



VELUX®

# HEAD DOWNERS REPORT 2021

Looking down, longing for  
what's above their heads



# Head downers. Looking down, longing for what's above their heads

## Main conclusions



Most respondents (**95%**) appreciate nature and believe that we should care for it. This opinion was not significantly differentiated by age or area of residence.



Most respondents reported that they were lacking contact with nature, with a longing for nature being stronger among people living in large urban areas. This group also had the highest percentage of people who spent the least time outdoors during the day, as well as a higher percentage of people who declare that they spend too much time in front of a phone or computer screen. People living on the outskirts of cities and in the countryside spend significantly more time outdoors, both on weekends and during weekdays. Significantly fewer of them believe that they spend too much time in front of a screen.



Most respondents agree that being in contact with nature and spending time outdoors helps them rest and is beneficial to their health and well-being.



Respondents are convinced (**94%**) that children and adolescents now spend less time outdoors than older generations. Interestingly, this opinion is expressed by both older and younger people (under 35 years of age). The vast majority (**93%**) of parents of children up to 18 years of age believe that their childhood was more nature-oriented than that of their children. An even higher percentage of affirmative responses (**97%**) was recorded from parents of children aged 15 – 18. Every fifth respondent disagrees with the opinion that today's children and adolescents have many other more attractive ways of spending their free time than being outdoors.



More than half of all respondents regularly take time out of their day to look up at the sky and observe the weather, birds, clouds, and the sun. Almost three-quarters of respondents can recognize no more than 10 bird species. Every third respondent can recognize no more than 5 tree species. All have problems with recognizing cloud types and constellations.



The vast majority (**97%**) of respondents agree that it is important to teach children to respect nature, with slightly fewer (**94%**) believing that it is essential to control the time kids spend in front of smartphones and computers. At the same time, only every third respondent believes that younger generations care more about the environment than previous generations. The percentage of people agreeing with this statement is much higher among people aged 18 – 34, as well as among parents.

Our quality of life is determined by a great deal of factors, one of which is our contact with nature. This, in turn, largely depends on the daily choices we make and on our awareness of the vital role played by nature in our overall well-being. What if, however, the relatively strong need to be close to nature and the knowledge about its impact on our health and well-being do not go hand in hand with what we observe in society on a daily basis? A constant lack of time, overloading with new technologies, poor daily habits, everyday problems, as well as excessive access of information – all these things require and use up our limited attention. As a result, we stop seeing the world around us. We stop enjoying the little things in life, like daily walks, looking up at the sky and trees, and even other people. Living in a world of algorithms and screens doesn't mean that we should be walking through life with our heads down.

The VELUX HEAD DOWNERS 2021 report highlights the contradictions between how we perceive the importance of being in contact with nature and our very own habits, which often take away from the time that we should be spending outdoors.

We want its conclusions to influence daily choices; to allow us and our children to experience nature in its fullest, as these decisions are have an impact on our future health and well-being. The youngest generations should be made aware of the key importance of the natural world – this will guarantee that they will tend to it as they get older, using its resources to their benefit and becoming better at dealing with stress and information overload, as well as the many other burdens brought about by global technological advancement.

Daylight improves our cognitive abilities and has a positive effect on our well-being, while seeing live greenery, the sky, or even clouds helps reduce feelings of fatigue. We should consciously make daily choices to get the most out of what is right in front of us – nature and the great outdoors – and enjoy the positive effects that spending time amongst nature has on our mental well-being. It's time to look up and change our perspective.

### About the study

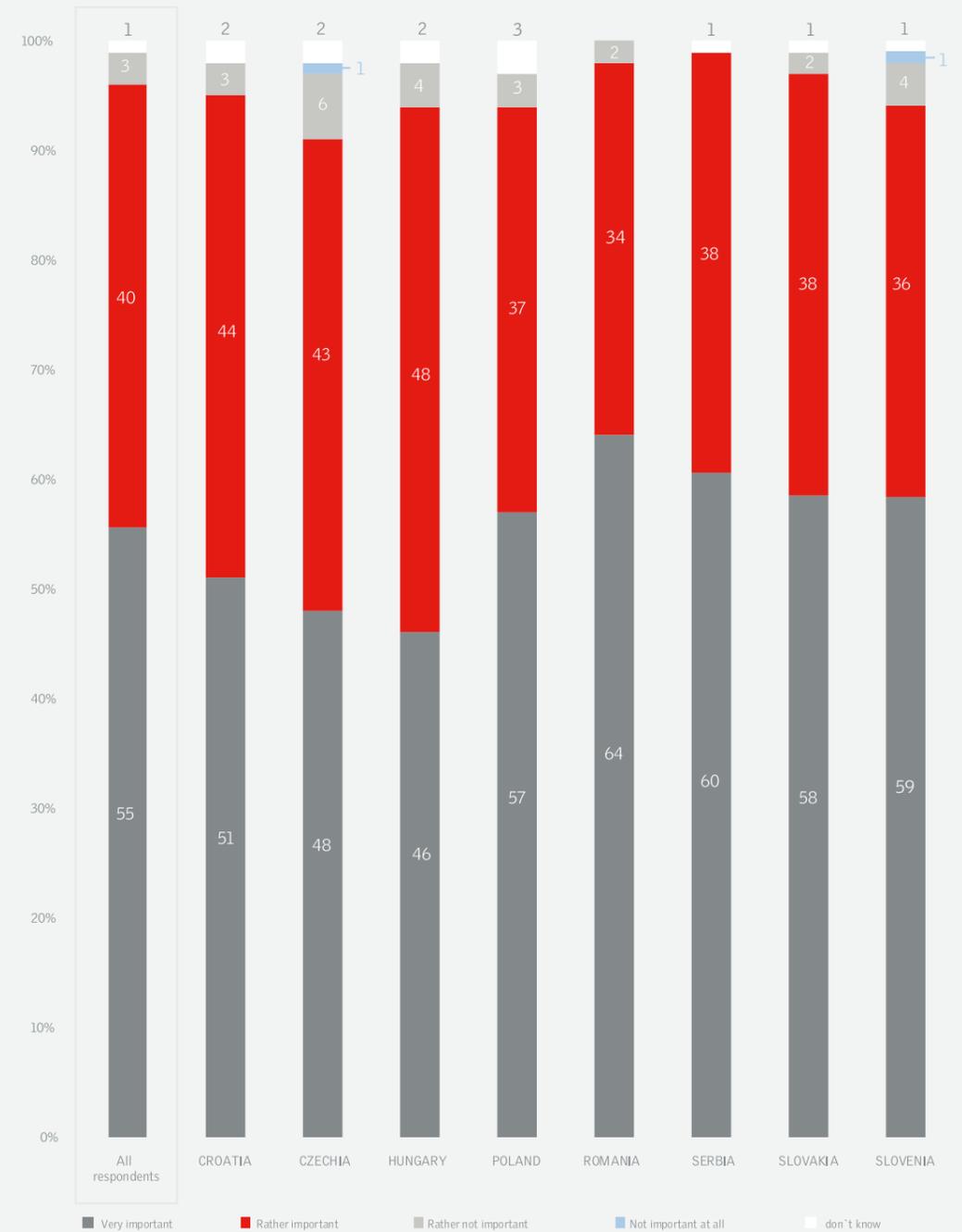
A comparative study commissioned by VELUX and conducted by Kantar using the CAWI method, held between September 3 – 6, 2021, among respondents aged 18 – 65, using representative demographic groups modelling the populations of eight European countries: Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia, on a sample of N = 2 408 respondents.

## Contact with nature – important but too often neglected

Being in touch with nature is considered crucial by most respondents across all countries. Parents of children aged 0 – 18 have a similar opinion to that of non-parents. 9 out of 10 respondents agree that spending time outdoors is a great way to recharge their batteries. Interestingly, nearly one in ten Hungarian respondents disagrees with the statement that spending time among nature promotes relaxation. People are also convinced (**93%**) that being close to nature is beneficial to their health. In Czechia, parents have this opinion more often than non-parents.



## How important is nature, being in contact with it, and taking care of the environment in your life?



Percentages may not sum up to 100% because the values have been rounded.

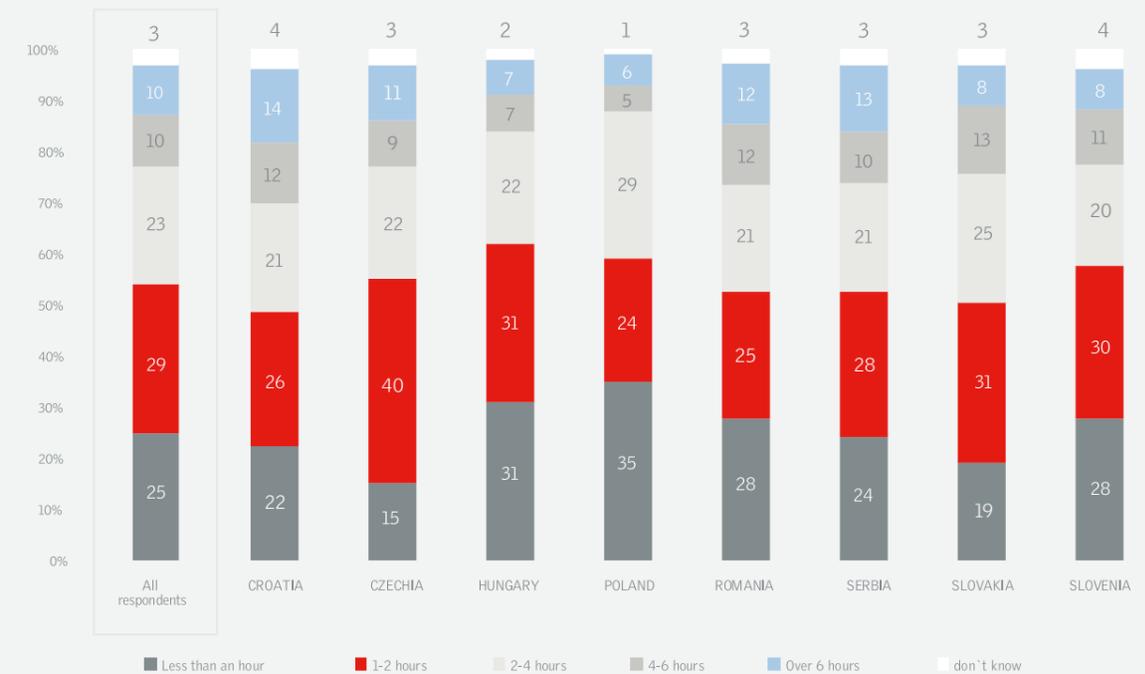
The fragmentation of social life begins with the loss of our sensitivity towards nature. By missing out on nature, we also lose out on our relationships with people.

Although we declare that we value nature, we often spend less than an hour outside every day. This was confirmed by every fourth respondent. Most of our lives pass within four walls.

Poles are disgraceful record holders here, with **35%** of respondents spending less than an hour outside per day.



How much time **do you spend outdoors** during a normal day (e.g., work or school week)?



Percentages may not sum up to 100% because the values have been rounded.

We understand the benefits of spending time outdoors, in forests, parks, and anywhere else, but this awareness isn't enough – plenty of respondents in each country hardly ever did.

Such situations were more common among parents than other respondents. This is most evident among respondents from Serbia (**83%**), Hungary (**82%**) and Croatia (**79%**). The exception is Slovenia, where the least respondents (**49%**) declare that they long to be closer to nature.

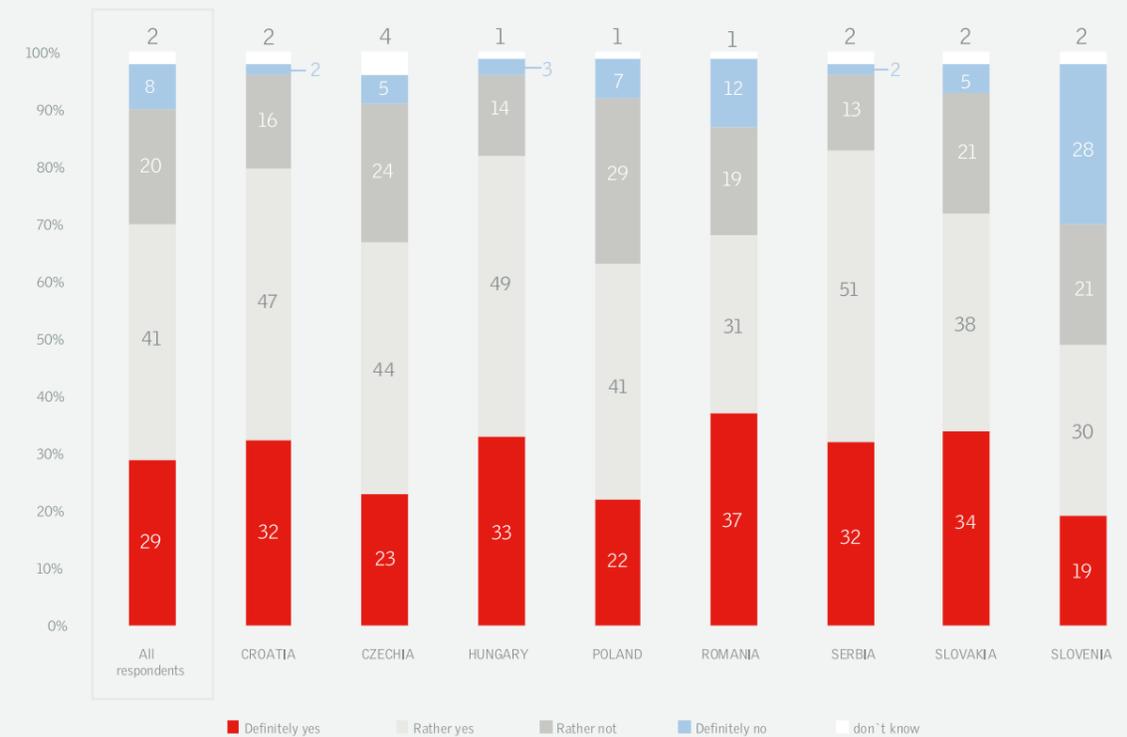
**35%**

**35%** of Poles, **31%** of Hungarians as well as every tenth Czech spend less than an hour outdoors during the week. What's more, every third respondent from Czechia, Hungary and Poland spends just 2 hours outside during their day off.

**12%**

Our lives go on indoors, even on days when we are not working. Although the time we spend outdoors is longer on weekends and holidays, **6%** of Serbs and **12%** of Hungarians are still unable to find an hour for themselves and their families to spend outdoors.

### Do you believe that you **lack contact with nature** on a daily basis?



Percentages may not sum up to 100% because the values have been rounded.

## The power of the digital screen

Constantly spending time indoors can result in a number of health complications. These lifestyle changes are so substantial that we even have a special name for cervico-thoracic spine degeneration caused by spending too much time with our heads facing a screen, one of the most dynamic diseases of our modern-day civilization: "Head Down / Dropped Head Syndrome", or simply "Text Neck".

"Text Neck" is believed to be caused by our own bad posture which results from constantly tilting our heads as we scroll through the screens on our phones and other devices, such as laptops and tablets. By doing so, we're changing the natural curvature of our spine, potentially leading to long-term damage and muscle pain in our backs, necks, shoulders, and even in our lower back.<sup>1</sup> "Dropped Head Syndrome" affects everybody, from adults to teenagers and even young children.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.primapictures.com/blogs/text-neck-anatomy-modern-spine-condition/>; <https://aip.scitation.org/doi/abs/10.1063/5.0036429>

5,000h

Research has shown that **some of us spend nearly 5,000 hours a year staring at screens:** phones, laptops, TVs, gaming devices, and e-book readers. This means that the average adult spends 34 years of their life staring at a screen.<sup>2</sup>

TEXT NECK

The term "text neck" was first used by Doctor Kenneth Hansraj, an American neurologist.



Are we aware that this is also happening to us? Responses indicate that yes, we are aware of our own bad posture, but unfortunately, we aren't doing much about it. **70% of respondents agree that they spend too much time in front of their phone, computer, or TV.** This percentage is higher among younger people (75% among respondents aged 18 - 34), as well as those living in large urban areas (78%). Romanians (80%), Croats (73%), Poles (73%) and Serbs (74%) declared that they logged the most screen time. The smallest screen time was reported by neighbouring Czechs (62%) and Slovaks (60%).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/news/screen-time-average-lifetime-years-phone-laptop-tv-a9508751.html>



Our perspective is as limited as our access to daylight. Even the brightest artificial lighting is no substitute for natural daylight. Scientific research has shown that there's a link between a lack of daylight and various physical and mental problems. Experts estimate that 15% of the world's population suffers from varying levels of SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder or Winter Depression), a trend that is more prevalent as latitude increases.<sup>3</sup> However, it is known that light therapy and daylight exposure above 1 000 lux can act as a cure here.<sup>4</sup> In our region, contact with natural light should be prescribed by doctors as a remedy to combat certain lifestyle diseases.

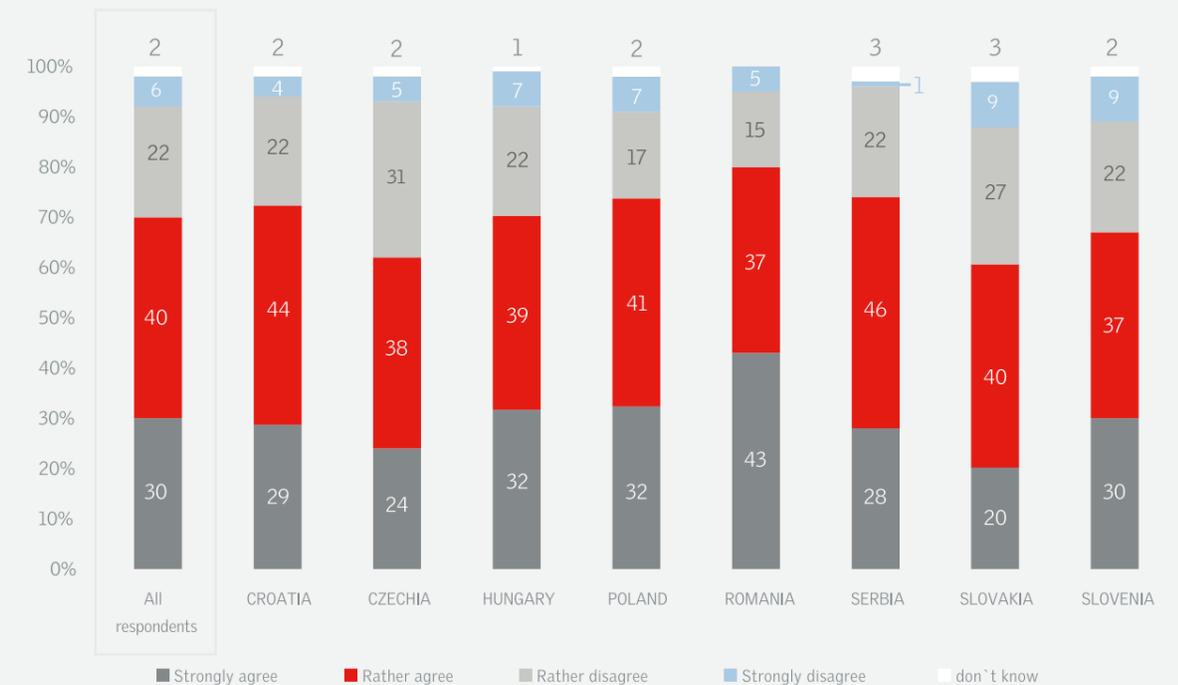


<sup>3</sup> <https://www.velux.com/indoorgeneration/daylight-is-a-necessity-not-a-luxury>  
<sup>4</sup> <https://greenbuildingencyclopaedia.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/a-guide-to-designing-healthy-homes-20180305.pdf>

## Is limiting screen time the answer?

94% of respondents believe that they should limit the time their children spend in front of screens. This opinion didn't vary much between respondents who have or do not have children, and neither did it between nationality, although Poles and Romanians were the most partial to this statement (71% and 72% respectively answered "definitely yes"), with Czechs supporting it the least. Interestingly, the percentage of people who want to control children's screen time is lower among people who did not consider contact with nature to be important (80%).

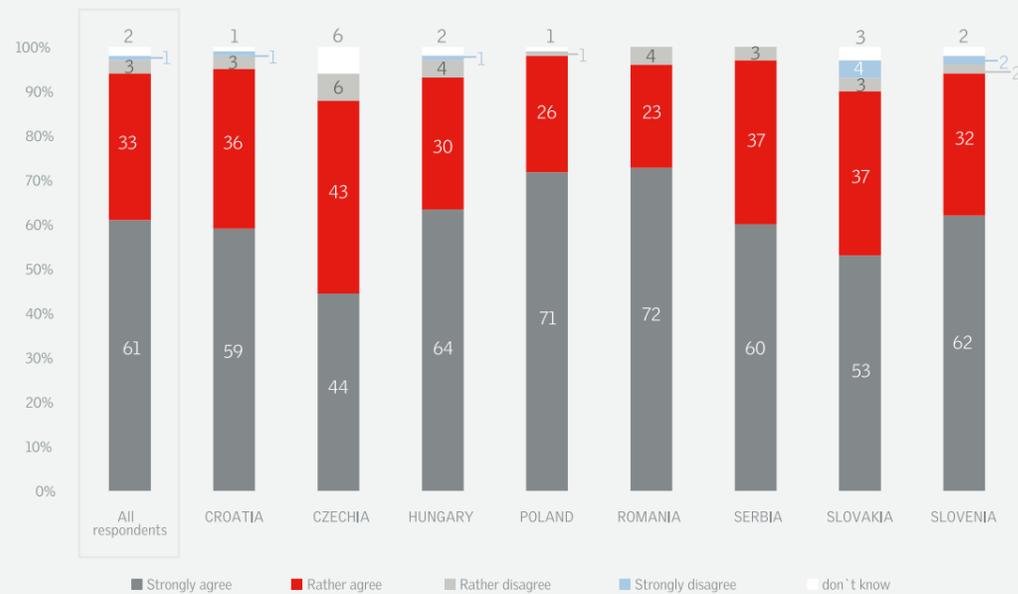
## I spend too much time in front of my computer, phone, or TV screen.\*



\*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I spend too much time in front of my computer, phone or TV screen. Percentages may not sum up to 100% because the values have been rounded.



The time that children and youth spend in front of screens (e.g. computers, mobile phones, or TV sets) should be controlled.\*



\*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The time that children and youth spend in front of screens (e.g. computers, mobile phones, or TVs) should be controlled.

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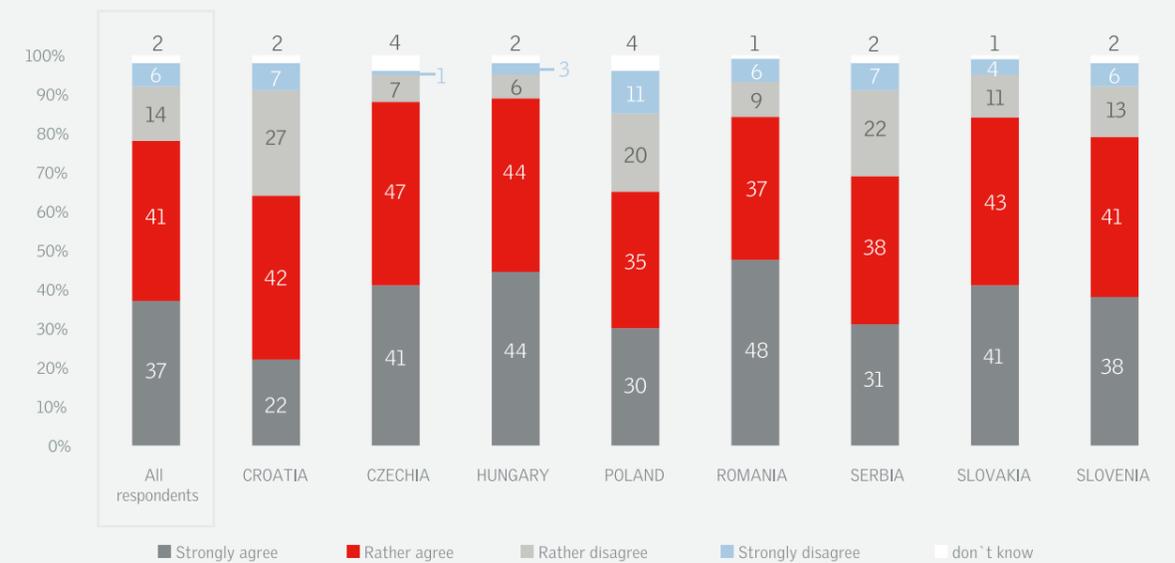
## The virtual backyard

### Childhood in a digital world

Nowadays, children seem to be keener on choosing to play with their friends virtually and online instead of in the backyard. Moreover, the widespread addiction of children and adolescents to technology is regarded as a serious problem (with over 90% of respondents agreeing with this statement), and almost all respondents agreeing that young people today spend less time outdoors than previous generations.

Regardless of nationality, over 90% of all respondents agreed that children should be taught to respect and care for the environment. However, this issue is all but simple. Today, many other activities are much more attractive to children and adolescents than those that can be done outdoors. That's how most respondents see things, including as many of 88% of Czechs and Hungarians.

Nowadays, there are many **other activities that are more** attractive for children and teenagers than spending time outside.\*



\*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Nowadays, there are many other activities that are more attractive for children and teenagers than spending time outside.

Percentages may not sum up to 100% because the values have been rounded.

# What are the children losing?

Nine out of ten respondents in all surveyed countries agree that today's younger generations spend less time outdoors than older generations (94%).

72% of Poles strongly agree with this statement. Also, the vast majority (over 90%) of surveyed parents are convinced that their childhood was more nature-oriented than that of their children. This result is lower for parents in Czechia (60%).

## What are children losing out on?

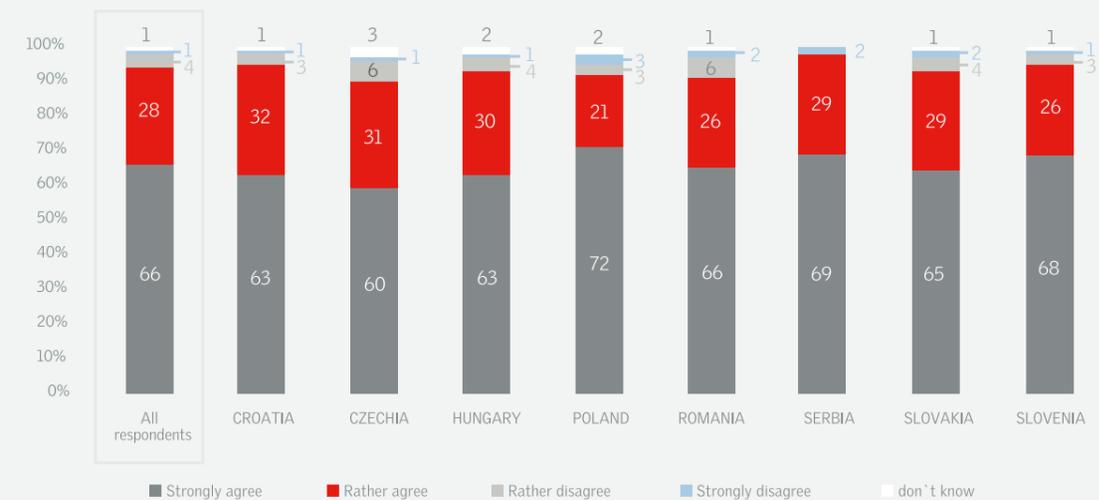
There is a lot of scientific research that helps understand exactly what children are being deprived of when they lose their touch with nature. Its collective conclusions led Richard Louv, author of *The Last Child of the Forest*, to come up with the term "nature deficit syndrome."

Vitamin D deficiency, the exacerbation of symptoms of disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and decreased motivation are the main manifestations observed by Louv in "nature-deficit" children.

An important study from 2008 by Susanna Huh and Catherine Gordon found a clear link between the reduction of time spent outdoors and the rapidly growing proportion of children suffering from vitamin D deficiency.<sup>5</sup> This vitamin, produced by the human body through exposure to sunlight, is essential for bone and tooth health, also helping prevent certain diseases, including Type 1 diabetes. As Louv writes: "Time spent in contact with nature is not the same as time for recreation; it is a vital investment in the health of our children (and ours, by the way)."<sup>6</sup>



## Children and adolescents spend less time outside than previous generations.\*



\*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Children and teens seem to care more about nature and the environment than previous generations. Percentages may not sum up to 100% because the values have been rounded.



5 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5675275\\_Vitamin\\_D\\_Deficiency\\_in\\_Children\\_and\\_Adolescents\\_Epidemiology\\_Impact\\_and\\_Treatment](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5675275_Vitamin_D_Deficiency_in_Children_and_Adolescents_Epidemiology_Impact_and_Treatment)  
 6 <https://grist.org/article/schallit/>

## Look up, you'll notice new things

Staring at a screen and losing our touch with nature impacts our ability to build relationships with other people. But when we look up, away from our digital worlds and out into the world the surrounds us, we notice new things and make more of our own observations. We become more open – not just to the outdoors, but to other people too.

90%

Losing contact with nature and spending most of our time in front of a screen has a negative impact on our ability to build and maintain relationships. **90% of respondents believe that relationships between people have become shallower over the years, also agreeing that civilizational advancement has separated man from nature.** Difficulties in building relationships are most often indicated by Romanians (66%). Of all countries in our survey, Czechia seemed least impacted (44%). In this case, the Czechs are very different from the Slovaks (57%).

43%

**We no longer observe and take note of what is happening outside. Most of us cannot even name the trees and birds that are outside our windows. Half of all survey respondents cannot remember the last time they looked up at the sky.** It seems we're spending our lives with our eyes pointed at our feet. 51% of Czechs say they didn't take time out of their day to simply look up at the sky in the past week. Similar answers came from respondents in Poland and Slovenia (46% in each). Meanwhile, simple activities like taking a walk or looking up at the sky bring us closer to the natural world.

95%

**95% of all respondents agree that people must change their behaviour and their attitude towards nature to save the world from a climate disaster.** We must change ourselves and our habits, but we must also change the way we educate younger generations. 37% of all inhabitants of the European Union indicated the extinction of species and the extinction of natural ecosystems to be the most important environmental challenges.

40%

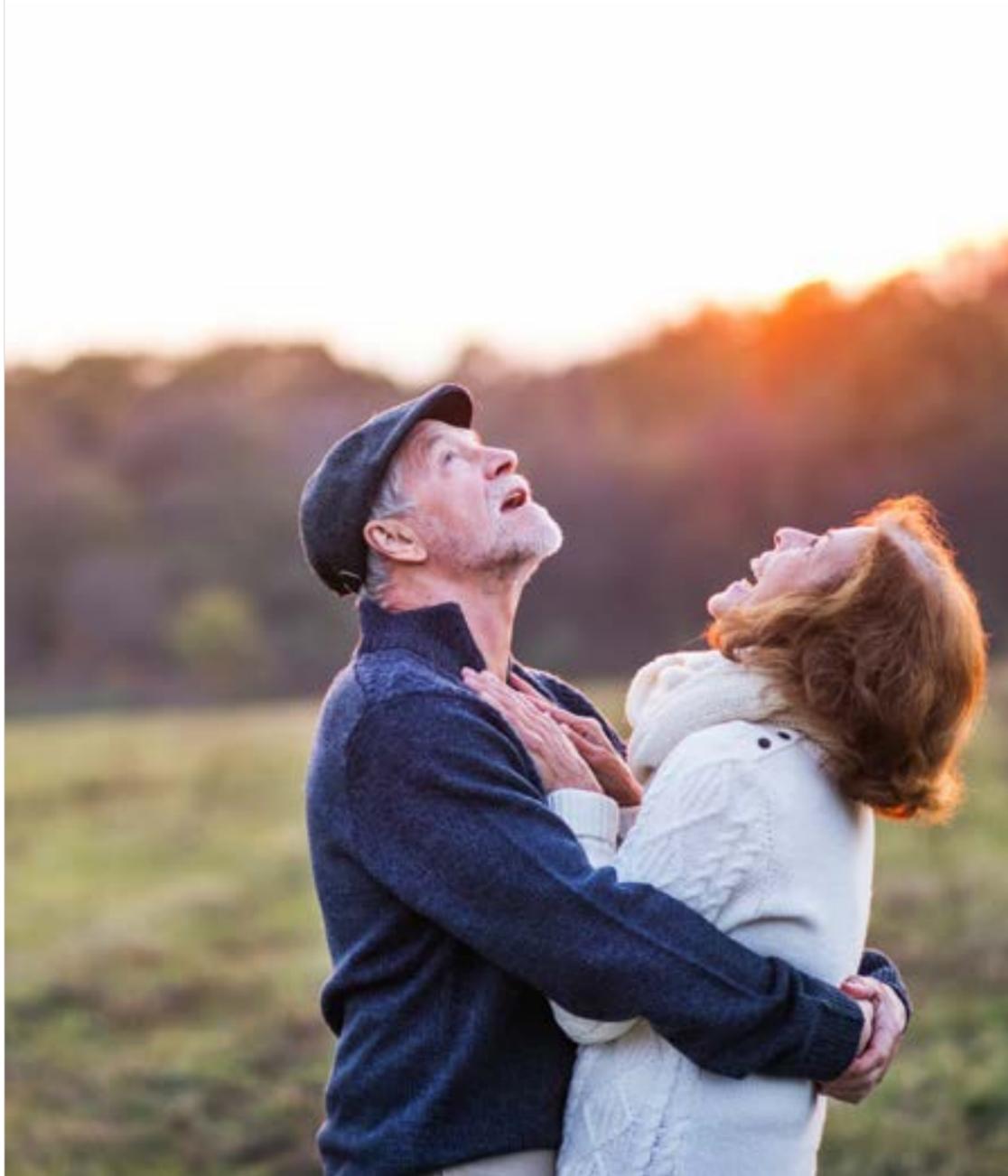
Will our children notice that there are no Siskins in the tree in front of their house? We highly doubt it. Out of the 10,000 bird species in the world, **40% of adult respondents know only 5 or fewer. Every tenth respondent from Croatia, Czechia and Slovenia can recognize only 1 or 2 species of birds.** Out of all 60,000 tree species in the world, most respondents can only recall 6 to 10 species. Almost 40% of respondents from Croatia, Hungary and Romania can only recognize up to 5 different types of trees.

63%

Most respondents cannot distinguish between cloud types, with levels of knowledge varying from country to country. Romanians and Hungarians know them best, and Slovaks and Czechs the least. **Almost 80% of Czechs and 73% of Slovaks do not know any cloud types.** It is much more difficult for them to predict a possible change in the weather and prepare for it without relying on their weather apps and forecasts.

## How to teach children to respect nature?

This study has shown that parents believe that children spend less time outdoors than previous generations did. They admit that their childhood was more nature-oriented. Today's children and teens seem to get involved in pro-environmental activities, but most respondents (55%), especially the older ones (61% in the group of respondents over 50 age) disagree that children and youth care more about nature than previous generations. The vast majority of respondents (97%) are convinced that children should be taught to respect nature.



Take notice of the birds nesting in a nearby tree, relax for a few minutes by observing the clouds overhead, open a window and take a deep breath or go for a stroll in the park.

All these options are at your fingertips. Sometimes, minor changes have major impact. We should make changes to our daily routine and lifestyle to be able spend more time in nature. However living our lives in health and happiness starts where we spend most of our time - at home. Our environment should contribute to our wellbeing, living without daylight and fresh air affects our health and wellbeing.

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