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Authors: Zinta Daija, Liga Krastina, Sarmite Rutkovska, Academic Information Centre
Reviewed by Cedefop

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More information on the survey at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/opinion-survey-vocational-education-and-training-europe

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The thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) systems provided in 'VET in Europe' reports. The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.
Thematic perspectives provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. They are available at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/refernet/thematic-perspectives
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Contents

Introduction

Raising the attractiveness of vocational education is one of the most crucial challenges in Latvian education policy. 'The Latvian National Reform Program for the implementation of the ‘EU 2020’ strategy' plans to change the proportion of students in vocational education and general education in favour of vocational education from the ratio 37/63 (in 2010) to the ratio 50/50 (in 2020).

There is very scarce research on perceptions of VET. In 2007, a qualitative study ‘The prestige of vocational education in Latvia’ (Klāsons, 2007) commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science was conducted on the image of VET in Latvia. Interviews and focus group discussions with students, their parents and teachers from VET and general secondary schools gave an insight into their perceptions of VET, the reasons for choosing VET over general secondary education and how to improve communication on VET. The most negative attitude towards VET was observed among general education (GE) teachers – they were stereotypically prejudiced against VET as a lower-quality education, and in their view choosing VET was only acceptable for students with poor grades and lack of interest in studies. At the same time, negative attitudes towards VET were not observed among students of the 9th grade (last year of the lower secondary education). They justified their wish to pursue VET at upper secondary level with clear interests that could be ‘transformed’ into a profession, suggestions from friends and relatives who did VET, recommendations from friends who are planning to enter VET, a desire to get out of the usual environment and to become more independent soon. Parents' attitudes toward VET were neutral, but they were concerned about the distance of schools from home, a possibly unfavourable social environment and their poor knowledge about VET. The recommendations resulting from the research on communication with target groups were mainly related to the provision of information on VET as equivalent in quality or even better than GE. It was suggested to expand communication of learners with VET students/ teachers and representatives of occupations, as well as to present VET as an opportunity rather than a decision for life.

Another study from 2007, commissioned by the Ministry of Welfare – ‘Professional activity of graduates of higher and vocational education institutions after graduation’ (Krūmiņš, 2007) – on the attitudes and work experience after IVET found that only 59% of graduates wanted to work in areas related to the acquired profession and 81% of these graduates who wanted to work in the acquired profession were doing it.

The study ‘Compliance of professional and higher education programmes with the requirements of labour market’ (Sloka, 2007), which was also commissioned by the Ministry of Welfare, revealed that employers unwillingly hire persons without work experience just graduated from VET. Practical skills of employees with vocational education do not satisfy employers in 64% of cases. Employees with VET qualification also consider that their education does not conform to the requirements of the labour market in 41% of cases.

In 2011, the Eurobarometer survey ‘Attitudes towards vocational education and training’ shows that 85% of Latvian respondents agreed with the statement that people in vocational education and training learn skills that are needed by employers, 77% evaluated teachers and trainers in VET as competent but only 55% thought that VET leads to jobs which are well paid. In comparison to other European countries fewer Latvians believed that VET offers high quality learning (63%), that VET has a positive image (60%), that it leads to professions which are highly demanded on the labour market (60%) and offers good career opportunities (57%). Many of VET programs give the opportunity to complete general secondary education, so 84% of Latvian respondents agreed that VET enables people to continue with university studies afterwards (only 68% of EU27) (European Commission, 2012).

In Latvia, VET offers a better route to the labour market for some (OECD, 2017) – among young adults (25-34 year olds) whose highest level of education attainment is upper secondary, employment rate for those with a vocational qualification (81%) is higher compared to those with a general education (73%).

However, so far, no such large-scale population surveys on VET as the Cedefop European Public Opinion Survey on vocational education and training (Cedefop, 2017) had been conducted in Latvia. The survey allows for analysis by education pathways at upper secondary level and provides an insight into a very broad range of aspects, giving also an opportunity to compare the views of people from Latvia and from other European countries. Survey data can become an important source of information for further development of the Latvian vocational education policy.

This article analyses quantitative data of the Latvian sample from the Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training. The fieldwork was carried out in June 2016; in Latvia 1010 respondents (aged 15 and older) from a representative sample were interviewed.

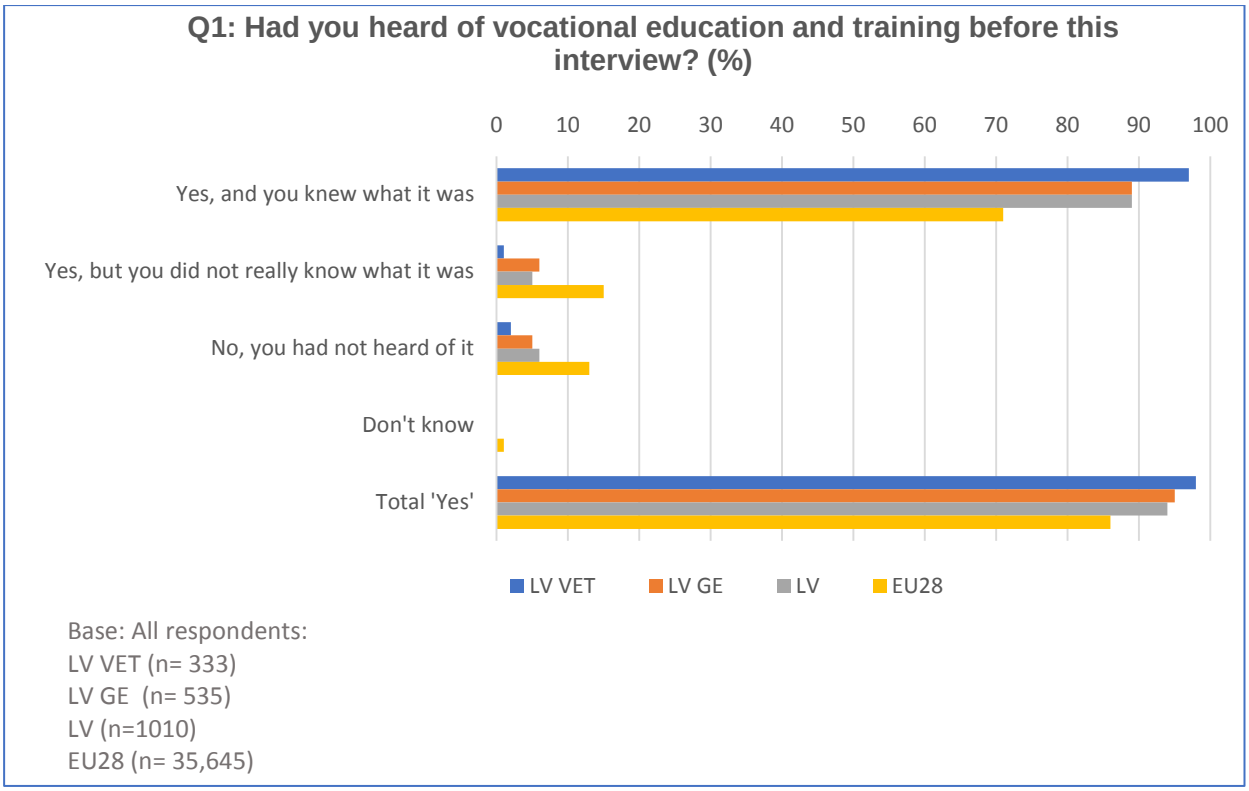
CHAPTER 1.

Awareness and knowledge of VET

1.1. Knowing VET

Most of the respondents in Latvia (89 %) had heard about vocational education and training before this interview and knew what it was, i.e. 97% of respondents with VET background (VE-participants) and 89% with general education background (GE-participants). This is the fourth highest figure among EU-28 countries (EU-28 average – 71%). Only 5% of LV-respondents had heard, but did not really know what it was (in EU-28 – 15%). Also, a negative answer that they had not heard about VET was given by 6% of LV-respondents, while in EU-28 it was an average of 13%. In LV these are mainly GE-participants – 5% had not heard about VET and 6% said they had heard but did not really know what it was. It thus shows that overall awareness of VET is higher in Latvia in comparison to EU-28 average and higher among VET-participants in comparison to GE-participants.

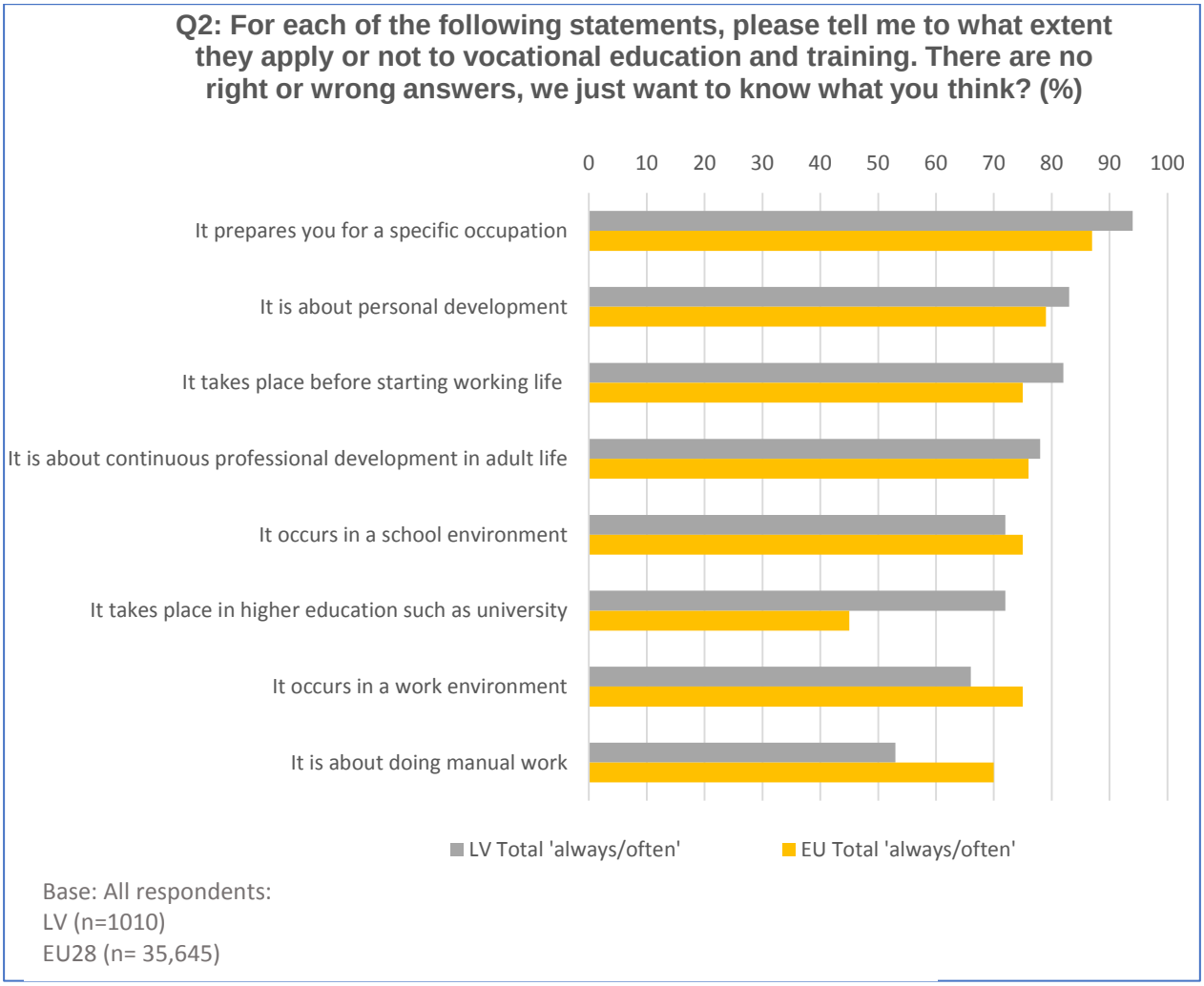
Figure 1. Knowing about VET



1.2. General conceptualisation of VET

Before revealing the specific definition of VET in this survey respondents were given eight statements and were asked to indicate to what extent they thought they applied to VET. LV-respondents relate VET to most of the identified aspects.

Figure 2. Factors associated with VET



The most distinctive characteristic of VET is that 'it prepares you for a specific occupation'. 94% say that this (always – 56%, often – 38%) applies to VET. The next characteristic of VET in Latvia is that VET is 'about personal development', which was pointed out by 83% respondents (always – 38%, often – 45%). The third distinctive VET characteristic is that 'it takes place before starting working life' – 82% think that it (always – 26%, often – 56%) applies to VET. Next factors associated with VET are that 'it is about continuous

professional development in adult life' (always – 27%, often – 51%), 'it occurs in a school environment' (always – 31%, often – 41%) and 'it takes place in higher education such as university' (always – 25%, often – 45%).The characteristic 'it occurs in a work environment' has been mentioned by 66% respondents (always – 18%, often – 48%). The least part of respondents (53%) associate VET with the following description: 'it is about doing manual work' (11% – always, 42% – often).

There are no significant opinion differences between GE- and VE-participants in LV.

In comparison to EU-28 average, LV-respondents associate VET more often (total 'always/often') with 'It prepares you for a specific occupation' (94% to 87%), 'It is about personal development' (83% to 79%), 'it takes place before starting working life' (82% to 75%) and especially with 'it takes place in higher education such as university' (72% to 45%). In comparison to LV, European respondents associate VET more often with work environment (75% to 66%) and as mainly about doing manual work (70% to 53%).

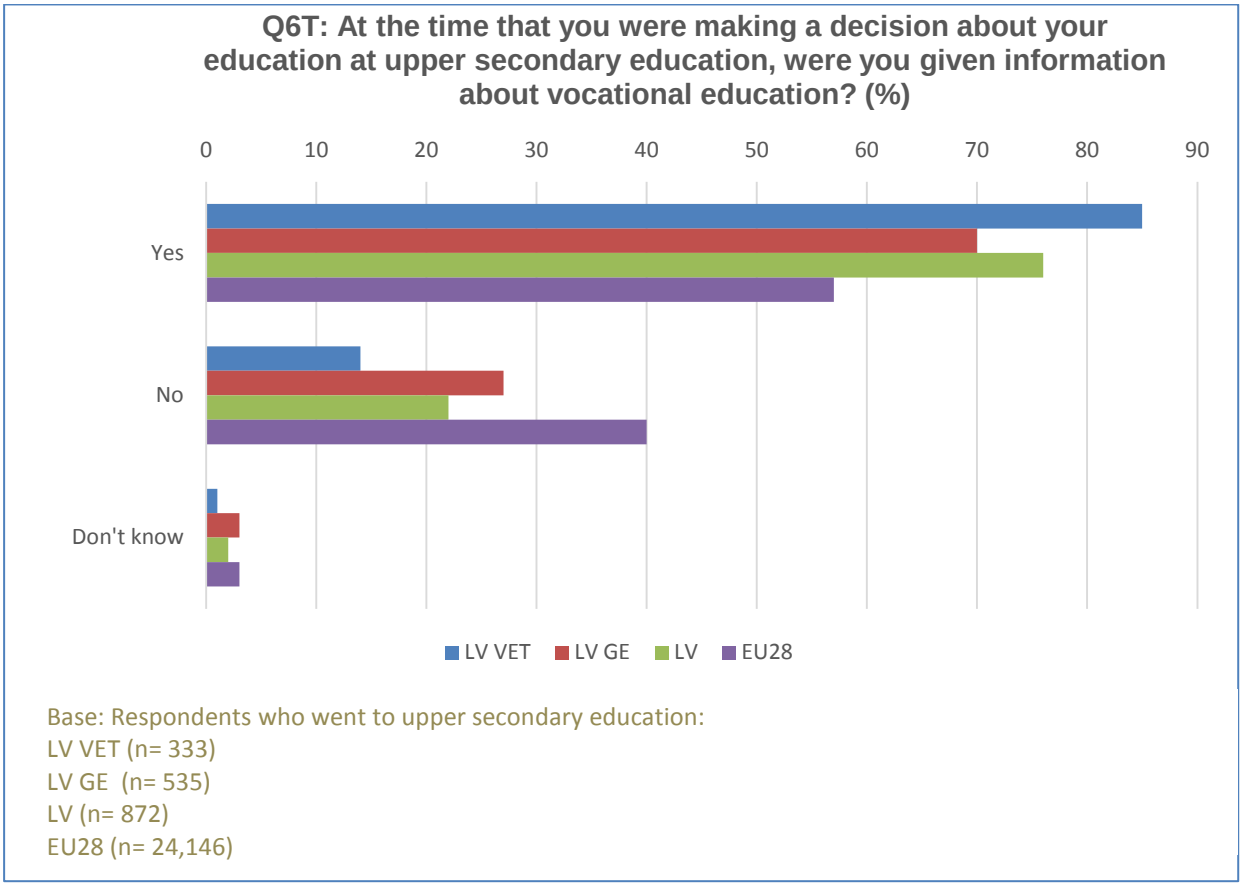
The results suggest that VET in LV is primarily associated to an occupation, personal development and starting working life. In addition, VET is related more often with school than work environment. This public opinion reflects the school-based VET system of LV, with very recent reforms introducing more work-based VET. The opinion that VET is taking place in higher education may reflect the fact that higher education in Latvia is divided into academic and professional higher education programs. There are also many colleges providing short-cycle professional higher education.

1.3. Education guidance and information

1.3.1. Provision of information

Asked if the respondents were given information about vocational education at the time they were making a decision about their upper-secondary education, most of LV-respondents (76%) who went to upper-secondary education answered affirmatively, VET-participants (85%) more often than GE-participants (70%). In comparison only 57% of the European sample had received information on VET at that time. This shows that in Latvia, in the general primary education system information about VET has been distributed more widely than in the EU.

Figure 3. Provision of information

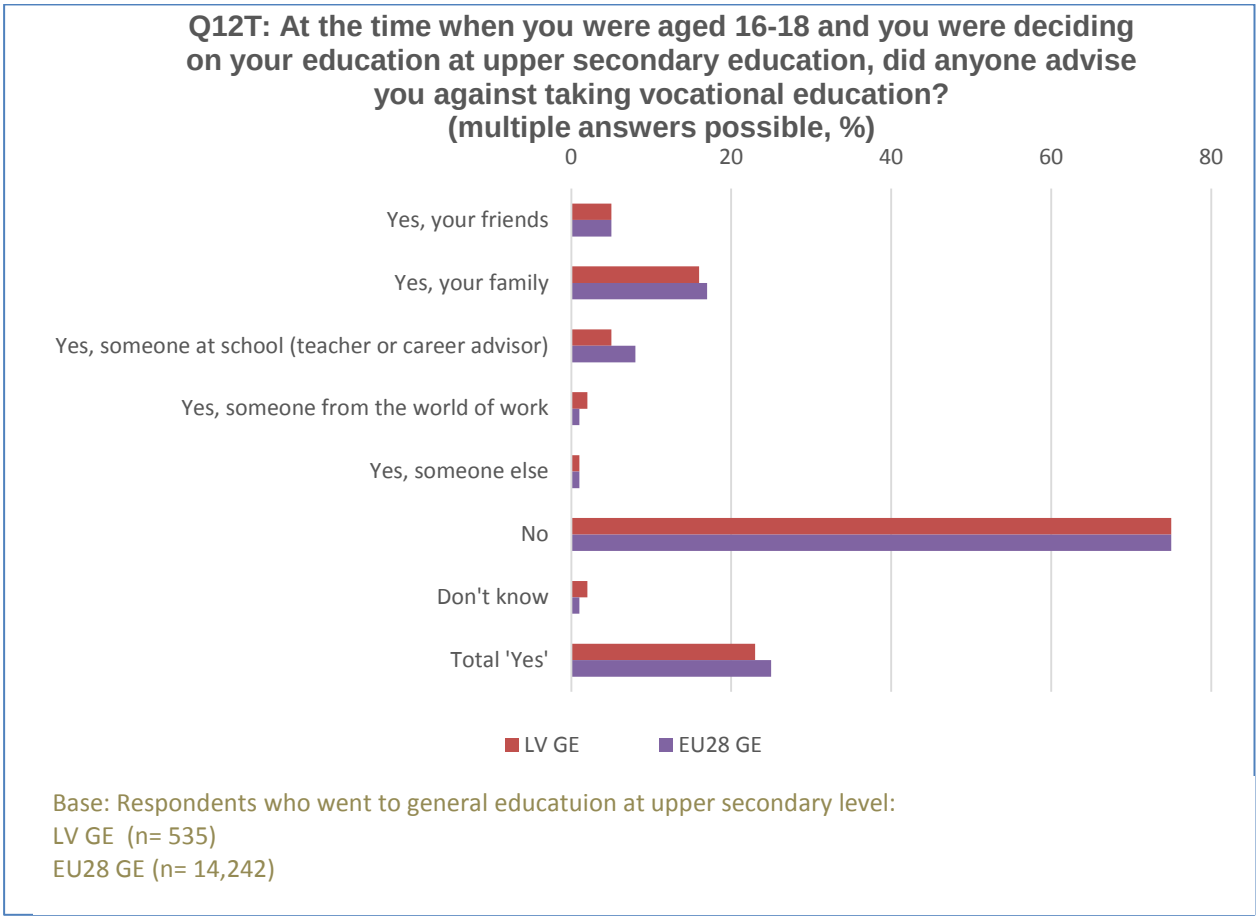


Base: Respondents who went to upper secondary education:
LV VET (n= 333)
LV GE (n= 535)
LV (n= 872)
EU28 (n= 24,146)

1.3.2. Advices against VET

23% of GE-participants answered that they were advised against taking VET. Most often this opinion against VET was expressed by family (16%), friends (5%), someone at school (5%), or someone from the world of work (2%) etc. Similarly, in EU 25% of GE-participants were advised against taking vocational education (for 17% it was family), but in comparison to LV, the negative opinion was expressed more often by someone at school (8%). These data coincide with the qualitative study (Klāsons, 2007) that revealed negative attitude of GE-teachers towards VET – they were stereotypically prejudiced against VET as a lower-quality education; while parents were concerned about the distance of VET schools from home and a possibly unfavourable social environment.

Figure 4. Advising against VET



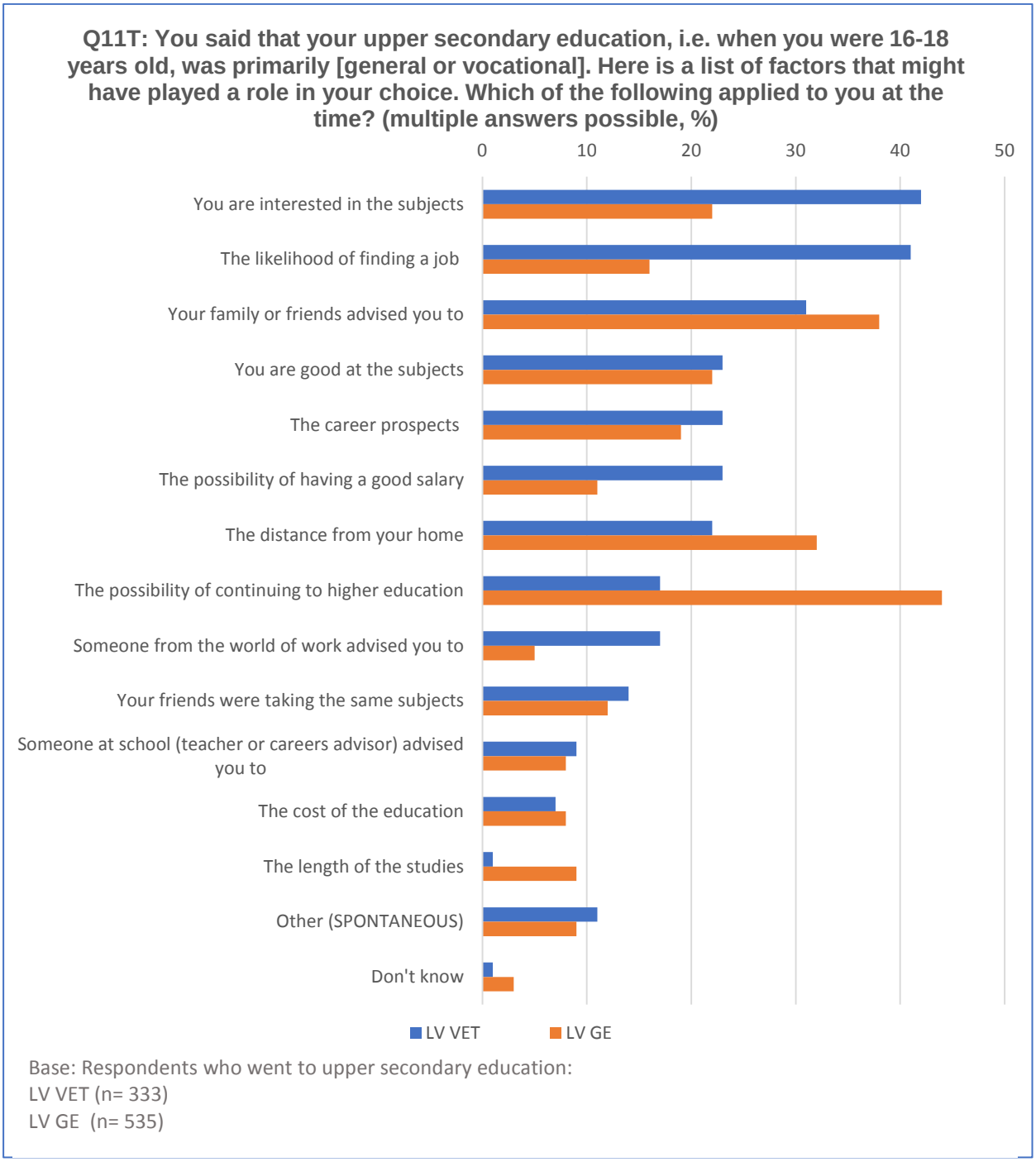
1.4. Reasons for deciding on an education path

The respondents were asked to indicate from a list of 13 factors those that might have played a role in their choice of the type of upper-secondary education.

The factors VET-participants mentioned more often than GE-participants were the following: their interest in the subjects (42% vs. 22%), the likelihood of finding a job (41% vs. 16%), the possibility of having a good salary (23% vs. 11%) and advice from someone from the world of work (17% vs. 5%). Whereas, the factors GE-participants mentioned more often than VET-participants were: the possibility of continuing to higher education (44% vs.17%), the distance from home (32% vs. 22%) and advice from family or friends (38% vs. 31%). The previous qualitative research (Klāsons, 2007) also showed that the decision of pupils in favour of VET was promoted by the clear interests that could be 'transformed' into a profession, suggestions from friends and relatives who acquired VET qualifications, recommendations from friends who are planning to

enter VET programmes, a desire to get out of the usual environment and become more independent earlier. In turn, as one of barriers to the decision on the choice of VE were revealed parents' concerns about having children to learn far away from home.

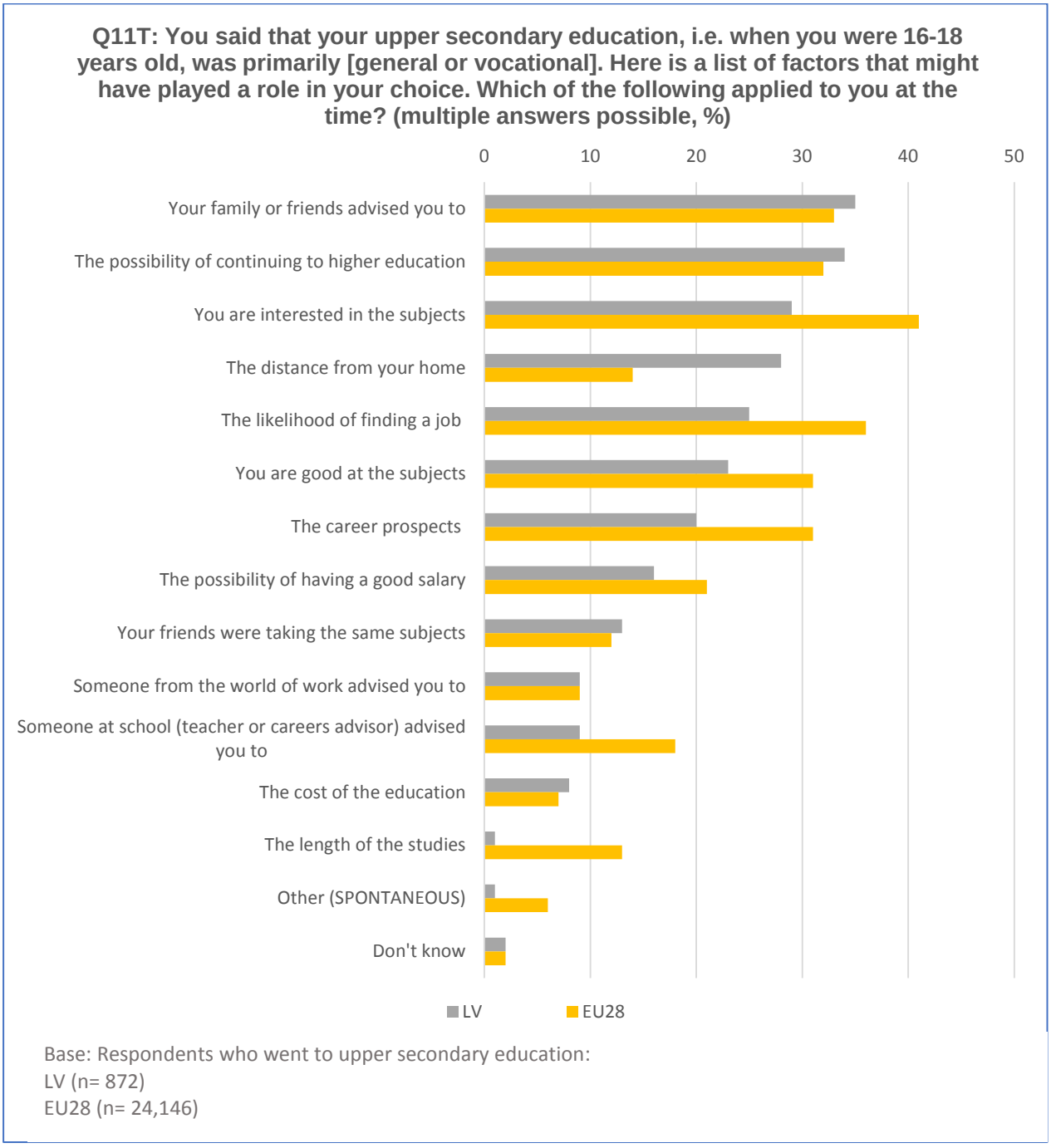
Figure 5. Factors that influenced decision on education path (VET vs GE participants)



These data stems from the fact that in Latvia students at lower secondary education level generally do not receive sufficient career support especially as regards the self-assessment, knowledge of the world of work and career decision-making process. If a young person has an interest in particular subjects and he wants to start working and earning money soon, and if he is not discouraged from VET education, he will possibly choose VET. While an unclear vision of continuing to higher education that is easily reachable as well as advice of friends and family against VET without necessary career guidance at school leads to continuing the general education path. Massive investments have been made in recent years in Latvia developing the career guidance and counselling system which will possibly show improvements in future surveys among young adults reporting their experiences.

In comparison with EU, LV-respondents most often mentioned the advice of family or friends (35%), the possibility of continuing to higher education (34%), interest in the subjects (29%) and the distance from home (28%).

Figure 6. Factors that influenced decision on education path (LV vs. EU28)



On average EU-28 respondents mention several reasons for deciding the education path more often than LV-respondents. Europeans were guided more often than LV-respondents by their interest in the subjects (41% vs. 29%), the likelihood of finding a job (36% vs. 25%), being good at the subjects (31% vs. 23%), the career prospects (31% vs. 20%), as well as the possibility of having a

good salary (21% vs. 16%), advise from teacher or careers advisor (18% vs. 9%) and the length of the studies (13% vs.10%). There is only one factor LV-respondents mention as relevant for their choice of education path more often than Europeans and it is the distance from home (28% vs. 14%).

CHAPTER 2.

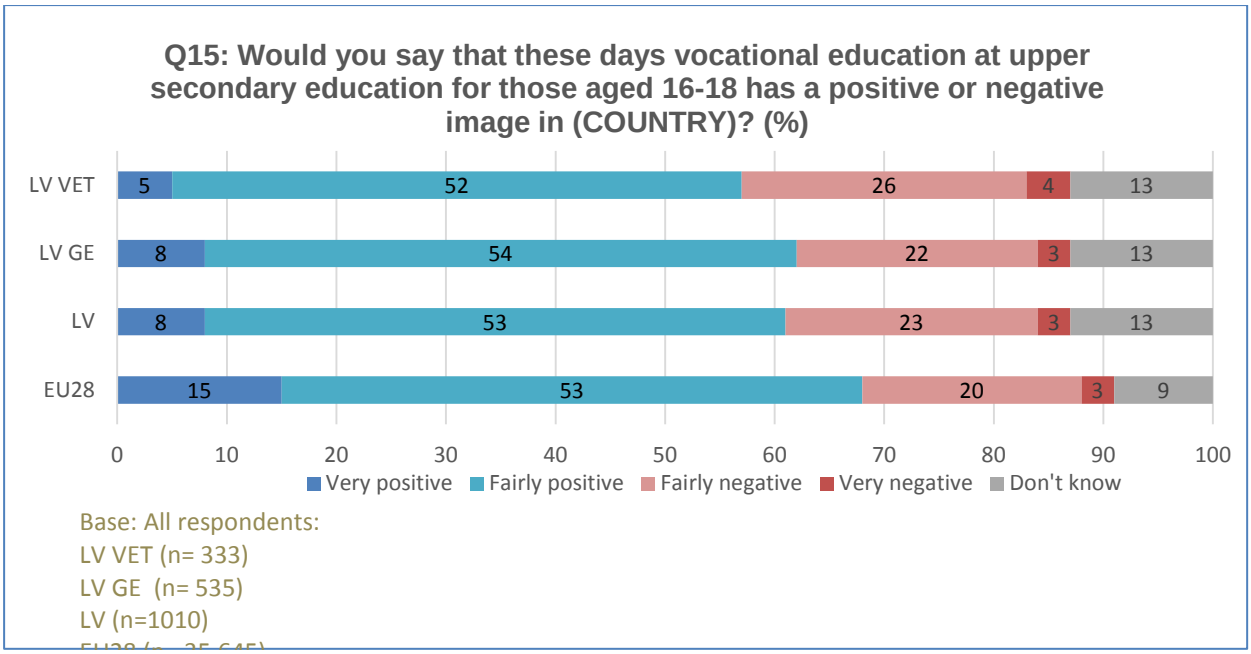
Attractiveness and access

Attractiveness in VET has been defined as its capacity to encourage individuals to choose vocational education and training; offer quality qualifications that open up career prospects; persuade employers to recruit holders of VET certificates (Cedefop, 2014, p. 30).

2.1. Vocational education image

Asked about the perception of these days VET among those aged 16-18 regardless of their own educational pathway, more than a half of LV-respondents (61%) think the image is positive (very positive – 8%, fairly positive – 53%) and around 26% find it negative (very negative – 3%, fairly negative – 23%). But in comparison with EU-28 (positive – 68%, negative – 23%) VET image in LV is less positive.

Figure 7. Perceived VET image

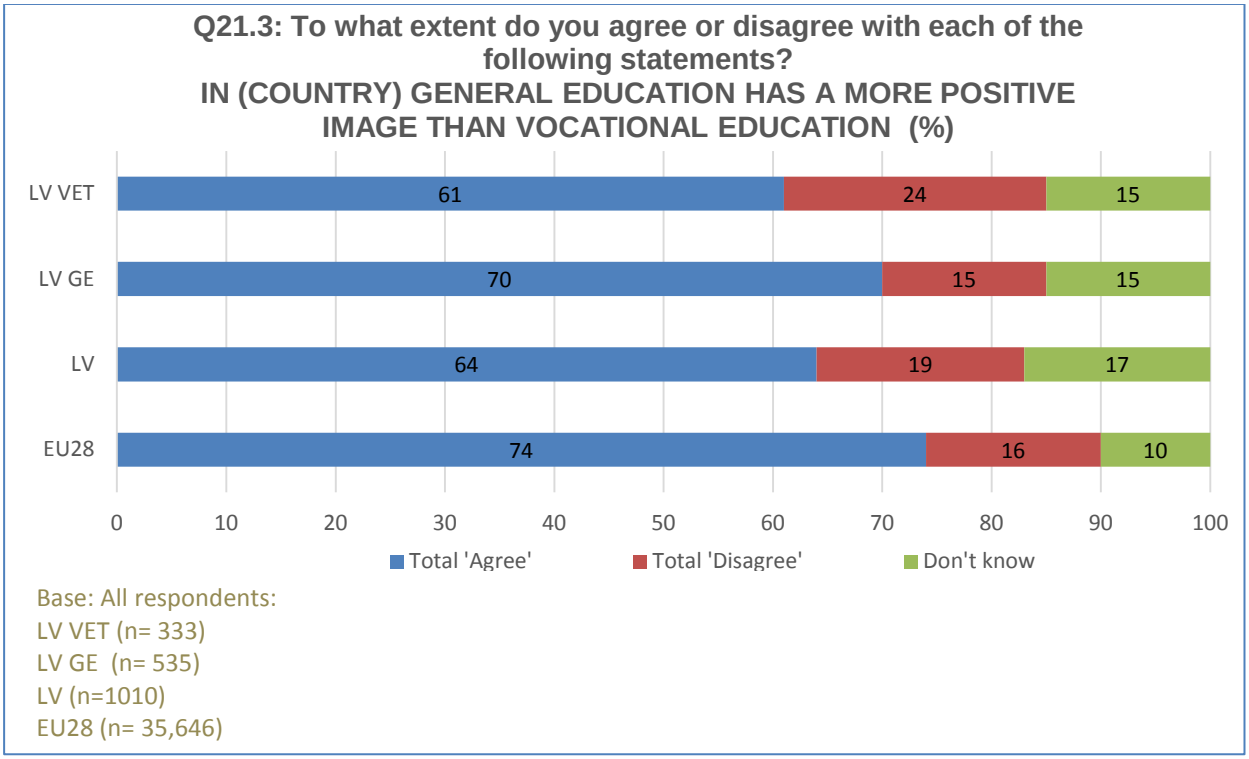


2.2. Qualifying VET image

2.2.1. Image of VET: comparison with GE

64% of LV-respondents agreed (19% disagreed) that in Latvia 'general education has a more positive image than vocational education'. Different opinions can be observed among VET- and GE-participants: GE-participants agreed with this statement much more (70% vs. 61% VET-participants) but VET-participants more disagree with this statement (24%, vs. 15% GE-participants). In comparison with EU-28 (agree – 74%, disagree – 16%), in LV the opinion that 'general education has a more positive image than vocational education' is less widespread.

Figure 8. Image of GE compared to VET



2.2.2. 3.2.2. Image of VET: academic performance

65% LV-respondents agreed, that students with low grades are directed towards vocational education (22% disagree) and there was no difference between answers of Latvian VET- and GE-participants. These data again relate to the results of previous study (Klāsons, 2007) that GE teachers accept VET choices only in cases where students have low grades and have no interest in learning at all. However, this opinion is less widespread in Latvia in comparison with EU-28 (agree – 75%, disagree – 15%).

Figure 9. Students with low grades directed to VET

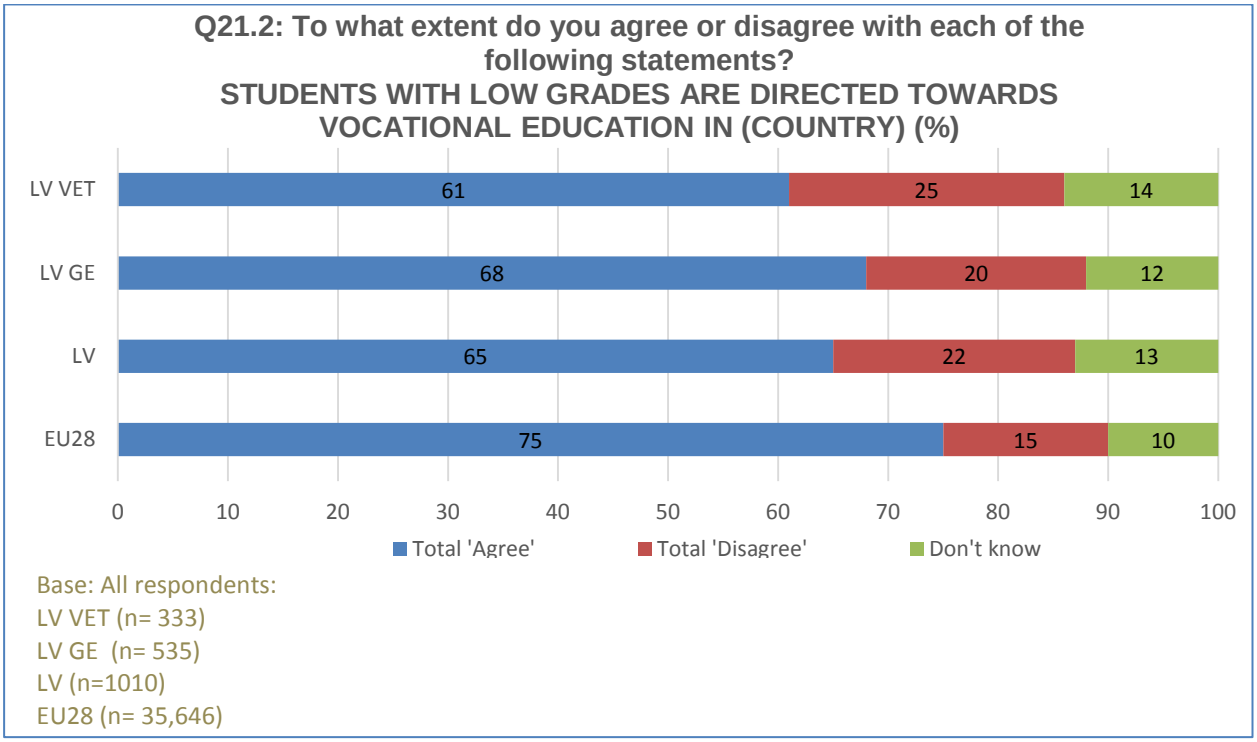
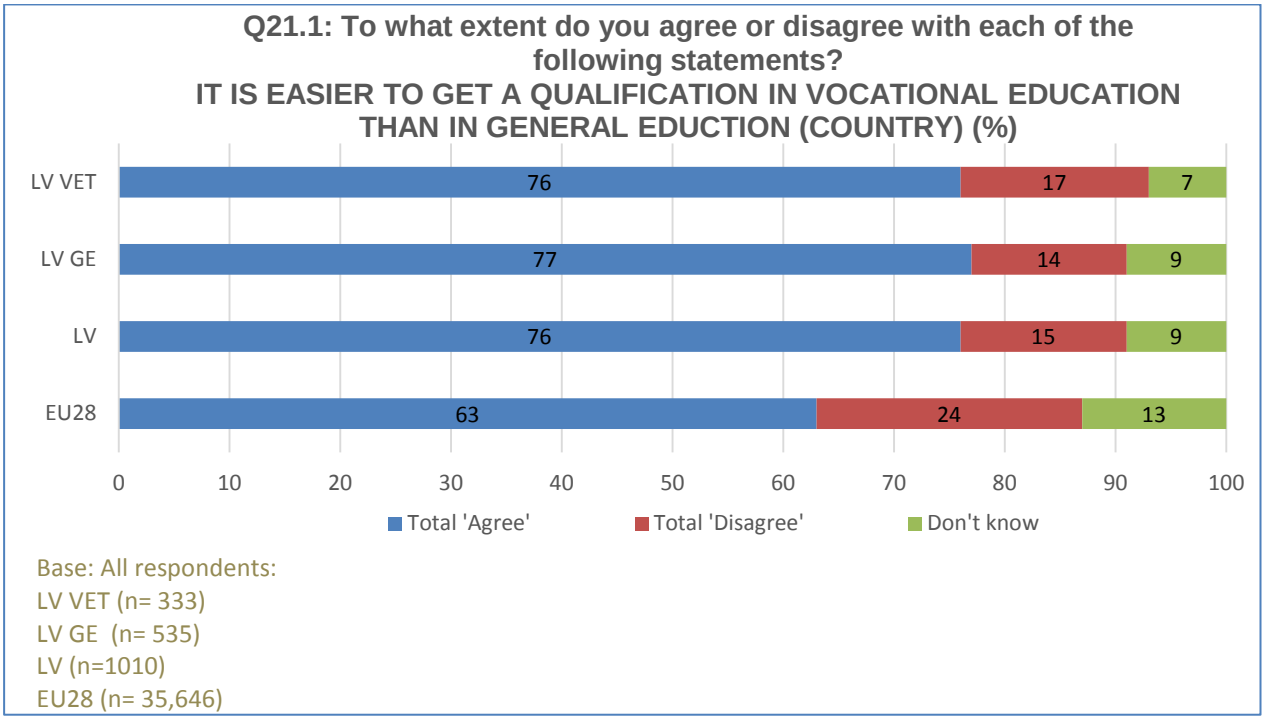


Figure 10. Qualifications easier to obtain in VET than in GE



2.2.3. 3.2.3. Image of VET: ease to obtain qualification

Regardless of the upper-secondary educational path 76% LV-respondents agreed (disagreed – 15%) that it is easier to get a qualification in vocational education than in general education. The data are consistent with previous study (Klāsons, 2007) that VET is perceived as pathway to obtain a profession. This opinion is more widespread in LV in comparison with EU-28 (agree – 63%, disagree – 24%).

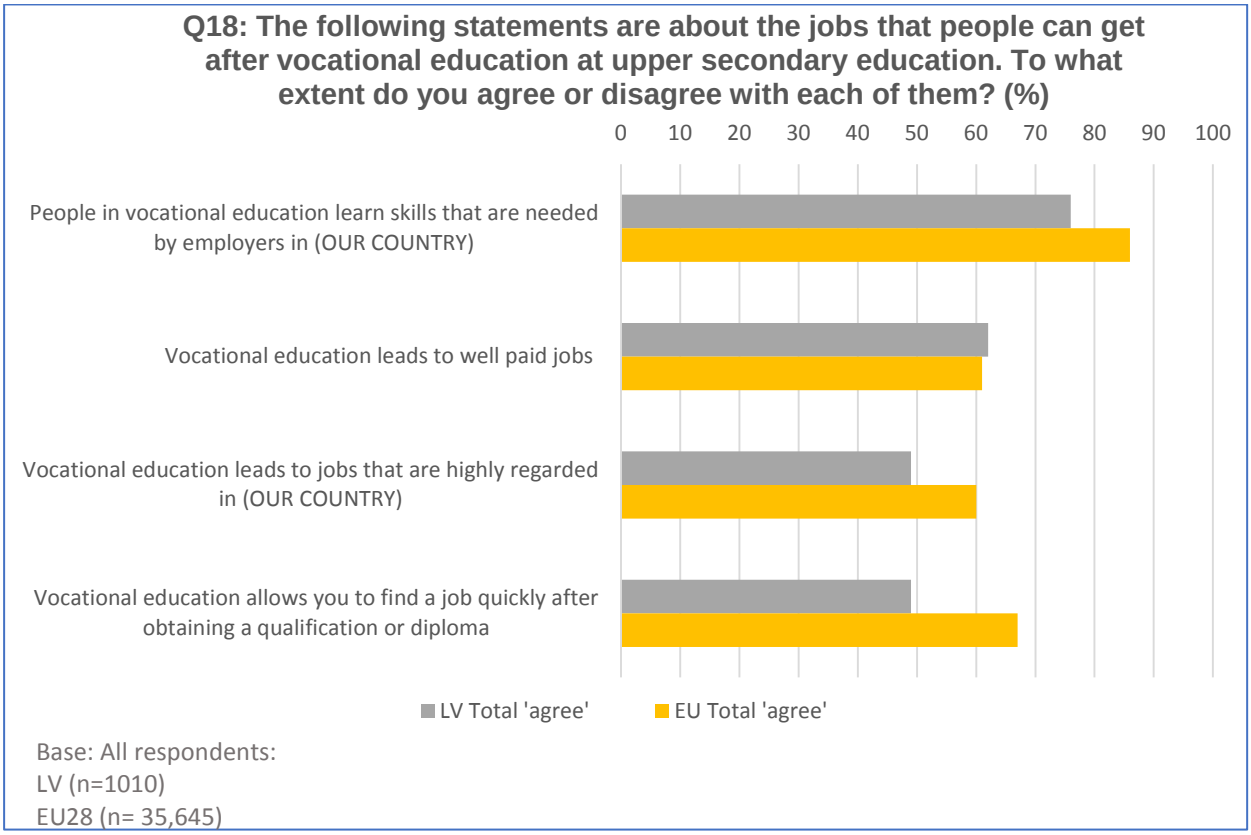
2.3. 3.3. Attractiveness of VET: labour market outcomes

Respondents were asked to which extent they agree or disagree with four positive statements about the jobs that people can get after vocational education at upper-secondary education.

2.3.1. Matching labour market needs

Although most (76%) LV-respondents regardless of the upper-secondary educational path agree (disagree – 18%) that people in vocational education learn skills that are needed by employers, it is still the lowest proportion (along with Bulgaria and Italy) seen among EU-28 countries (on average 86% agree and only 9% disagree). These data show that in Latvia the opinion that the VET outcomes do not always meet the needs of labour market, is more widespread than in EU. These data relate with the previous study (Sloka, 2007) that both employers and employees are not satisfied with practical skills of VET graduates.

Figure 11. Core benefits of VET in relation to labour market issues



2.3.2. Leading to employment.

In the EU as a whole, 67% agree and 26% disagree that vocational education allows them to find a job quickly after obtaining a qualification or diploma; while in LV the view is more pessimistic - only half (49%) of respondents agree and 45% disagree regardless of the upper-secondary educational path, and again it is the lowest proportion (along with Spain) seen among EU-28. Unemployment patterns can play a role in these perceptions. During the crisis, the unemployment rate in Latvia reached 19.5% (in 2010) ([1]) and it was second highest in EU-28 after the Spain (19.9%). These data can be linked also to the findings of previous study (Sloka, 2007) that employers do not want to hire young people after their studies because they do not have practical work experience. This employers' opinion was widespread (64%), talked about in society and in the media, and could have been established in the minds of the public despite the fact that in recent years in the framework of vocational education reform students gain work experience already during learning and the opinion of public could have changed.

([1]) Eurostat [une_rt_a], last update: 02-07-2018

2.3.3. Jobs highly regarded

In EU countries in average 60% respondents agree and 33% disagree that vocational education leads to jobs that are highly regarded in their country, and in LV again the opinion of respondents is considerably more negative – only half (49%) agree and 44% disagree with this statement regardless of the upper-secondary educational path. For this labour market outcome, a more in-depth study would be needed, especially in view of its role in increasing or decreasing the attractiveness of VET in Latvia.

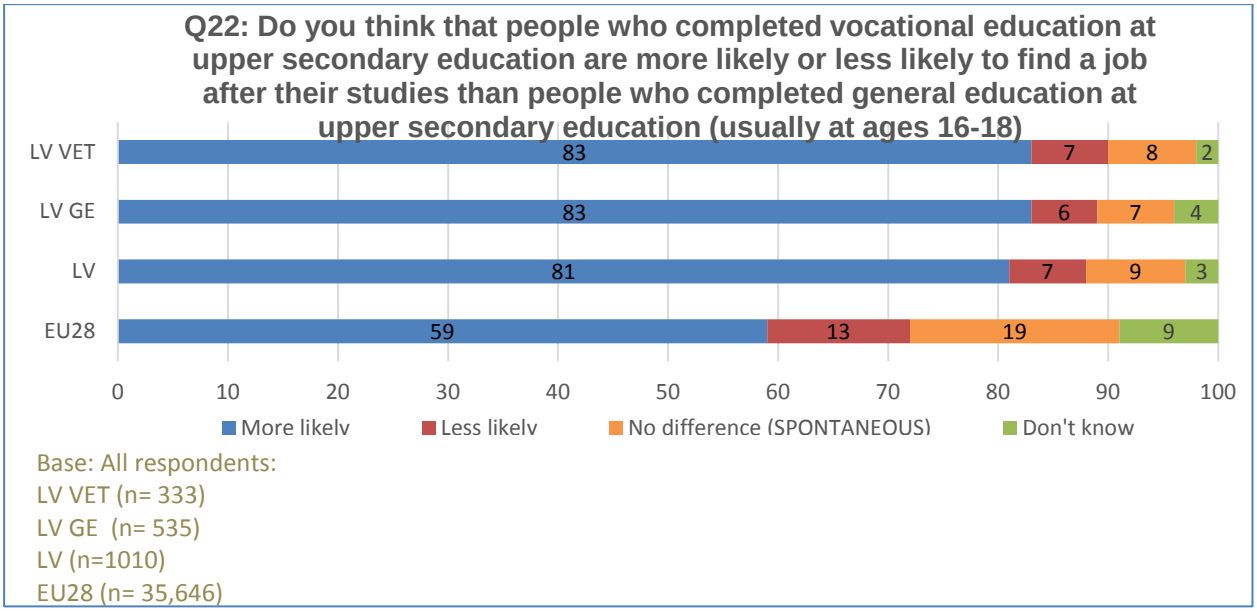
2.3.4. Well paid jobs

Only regarding statement that vocational education leads to well paid jobs, opinions are similar in LV (agree – 62%, disagree – 33% regardless of the upper-secondary educational path) and in EU-28 on average (agree – 61%, disagree – 32%).

2.3.5. Finding job in comparison to general education

When comparing VET with GE, most LV respondents (81%) regardless of their upper-secondary educational path think that people who complete VET are more likely to find a job than those who complete GE at upper secondary stage (only 7% think the opposite). This opinion is more widespread in LV than in EU (more likely – 59%) and corresponds to unemployment rates among both groups.

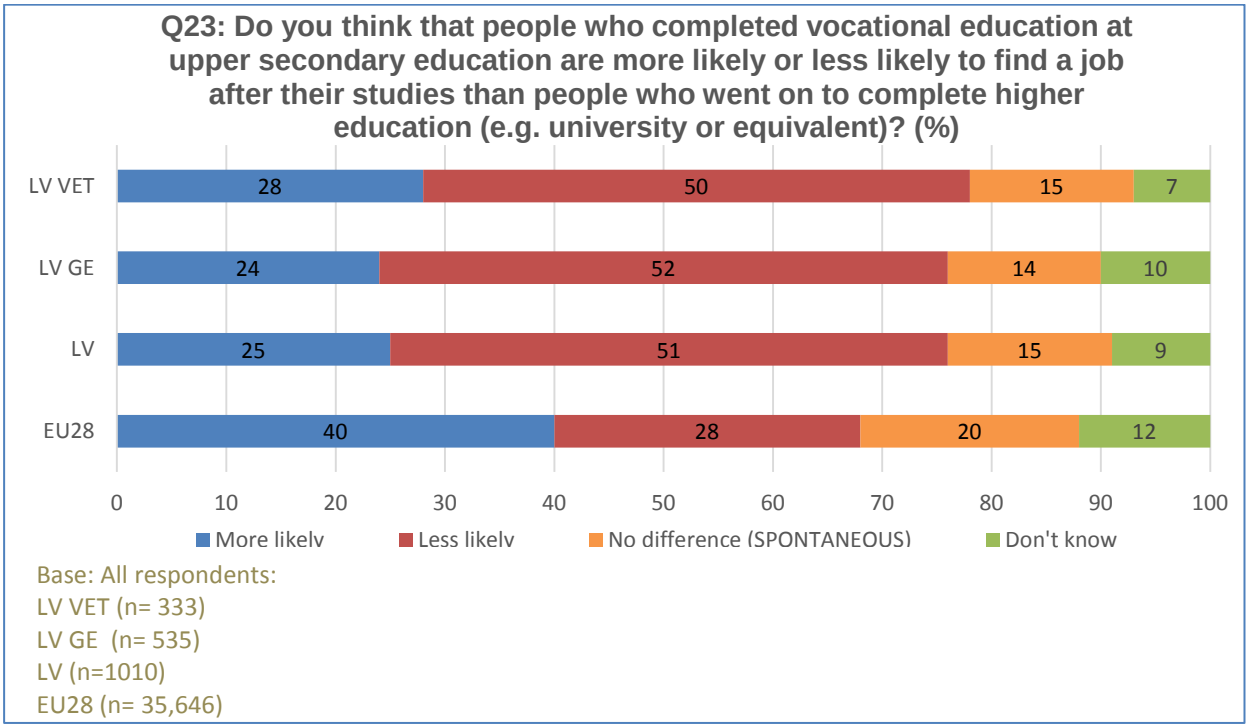
Figure 12. Likelihood of finding a job



2.3.6. Finding job in comparison to higher education

When comparing VET with higher education the results are the opposite. Half (51%) of LV-respondents irrespective of their upper-secondary education path think that people who completed vocational education at upper-secondary education are less likely to find a job after studies than people who went on to complete higher education. Only 25% LV respondents think that people with upper-secondary VET are more likely to find job than those with higher education. This is the lowest figure among EU countries (CEDEFOP, 2017). In EU-28 the respondent opinion is reversed: more respondents think that people with VET are more likely (40%) to find job than people with higher education (28%).

Figure 13. Likelihood of finding a job among VET students and those who went on to complete higher education



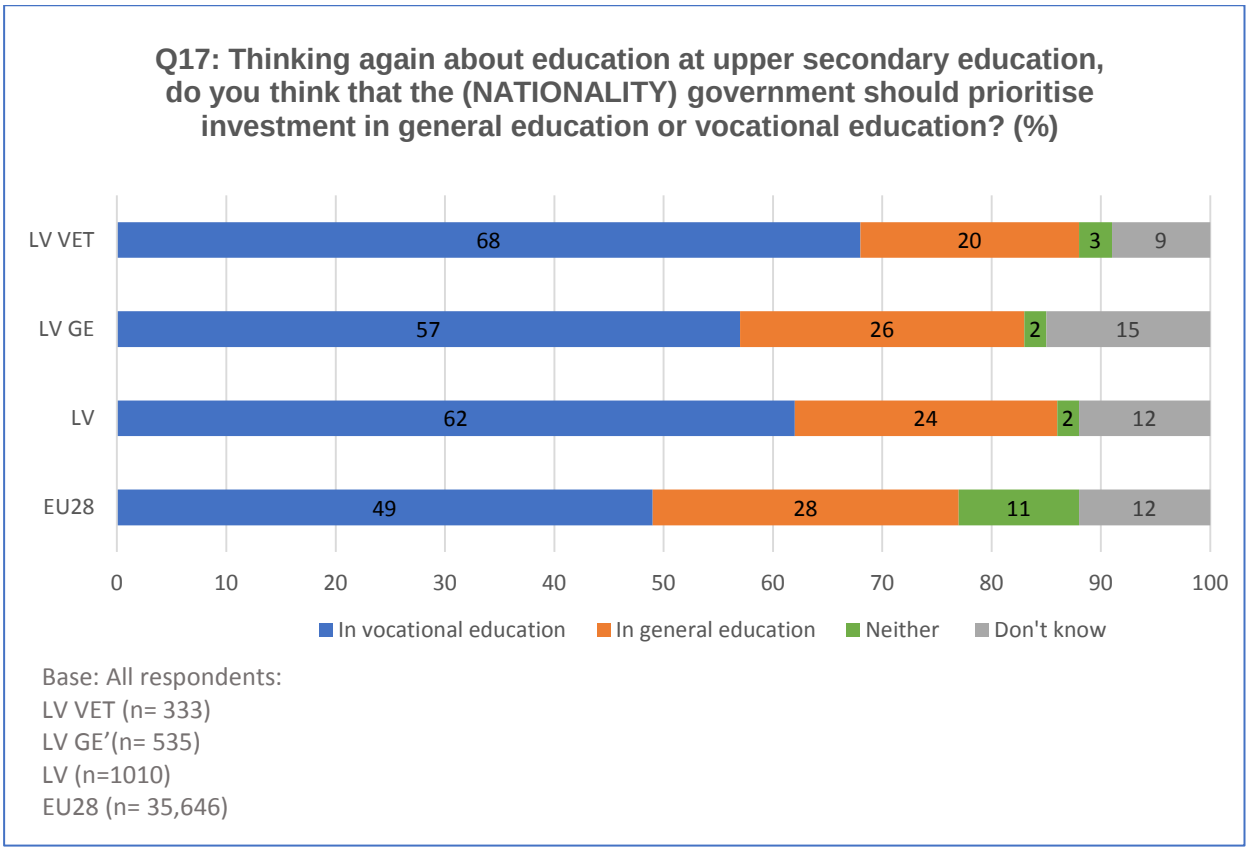
2.4. Attractiveness: prioritising public funding

When asked if the national Government should prioritise investment in general education or vocational education, 62% of LV-respondents point out the necessity to invest in VET and only 24% to invest in GE. Investments in VET are more supported by VET-participants (68%) than GE-participants (57%). Compared to LV, in EU investments in VET are supported by a significantly

smaller proportion of respondents (49%), but investments in GE by more respondents (28%).

This goes in line with the general perception that VET requires more specific facilities and technical equipment than general education. It can also be based on the view of VET as poorly equipped and outdated therefore requiring more investments as the LV-respondents satisfaction with available equipment was lower than in EU-28 (see section 4.2.1.).

Figure 14. Priorities for national investment



2.5. Recommending VET to young people

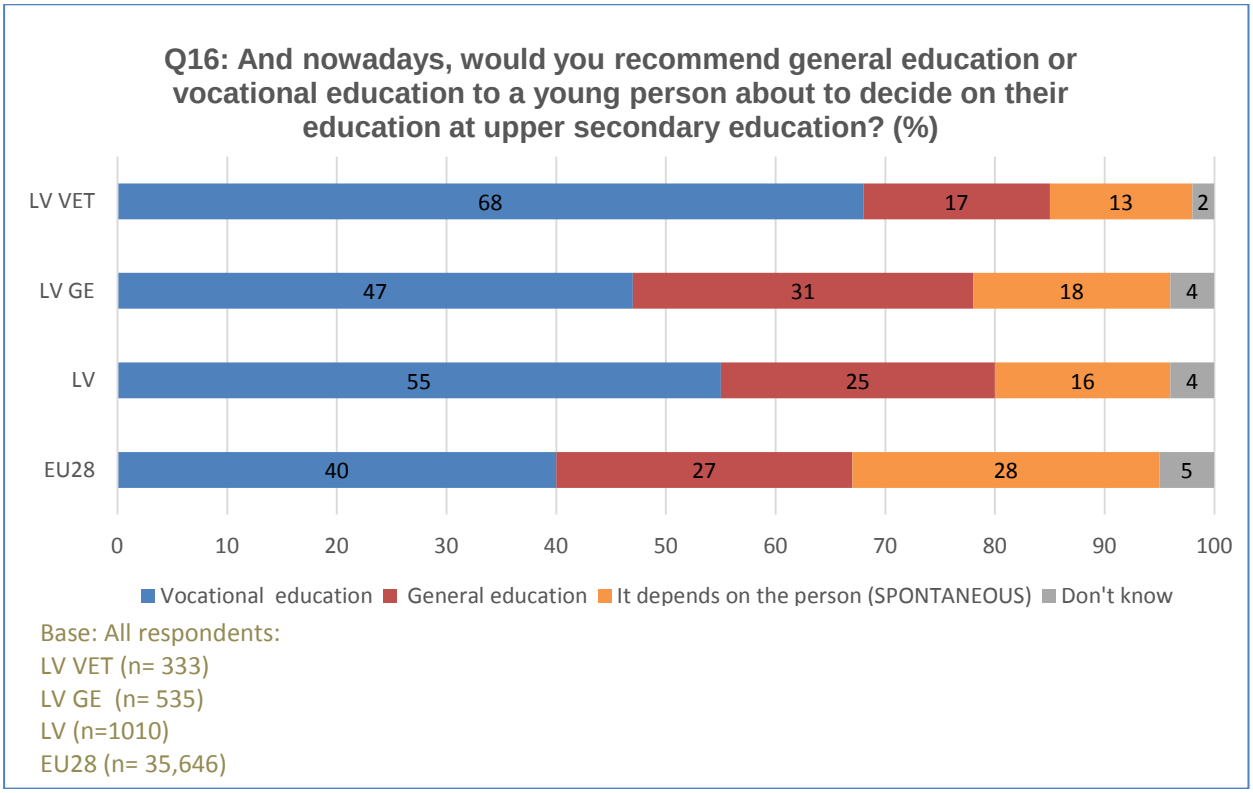
The survey also explored the issue of attractiveness in terms of likelihood of recommending VET to a young person. In LV, VET is recommended more often than in EU. 55% of LV-respondents would recommend VET (in EU - 40%), only 25% would recommend GE (in EU 27%), and even a smaller proportion (16%) say that it would depend on the person (in EU 28%). In addition, in Latvia both VET-participants (68%) and GE-participants (47%) would recommend rather VET than GE. Here is the difference from the EU-28 average, where the respondents

recommended more often the upper secondary education path that they took themselves (CEDEFOP, 2017).

2.6. Permeability in VET

One aspect that is likely to contribute to the attractiveness of VET is the so-called permeability of the education and training system. Permeability in education and training means that a learner is able to move from one type of education to another and between different levels.

Figure 15. Recommending GE or VET to young people



2.6.1. Transitioning between education types

The half of LV-respondents (regardless of their secondary education background) think that for someone aged 16-18 who has started taking vocational education at upper-secondary level it would be easy to switch from vocational to general education (easy – 49%, difficult – 36%). Europeans are more pessimistic regarding this possibility – only 41% of the European common sample agree that it would be easy and 42% think that it would be difficult. This can be explained by

the fact that most vocational programs in Latvia provide general education as well.

2.6.2. Transitioning to higher education.

Regarding to the studying opportunities after vocational secondary education, 66% of LV-respondents regardless of their secondary education background agree that it is easy to continue into higher education such as university after vocational education at upper-secondary education (disagree – 21%). In comparison to LV, in EU a significantly smaller share of respondents has this opinion (agree – 54%, disagree – 31%).

Figure 16. Ease of switching from VET to GE

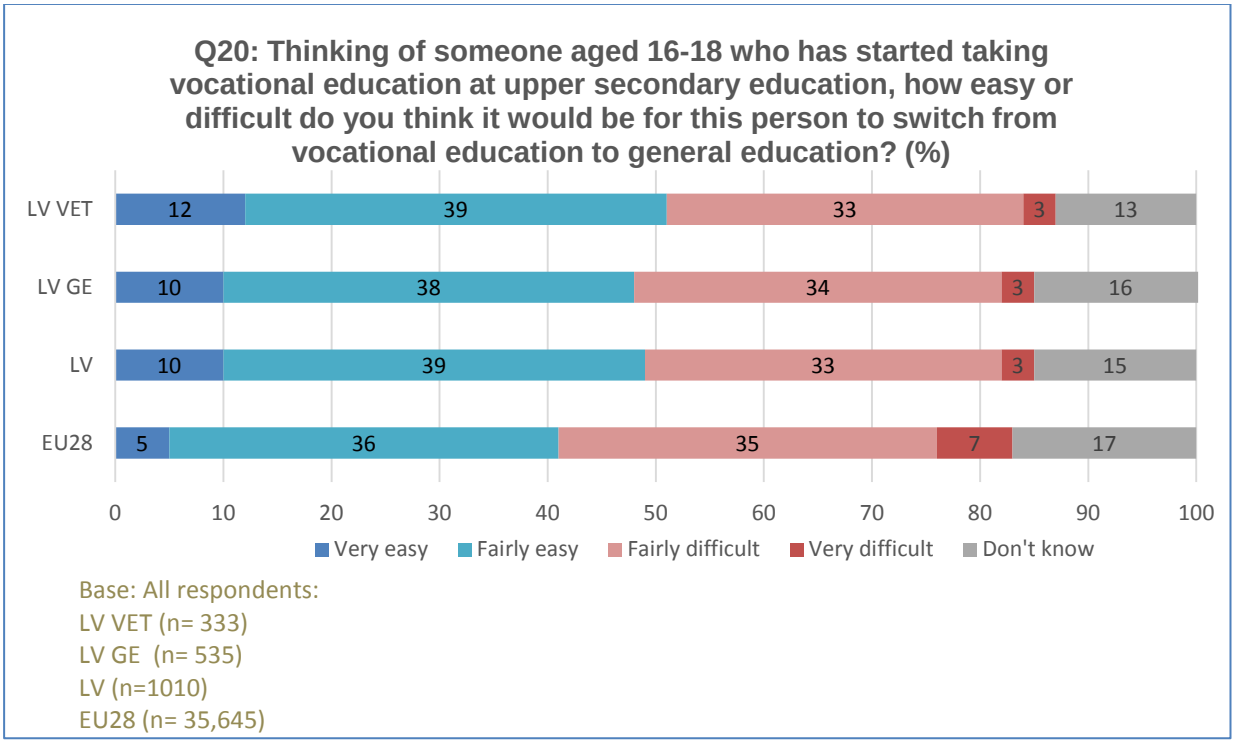
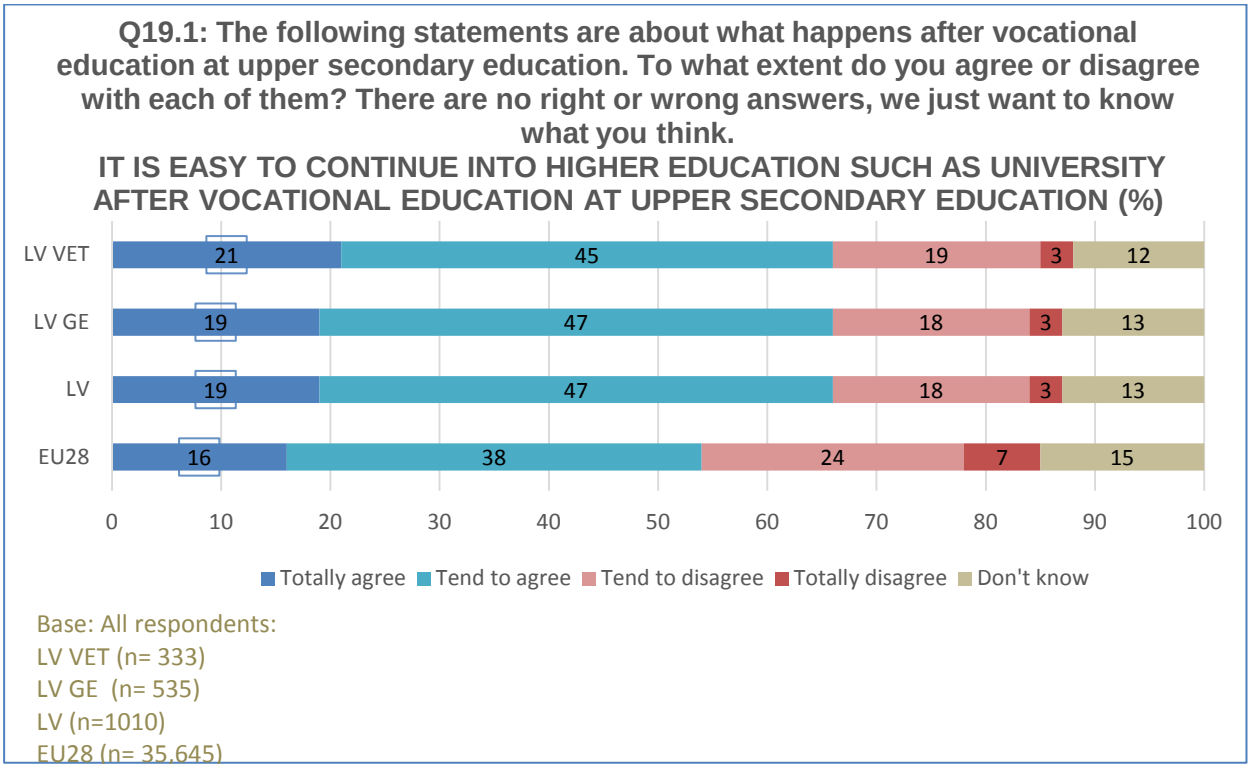


Figure 17. Ease of continuing to higher education after VET

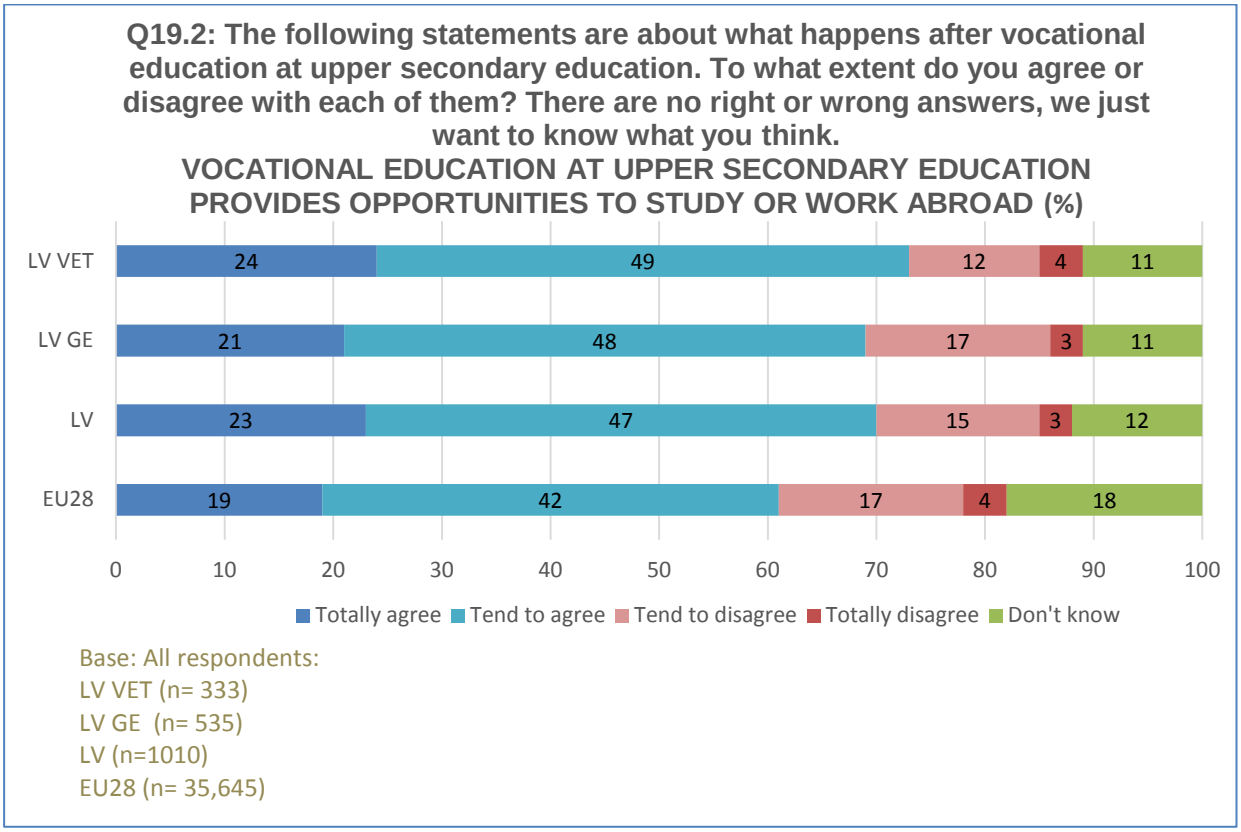


This reflects the peculiarity of the Latvian education system that most vocational programs offer general upper-secondary education integrated into their programmes, and after graduation students are eligible to enter higher education or join the labour market.

2.7. Mobility prospects.

LV-respondents regardless of their own educational pathway agree more often (agree – 70%, disagree – 18%) with the statement that vocational education at upper-secondary education provides opportunities to study or work abroad. In comparison to LV, across EU this opinion is considerably less widespread (agree – 61%, disagree – 21%). This can be explained by the massive emigration Latvia has experienced in the last decades; large parts of population (all levels of socioeconomic status) live and work abroad. However, studies on the education and employment experience of the emigrant population would be needed.

Figure 18. VET provides opportunities to work or study abroad



CHAPTER 3.

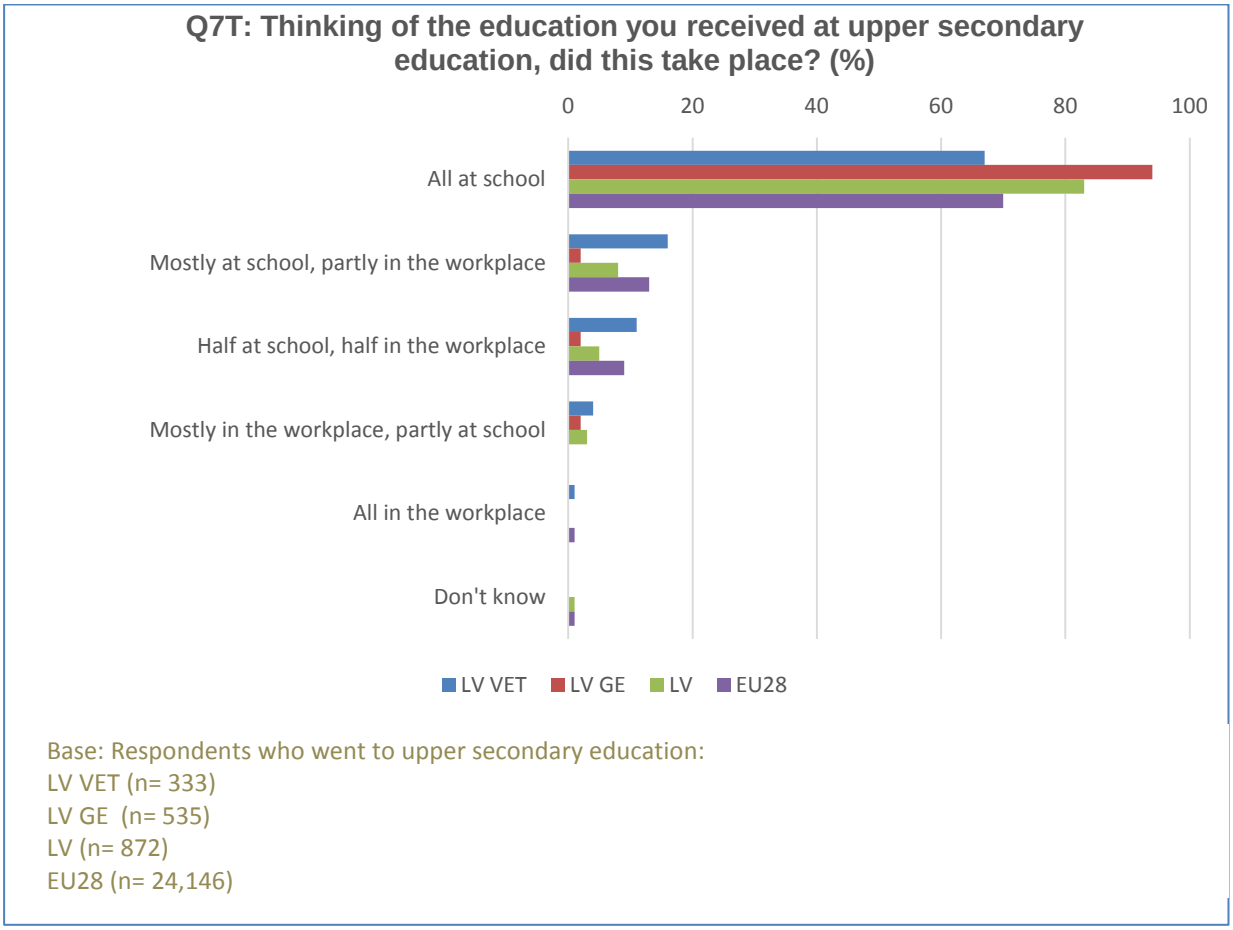
Experience and satisfaction

3.1. Mode of delivery: school versus workplace

Most (83%) of LV-respondents report that their education took place all at school. In comparison, in EU-average less respondents (70%) report this experience. Also, two thirds (67%) of LV VE-participants report that their education took place all at school. For 16% it was mostly at school and partly in the workplace. 11% said their vocational education was equally distributed between school and workplace. For only 4% it was mostly or all in workplace.

This reflects the Latvian situation in VET provision (combining theoretical and practical learning at school, complemented by internships in enterprises) until recently when work-based learning was introduced and was made a priority of education and employment policies.

Figure 19. Education at school or in the workplace



In Latvia, general upper secondary education is provided only at schools, nevertheless some GE-participants have reported having received it in workplace as well which is rather puzzling and should be investigated further.

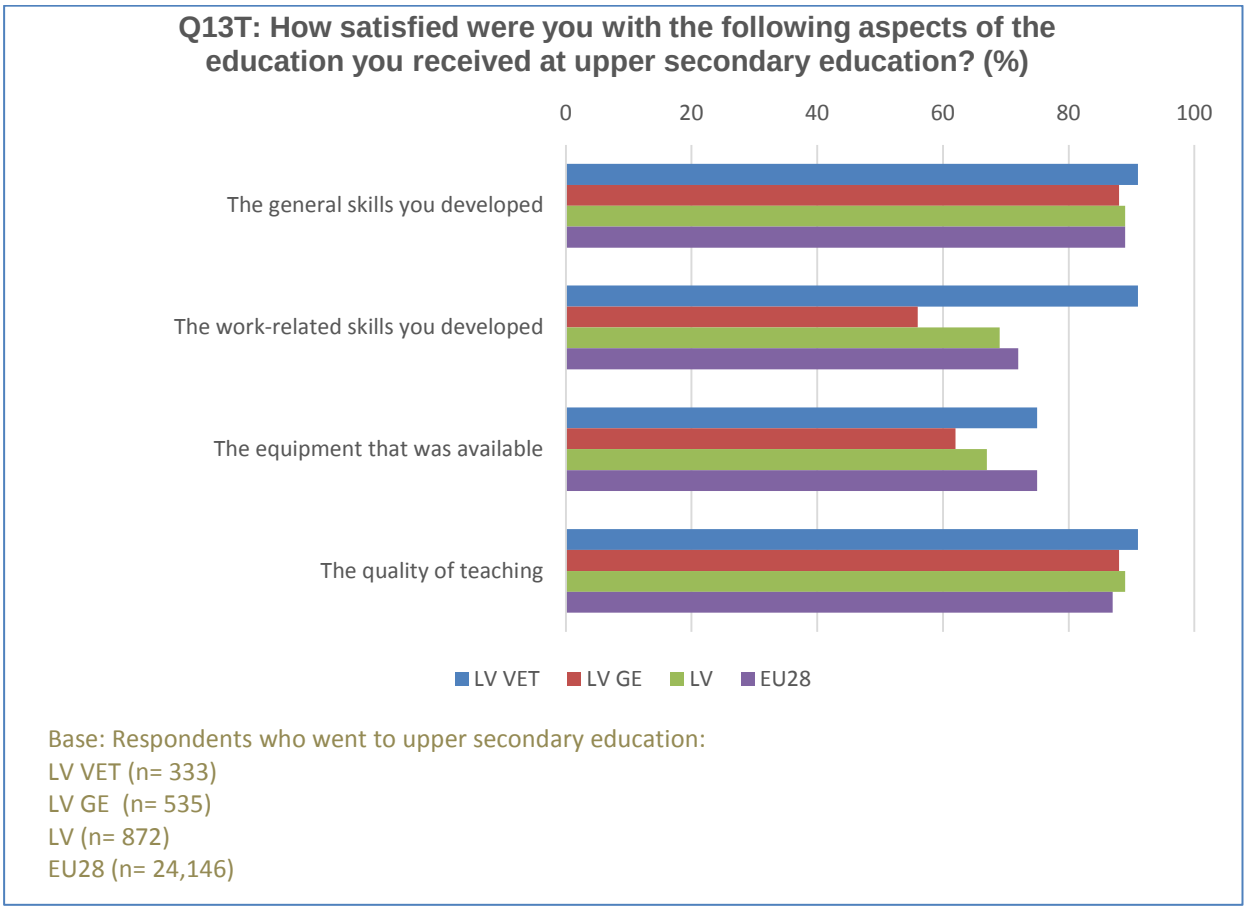
3.2. Satisfaction with upper secondary education

3.2.1. Overall satisfaction

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with various aspects of their upper-secondary education. Most LV-respondents (89%) regardless their upper-secondary education background (VET or GE) were satisfied both with the general skills they developed during their upper-secondary level education and with the quality of teaching that they received in their upper-secondary education. There were no significant differences between LV and EU-28 average data. Regarding the work-related skills developed at upper-secondary education 69% of LV-respondents were satisfied (unsatisfied – 19%) and the data from the

European sample are quite similar (satisfied – 72%, unsatisfied – 21%). However, there is a difference between LV VET- and GE-participants: satisfied with the developed work-related skills were 91% of VET-participants and only 56% of GE-participants (unsatisfied were 9% VET and 26% GE-participants). These results are in line with the majority of respondents' opinion that work-related skills or skills required by employers are core benefits of vocational education (see section 3.3.1.) The LV-respondents' satisfaction with available equipment (satisfied – 67%, unsatisfied – 24%) was lower than in EU-28 (satisfied – 75%, unsatisfied – 22%). This relates with opinion on government's prioritising investments in vocational education (see section 3.4.) However, the satisfaction with available equipment was higher among LV VET-participants than GE-participants (75% vs. 62%).

Figure 20. Overall satisfaction with aspects of education

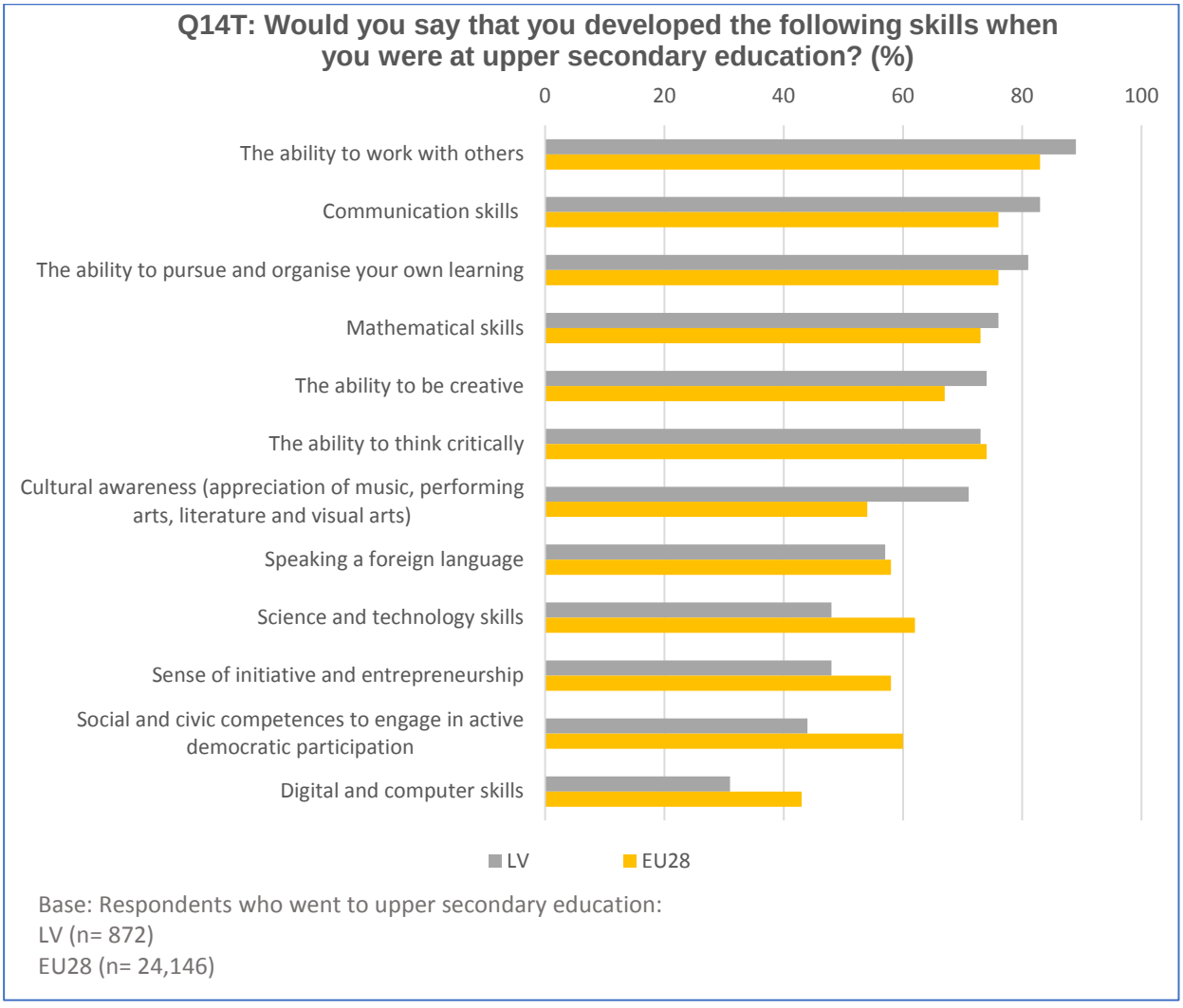


3.2.2. Satisfaction with skills development

More LV-respondents in comparison with EU-28 average reported that they have developed following skills: the ability to work with others (89% in LV vs. 83% in

EU), communication skills (83% vs. 76%), the ability to pursue and organise their own learning (81% vs. 76%), mathematical skills (76% vs. 73%), the ability to be creative (74% vs. 67%) and cultural awareness (71% vs. 54%). The similar proportion of LV-respondents and EU-28 have developed the ability to think critically (73% vs. 73%) and speaking foreign language (57% vs. 58%). But there were less LV-respondents in comparison with EU-28 average that reported the development of: science and technology skills (48% vs.62%), sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (48% vs. 58%), social and civic competences (44% vs. 60%) and digital and computer skills (31% vs. 43%).

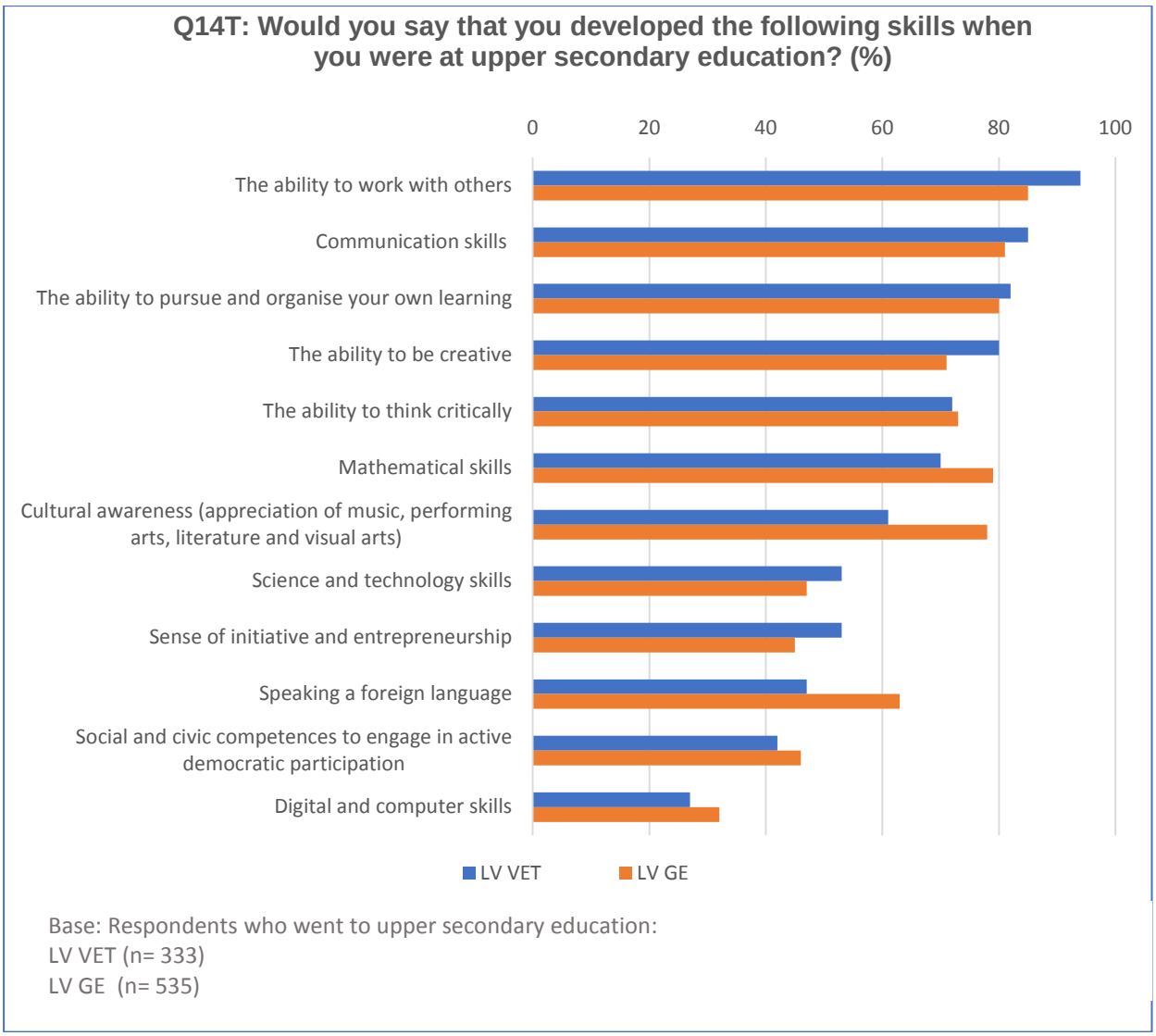
Figure 21. Personal views on development of key competences in education (LV vs EU-28)



Most of LV-respondents reported that they developed the ability to work with others (more VET-participants – 94% – than GE-participants – 85%). Equal share

of respondents from both groups have developed communication skills (85% VET and 81% GE-participants) and the ability to pursue and organise their own learning (82% VET and 80% GE-participants). VET-participants more often than GE-participants also say that they developed the ability to be creative (80% vs. 71%). In turn, VET-participants to a much lesser extent than GE-participants reported the development of such key competences as mathematical skills (70% vs. 79%), cultural awareness (appreciation of music, performing arts, visual arts (61% vs. 78%) and speaking foreign language (47% vs. 63%). Regarding other skills development there were no differences between VET and GE-participants, but differed the skills development level: most LV-respondents at upper-secondary education have developed the ability to think critically (73%), but less than half have developed science and technology skills (48%), sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (48%), social and civic competences (44%) and digital and computer skills (31%).

Figure 22. Personal views on development of key competences in education (VET vs GE participants)



However, the biggest difference between these groups is concerning foreign language skills – 63% of general education followers vs. 47% of VET students reported having developed this competence at upper-secondary education. This tendency is very strong in other European countries as well (67% of GE vs. 44% of VET students). Latvian respondents with secondary VET education reported a bit more often having developed science and technology skills (53% vs. 47%).

Regarding the horizontal skills the overall tendencies are quite similar to the ones observed in the common European sample. Most Latvian VET students believe they developed sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (53% vs. 45% GE students), the ability to work with others (94% vs. 85%) and the ability to be creative (80% vs.71%). On the other hand, both Latvian and European samples

show an important tendency with regard to skills related to cultural awareness (appreciation of music, performing arts, literature and visual arts) – 78% of respondents with primarily general upper-secondary education and only 61% of VET students report having developed these competences during their upper-secondary education (65% and 40% respectively in EU).

CHAPTER 4.

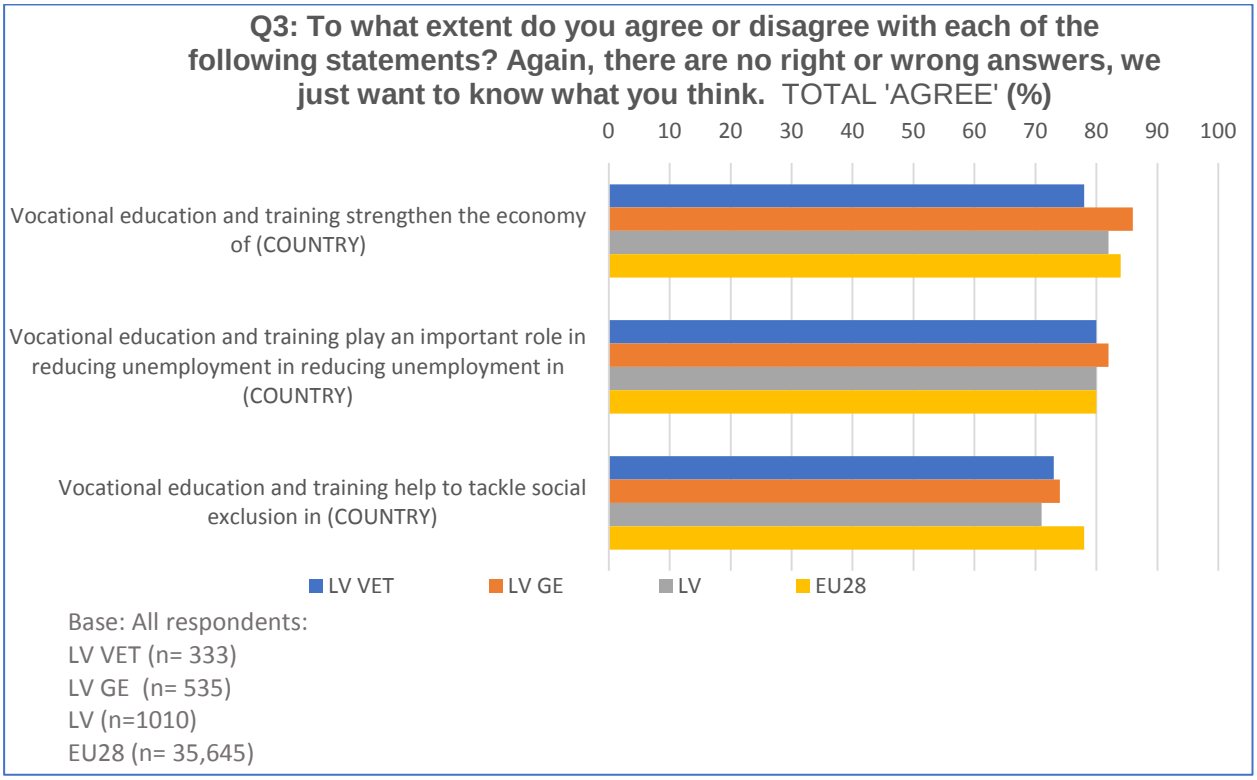
Outcomes and effectiveness

4.1. Vocational education in society

Most of the LV-respondents (82%) agree that VET strengthens the economy of Latvia, and GE-participants think so more often than VET-participants (86% vs. 78%). Most LV-respondents irrespective of their educational path also agree, that VET play an important role in reducing unemployment in Latvia (80%) and agree that VET helps to tackle social exclusion in Latvia (71%). This goes in line with the perception of upper secondary VET before its reform was started as fulfilling a social function for young people who are not able or motivated to pursue general upper secondary education (Sloka, 2007).

In comparison with the EU-average opinion on VET role in strengthening economy in country more of LV-respondents don't agree with this statement (15% vs. 10%). LV-respondents are also more pessimistic than in EU that VET can tackle social exclusion in country (in LV agree – 71% vs. in EU 78%; in LV disagree – 21% vs. in EU 15%). Only the opinion regarding VET role in reducing unemployment does not differ in LV and EU.

Figure 23. Role of VET in society



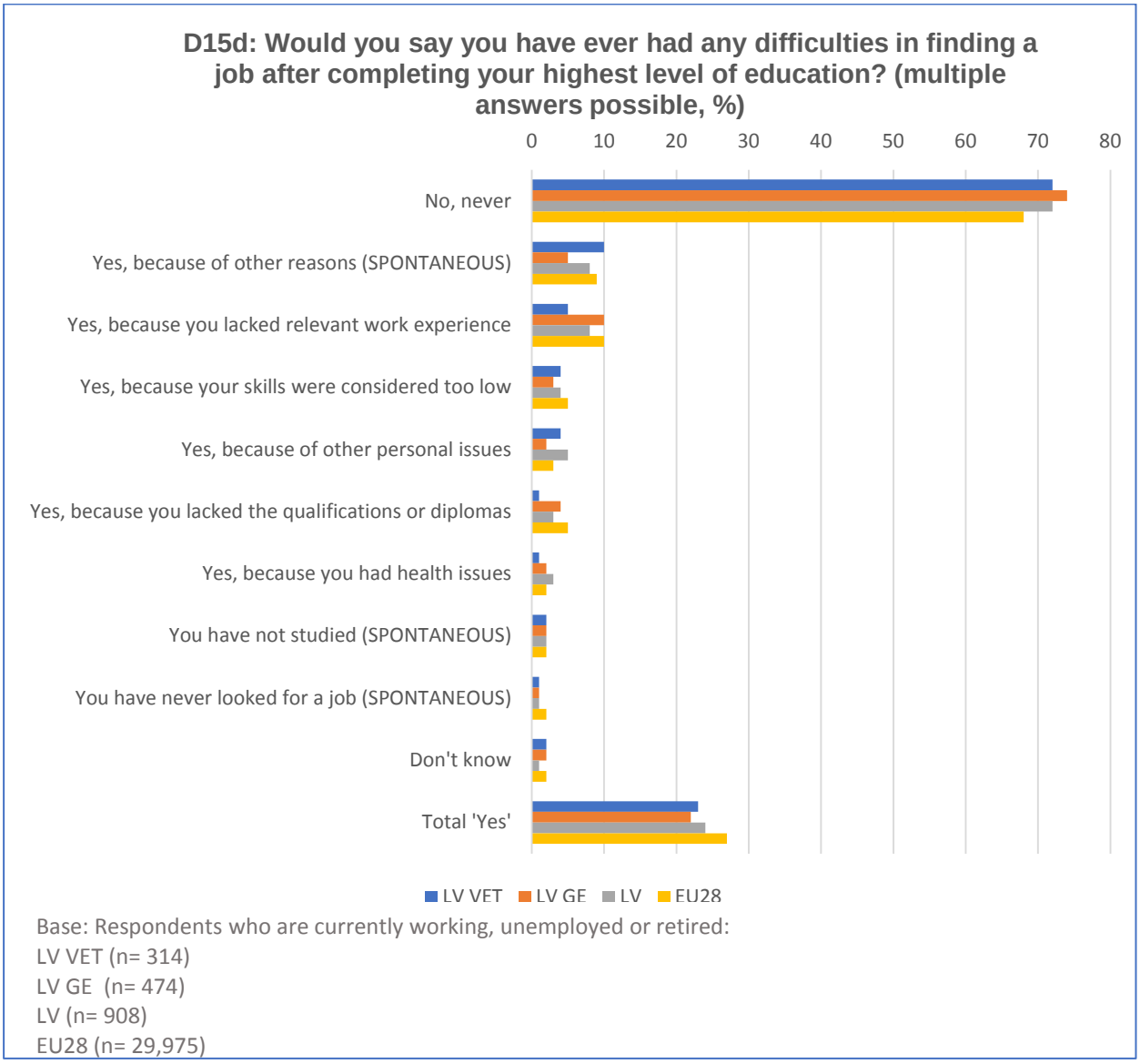
4.2. Finding a job after studies

4.2.1. Difficulties in finding job.

All respondents that reported to be working, unemployed or retired, irrespective of educational path, were asked if they ever had any difficulties in finding a job after completing their highest level of education. 72% LV-respondents reported having never experienced such difficulties. VET-participants less often than GE-participants reported experienced difficulties cause by lack of qualifications or diplomas (1% vs. 4%) and health issues (1% vs. 2%).

In comparison to EU-average LV situation in job finding is better: more LV-respondents never had difficulties in finding job (72% vs. 68% in EU), less had experienced difficulties (24% vs. 27%), and in LV smaller is the proportion of those who had difficulties because they lacked qualification or diploma (3% vs. 5%), and because they lacked relevant work experience (8% vs. 10%). In the contrary, difficulties caused by health issues LV-respondents experienced more often (3% vs. 2% in EU).

Figure 24. Difficulties in finding a job



4.2.2. Time lapse before finding a job

Respondents who were either working, in unemployment or retired were asked how long it took them to find their first long-term job after their main studies. LV VET-participants more often than GE-participants say that that they found a job before the end of their main studies (49% vs. 38%). A similar proportion, around 40%, found a job during a month after completing studies irrespective their education path.

These indicators are significantly higher in Latvia than in EU. 40% LV-respondents found a job before the end of studies (27% in EU) and 40% say that it took them no more than a month to find a job after studies (28% in EU).

Figure 25. Time lapse before finding a job (VET vs GE participants)

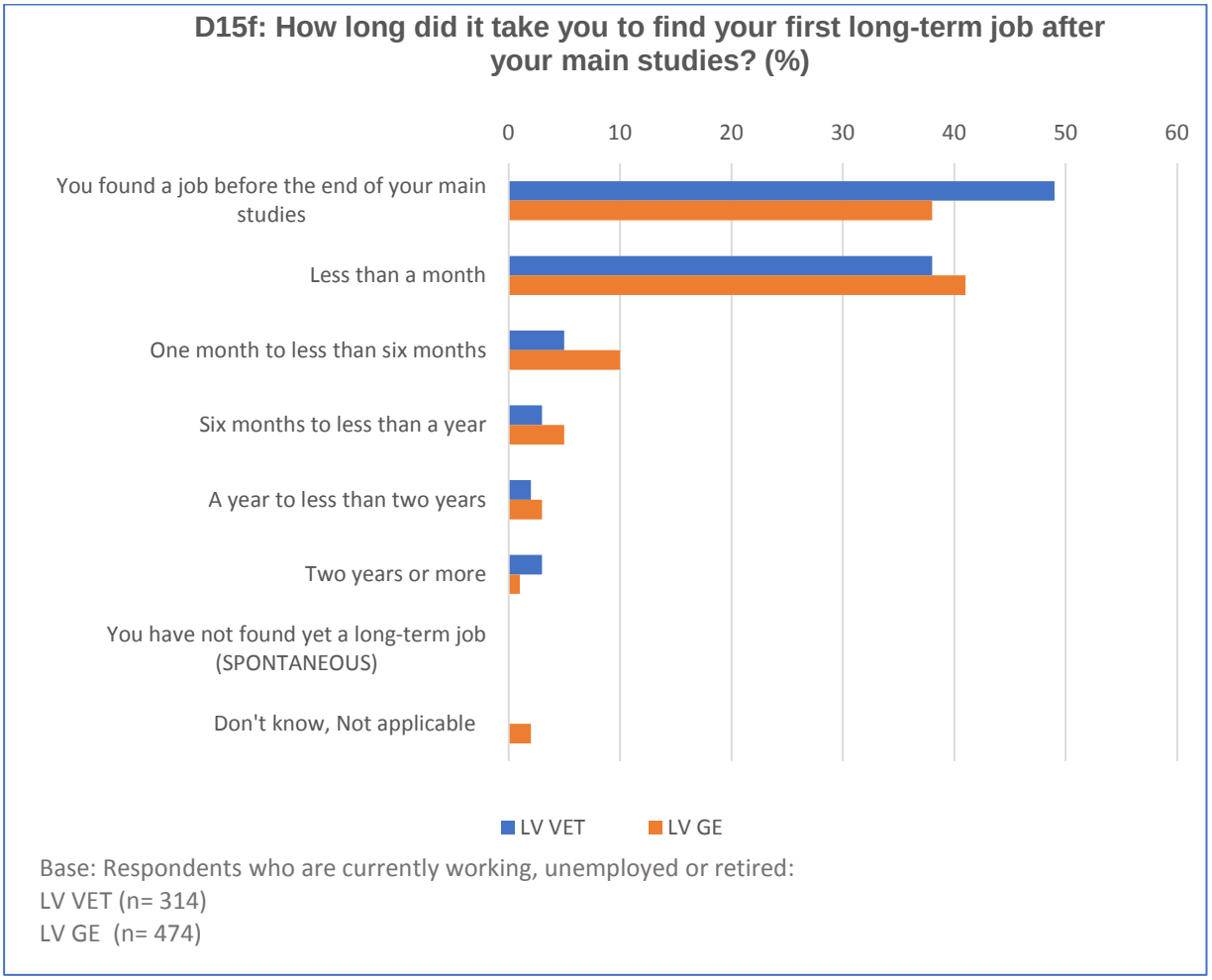
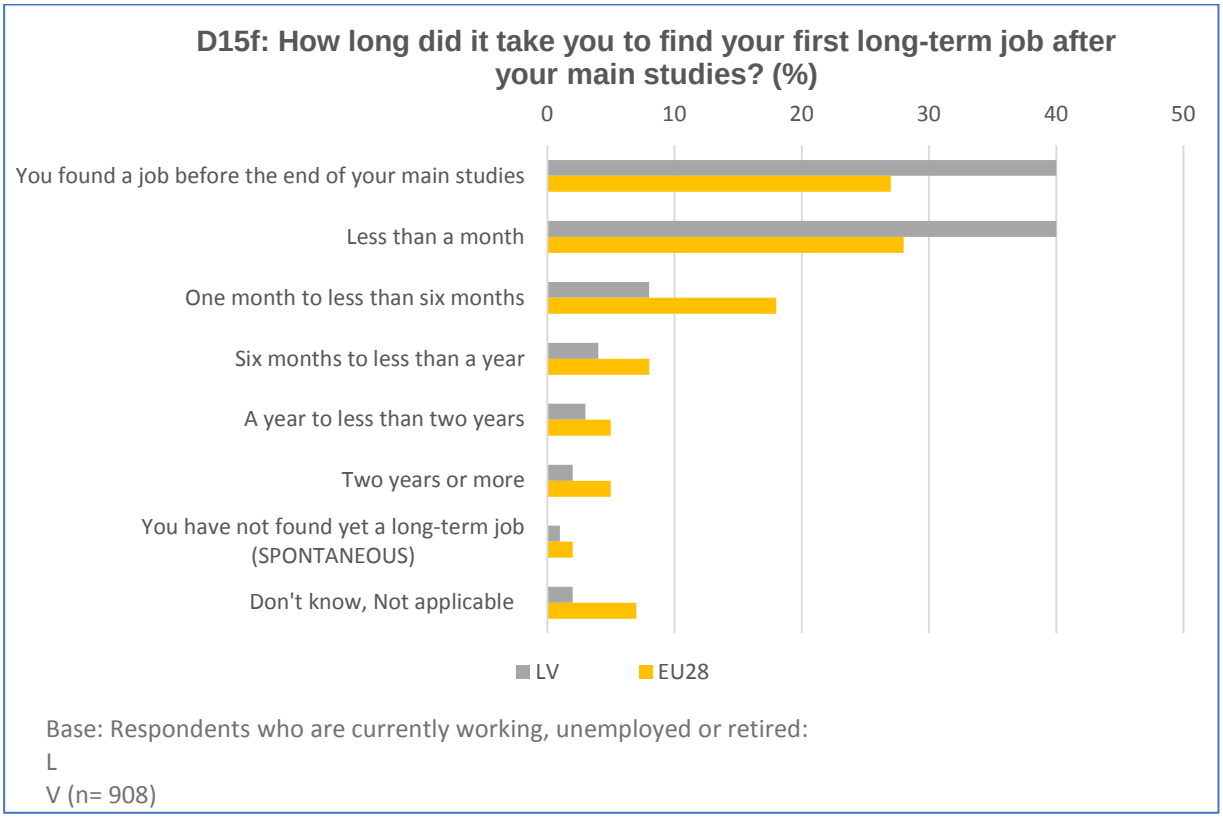


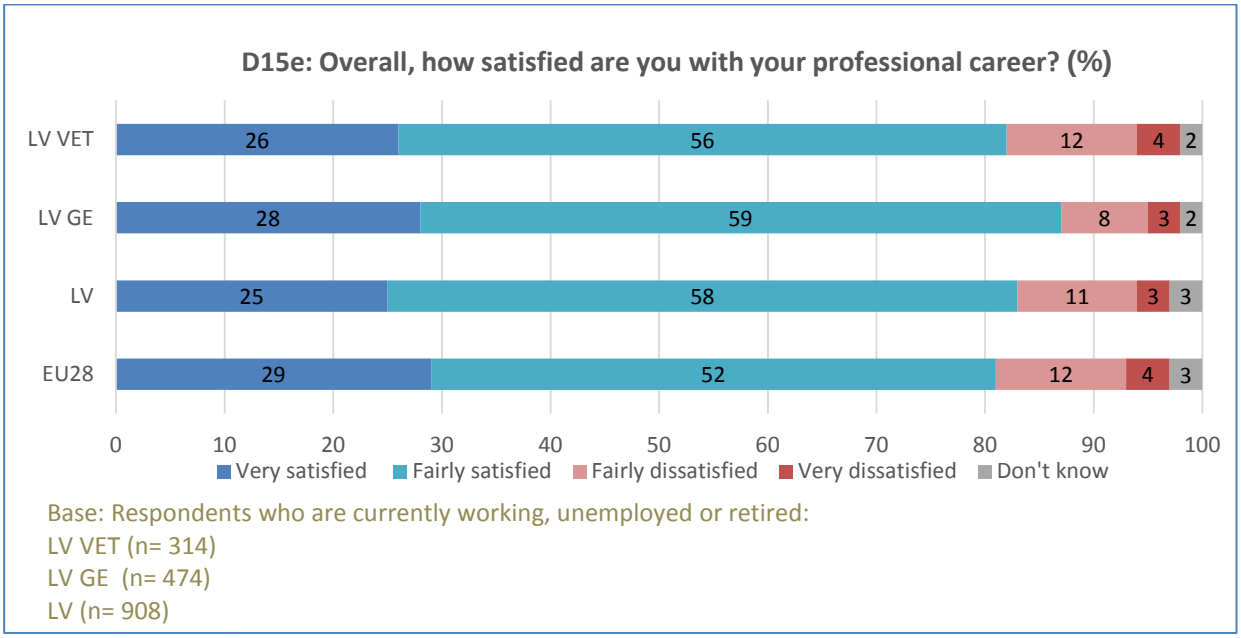
Figure 26. Time lapse before finding a job (LV vs EU28)



4.3. Career satisfaction

Most (83%) of LV-respondents irrespective of their education path said to be satisfied with their careers. But, when compared to the common European sample in LV there are less very satisfied (25% vs. 29% in EU) respondents with their careers. Unsatisfied were similar proportion of LV and EU-28 respondents (14% vs. 16%).

Figure 27. Career satisfaction



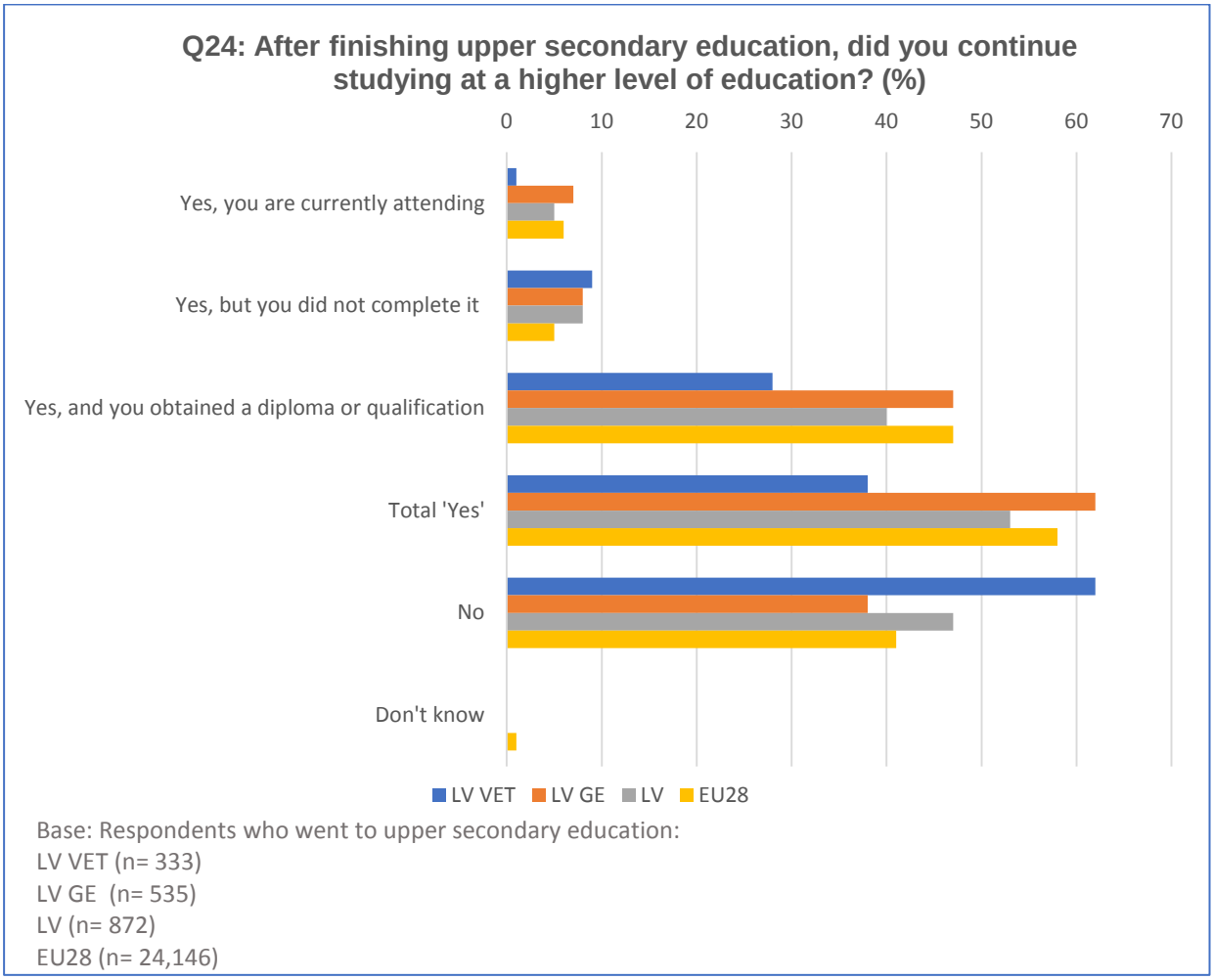
4.4. Further education and training

4.4.1. Continuing to higher education

Respondents who have completed upper-secondary education were asked whether they continued studying at a higher level. 53% LV-respondents have continued studying at a higher level of education and GE-participants more often than VE-participants (62% vs. 38%). Higher education studies were not completed by a similar proportion among LV GE- and VET-participants (8% vs. 9%), currently in higher education are more GE- than VE-participants (7% vs. 1%) and the rest has obtained diploma or qualification.

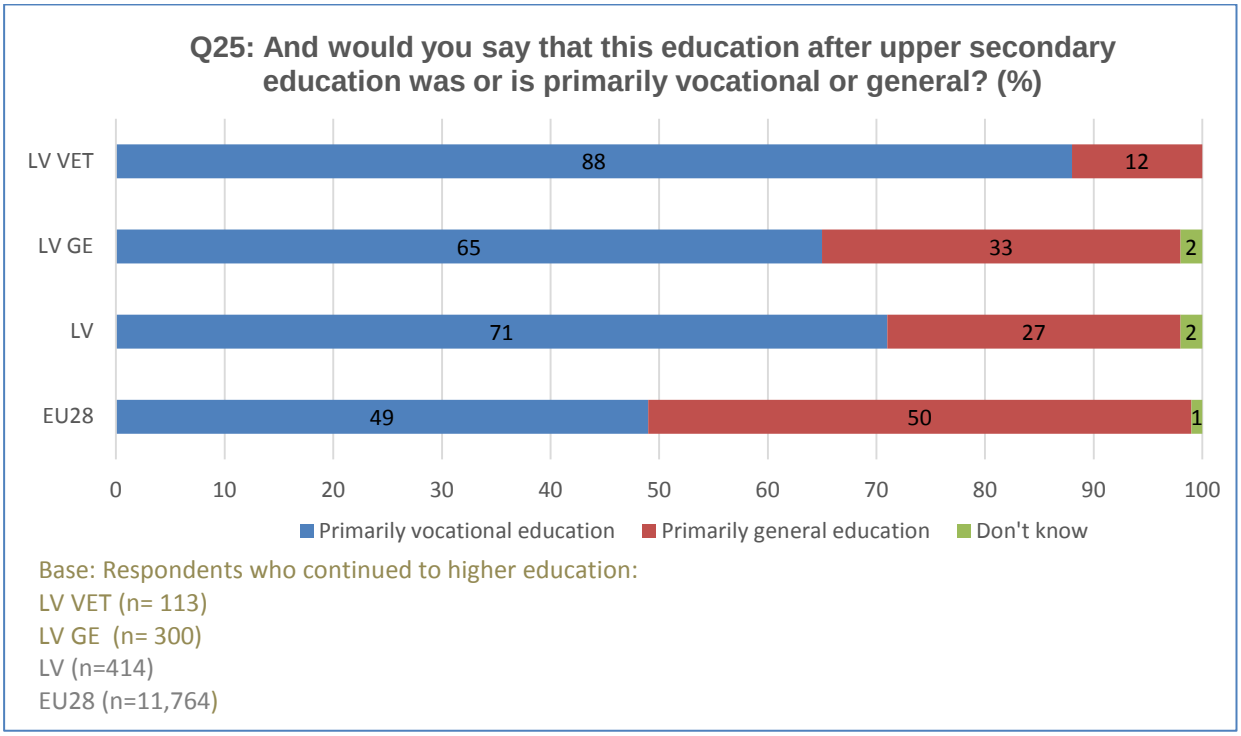
In comparison with EU-average, in LV smaller proportion after completing upper-secondary education follow education at higher level (53% vs. 58% in EU) and this difference comes from GE-participants who continue studying at a higher level of education less often than in EU (62% vs. 72% in EU). In comparison to EU, in LV more respondents started studying at higher level but did not complete it (8% vs. 5% in EU). These data imply that probably students without clear professional aims continue pursuing the general education path at upper secondary level.

Figure 28. Progression into higher education



LV-respondents who continued to higher education level mainly moved on to higher education that was primarily vocational (71%) than primarily general (27%). It is more typical for VET-participants – 88% went on to a higher level of education that was also vocational, while just 12% switched to general education. But also among GE-participants 65% moved on to higher education that was primarily vocational, while 33% stayed in higher education that was primarily general. This choice of GE-participants to continue with primarily vocational higher education is the opposite of the leading tendency of EU-28 where respondents who continued on to higher education generally stayed with the same type of education as they had at the upper-secondary stage. In EU more GE-participants (63%) stayed in education that was primarily general and only 36% switched to primarily vocational higher education.

Figure 29. VET or GE at higher education



Higher education programs in Latvia can either be academic or professional and strictly speaking there is no general higher education. Therefore, the wording of this question could be confusing to respondents in Latvia.

4.4.2. Work-related training

When asked about participation in work-related training (during the last 12 months) 31% of LV-respondents irrespectively of their educational background reported having participated in one and 69% said the opposite.

Participation in work-related training in the EU-28 is significantly lower: only 19% respondents have participated in one, and 80% have not.

Among LV-respondents who have participated in work-related training irrespective of their initial educational background, main purposes were the following: to update existing skills (66%), to acquire new skills (52%), for career development (30%) and to change career (8%). In comparison with EU-28 average, LV-respondents have more often participated in work-related training to update existing skills (66% vs. 50% in EU) and less often for career development (30% vs. 40% in EU).

Figure 30. Participation in work-related training

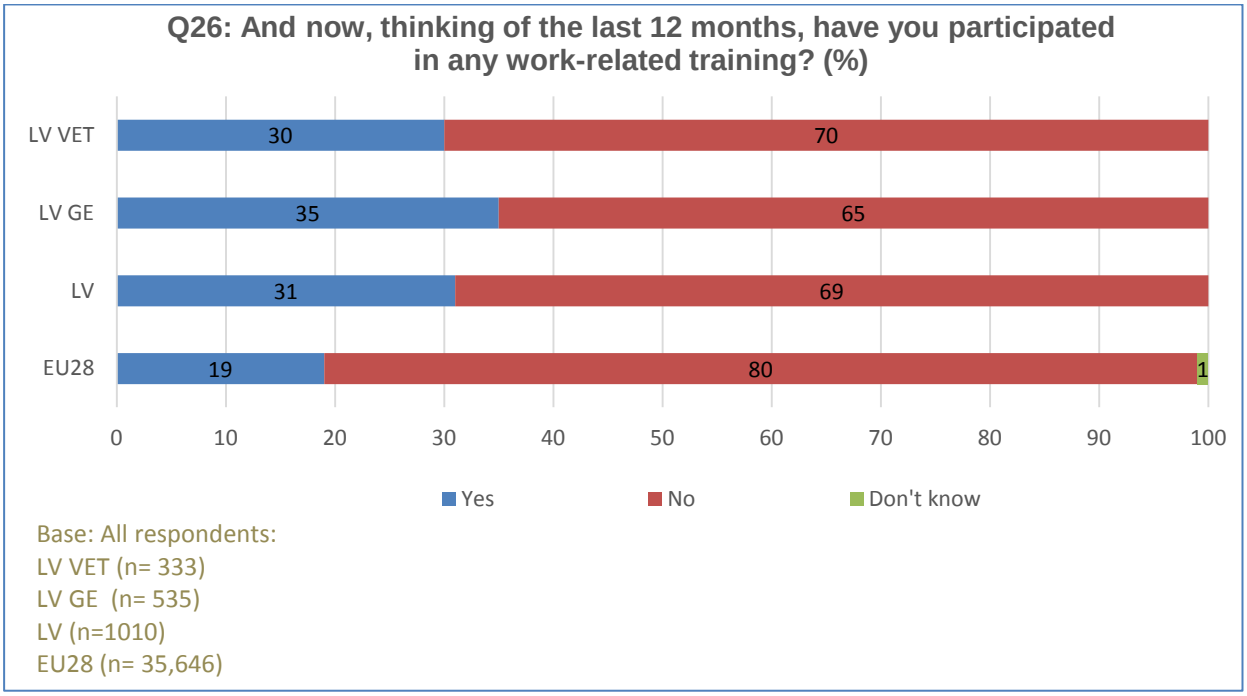
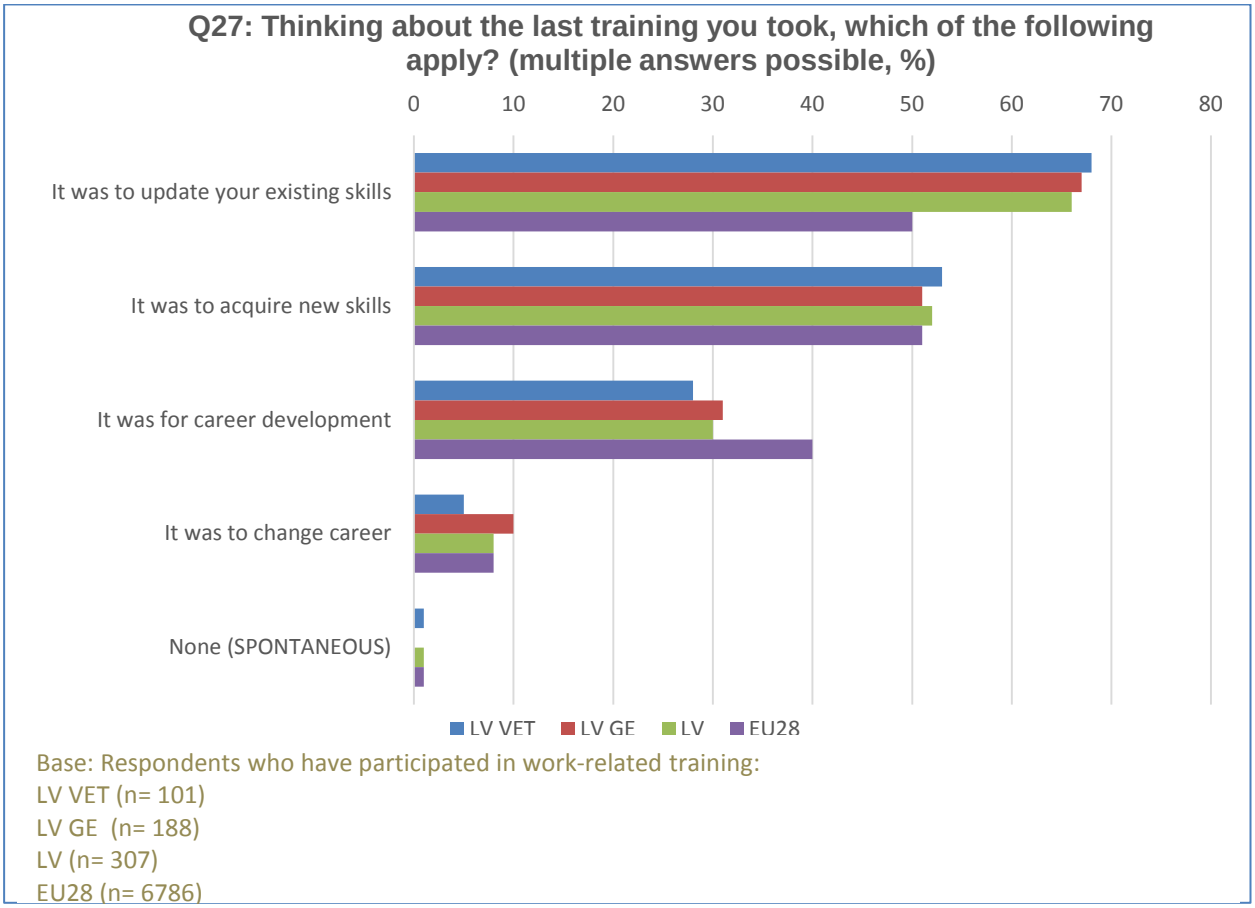


Figure 31. Reasons for work-related training



Base: Respondents who have participated in work-related training:
LV VET (n= 101)
LV GE (n= 188)
LV (n= 307)
EU28 (n= 6786)

CHAPTER 5.

Main conclusions and further research needs

5.1. Main conclusions

This article has examined Latvian citizens' awareness and opinions of VET, as well as their own personal experience at upper secondary level.

(a) The survey shows a generally rather a positive perception of VET in Latvia. This is especially in relation to its capacity for preparing people for the world of work, providing personal development, job opportunities and matching employer needs, as well as VET's permeability and mobility opportunities. Latvian citizens also generally agree that VET plays a role in society, specifically by strengthening Latvia's economy and reducing unemployment and social exclusion, and that Government should prioritize investments in VET. More than half (61%) believe that VET image is positive also for today's youth and half (55%) would recommended VET for young persons. However, VET labour market outcomes especially in relation to concept of VET as education leading to jobs that are highly regarded and helping to find job quickly after obtaining diploma, in Latvia are perceived controversially. To address these perceptions, it might be necessary to explore in depth their possible causes.

(b) When asked to compare VET with general education, more than half (64%) of Latvians tend to agree that general education has a more positive image than VET. In this comparative view the perception of the VET image is narrowed to the widespread opinion that VET is mainly for students of lower academic performance, and does not relate to respondents' own views on the greater VET than general education benefits in the world of work (obtaining a qualification is easier in VET than in general education and after VET people are more likely to find job than people with general education). This may be because in Latvia, finding job in comparison to higher education is another negative aspect of the VET image. Half (51%) of Latvians irrespective of their upper-secondary education path, think that people who completed vocational education at upper-secondary education are less likely to find a job after studies than people who went on to complete higher education.

(c) Latvian citizens in comparison with Europeans are more informed about VET. Latvians more often than Europeans conceptualise VET with acquisition of specific occupation, personal development, taking place before working life, school environment and higher education, while Europeans more often than Latvians are advised against VET at school and more often conceptualize VET with occurring in work environment and doing manual work. If the choice of upper secondary education path for Latvians is more often than for Europeans guided by the distance from home, Europeans' choice more often than for Latvians is based on academic performance, interest in subjects, advise from school, career prospects, possibility of having good salary and length of studies.

(d) Regarding VET attractiveness, the opinion that these days VET has a positive image among young people, is reported less often in Latvia than in EU. However, when respondents compare VET with GE, the opinion that GE has a more positive image than VET, also is less widespread in Latvia than in EU and Latvians less often believe that students with low grades are directed towards VET. In comparison with Europe, in Latvia VET image comparing with GE image is perceived more often as allowing easier to get qualification and more likely to find job after studies in VET than GE. More Latvians than Europeans think that government should prioritize investments in VET. Latvians more often than Europeans perceive VET also as education which provides horizontal and vertical permeability and mobility opportunities and Latvians more often than Europeans would recommend VET to young people. Contrary to it, Europeans more than Latvians relates VET with labour market outcomes such as education which leads to skills needed by employers and jobs highly regarded in country, that VET allows to find job quickly after obtaining diploma as well as that VET students are more likely to find a job after their studies than higher education students.

(e) Latvian respondents more often than Europeans have reported their upper secondary education as taking place all at school, and they were less satisfied with available equipment. At the same time Latvians were more satisfied than Europeans with developed communication skills, ability to pursue and organize own learning, ability to be creative, ability to work with others, cultural awareness and mathematical skills, while Europeans are more satisfied than Latvians with developed other key competences such as science and technology skills, digital and computer skills, social and civic competence, and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.

(f) Latvians are more pessimistic than Europeans regarding VET role in society, especially regarding VET role in strengthening economy and tackling social exclusion. In contrary, personal labour market outcomes after upper secondary education (no difficulties in finding job, job was found before end of main studies or it took less than month to find job) in Latvia are reported more often than in EU. Therefore, the aspects related to the image of VET – especially in relation to labour market outcomes and their personal experience – should be investigated further. Latvians more often than Europeans were participated in work-related training (to update existing skills) while Europeans more often continued studying at higher education level and their work-related training more often was for career development. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that in Latvia both vocational and general upper secondary education graduates more often continued studies in higher education level which is primarily vocational while Europeans tend to follow their type of upper secondary education also in further higher education.

(g) Latvian VE-participants in comparison to GE-participants have higher awareness of VET and their decision on VET path was more based on interest in subjects, advices of someone from world of work, job finding and good salary opportunities. GE-participants are more confident that GE has a more positive image than VET and their decision regarding GE path was more based on possibility to continuing higher education and distance from home. VET-participants were more satisfied than GE-participants with developed work-related skills, available equipment, developed ability to be creative and ability to work with others, while GE-participants with developed such key competences as foreign language, mathematical skills and cultural awareness. VET-participants more often found job before the end of main studies while GE- participants more often continued studies at higher education level. Despite the fact that GE-participants more often than VET-participants consider that VET strengthen economy of Latvia, VET-participants more often than GE-participants agree that Government should prioritize investments in VET.

(h) Despite the fact that Latvians are well informed about VET, the potential of career guidance and counselling is not fully used, especially at lower secondary education level. Information on labour market needs and labour market outcomes of education should be used to greater extent in career guidance/education.

In recent years, Latvia has made massive investments modernizing the VET facilities and educational programs but these changes can go unnoticed for large

parts of population. Therefore, more visibility actions for VET would be necessary in Latvia in order to improve its image and raise its attractiveness.

5.2. Further research needs

This article presents a rather general insight in the data collected in Latvia. A more in-depth analysis could be very fruitful regarding different socioeconomic and age groups. Especially the latter would help to capture the more recent experiences learners make at upper secondary level.

The survey questionnaire could be complemented by more detailed questions regarding the further educational and professional careers, e.g. exploring if respondents worked in areas related to their acquired profession.

In future waves the quantitative opinion survey could be complemented by qualitative interviews or focus group discussion allowing to understand more thoroughly the survey data and the underlying perceptions of VET and general secondary education, as well as the motivation of students to choose one or another pathway. Expert interviews with employers, policy makers and relevant stakeholders could be used to elaborate a more precise interpretation of the survey data.

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