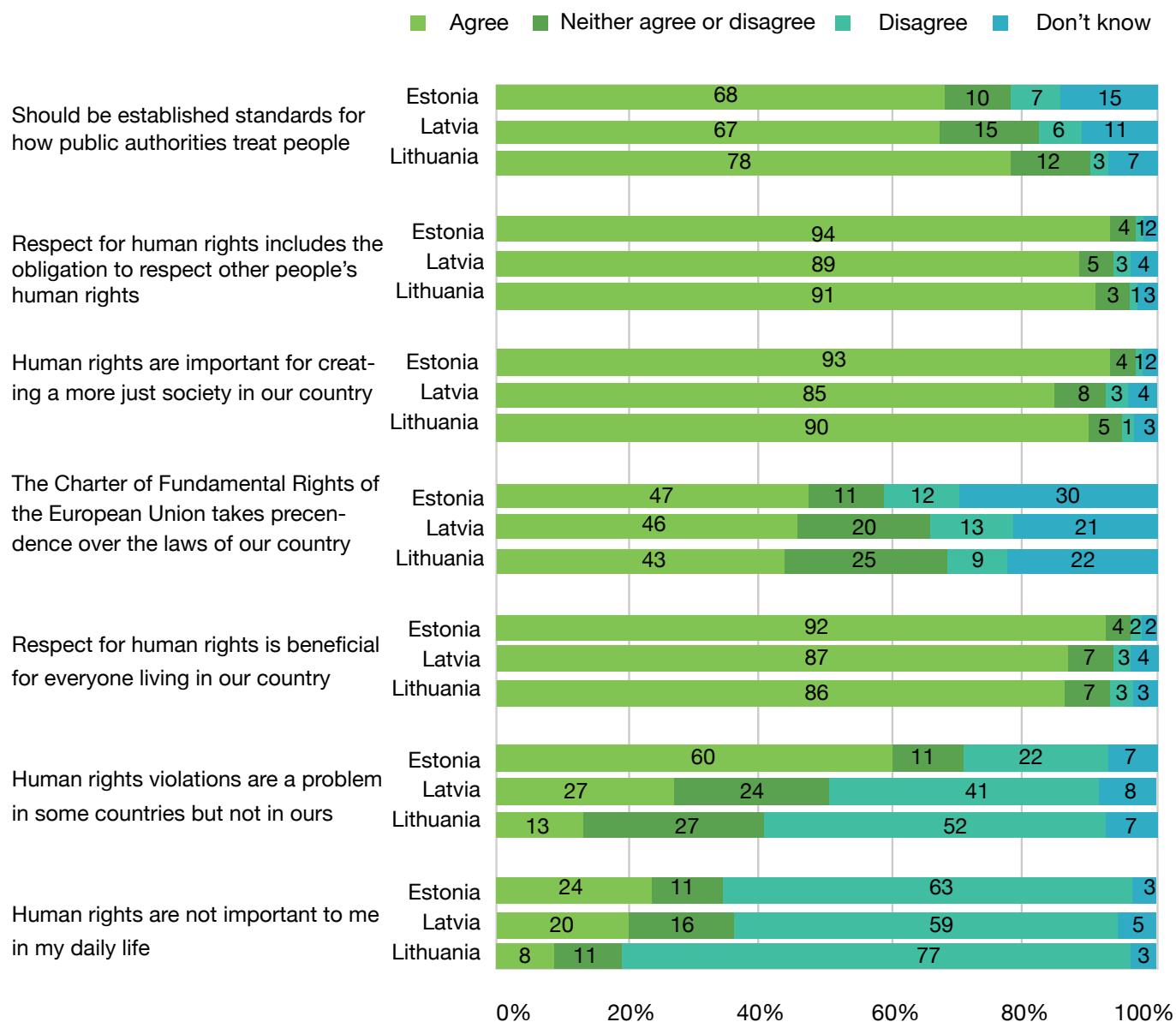


Figure 16. General attitudes towards human rights.

# 14. RECOURSE IN THE EVENT OF A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Residents of Estonia and Latvia most frequently responded that they would access a website for legal assistance, would use free of charge legal aid, would consult with a lawyer and then turn to the courts in the event of a violation of human rights.

In Lithuania, the first choice was also the courts, followed by human rights organisations, legal information on the internet and consulting with lawyers. The Chancellor of Justice or Ombuds-man came in a distant third in all three countries, which shows that they are turned to if insufficient help is available from the other sources.

Lithuanian citizens would relatively more frequently than Estonian and Latvian respondents first file a complaint directly with the European Court of Human Rights – 12%. This answer is, however, misguided, since a person can file a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights only after all domestic remedies have been exhausted. This answer thus shows a poor understanding of how the court system works.

This question was left unanswered by 19% of respondents in Lithuania and 16% and 8% of respondents in Latvia and Estonia, respectively.

■ Most important ■ Second most important ■ Third most important

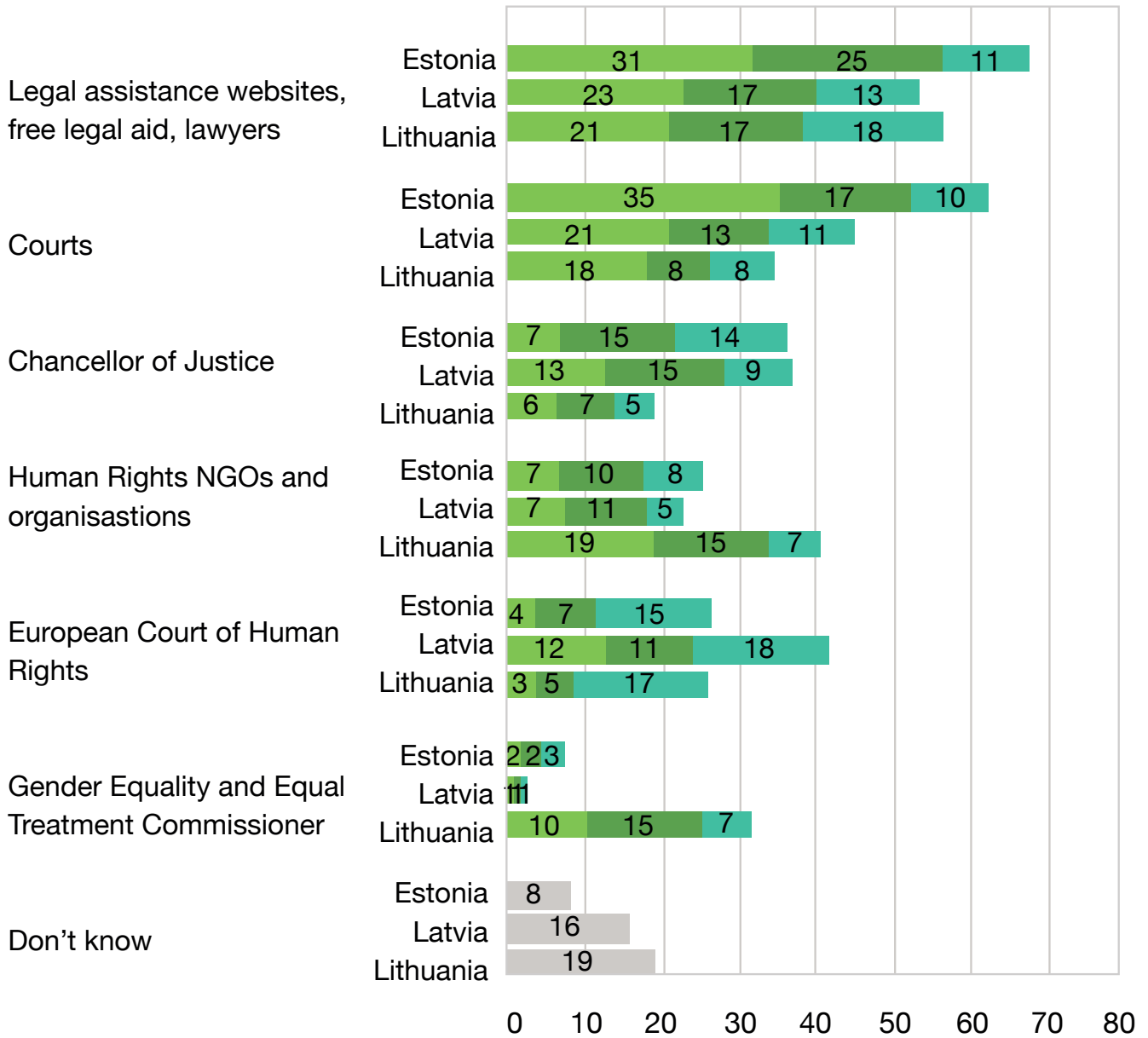


Figure 17. Recourse in the event of a violation of human rights.

# 15. ATTITUDES TOWARDS STATES THAT VIOLATE HUMAN RIGHTS

Question: Is it ethical for the state to develop relations with states that grossly violate human rights?

Attitudes towards states in which there are gross violations of human rights are somewhat more neutral in Latvia and Lithuania compared to in Estonia. Nearly one-quarter of respondents left the question unanswered (compared to 10% in Estonia), and less respondents chose the answer “rather unethical”.

At the same time, there was a rather equal share of respondents in all three countries who held that there should be no relations with such states or relations with them should be severed.

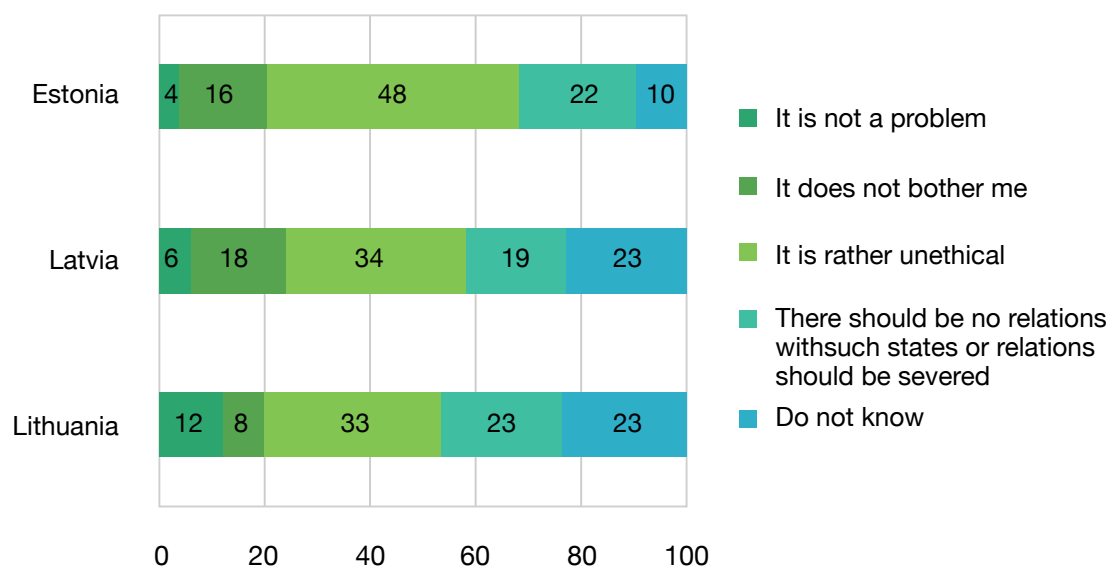


Figure 18. Attitudes towards states that violate human rights.



# 16. DO YOU FEEL THAT THE STATE PROTECTS YOUR HUMAN RIGHTS?

Question: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that all human being have the same rights and freedoms, but also the same obligations. Do you feel that the state protects your human rights?

Seventy-nine percent of Estonian residents feel that the state protects their human rights, while this percentage is 54% in Latvia and 50% in Lithuania.

The results are presented in greater detail in the figure below.

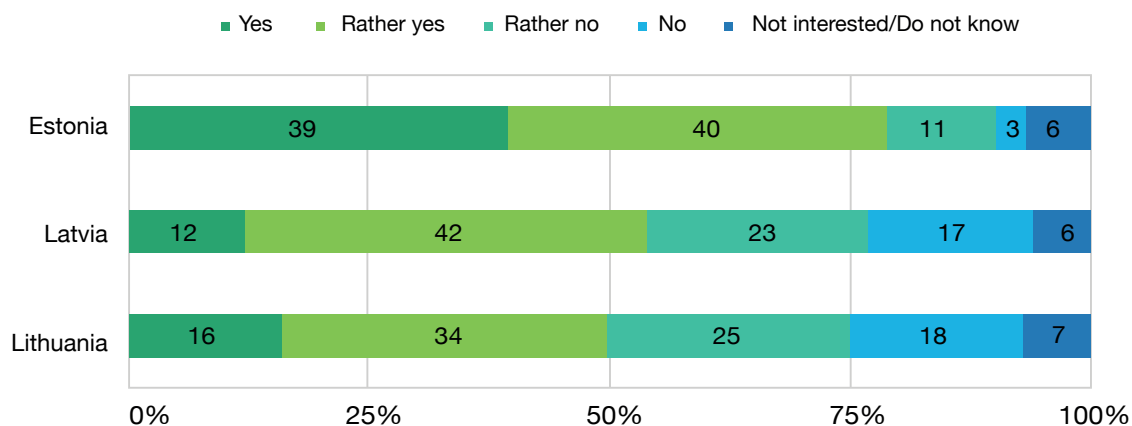


Figure 19. Do you feel that the state protects your human rights? All states.

## Estonia

Question: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that all human beings have the same rights and freedoms, but also the same obligations. Do you feel that the Estonian state protects your hu-man rights?

Seventy-nine percent of Estonian residents feel that the state protects their human rights, where-as 14% do not share this sentiment. A clear “yes” was recorded for 39% of residents, which is a good result (above Figure 20).

Younger persons had the most positive views – 87% of 15-19 year olds and 85% of 20-29 year olds feel protected. Among the oldest age group, the result was 81%, while the lowest result was recorded among persons aged 40-49 years (68%).

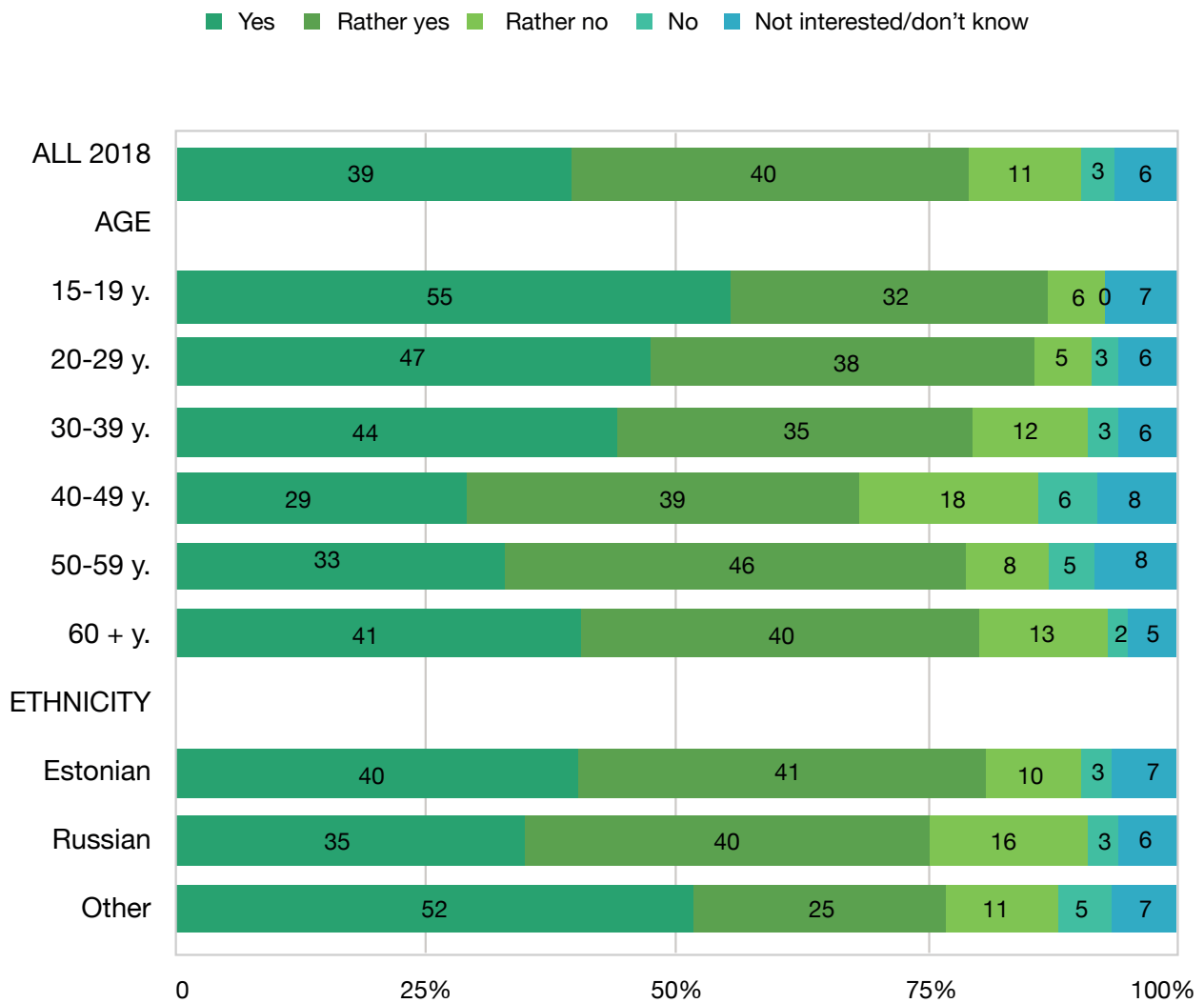


Figure 20: Do you feel that the state protects your human rights? Estonia.

There are no significant differences in the results of respondents with different native languages for this question. Among Estonians, 81% feel protected while 75% of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and 77% of persons with other ethnic backgrounds feel the same. Persons with higher education feel the most protected (81%), with a slightly lower result among persons with secondary education (75%) – although this is also quite a high result. Regionally, the high-est ratings were given in Northern Estonia (84%) and Southern Estonia (83%), with the lowest in Central Estonia (70%).

On the whole, there were no larger differences between the views of different groups based on various characteristics.

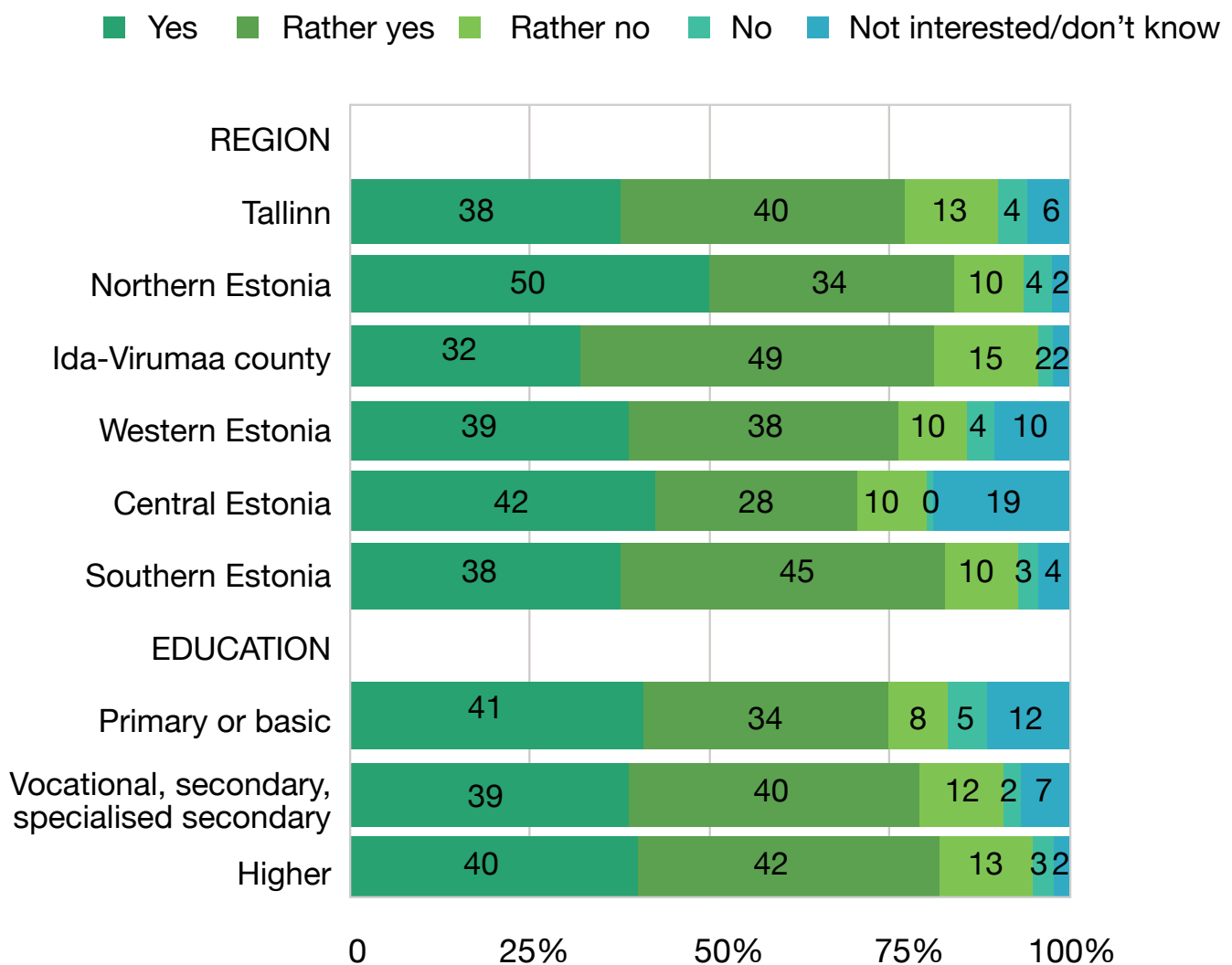
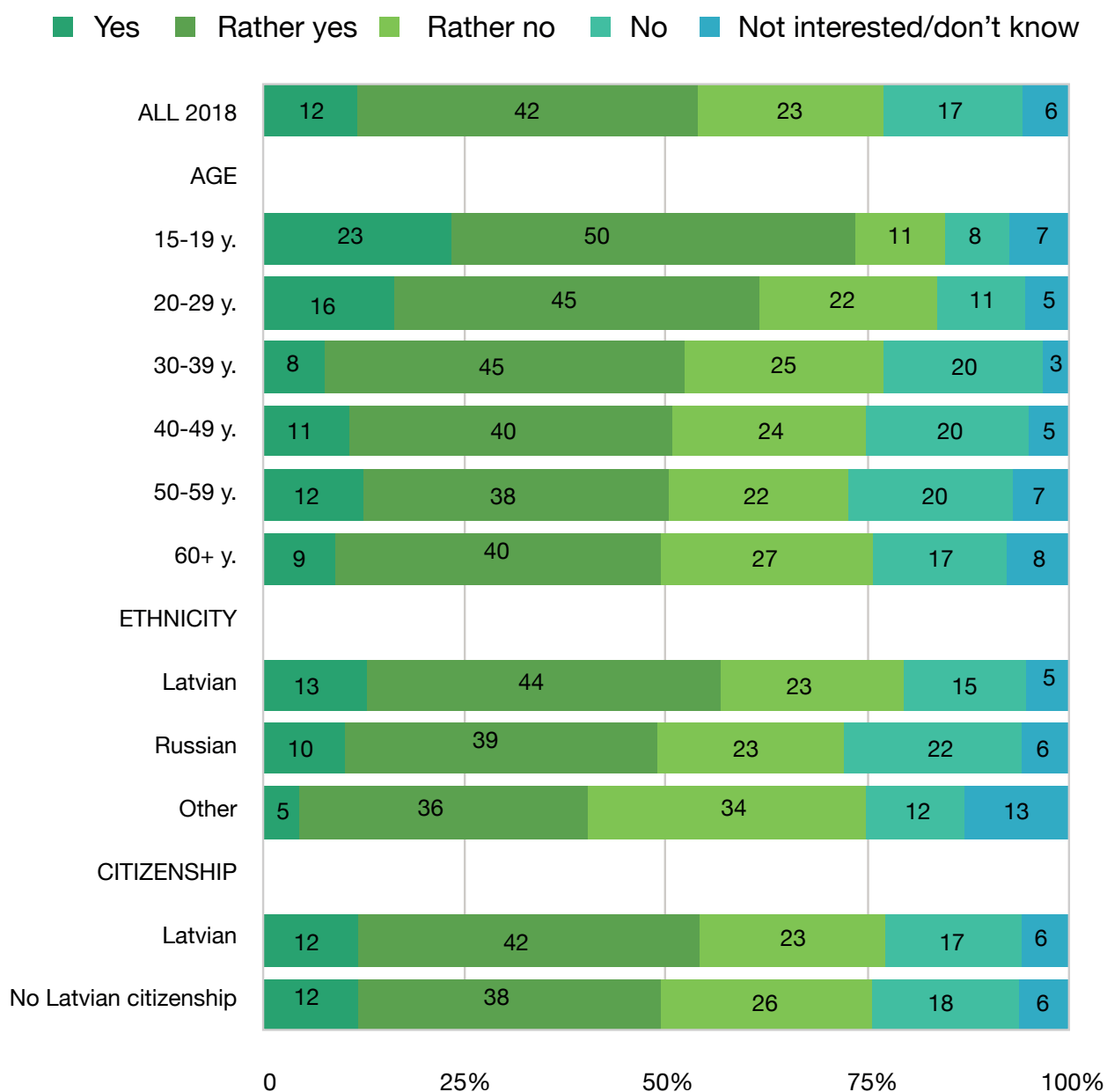


Figure 21: Do you feel that the state protects your human rights? Region and education.

## Latvia

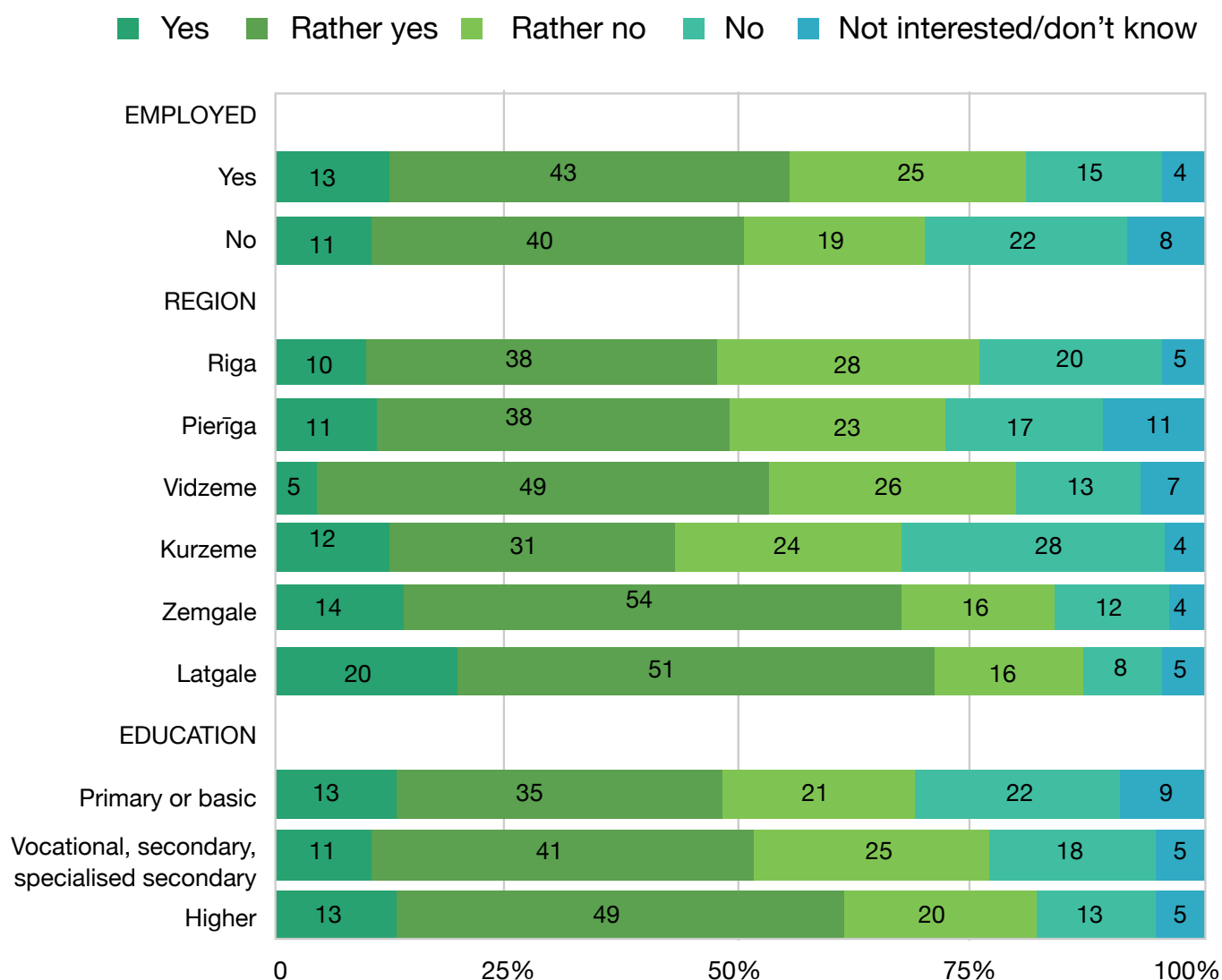
The results in Latvia were lower than in Estonia – there, 54% of the population feels that the state protects their human rights, but 40% do not think so. Only 12% answered a clear “yes”. Youngers persons have more positive views than average: 73% of 15-19 year-olds and 61% of 20-29 year-olds feel protected. Among the oldest age group, this result was only 49%.



Figures 22. Do you feel that the state protects your human rights? Latvia.

There were also no great differences between the answers given by ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking residents in Latvia: 57% of ethnic Latvians feel protected, as do 49% of the local Russian-speaking population. The highest result was recorded among Latvian citizens (54%) and the lowest among persons without Latvian citizenship (50%).

It is also evident that employed persons feel better protected (56%), while only 51% of unemployed respondents agreed. The most positive results were recorded in the Zemgale and Latgale regions, with lower than average results in the Riga and Kurzeme regions.



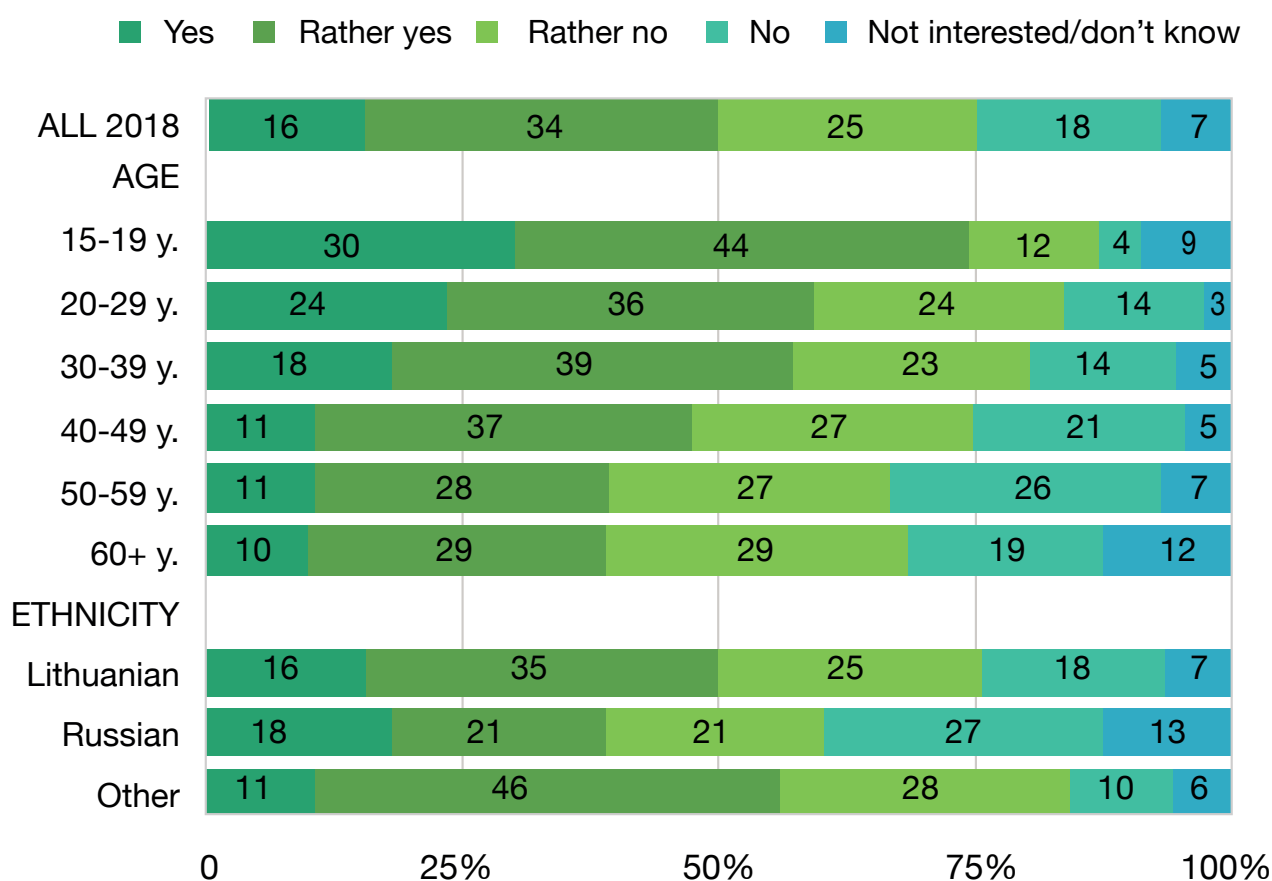
Figures 23. Do you feel that the state protects your human rights? Latvia.

## Lithuania

In Lithuania, 50% of residents feel that the state protects their human rights, while 43% do not think so. Only 16% of respondents answered “yes” to this question. Younger persons are more positive in their views than the average – 74% of 15-19 year-olds and 60% of 20-29 year-olds feel protected. The result for the oldest age group was only 39%.

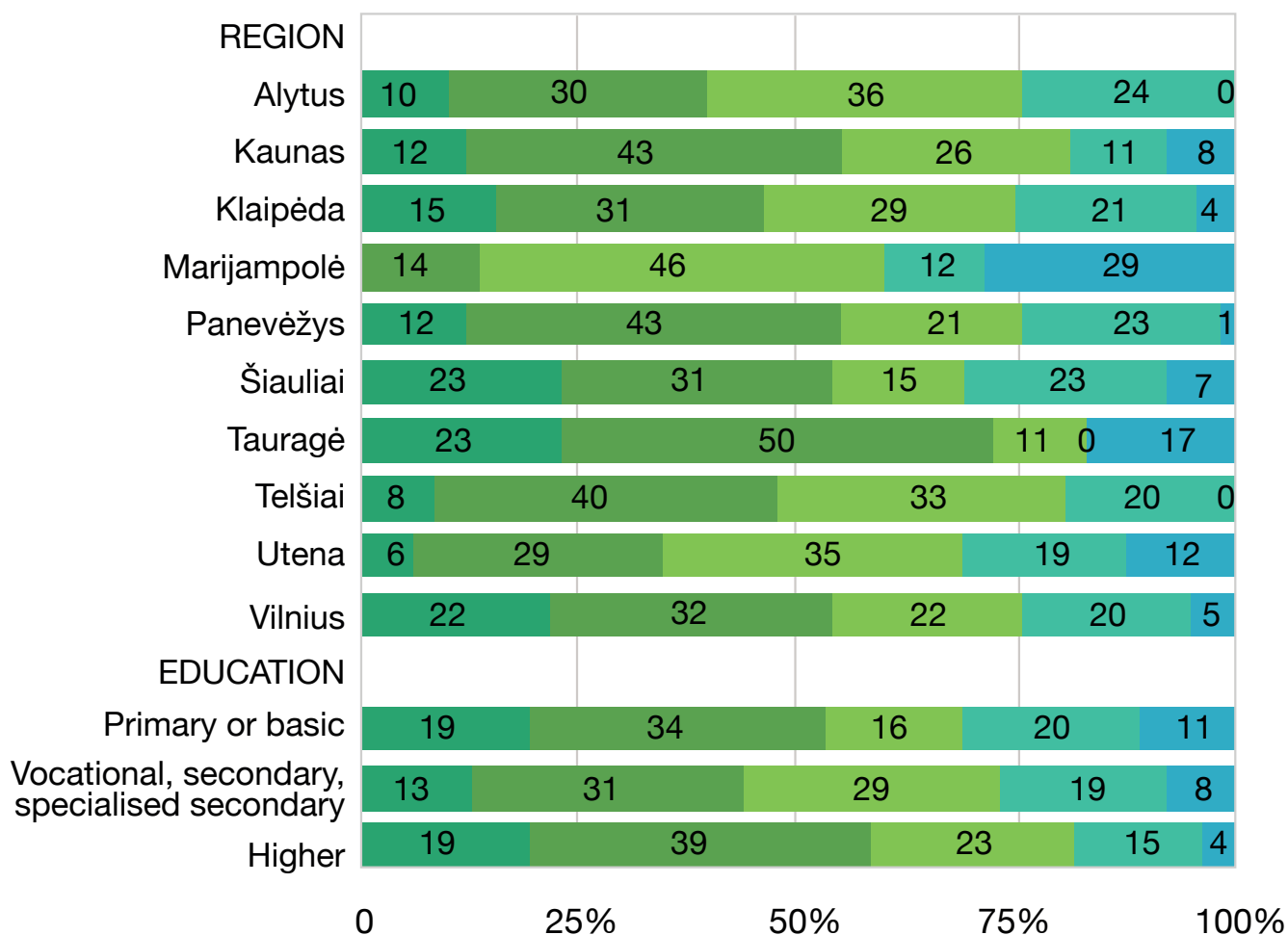
Among ethnic Lithuanians, 51% feel protected, while 39% of the local Russian-speaking population and 57% of persons from other ethnic groups feel the same.

Among Lithuanian citizens, 58% with higher education, 53% with basic education and 44% with secondary education feel that their human rights are protected.



Figures 24. Do you feel that the state protects your human rights? Lithuania.

■ Yes ■ Rather yes ■ Rather no ■ No ■ Not interested/don't know



Figures 25. Do you feel that the state protects your human rights? Lithuania.

Regional differences are most evident in two regions: Tauragė for the best and Marijampolė for the worst results. The highest number of respondents in the latter region did not know how to answer this question.

Comparatively, younger persons feel best protected. This indicates a certain secure standard of living and that people are not concerned about their human rights.

# 17. AGREEMENT TO LIMITATIONS ON RIGHTS

Questions: Which of your rights would you agree to be limited if this were necessary for the security of the state or to prevent terrorist acts?

Answering this question required a certain amount of pre-existing knowledge and the ability to distinguish between violations of human rights and their (temporary) limitation. The results are presented by country.

In the interests of state security, Estonian residents would most agree to limitations on their freedom of movement (28%), followed by their right of association (24%), right of assembly and freedom of expression. Some respondents (4%) noted that they would not agree to the limitation of any of their rights. A further 46% of the population did not know how to answer the question.

Variations from the general results were recorded among the following groups of respondents:

Residents of Northern Estonia (20%) and Ida-Virumaa county (20%) as well as Russian-speaking residents and persons aged 60+ (21%). Residents of Southern Estonia (40%), 20-29 year-olds (38%), respondents with higher education (37%) and respondents with higher incomes (35-41%) were more agreeable. Respondents from Tallinn more frequently would agree to limitations of their right of assembly.

As for limitation of freedom of expression, residents of Tallinn (19%) were more ready to consent, while respondents from Northern Estonia (7% agree), Southern Estonia (10%), rural residents (10%) and 40-49 year-olds (8%) were more frequently opposed to limitations than the average.

Persons with higher education (7%) more frequently than average noted that they would not agree to the limitation of any of their rights.



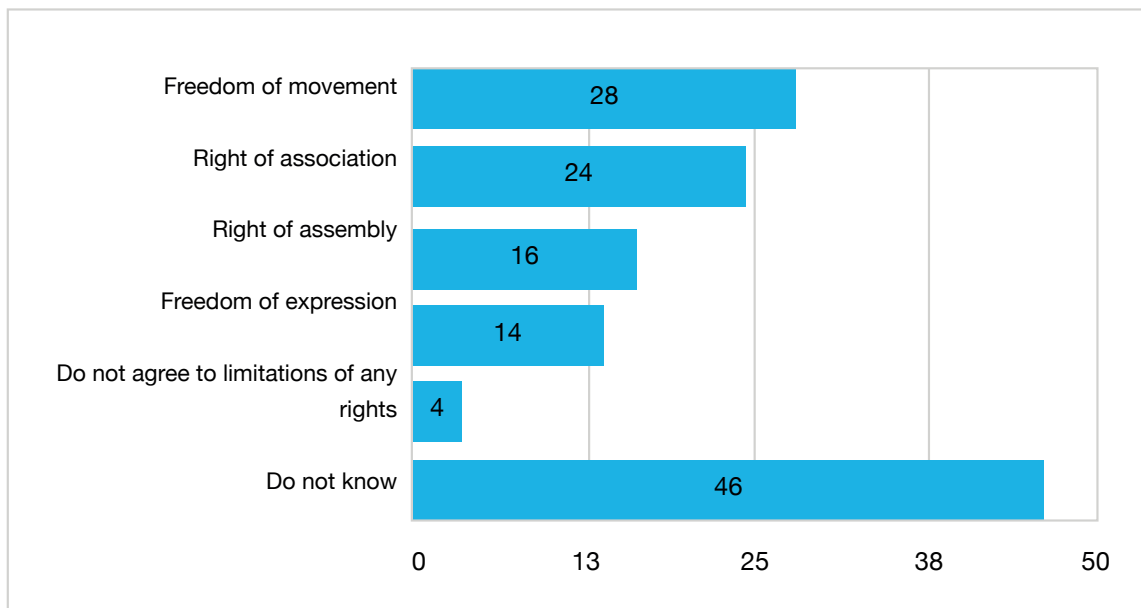


Figure 26. Which of your rights would you agree to be limited if this were necessary for the security of the state or to prevent terrorist acts? Estonia.

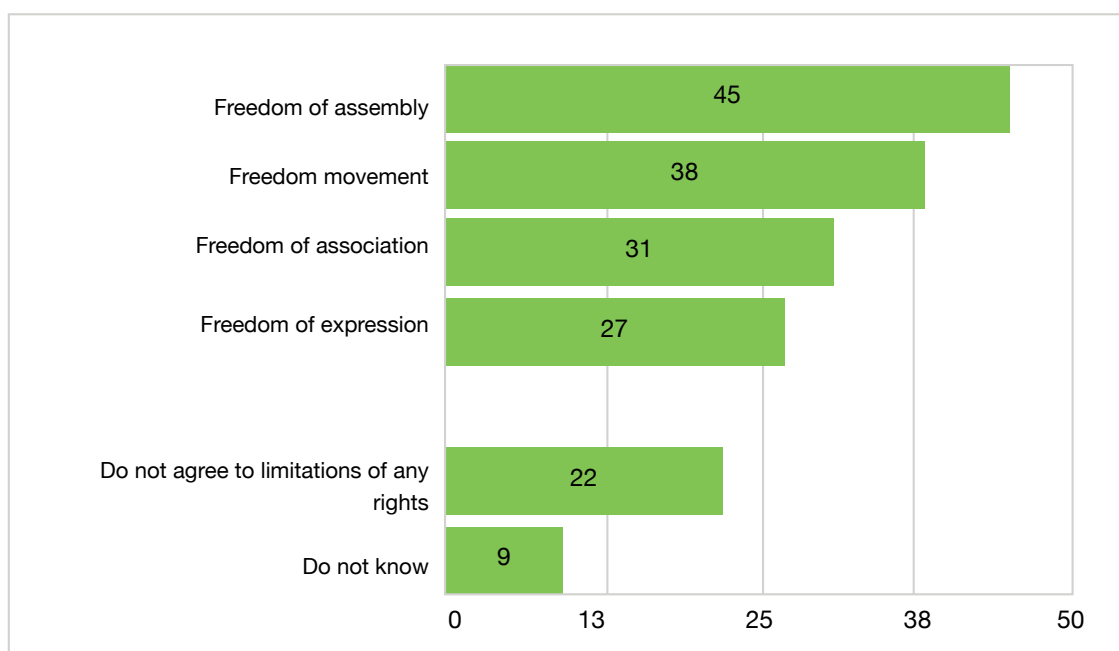


Figure 27. Which of your rights would you agree to be limited if this were necessary for the security of the state or to prevent terrorist acts? Latvia.

For the sake of state security, Latvian residents would most frequently allow limitations on their right of assembly (45%), followed by freedom of movement (38%), freedom of association (31%) and freedom of expression (27%). Twenty-two percent of respondents would not agree to limitations on any of their rights.

Variations from the general results were recorded for the following groups:

Russian-speaking residents more frequently agreed to limitations on freedom of movement (45%), while respondents with basic education agreed less frequently (30%). Younger persons aged 20-29 more frequently agreed to limitations on freedom of assembly, while non-citizens agreed to this less. A higher than average number of respondents (28%) who did not agree to the limitation of any of their rights were found in the Riga region.

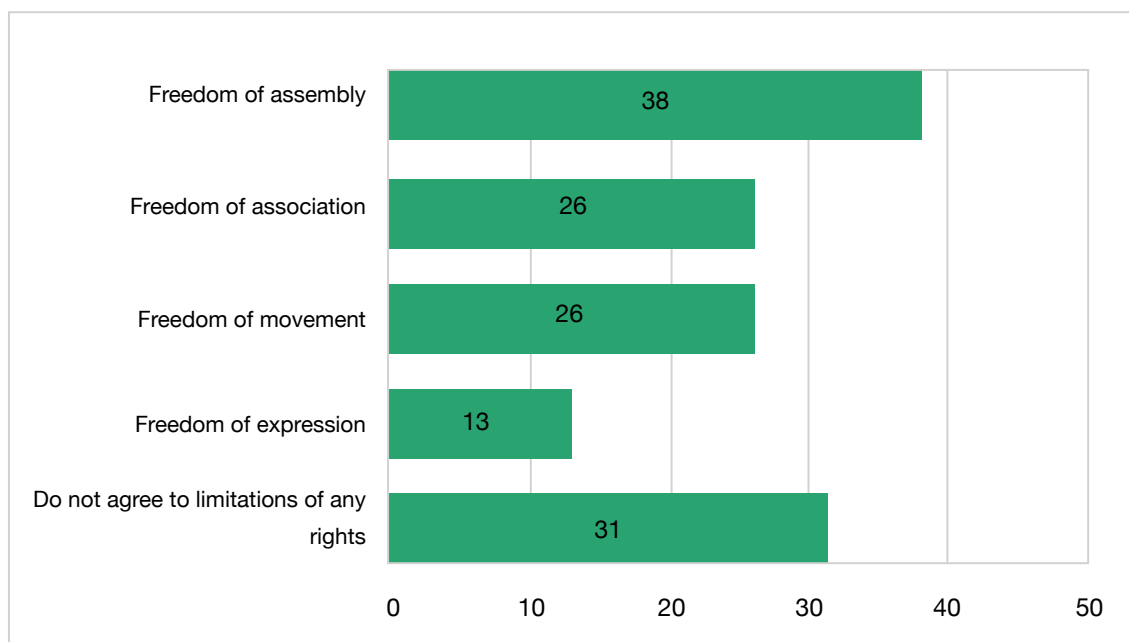


Figure 28. Which of your rights would you agree to be limited if this were necessary for the security of the state or to thwart terrorist acts? Lithuania.

Lithuanian residents most frequently agreed to limitations on their freedom of assembly (38%), followed by freedom of association and freedom of movement. The lowest percentage of respondents agreed to limitations on freedom of expression in Lithuania (13%). Among Lithuanian residents, 31% would not agree to limitations on any of their rights.

Variations from the general results were recorded among the following groups:

Respondents from other ethnic backgrounds more frequently agreed to limitations on freedom of movement (46%). With regard to freedom of assembly, 20-29 year-olds (29%), people living in rural areas (32%) and persons from other ethnic groups (20%) indicated less frequently than average that they would agree to limitations on this right. Respondents with higher education agree less with the limitations on freedom of expression (9%). Most often, people who are un-employed, would not agree to any limitations of their rights (44%).

Comparatively among the Baltic states, the trust of Estonian respondents in the state remains high, as demonstrated by high levels of support of the Defence Forces and Police ( by Turu-uuringud in spring 2018).

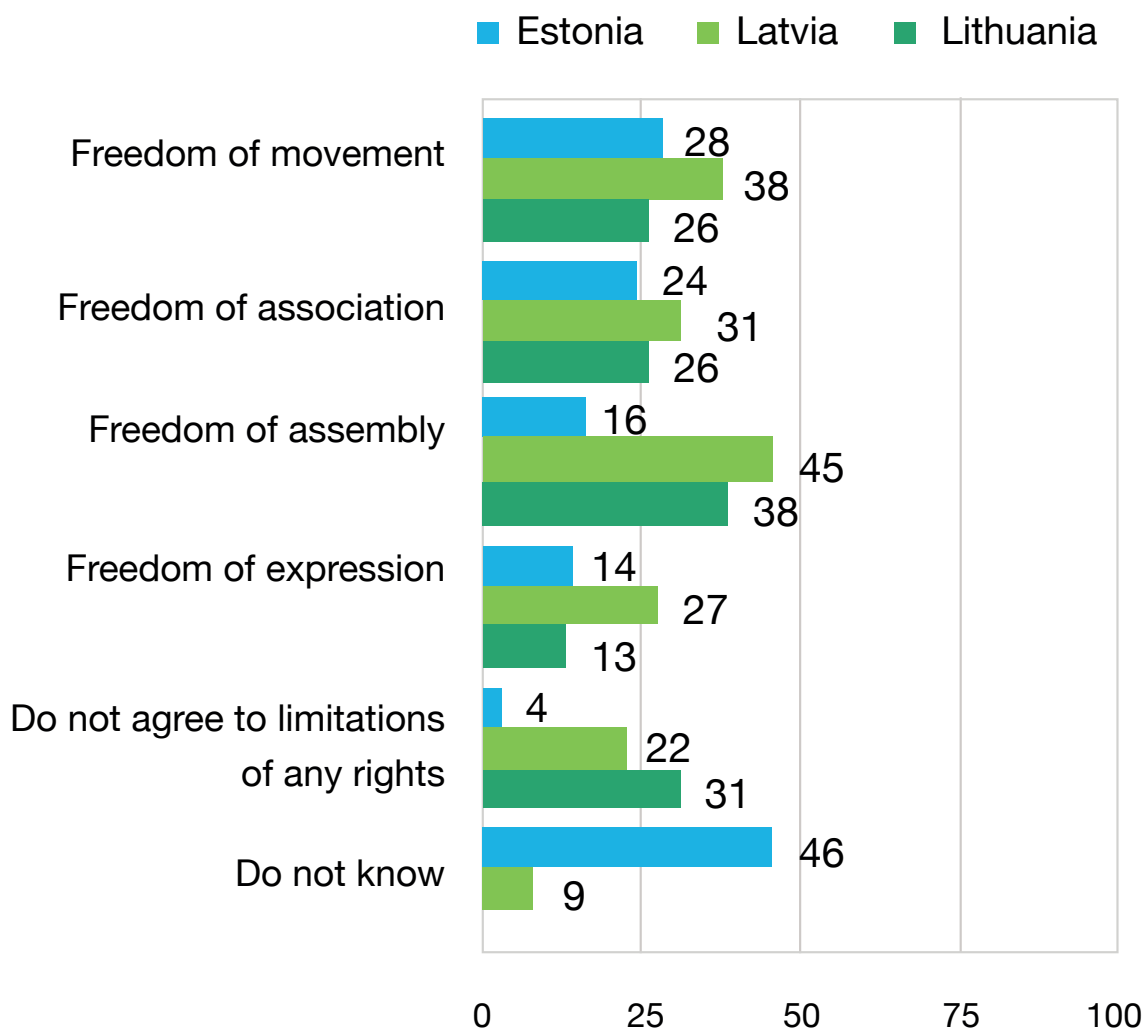


Figure 29. Agreement to limitations on rights. Baltic states compared.

# 18. GENERAL PRE-EXISTING INFORMEDNESS

The results of the final question in the survey demonstrate that Estonian residents considered themselves to be best informed (48%). In Latvia and Lithuania, the most popular response was “not very” (41%).

There were the highest percentage of respondents in Latvia who had heard a word, but did not know what it meant (12%), and also who had never heard a word (5%).

In all three countries, the majority population was better informed than the Russians or persons from other ethnic groups living in those countries. One reason for this is likely the use of human rights issues for propaganda purposes in the Russian media, which obscures the term and distorts its meaning.

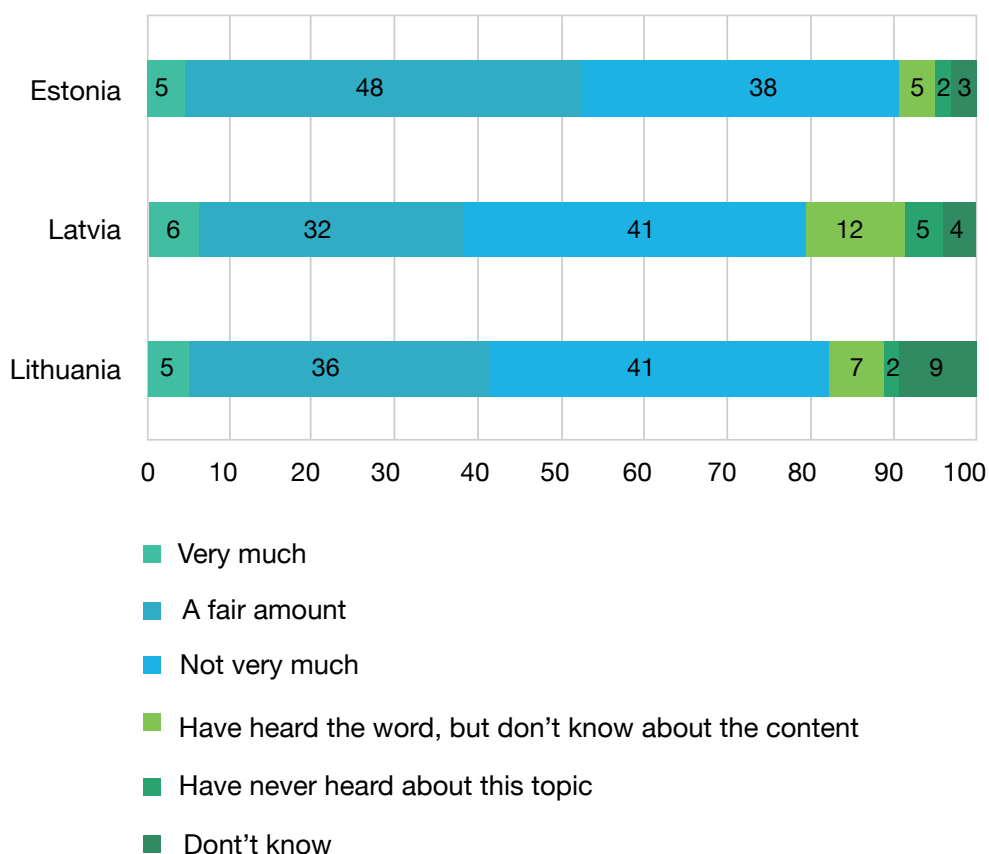


Figure 30. General pre-existing informedness.

# SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF THE COMPARATIVE HUMAN RIGHTS SURVEY IN THE BALTIC STATES

## Knowledge about human rights

The survey results would suggest that there is no common understanding of human rights in the three Baltic states, and that the level of knowledge of different aspects of this issue varies. This may mean that the human rights situation in these three countries is indeed different, as the picture that emerges is very diverse and contradictory, also among different groups within one state.

In Estonia, the term “human rights” is associated quite equally with the right to life, free-dom/autonomy and freedom of expression. Respondents in Latvia and Lithuania associated this term more with freedom and the right to autonomy. As these responses were most common among the youngest age group (15-29) in each country, their knowledge can likely be related back to the school curriculum and what is covered on this topic in textbooks and how this is presented.

The results of Latvian and Lithuanian respondents show other significant similarities: emphasis is on freedom, equality and rights. Additionally, respondents in Latvia and Lithuania more frequently noted a dignified life and salary (7-8%), and respondents in Latvia also more frequently marked respect for the rights of others and obligations (9%).

A significant share of respondents did not answer the question of what human rights mean, and it would seem that they do not associate the term human rights with anything in particular. Latvian respondents were able to provide a somewhat greater number of responses, while a greater share of respondents in Estonia and Lithuania did not answer the question.

Forty-two percent of respondents in Estonia and 34% in Lithuania were unable to think of anything associated with the term human rights or they were not able to express it in words. The respondents' knowledge was also rather vague: they had heard something about human rights, but were unable to explain the term or associate it with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In any case, a very significant share of the population was unable to define or explain the term.

## Respect for human rights

Respondents in the three Baltic states have different opinions as to whether human rights are respected. Whereas in Estonia it is generally held that there are no problems with human rights (73% of respondents), this sentiment is shared by 47% of Latvian respondents and only 33% of respondents in Lithuania.

This question was answered in the affirmative by nearly half of the respondents in Latvia (47%) and one-third in Lithuania (33%). The reason for this is not, however, likely to be greater violations of human rights in these countries, rather the fact that there is less awareness of this topic in Latvia and Lithuania – where 32% and 26% of respondents respectively left the question unanswered – than in Estonia. A negative response was given by 35% of residents in Lithuania, 26% in Latvia and only 14% in Estonia. There are some similarities here with the results of studies that have been held in Estonia previously. It is only in this 2018 study that the percentage of respondents in Estonia who answered “no” is significantly lower. It would seem that a certain amount of time is required for there to be awareness of human rights in society.

If in Estonia opinions on human rights are affected by a person's age, ethnicity (native Russian-speakers have more negative views), education, citizenship, income level and place of residence, then similar patterns are evident also in Latvia. More negative attitudes towards human rights violations are found among the following groups of respondents: persons aged 60+, Russian speakers (34%), persons without Latvian citizenship, pensioners, persons with low incomes and residents of the Latgale region (38%).

The results in Lithuania were somewhat different compared to Estonia and Latvia, where 50-59 year-olds, persons with secondary education and unemployed persons (52%) were more critical. In Lithuania, persons from other eth-

nic groups were more frequently unable to answer the question, but they do not have negative views about the human rights situation. It would seem that they have not had to deal with this topics. Thus, the factors that make people lean towards negative views are likely related to their knowledge of human rights and whether they are a part of and follow the local information space.

With regard to the rights which respondents considered to be most frequently violated in their country, then in all three states the highest results related to standard of living. This is not, how-ever, strictly a human rights issue (this becomes a human rights issue if a state unjustifiably fails to provide conditions for a dignified life, such as pensions below the subsistence minimum). In Estonia, these topics were important in the 2012 survey which was conducted during the eco-nomic downturn.

Yet few respondents consider themselves to have experience with human rights violations: 6% in Estonia, 15% in Latvia and 15% in Lithuania. The descriptions of these incidents provided by the respondents reveal that the majority relate to problems with getting by. The results were ra-ther similar in Estonia and Latvia. In both, a strong so-called Russian issues component is evi-dent, which are issues that are less related to human rights and more the result of exposure to Russian media and propaganda.

In all three countries, many vague answers were given and social problems were categorised as human rights issues. It can thus be said that opinions on human rights violations are more gen-eral and are not based in fact.

The second most important topic noted in the three Baltic countries was ine-quali-ty and discrimi-nation, including in the workplace.

The third largest area of concern involves so-called Russian issues which were characteristic of the responses of Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia. Is-sues relating to citizenship, educa-tion and language are emphasised, but these are not related to human rights.

With regard to a specific state, it can be noted that in Latvia, concerns about a low standard of living were followed by unequal treatment at work and in gen-eral and poor access to medical care.

In Lithuania, the most frequent complaints related to access to medical care,

followed by vic-tims' rights and unfair trials. Poverty, social inequality, guarantees for children's rights and the right to housing were more frequently noted in Latvia than in Estonia or Lithuania. In Lithuania, comparatively more respondents considered failure to ensure the right to work, by which they mean unemployment, to be a problem.

Six percent of respondents in Estonia, 15% in Latvia and 15% in Lithuania complained of human rights violations against themselves or someone they know. Thus, the opinions relating to human rights violations expressed in all three countries were rather more general, were not based in fact and may have been the result of influence from the traditional and social media.

The survey of personal experiences involving specific human rights violations experienced by respondents or persons they knew revealed that similarly to respondents in Estonia, respondents in Latvia most frequently noted inequality in the workplace, followed by a low standard of living and the citizenship problems of non-citizens, which do not, however, qualify as human rights violations.

Lithuanians also erroneously noted most frequently issues relating to a low standard of living. This was followed in frequency by poor access to medical care and unfair trials. Twenty-seven percent of respondents in Estonia, 18% in Latvia and 19% in Lithuania consider the rights of persons with disabilities and special needs to be a concern. Here the role of the media and of the public in raising awareness of this issue should be noted.

Again, the results were quite similar in Estonia and Latvia, with greater variation in Lithuania. A significant number of vague responses were given in all three states, and social problems were categorised as human rights violations.

As for the issue of citizenship, it is important to recall that views on this issue among the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and Latvia are shaped by propaganda disseminated by Russian media channels which claim that Russians are treated unfairly under the citizenship laws of those countries. However, participation in elections is not limited in these countries based on language or ethnicity, rather the right to elect and be elected to parliament in these countries belongs to all Estonian and Latvian citizens, respectively.

The requirements for citizenship are not complicated – they can be met by all



persons and are similar to the respective requirements imposed by the Russian Federation and the majority of European states. Citizenship cannot generally be categorised as a human rights issue, as this is a matter of the legal relationship between an individual and a state.

In each state, a very significant proportion of responses – one-third to one-half – related to issues that are far removed from human rights. This gives evidence of poor and unsystematic knowledge of this issue, and the uncritical acceptance of hostile propaganda. This is particularly visible from the responses of members of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and Latvia, who have a low interest in the local media and information.

Social media continues to play an increasingly important role in the dissemination of information, which has already become the most important source of information for young persons from minority ethnic groups and shapes their views on human rights issues. Thus, information can be disseminated through social media with relative ease, influencing the ideological views of users.

## Information on human rights

The habits of residents of the Baltic states in searching for information are quite similar: the residents of all three states receive new information primarily from television and are willing to search for it on the Internet. Latvian respondents obtain information less often from newspapers, radio and schools, while in comparison with respondents in Estonia and Lithuania, they would like to search for it and receive it more through the Internet.

The inhabitants of the Baltic states do not perceive any great lack of information on human rights issues. It is possible that they do not consider the topic to be relevant to their daily lives, or that they have not actually dealt with any of these issues. For example, respondents who answered that there was little information were asked to specify the areas in which information was lacking. A significant share of respondents had trouble defining this and simply indicated that they would like more information on all areas. Thus, human rights and their violation are not a current topic in society, and no substantial information is needed.

In comparison to Estonia, it is evident that there has been less discussion on human rights issues in Latvia and Lithuania. In those countries, new information is received mostly from television, and people are willing to look for it on the Internet.

## Attitudes and security

Whereas in Estonia, 60% of the population consider that human rights violations are a problem in some countries but not in their own country, this view is shared by only 27% of the population in Latvia and 13% in Lithuania. It would seem that respondents in Latvia and Lithuania have not thought this question through for themselves. In Lithuania, the respondents noted that human rights are important to them (77%), but they had been unable to demonstrate any real knowledge of the topic in their responses to the previous questions.

While respondents in Latvia and Lithuania more frequently than respondents in Estonia answered that human rights are violated, the survey revealed that people do not have a clear view of the subject, and some respondents tended to place all kinds of grievances in their private lives in this category, including socio-economic problems. A significant share of respondents were unable to explain their responses, and were unable to bring examples of incidents of human rights violations involving themselves or someone that they knew. There is a certain inability to distinguish between human rights and issues relating to our daily lives, and some members of the Russian-speaking population are unable to critically analyse false claims disseminated from within the Russian Federation in the context of human rights.

In the event of a violation of human rights, Estonia and Latvian residents would most frequently access legal assistance websites on the Internet, would use free legal aid and consult with a lawyer, and then turn to the courts.

In Lithuania, the first choice is also the courts, followed by human rights organisations, legal information on the Internet and consulting a lawyer. The Chancellor of Justice or Ombudsman came in a distant third in all three countries, which shows that they are turned to if insufficient help is available from the other sources.

With regard to attitudes towards states in which there are gross violations, Estonian residents stand out in considering relations with such countries to be un-

ethical, whereas attitudes in Latvia and Lithuania are more neutral. At the same time, 79% of people in Estonia feel that the state protects their human rights, while 54% of people in Latvia and 50% of people in Lithuania feel the same.

There is little divergence in this response based on a person's native language. In Estonia, 81% of ethnic Estonians, 75% of Russian speakers and 77% of persons from other ethnic groups feel protected.

There were also no significant differences in the responses of ethnic Latvians and Russian speakers in Latvia: 57% of ethnic Latvians feel protected, while 49% of Russian speakers share this view. The highest result was recorded among Latvian citizens (54%) and the lowest among persons without Latvian citizenship (50%).

In Lithuania, 51% of ethnic Lithuanians feel protected, whereas 39% of Russian speakers and 57% of persons from other ethnic groups feel the same. In all three countries comparatively it can be noted that younger people feel better protected. This indicates a certain secure standard of living and that people are not concerned about their human rights.

Estonian residents would be most willing to allow limitations on their rights in the interests of state security or to prevent terrorist attacks (79%), while 54% in Latvia and 50% and Lithuania would agree.

Comparatively among the Baltic states it is evident that the trust of Estonian respondents in the state and support for the state's security policies remain high, as demonstrated by high levels of support of the Defence Forces and Police (study conducted by Turu-uuringud in spring 2018).

Estonian respondents demonstrated more knowledge in their responses to many of the questions. Respondents in Latvia and Lithuania more frequently left questions unanswered, and their views on respect for human rights by the state were more negative, similarly to answers by Estonian respondents to the 2012 survey.

It would appear that more time and attention is needed in school curricula for the topic of human rights to become better understood in society as a whole. It is also noteworthy that more negative views regarding human rights are found

primarily among persons with lower levels of education and lower incomes, and also unemployed persons and pensioners. This is also the case for Russian-speakers who predominately follow Russian media, both in Estonia and in Latvia.

Thus, factors that influence people towards more negative views can likely be associated with the respondent's level of knowledge of human rights and being part of and following the local information space.

The survey exposed significant failings and deficiencies that merit attention in future. In the context of human rights, social inequality (including equal treatment in the workplace and the stratification of society), poor access to medical care and ensuring the equal rights of persons with disabilities and older persons all need the continued attention of government.

*To conclude, on the one hand the survey demonstrates that people from all three countries have a vague understanding of human rights and the violations of human rights. However, on the other hand, this can be interpreted as a positive – people have not been exposed to these issues in their personal lives.*

The definition of human rights is vague and often affected by propaganda – people in the Russian sphere of influence in all of the Baltic States considered social issues to be violations of human rights while in reality these are not to be categorised as such.

In addition, citizenship issues were mentioned as a human rights violation and this can also be attributed to the propaganda from the Russian television and social media where claims about the laws of citizenship being restrictive towards Russians are made. However, participation in elections is not limited in these countries based on language or ethnicity, rather the right to elect and be elected to parliament in these countries belongs to all citizens. The requirements for citizenship are not complicated and can be met by all persons and are similar to the respective requirements imposed by the Russian Federation

and the majority of European states.

While respondents in Estonia were more aware of human rights, it is apparent that there is significant work to be done in all three countries to elucidate the topic of human rights, especially among the people in the Russian sphere of influence and lacking the ability to apply critical analysis.