



Public opinion on national defence 2023

Client: Ministry of Defence
Study conducted by: Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ

July 2023




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INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Defence has been conducting public opinion surveys since 2000. They have been focused on issues of national defence and have become a unique database that makes it possible to follow the public's attitude towards national defence over the span of two decades. This year's study included 1200 respondents who were surveyed in March and April of 2023.

We are glad to report that willingness to defend the country, both passively and actively, remains high. Around two-thirds of the population are prepared to participate in defence activities in various roles: more than a tenth of the population is prepared to participate in direct defence activities, a fourth in auxiliary military defence activities and a little under a third in non-military defence activities. 90% of Estonian residents consider conscript service necessary. There is a favourable attitude (85%) towards reservists and calling up reservists for training is also viewed favourably (79%).

It is no surprise that opinions may differ among those speaking Estonian and those speaking Russian. However, over the past year, the latter group has also seen an increase in support for armed resistance if Estonia was to be attacked, willingness to participate in defence activities themselves and support for conscript service for young men.

There is also a favourable attitude towards Defence Forces-related activities all over Estonia. For example, more than half of residents have a favourable opinion of the expansion of military training areas, an issue that has caused a lot of debate in the past year. The strongest support for the expansion can be found in Northern and Central Estonia, followed by Western Estonia, Tallinn, Southern Estonia and Ida-Viru County.

The Defence Forces and the Defence League have traditionally been the most trusted state institutions. In 2023, they were trusted by almost 80% of Estonian residents. Trust in the Defence Forces has remained at the same level for the fifth year in a row and trust in the Defence League has grown steadily since 2020.

Around half of Estonian residents believe national defence education should be a mandatory course in secondary education institutions, as it will be from autumn 2023, and a bit little see it as a voluntary course. The percentage of residents who believe national defence education should be made mandatory has grown over the past year (from 35% to 46%), while the percentage of residents preferring it to remain voluntary has decreased (from 53% to 41%). There is still room for improvement, exemplified by the fact that only a third of Estonian residents believe they are sufficiently informed on how to behave in the event of a potential attack by a foreign state.

Estonia's defence capability rests on two foundations: Estonia's own military capability and NATO's collective defence, which Estonia has been a part of since 2004. In this context it is important to note that around three-fourths of Estonian residents support increasing defence expenditures or leaving them at the current level. Support for Estonia's membership in NATO continues to remain strong (82%) and has also grown among the Russian-speaking population (from 50% to 57%).

SUMMARY

At the request of the Ministry of Defence, Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ conducted a survey in the spring of 2023 among Estonian residents between the ages of 15 and 74. The primary purpose of the survey was to analyse residents' attitudes and stances towards national defence. The sample included 1200 respondents and the methodology was a combination of web panel (70%) and phone interviews (30%).

Pride over living in Estonia

- ✓ In 2023, 80% of residents are rather proud or very proud to live in Estonia, whereas 14% are rather not proud or not proud at all.
- ✓ Estonians and elderly residents who are 50–74 years of age are more likely to be proud to live in Estonia. In comparison with the previous year, the percentage of young people who are proud to live in Estonia has increased significantly in 2023, this figure being 25% in 2022 and 38% this year.

Credibility of institutions

- ✓ Of the institutions surveyed, Estonian residents in 2023 have the most trust in the rescue service (96% rather trust or trust completely) and the Police and Border Guard Board (85%), but also the Defence Forces (77%), the Presidency (77%) and the Defence League (76%). The least trusted are the Parliament of Estonia (51%), the Prime Minister (52%) and the Government (57%).
- ✓ Estonians have more trust in institutions than do respondents of other ethnicities. Both Estonians and other ethnicities feel that the rescue service and the Police and Border Guard Board are the most trustworthy. Estonians feel that the Parliament is the least trustworthy while other ethnicities feel this way about the prime minister and NATO.

Security and threats

- ✓ In 2023, 29% of residents believe that life in Estonia will become safer in the next ten years, 22% believe that life will become less safe and 34% believe the situation will remain the same.
- ✓ In 2023, the use of nuclear weapons (76%), Russia's war in Ukraine (72%) and Russia's attempts to reestablish its power in neighbouring states (68%) were most often named as security risks to world peace and safety.
- ✓ In 2023, the spread of fake news (very or rather likely; 84%) and cyberattacks against national systems, institutions, businesses or residents (83%) are considered the most likely threats to the security of Estonia.
- ✓ In comparison with 2022, cyberattacks against national information systems, institutions, businesses or residents and limited military strikes against a strategic object are considered more likely threats in 2023.
- ✓ In 2023, 57% of residents believe that media coverage of military threats is sufficient. 26% believe that the coverage of military threats is excessive, whereas 9% believe it is insufficient.

- ✓ In 2023, Estonian residents continue to believe that membership in NATO, the permanent presence of allied forces in Estonia and membership in the European Union are the primary security guarantees of the Estonian state.

Defence willingness

- ✓ In 2022, 83% of Estonian residents consider armed resistance definitely or rather necessary in the event of an attack. 64% of residents are rather or definitely willing to participate in defence in accordance with their abilities and skills. No significant changes were found when compared to the previous year.
- ✓ If Estonia was attacked, 11% of residents would participate directly in military defence activities, 24% would participate in military defence activities in an auxiliary role (logistics, in the rear; of them 37% are men and 11% are women) and 30% would participate in non-military defence activities (medicine, evacuation; of them 17% are men and 44% are women). 9% of Estonian residents would not participate in defence activities but would still remain in Estonia while 17% would try to leave Estonia. A tenth of Estonian residents were not able to predict their behaviour in this situation.
- ✓ If Estonia was attacked, 61% of Estonian residents would be willing to hand over a personal or company car, other technical equipment, buildings, farmlands and other property to the Defence Forces for use.
- ✓ Similarly to previous years, only a third of residents believe they are rather or completely informed on what to do in the event of a potential attack by another state. 58% of residents consider their knowledge on this matter insufficient.
- ✓ In 2023, the topics on which Estonian residents need the most additional information on when it comes to how to behave in the event of an attack by a foreign enemy are instructions regarding sheltering and shelter places (43%) and instructions on how to behave as a civilian in a combat area (42%).

Defence capability

- ✓ In 2023, 56% of Estonian residents believe that Estonia would certainly or most likely be able to defend itself until additional allied assistance arrives. This percentage has fallen by 4 percentage points in comparison with 2022.
- ✓ In 2023, around two-thirds of the population believes the state border to be very or rather well protected. This assessment has improved by 10% in comparison with 2022.
- ✓ In 2023, 43% support an increase in defence expenditures. In comparison with 2022, there are more Estonian residents who support the preservation of defence expenditures at the current level (+8%), while the percentage of those who support a significant increase has decreased (-9%).
- ✓ 70% of Estonian residents are very or rather satisfied with the development of national defence.
- ✓ Calling up reservists for exercises is the most positively assessed Defence Forces related activity (very and rather favourable opinion 80%). This is followed by allied air exercises and overflights in Estonian airspace (75%), transport of Defence Forces materiel (73%) and wearing a Defence Forces uniform in public places or events (71%). 65% of Estonian residents support Defence Forces training exercises in the area they

live in. 55% support the expansion of training areas to the area they live in. 50% of Southern Estonians are also in support.

Attitude towards conscript and reserve service

- ✓ In 2023, 90% consider conscript service for young men definitely or rather necessary, while less than a tenth of residents considers this rather or definitely unnecessary. 92% of Estonians and 74% of other ethnicities believe that completing conscript service is necessary for young men.
- ✓ 55% of Estonian residents disapprove of conscript service evasion: 36% have a rather negative opinion of it and 19% condemn it completely.
- ✓ 89% of residents have a favourable opinion of professional servicemen and 85% have a favourable opinion of reservists.
- ✓ Estonian residents are most likely to have experience with service in the reserve and reservists through friends and acquaintances. A third have someone in their circle of acquaintances that is a reservist.
- ✓ Support for mandatory conscript service for women is low (6%). However, around 80% of Estonia's population does believe that women should have the opportunity to participate in conscript service voluntarily. 44% of Estonian residents believe women should participate in conscript service on the same basis as men. 35% believe they should do so based on a separate programme. 12% believe that women should not participate in conscript service at all.

Experience with national defence structures

- ✓ In 2023, 58% of residents have experience with conscript service in the Defence Forces through family or friends, 46% with reservist training and voluntary reserve officer training courses in the Defence Forces, 37% with active service in the Defence Forces, 33% with Defence League and/or Naiskodukaitse (Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation) activities, 29% with national defence education and 21% with the Noored Kotkad (Estonian Defence League Boys Organization) and Kodutütred (Estonian Defence League Girls Organization).
- ✓ The most frequent personal experiences include national defence education at school (12%) and conscript service in the Defence Forces (11%).

Attitude towards the Defence League and Naiskodukaitse

- ✓ In 2023, over 84% of residents have a favourable opinion of volunteer members of the Defence League.
- ✓ In 2023, residents continue to believe the most important duties of the Defence League are preparing for the organised defence of residents in the event of emergency situations, participating in rescue activities in the event of accidents and catastrophes and constant readiness for the state's military defence.
- ✓ 34% of residents who have not yet participated in Defence League and/or Naiskodukaitse activities would consider joining the organisations if they received such a proposal. 51% would rather not join.

Attitude towards NATO

- ✓ 82% of residents support Estonia's membership in NATO, with 63% being definitely in favour, whereas 11% are against. In terms of ethnicities, NATO membership is supported mostly by Estonians (94%), whereas other ethnicities are much less in favour (57%). However, support among the latter has increased by 7% in comparison with 2022.
- ✓ 29% of Estonian residents believe NATO membership helps prevent military conflicts, 48% believe that NATO would provide direct military assistance to Estonia in the event of a conflict, 10% believe that NATO would not go further than political and diplomatic support and 7% of residents believe Estonia would not receive any assistance from NATO.
- ✓ In 2023, 19% of Estonian residents believe that the steps taken by NATO to ensure Estonian security have been completely sufficient, while 50% consider them rather sufficient. No significant changes occurred in attitude when compared to the previous year.
- ✓ 53% definitely support the presence of NATO allied forces and 27% rather support it.
- ✓ The soldiers of the NATO battle group in Estonia are considered to be professional, friendly, capable, well-intentioned, polite and dedicated. They are seldom associated with negative characteristics, and those that do are mostly respondents of other ethnicities.

Attitude towards international military operations

- ✓ The population's attitude towards the necessity of Estonia's participation in international military operations continues to be positive in 2023, with 61% being in support, 29% being in opposition and a tenth having no opinion on the matter.
- ✓ Estonian residents believe that the most important reasons for participating in international military operations are that it gives Estonian soldiers real battle experience and ensures NATO's assistance in the event of potential threats.

Attitude towards national defence education

- ✓ 46% of Estonian residents believe national defence education should be a mandatory course in secondary education institutions, while 41% of the population preferred it as a voluntary course and 8% did not consider the course necessary at all.
- ✓ Belief in mandatory national defence education has grown by 11% during the previous year.

Media consumption

- ✓ Of Estonian news portals, the most followed are Eesti Päevaleht/Delfi (73%), Postimees (72%) and ERR (the national broadcasting news portal) (71%). Russian news portals, online versions of newspapers and the portal Uued Uudised are followed the least (15–18%).
- ✓ The most frequently followed social media channels are YouTube (90%) and Facebook (83%). Direct messaging applications are also widely used (83%).

- ✓ In terms of television and radio channels, the most followed among Estonian residents are ETV's Estonian-language shows (73%), Kanal 2 (61%) and TV3 (59%). The audiences for other channels are around half of Estonian residents or less.
- ✓ Across all media channels, there is a clear trend of Estonians primarily following Estonian-language channels, whereas other ethnicities follow channels in other languages as well, especially in Russian. Viewership of Russian television channels has decreased sharply, however.
- ✓ Television (very or rather important 88%), news portals (87%) and radio (83%) are considered the most important sources of national defence related information. No significant changes were found when compared to 2022. Printed and street advertisements continue to be considered the least important channels.
- ✓ When disseminating national defence information, Estonians consider all channels more important in comparison with other ethnicities. A significantly higher percentage of other ethnicities consider television, news portals, radio and newspapers unimportant channels when disseminating national defence information.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

An integrated society is more difficult to damage and influence externally. In an emergency situation it is important for Estonian society not to be divided and for residents to trust and support state actions to resolve the situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 and the restrictions put in place to fight it had a negative impact on many societal groups. The insecurity and unstable living environment the pandemic created affected people's sense of safety. Russian aggression against Ukraine, which escalated on 24 February 2022, has reduced people's sense of security even more.

To determine the residents' attitudes and stances towards national defence, OÜ Eesti Uuringukeskus, on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, conducted a survey in the spring of 2023 among Estonian residents between the ages of 15 and 74. Similar surveys have been conducted since 2001.

The survey covered the following topics in detail:

- 1) attitudes towards the Estonian state;
- 2) the credibility of institutions (including defence structures) among the population;
- 3) opinions on potential threats and security risks to Estonia and in the world;
- 4) the residents' defence willingness and their predicted behaviour in the event of potential threats to Estonia;
- 5) opinions on Estonia's defence capability and the state's activities in this field;
- 6) attitude towards conscript service and other defence structures;
- 7) attitude towards NATO and developments associated with it;
- 8) attitude towards international military operations;
- 9) media consumption.

METHODOLOGY

Target group and sample

The population of the survey consisted of permanent residents of the Republic of Estonia between the ages of 15 and 74 (989,033 people according to the Statistical Office in 2022) and the sample size was 1200 respondents who were selected randomly from among Estonian residents. Quota sampling by gender (man/woman), age group (15–19/20–29/30–39/40–49/50–59/60–74), location of residence (county and Tallinn), type of settlement (town/rural) and ethnicity (Estonian/other) was used to conduct the survey (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the population and unweighted and weighted sample.

Total		POPULATION		SAMPLE		WEIGHTED SAMPLE	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
		989,033	100%	1200	100%	1200	100%
GENDER	MEN	485,513	49%	578	48%	589	49%
	WOMEN	503,520	51%	622	52%	611	51%
AGE	15–19	66,578	7%	80	7%	81	7%
	20–29	134,506	14%	161	13%	163	14%
	30–39	199,035	20%	244	20%	241	20%
	40–49	183,636	19%	224	19%	223	19%
	50–59	171,562	17%	207	17%	208	17%
	60–74	233,716	23%	284	24%	284	23%
ETHNICITY	ESTONIAN	662,652	67%	804	67%	812	67%
	OTHER ETHNICITY	326,381	33%	396	33%	388	33%
REGIONS	TALLINN	330,528	33%	404	34%	401	33%
	NORTHERN ESTONIA	128,210	13%	161	13%	156	13%
	WESTERN ESTONIA	106,988	11%	126	11%	130	11%
	CENTRAL ESTONIA	89,812	9%	111	9%	109	9%
	SOUTHERN ESTONIA	232,206	24%	278	23%	282	24%
	NORTH-EASTERN ESTONIA	101,289	10%	120	10%	123	10%
TYPE OF SETTLEMENT	TOWN	682,433	69%	828	70%	833	69%
	RURAL	306,600	31%	372	30%	367	31%

The structure of the sample that developed throughout the survey was compared with the corresponding indicators for the general population. To ensure representability, the sample was weighted by gender, age, ethnicity, county of residence and type of settlement.

The sample's maximum margin of error at a 95% confidence level is no higher than $\pm 2.83\%$. The error may be higher when examining smaller groups.

Conducting the survey

The survey was conducted as a combination of a Norstat Estonia online panel (70%) and phone interviews (30%).

The online survey took place from 29 March to 10 April and the phone interviews were conducted from 16 March to 29 March 2023.

Since this was a repeated survey, the questionnaire was based on the questionnaire used in 2022, which was partially changed in cooperation with the client.

The questionnaire could be answered in both Estonian and Russian. The average duration of a phone interview was 35 minutes and the median duration was 34 minutes. The average response time in the online survey was 20 minutes, the median was 17 minutes.

Data processing

Data processing packages MS Excel and SPSS were used to process the results of the survey. The data on the figures have been rounded by a computer programme, thus the total sum of rows or columns may sometimes be slightly below or over 100%.

When comparing the results by background characteristics (gender, age group, ethnicity, region (NUTS III, the capital Tallinn is separate from Harju County), education, personal net income per month) we used chi-squared tests to compare the percentages. The analysis points out only those differences that turned out to be statistically significant and can therefore be extended to the population.

Differences in methodology compared with previous years

Until 2020, the study was conducted as a face-to-face (F2F) survey. In the spring of 2021, the survey was conducted with a new method: as a combination of a Norstat Estonia online panel¹ (70%) and phone interviews (30%).

Until 2006, the survey was conducted thrice a year and since 2007, it has been conducted twice a year – in the spring and in the autumn. Starting from 2021, the survey is conducted once a year in the spring. For this reason, results were compared with previous spring results whenever possible. In cases where a spring study did not include a specific question, the results were compared with the data of an autumn study, if possible.

Until 2020, the target group of the study was residents aged 15 and older, but in 2021 the maximum age of the target group was set to 74.

¹ The Norstat Estonia online panel includes 25,900 active respondents from Estonia.

RESULTS

1. Pride over living in Estonia

In 2023, 80% of residents are rather proud or very proud to live in Estonia, whereas 14% are rather not proud or not proud at all (Figure 1).

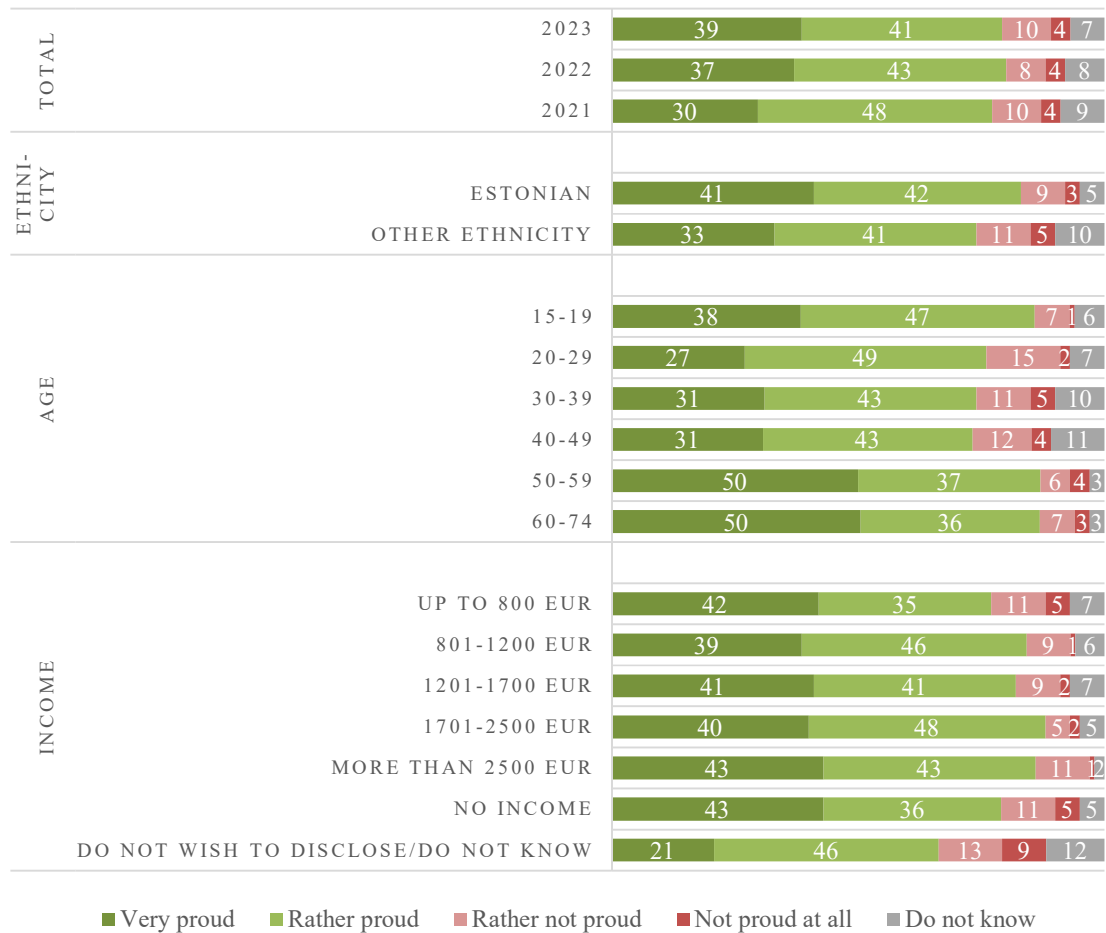


Figure 1. Pride in living in Estonia in 2023 by ethnicity, age and net personal income per month (%; N = all respondents).

Estonians (very or rather proud 83%) and elderly people aged 50–74 (87%) feel more positively about Estonia than the average resident. In comparison with 2022, the percentage of young people who are proud to live in Estonia has increased significantly in 2023, this figure being 25% last year and 38% this year.

When comparing by personal net income, the differences between the various income groups were smaller, but we can still highlight that residents with a monthly income of 1701–2500 gave the most positive assessments.

From 2021 to 2022 the percentage of Estonian residents who were very proud of Estonia increased significantly, but no significant changes occurred over the previous year.

2. Credibility of institutions

The study also examined residents' trust in twelve national or international institutions. When choosing the institutions, their role as maker, implementer or supporter of Estonian security policy was taken into account. Since October 2018, the list of assessed institutions also includes local governments and the judicial system.

The most trusted are the rescue service (96% trusts completely or rather trusts) and the Police and Border Guard Board (85%), but also the Defence Forces (77%), the Presidency (77%) and the Defence League (76%) (Figure 2). Of the surveyed institutions, residents have the least trust in the Parliament of Estonia (51% trusts completely or rather trusts), the Prime Minister (52%) and the Government (57%).

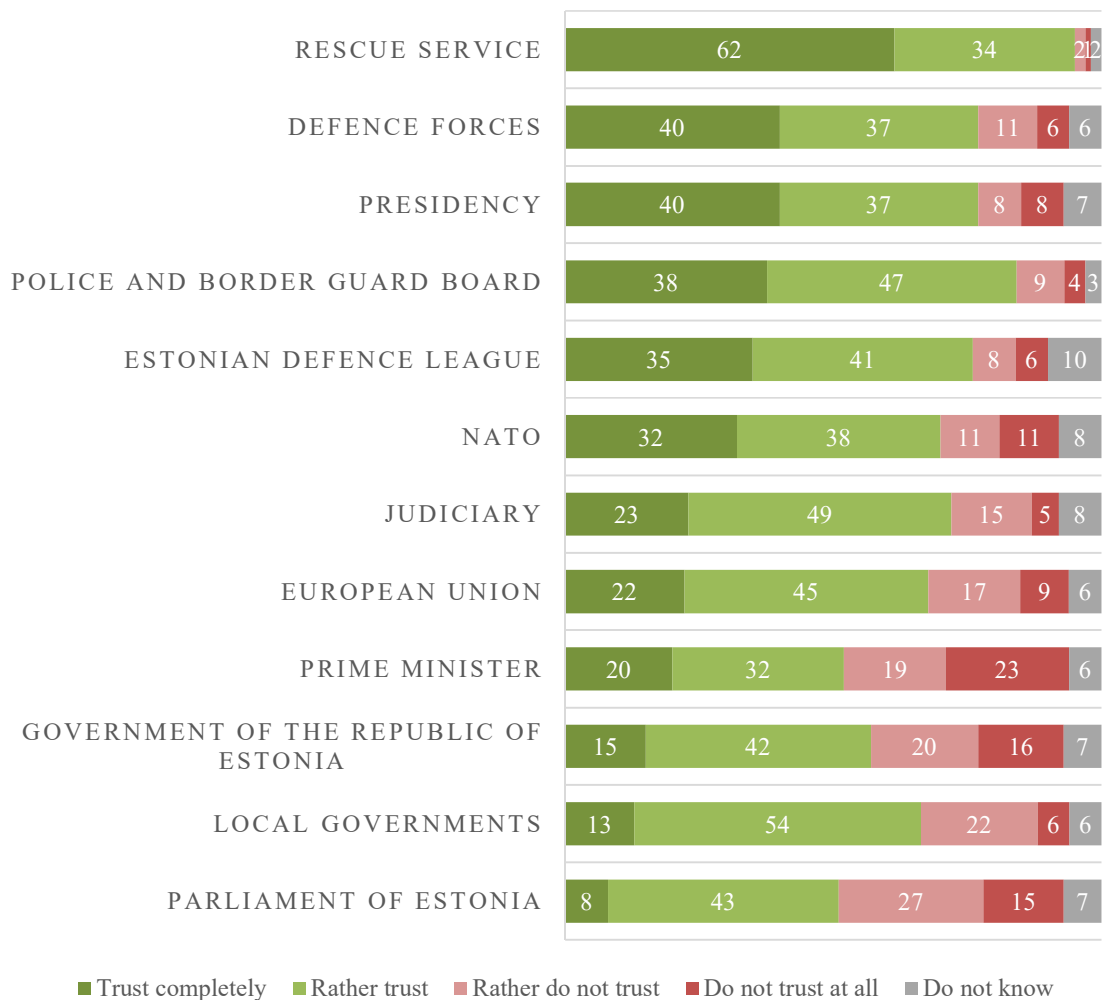


Figure 2. Credibility of institutions in 2023 (%), N = all respondents).

Looking at the last five years, Estonian residents believe that the most credible institutions are the rescue service, the Police and Border Guard Board and the Estonian Defence Forces (Figure 3). During the years 2022–2023, trust in the presidency and the Defence League has risen to the same level as trust in the Defence Forces.

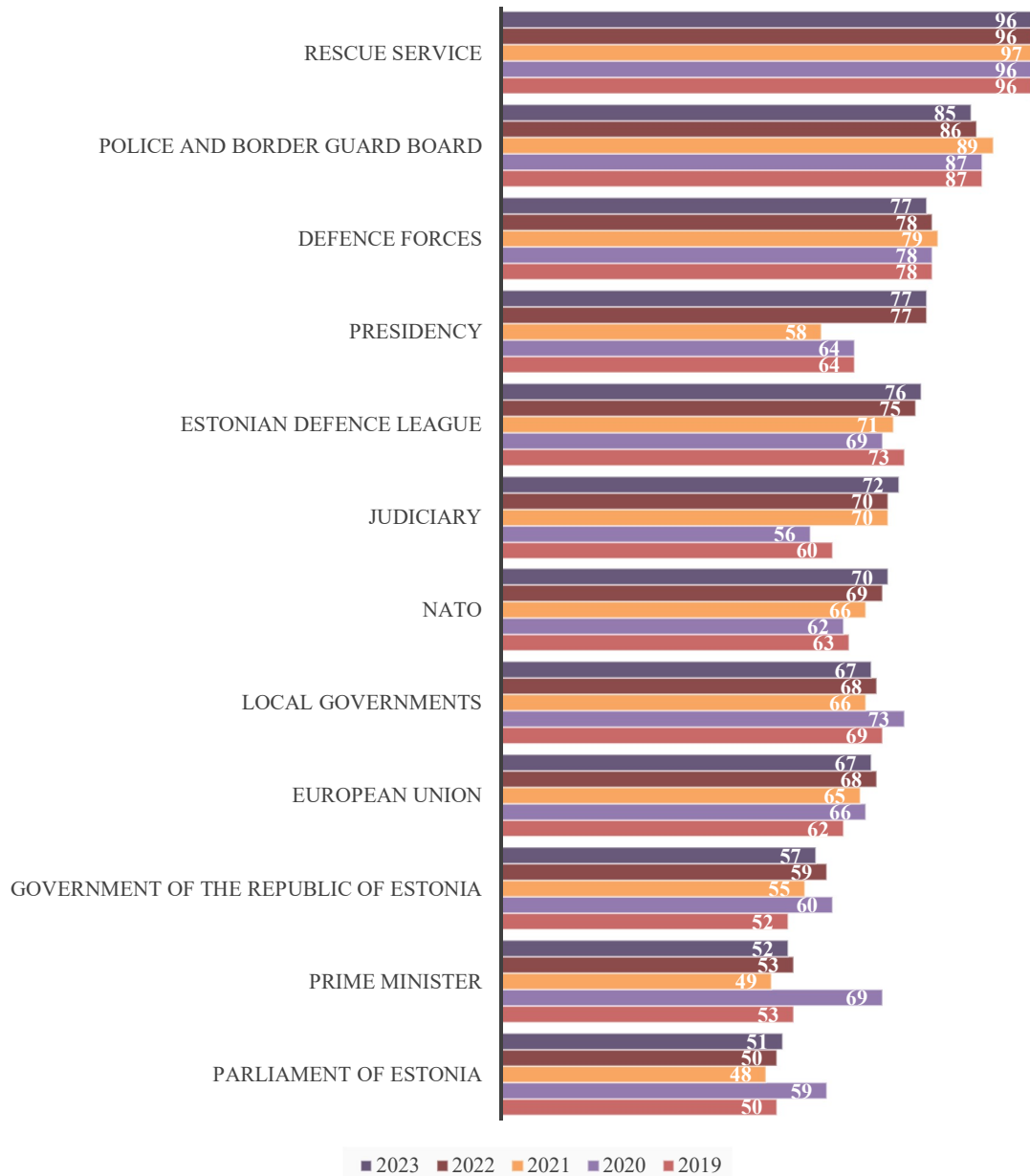


Figure 3. Credibility of institutions from 2019 to 2023 (trust completely/rather trust; %, N = all respondents).

In comparison with 2022, there have been no significant changes in the credibility of institutions in 2023, as all differences remain within a 2% limit.

Estonians have more trust in institutions than other ethnicities (Figure 4). Both Estonians and other ethnicities feel that the rescue service and the Police and Border Guard Board are the

most trustworthy. Estonians feel that the Parliament is the least trustworthy while other ethnicities feel this way about the prime minister and NATO.

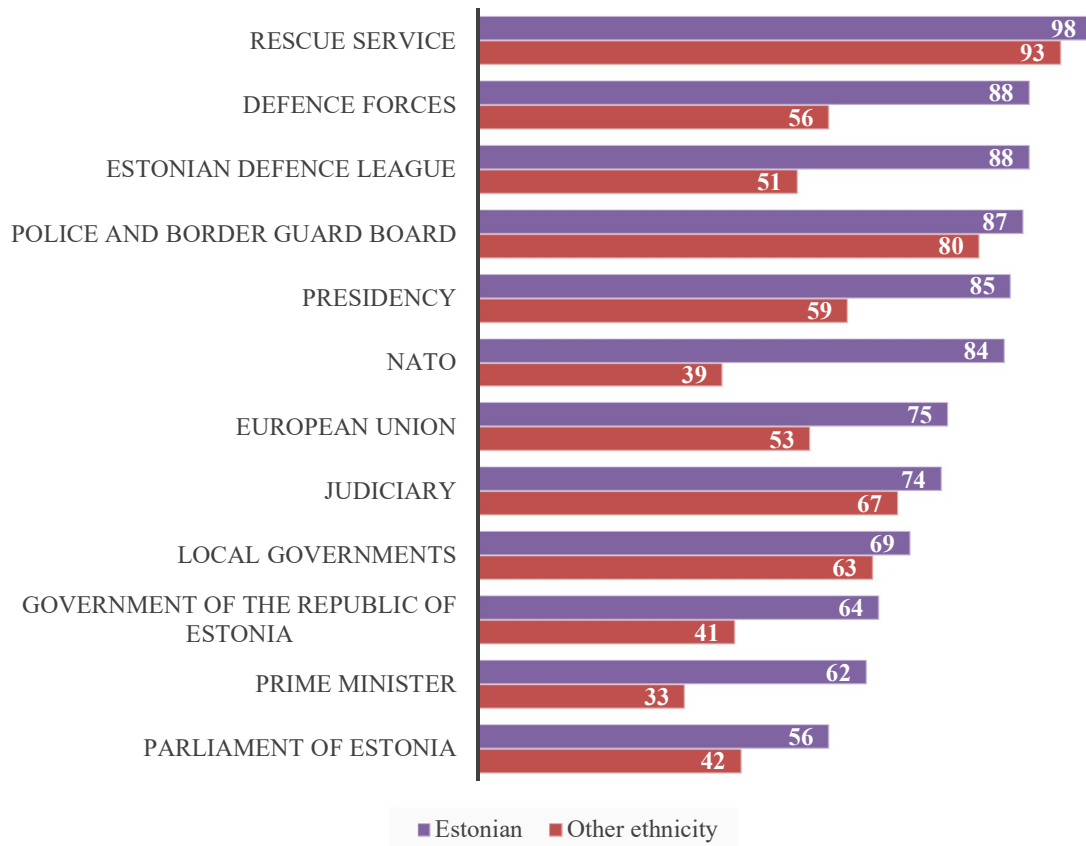


Figure 4. Credibility of institutions by ethnicity in 2023 (trust completely/rather trust; %, N = all respondents).

Similarly to 2022, the opinions of Estonian and other ethnicities differ the most when it comes to attitudes towards organisations that are directly involved with the military defence of Estonia. The largest gap can be seen with NATO, which is trusted by 84% of Estonians and 39% of other ethnicities².

Compared to Estonians, respondents of other ethnicities also have significantly less faith in the Prime Minister (62% vs 33%), the Presidency (85% vs 59%), the Government (64% vs 41%) and the European Union (75% vs 53%).

In comparison with 2022, Estonians have a bit less trust in most institutions in 2023, with the presidency losing the most credibility (–4%). The situation is the reverse when it comes to non-Estonians, as trust in most institutions has improved over the year. The Defence League (+7%), the Presidency (+6%), NATO (+5%) and the European Union (+5%) improved their credibility the most in the eyes of other ethnicities.

²However, membership in NATO is definitely or rather supported by 57% of other ethnicities.

The Defence Forces, which has consistently been among the most trustworthy institutions, is trusted by 77% of Estonian residents in 2023 (Figure 5). 88% of Estonians and 56% of other ethnicities trust the Defence Forces.

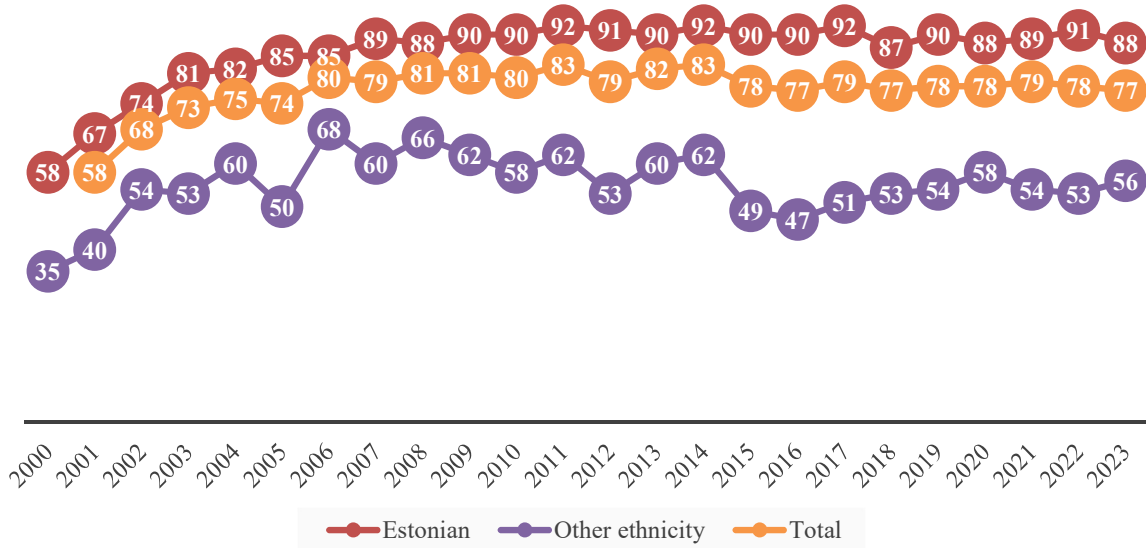


Figure 5. Credibility of the Defence Forces from 2000 to 2023 by ethnicity (trust completely/ rather trust; %, N = all respondents).

The credibility of the Defence League is on a similar level with that of the Defence Forces. 76% of residents trust the Defence League, with 88% of Estonians and 51% of other ethnicities doing so (Figure 6).

The credibility of the Defence League has grown remarkably among other ethnicities over the year (+7%).

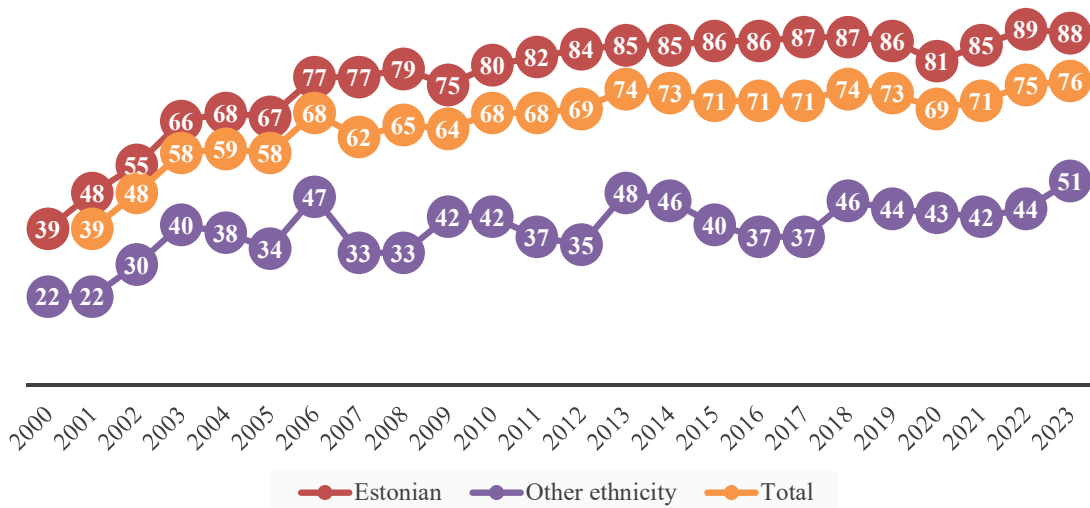


Figure 6. Credibility of the Defence League from 2000 to 2023 by ethnicity (trust completely/ rather trust; %, N = all respondents).

In 2023, the percentage of both those who completely trust and completely distrust the Government, the prime minister, the Defence League, the European Union and the judiciary is higher **among men** than it is among women. Men trust NATO and the judiciary more often than women, but men also have more distrust towards the presidency and the Defence Forces.

Comparisons between age groups brought out that elderly residents have the most trust in various institutions, though in some cases the same applied to the youngest age group. Residents who are 50 years of age and older have the most trust in the Government, Defence Forces and the Police and Border Guard Board. Estonian residents who are 60–74 years of age are most likely to trust the Parliament, the Presidency, the Defence League and local governments. The youngest age group – 15–19 years of age – was noticeable in having the highest rate of trust for the Prime Minister, the European Union and the judiciary. Both those who are 50 years of age and older and 15–19 years of age have similarly high levels of trust in the Parliament and NATO.

Comparison by education brought out that Estonian residents with higher education trust the Parliament, the Government, the Prime Minister and the judiciary the most. Residents with a secondary, secondary vocational or vocational education stood out by having little trust in the European Union, while residents with a primary or basic education had little trust in local governments.

By net monthly income, residents with a monthly income of over 2500 euros remarkably stood out, as they considered the Police and Border Guard Board, the rescue service, the European Union and the judiciary the most trustworthy. Residents earning a monthly income of both 1701–2500 euros and over 2500 euros have more trust in the Defence League and NATO than residents with a lower income. Trust in the Defence Forces is highest among Estonian residents earning a monthly income of 1701–2500 euros and up to 800 euros, with the latter income group also having the highest trust in local governments.

By region, the inhabitants of Ida-Viru County stood out by having the least trust in the Parliament, the Government, the Presidency, the Defence Forces, the Police and Border Guard Board, the Defence League, NATO, the European Union and local governments.

The inhabitants of Northern and Western Estonia stood out by having the highest trust in the Parliament, with Northern Estonian inhabitants also standing out by trusting the Prime Minister. Trust in the Defence League was the highest in Western Estonia (87%).

3. Security and threats

The study also identified residents' assessments of the security situation in Estonia and the world, as well as what they considered potential security threats and guarantees.

3.1 Security in Estonia

Based on the results of the 2023 study, 29% of residents believe that Estonia will become more secure over the next decade. However, 22% of residents believe that the future will be less secure and 34% predict that the situation will remain the same (Figure 7). In 2022, the percentage of residents believing that Estonia's future will be less secure in a decade increased, presumably due to the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine, but in 2023, this percentage has decreased by a little compared to the previous year. The percentage of those predicting that the present situation will continue has increased.

This change presents itself the most among other ethnicities, whereas among Estonians there have been no significant changes in comparison with the previous year.

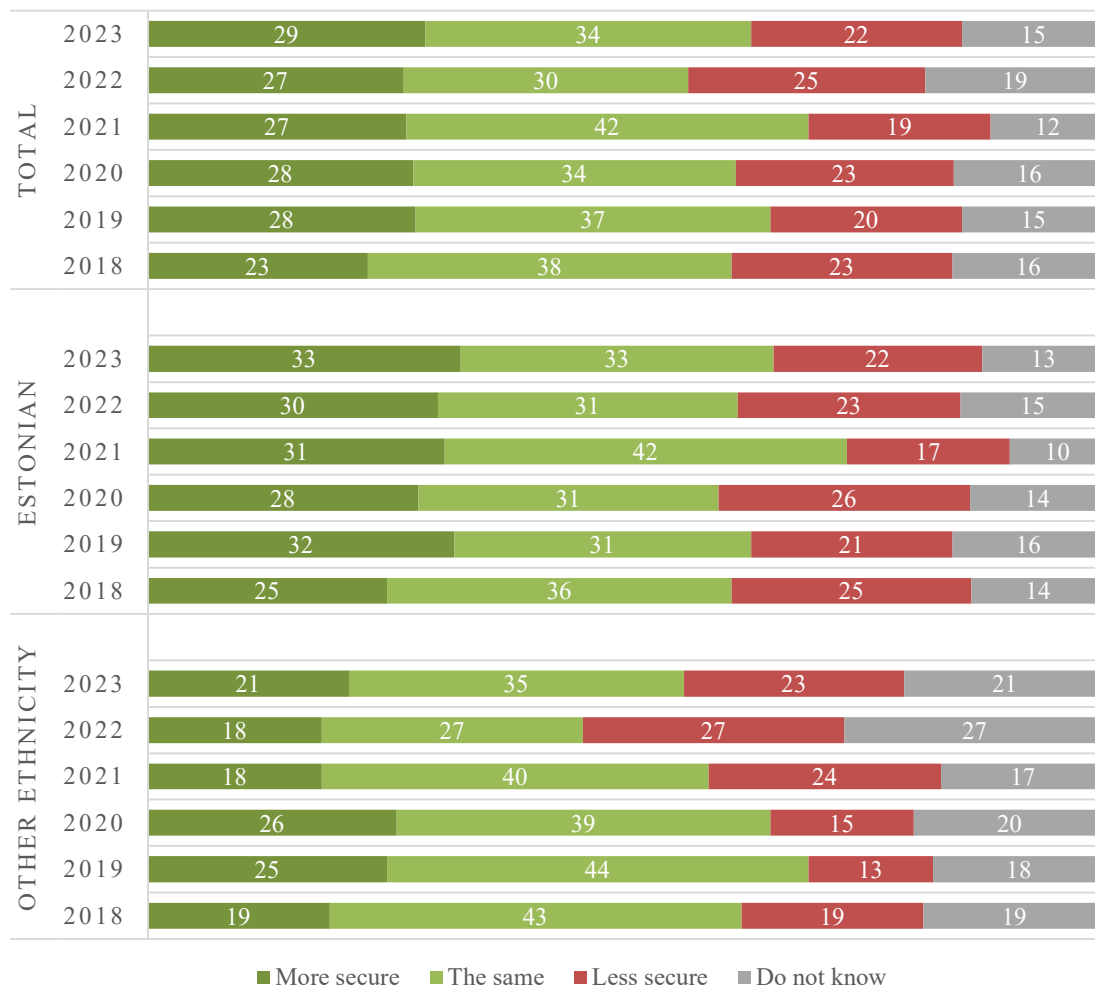


Figure 7. Residents' predictions for the security of the living environment in Estonia for the next decade from 2018 to 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

Men believe more often than women that life will become more secure (32%). Women, however, believe more often than men that it will become less secure (24%) (Figure 8).

Higher-income Estonian residents are more likely to believe that Estonia's living environment will become more secure – residents with a monthly personal net income of over 2500 euros stand out particularly (43%), but the same opinion is also shared more often than on average by residents with a monthly income of 1701–2500 euros (35%).

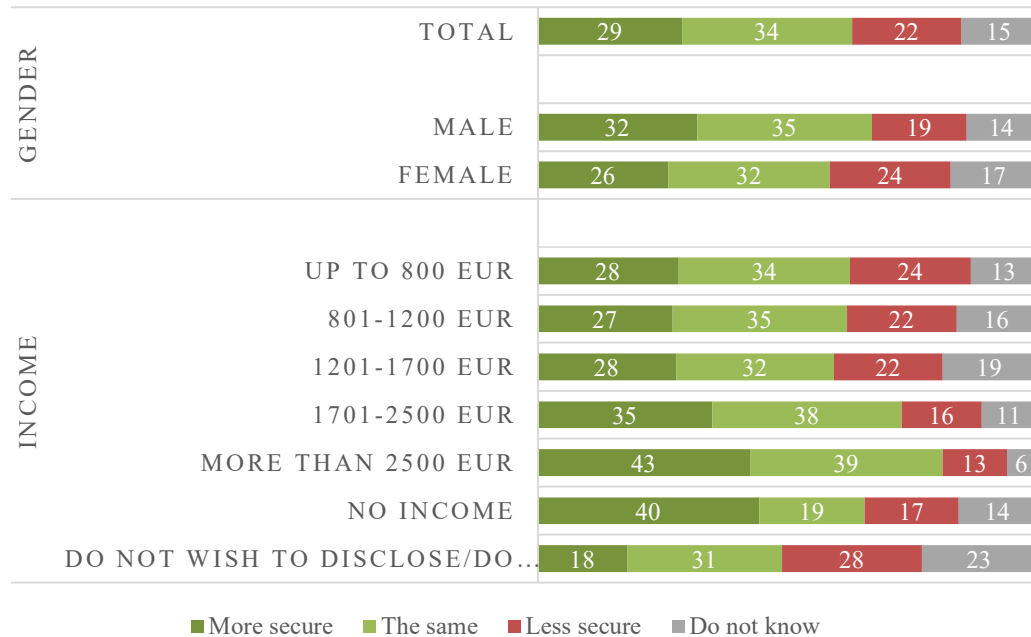


Figure 8. Residents' predictions for the security of the living environment in Estonia for the next decade by gender and income 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

3.2. Threats to Estonia

To determine how threats to Estonia are perceived, respondents were presented with ten potential threats and were asked to assess the probability of their occurrence (Figure 9).

In 2023, the spread of fake news (very or rather likely; 84%) and cyberattacks against national systems, institutions, businesses or residents (83%) are considered the most likely threats to the security of Estonia. With the continuing of Russia's war in Ukraine, about 61% of Estonian residents believe foreign intervention in Estonian politics or economy in order to benefit the intervening country to be likely. Military strikes against a strategic object (36%) and a widescale military attack by a foreign country (29%) are also considered likely threats.

In 2023, the most unlikely sources of threats are considered to be the economic collapse of the Estonian state (definitely or rather improbable; 62%), a massive industrial accident or nuclear disaster near Estonia (63%) and widespread marine or nature pollution (53%).

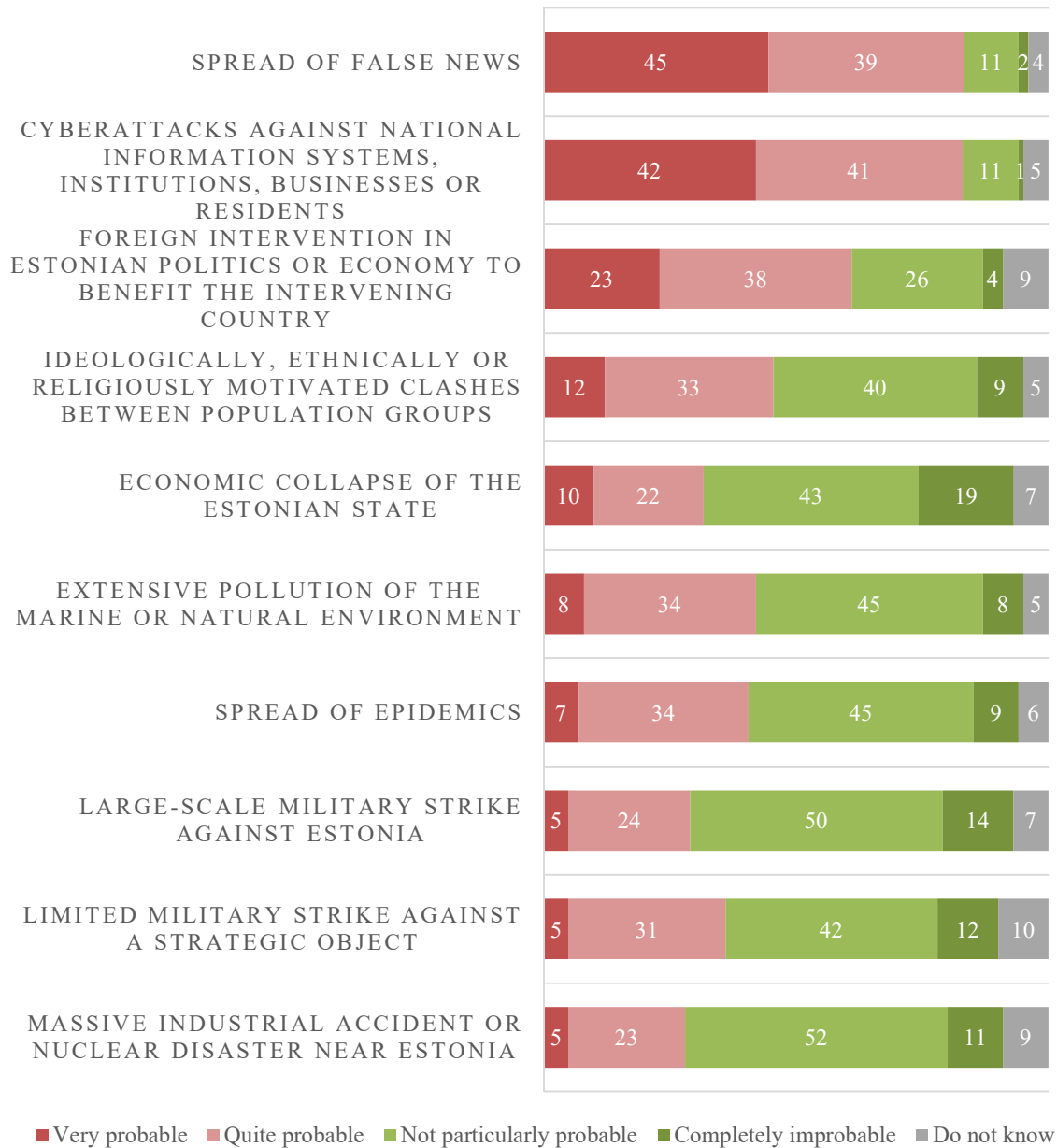


Figure 9. Assessments of the probability of threats to Estonia in the coming years in 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

In 2023, with the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of epidemics was considered a threat significantly less often than in 2022 (definitely or rather improbable –24%, Figure 10). With more than a year after the escalation of Russia’s war in Ukraine, a large-scale military attack against Estonia (–10%) and clashes due to ideological, national or religious conflicts (–4%) are also considered less likely.

In comparison with the previous year, cyberattacks against national information systems, institutions, businesses or residents (+8%) are considered more likely in 2023.

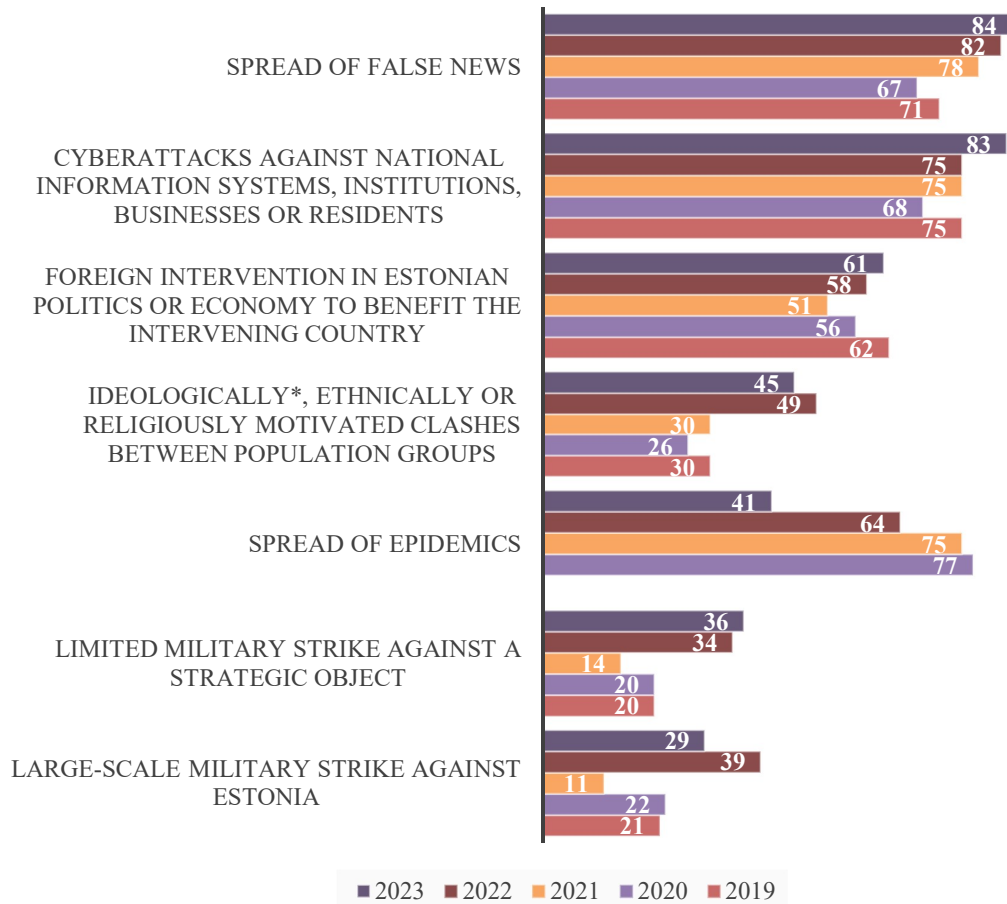


Figure 10. Assessments of the probability of threats to Estonia in the coming years from 2019 to 2023 (%), N = all respondents, “ideological” added in 2023).

In 2023, both Estonians and other ethnicities consider the most likely security threats in the coming years to be the spread of false news and cyberattacks against national information systems, institutions, businesses or residents (Figure 11).

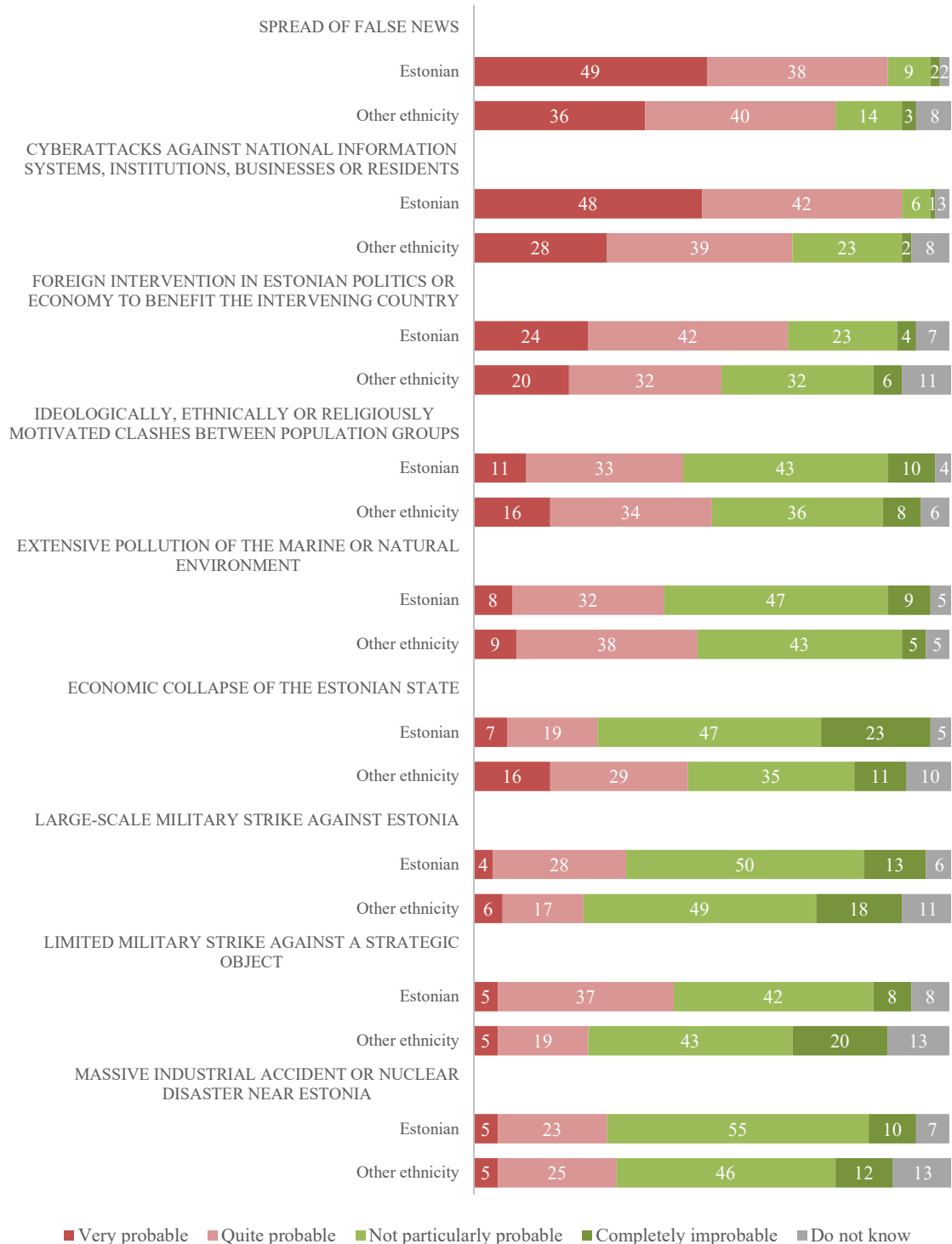


Figure 11. Assessments of the probability of threats to Estonia in the coming years in 2023 by ethnicity (% , N = all respondents).

Estonians are more likely than other ethnicities to consider cyberattacks (+23%), limited military strikes against strategic objects (+18%), political or economic intervention in Estonia by a foreign country in order to further the intervening country's interests (+14%), the spread of false news (+12%) and a large-scale military attack against Estonia (+9%) to be probable threats.

Respondents of other ethnicities are more often concerned about the economic collapse of the Estonians state (+19%), large-scale marine or nature pollution (+7%) and possible internecine conflicts due to ideological, national or religious motives (+6%).

3.3 Threats to global security

When Estonian residents were asked to assess which threats they think are definitely endangering global peace and security, the most frequently named risks in 2023 were the use of nuclear weapons (76%), Russia's war in Ukraine (72%) and Russia's attempts to restore its influence in neighbouring states (68%) (Figure 12).

More than half of Estonian residents also saw definite threats in the extensive spread of false news (63%) and cyberattacks (56%). Global climate change, the spread of epidemics, the rise of China's economic and military might and the immigration of war refugees and other refugees into Europe were more often considered rather threatening to global security rather than definitely threatening.

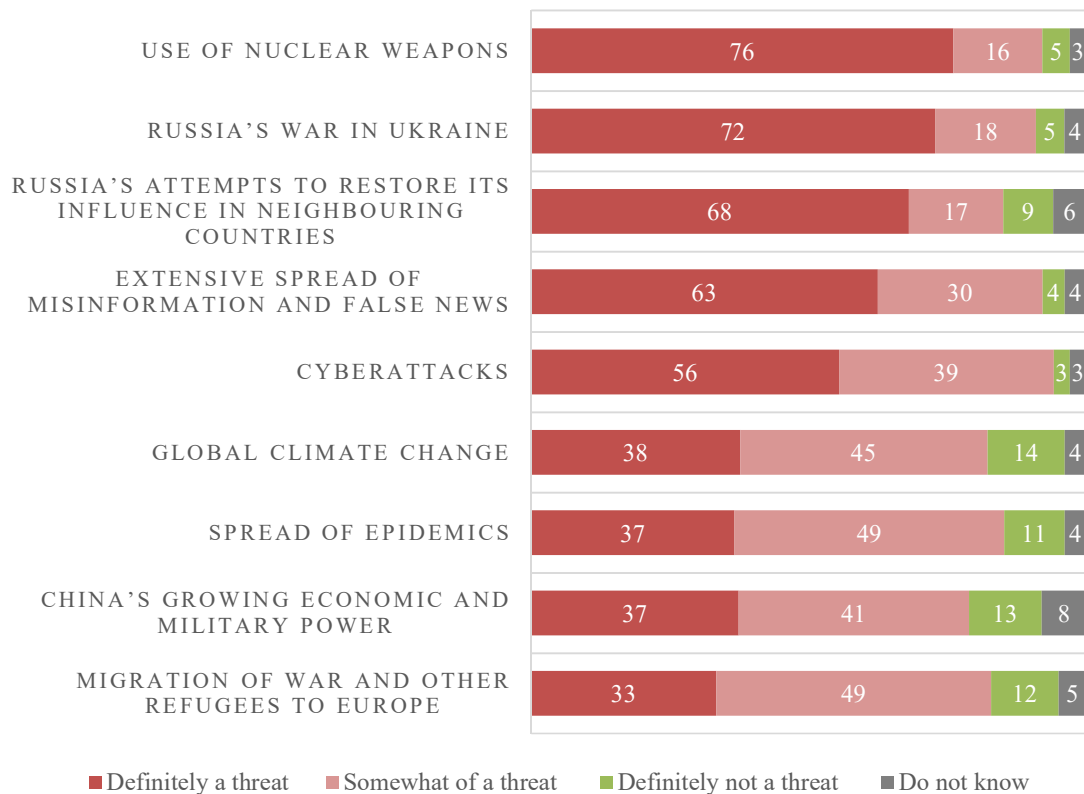


Figure 12. Threats to global peace and security in 2023 (%), N = all respondents).

In comparison with the previous year, global climate change is more often considered a threatening factor to global peace and security in 2023 (+5%) (Figure 13). The immigration of

war refugees and other refugees into Europe is considered a less important (–4%) source of threat than earlier.

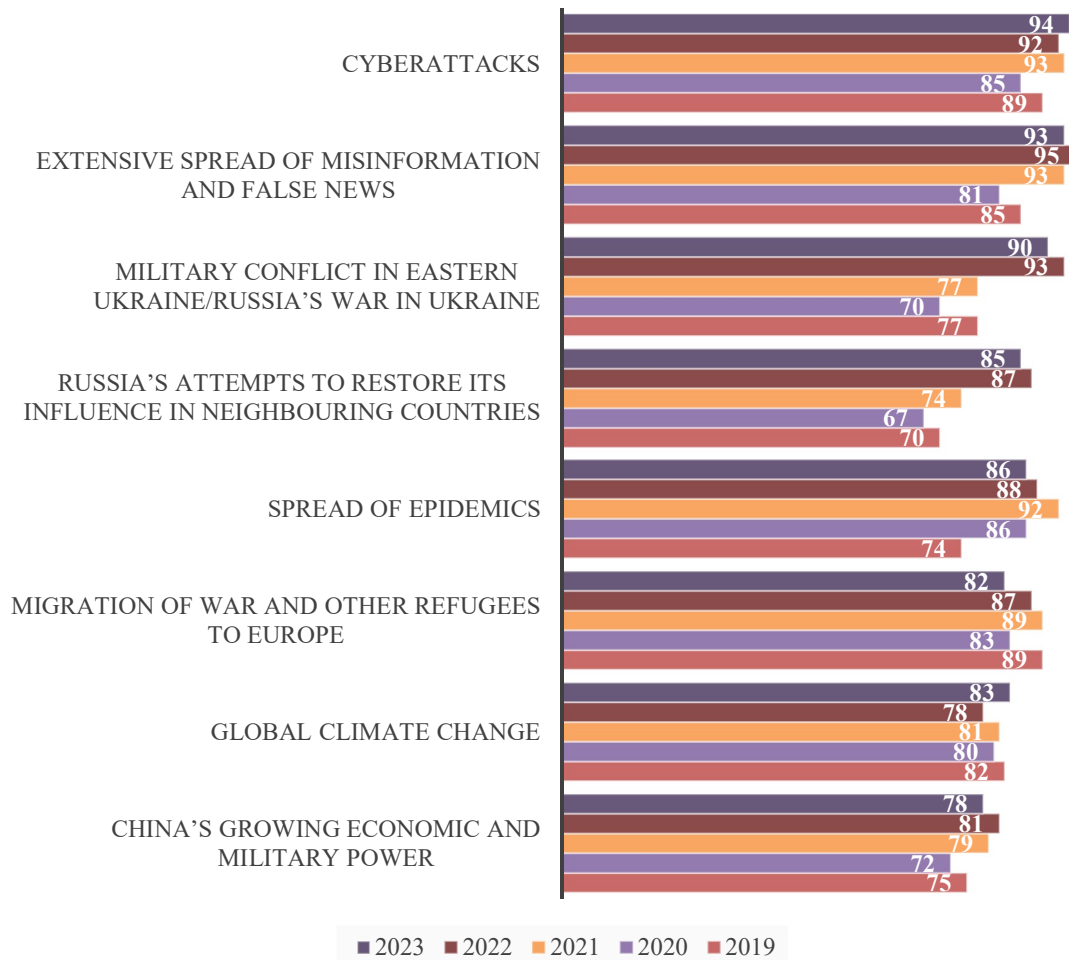


Figure 13. Threats to global peace and security from 2019 to 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

In 2023, Estonians continue to see Russia’s war in Ukraine and Russia’s attempts to restore its influence in neighbouring states, followed by the use of nuclear weapons, as the most likely security threats (Figure 14). Other ethnicities are most worried about the use of nuclear weapons, followed by the wide spread of disinformation and false news.

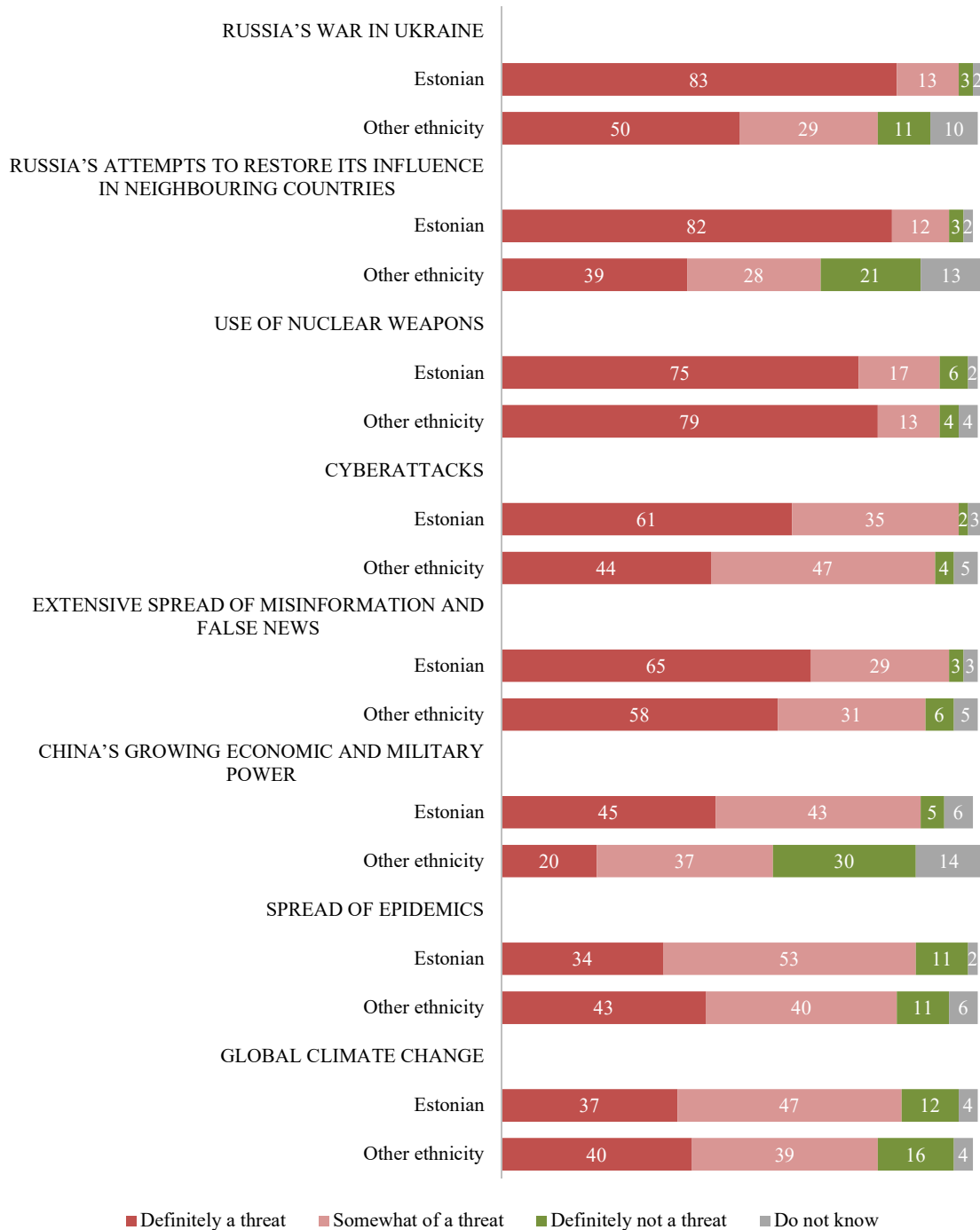


Figure 14. Threats to global peace and security in 2023 by ethnicity (%). N = all respondents.

3.4 Media coverage of security threats

In 2023, 57% of Estonian residents believe that media coverage of military threats is sufficient and slightly under 10% believe it is insufficient. Over a fourth of residents believe that media coverage of military threats is excessive (Figure 15).

In comparison with the previous year, there have been no significant changes in Estonian residents' overall assessments of the coverage of security threats in 2023.

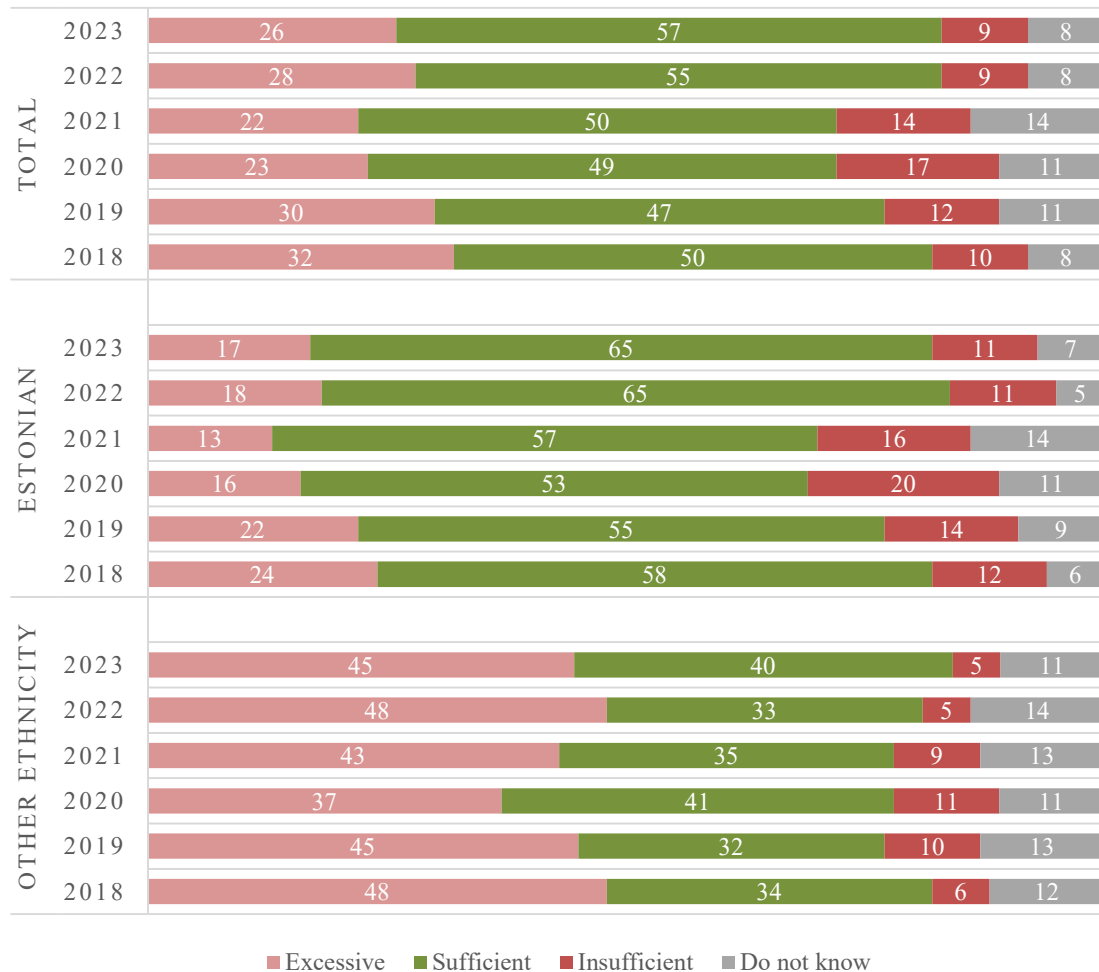


Figure 15. Assessments of the coverage of security threats in Estonian media from 2018 to 2023 (%). (N = all respondents).

In 2023, 65% of Estonians and 40% of other ethnicities consider the coverage of military threats by Estonian media sufficient.

In the period from 2018 to 2023, respondents of other ethnicities are significantly more likely than Estonians to believe that media coverage of military threats is excessive.

There has been no significant change in Estonians' opinions of security threats coverage in Estonian media in comparison with 2022, but other ethnicities believe that coverage of security threats is sufficient more often compared to the previous year.

3.5 Security guarantees

In 2023, one of the primary security guarantees of the Estonian state according to Estonians residents continues to be NATO membership (69% believe it to be among the three most important guarantees) (Figure 16).

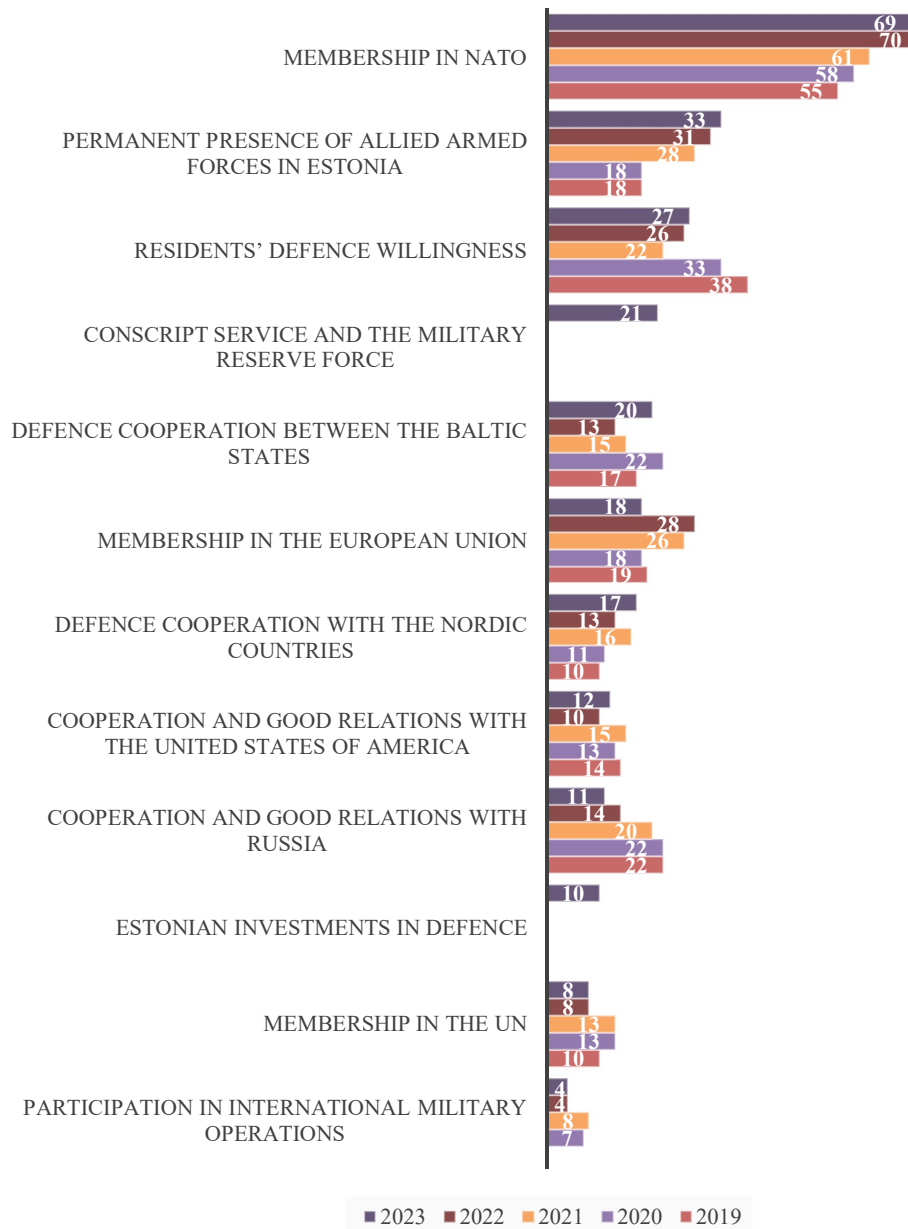


Figure 16. Estonia's security guarantees from 2019 to 2023 (up to three most important; %, N = all respondents).

NATO membership was considered the most important security guarantee from 2019 to 2021 as well, but this opinion has been even more popular during the last two years due to the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine.

The permanent presence of allied armed forces in Estonia is considered the second most important security guarantee (33%). The defence willingness of Estonian residents is considered the third most important security guarantee (27%). Around a fifth of Estonian residents also consider conscript service and reserve forces, defence cooperation between Baltic states, membership in the European Union and defence cooperation with Nordic countries to be important security guarantees.

In comparison with 2022, defence cooperation with Baltic states (+7%) and Nordic countries (+4%) were more often seen as primary security guarantees in 2023, while the same opinion about membership in the European Union was significantly rarer (−10%). Assessments of cooperation and good relations with Russia also continued its downward trend (−3%).

The perception of the most important security guarantees to Estonia has been quite different among Estonians and other ethnicities throughout the years. Estonians continue to see NATO membership as the most important security guarantee (79%). This percentage has decreased a little over the year (−4%) (Figure 17).

In 2021, other ethnicities considered good cooperation and relations with Russia as the primary security guarantee, but since 2022, when Russia’s war in Ukraine escalated, this percentage has decreased from 40% to 27%. Other ethnicities also see NATO membership as Estonia’s primary security guarantee, its percentage increasing from 34% to 48% in two years.

Estonians also considered the permanent presence of allied forces in Estonia (38%) and the defence willingness of Estonian residents (30%) to be the most important security guarantees.

Relations with Russia represent a significant difference in opinion on security guarantees by ethnicity. In 2023, there are almost seven times fewer Estonians than other ethnicities who consider good relations and cooperation with Russia important on this matter (4% vs 27%).



Figure 17. Estonia’s security guarantees in 2023 by ethnicity (up to three most important; %, N = all respondents).

4. Defence willingness of Estonian people

4.1 Attitude towards the necessity to provide armed resistance

In 2023, 83% of Estonian residents consider armed resistance definitely or rather necessary in the event of an attack by a foreign state (Figure 18).

From 2018 to 2021 the percentage of residents who considered armed resistance to be necessary steadily decreased, but in 2022 the percentage of residents who believed it to be definitely necessary increased significantly following the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine.

In 2023, there have been no significant changes both among the general population and Estonians in the assessments of the need for armed resistance. However, the percentage of other ethnicities who consider armed resistance definitely necessary has increased.

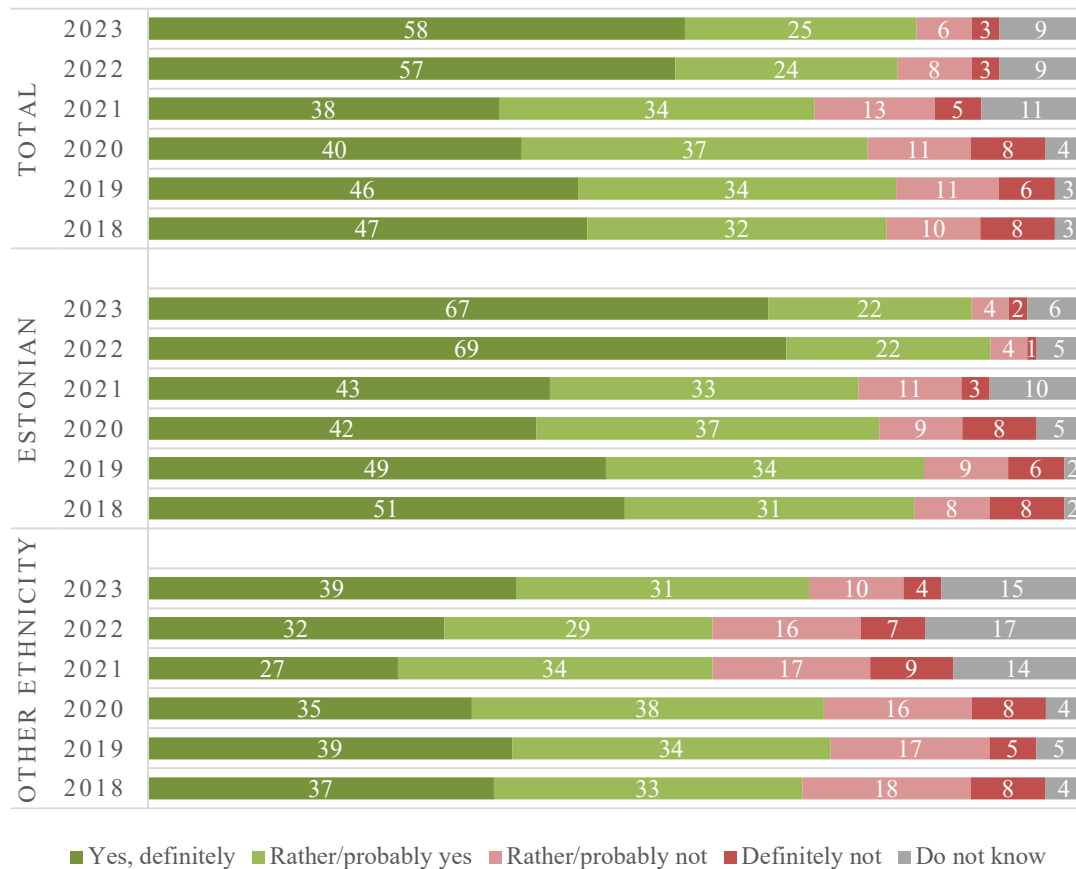


Figure 18. Assessments of the need to provide armed resistance in a situation where Estonia is attacked by another state from 2018 to 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

The period from 2019 to 2021 showed a trend of continuous decrease in support for armed resistance in the event of an armed attack by a foreign country and an increase in opposition, but in 2022, after the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine, a significant change in opinion towards supporting armed resistance took place (Figure 19). Support for the necessity of armed resistance is continuing its upward trend in 2023.

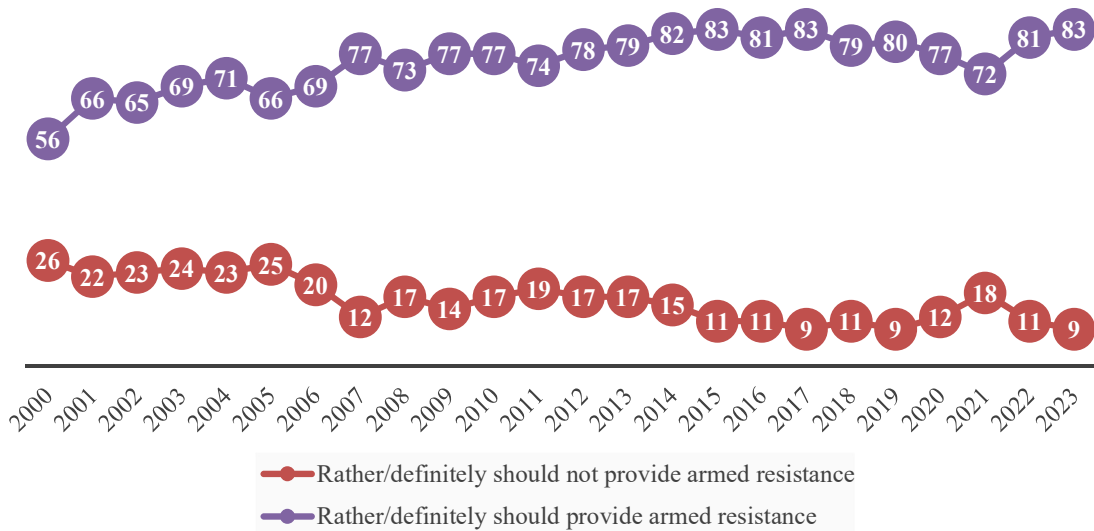


Figure 19. Assessments of the need to provide armed resistance by year (%). N = all respondents).

Estonian and other ethnicities support for armed resistance was almost equal in 2013 and 2014, but then a gap in assessments emerged after the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s full-scale military invasion of Eastern Ukraine, with Estonian support for armed resistance increasing and other ethnicities support decreasing (Figure 20).

In 2022, when Russia’s war in Ukraine escalated, support for armed resistance in the event of an attack by a foreign country increased significantly among Estonians (+14%), while among respondents of other ethnicities no changes in assessments occurred. In 2023, however, Estonian support for armed resistance has remained broadly unchanged³, while there has been a significant increase in support among other ethnicities (+10%).

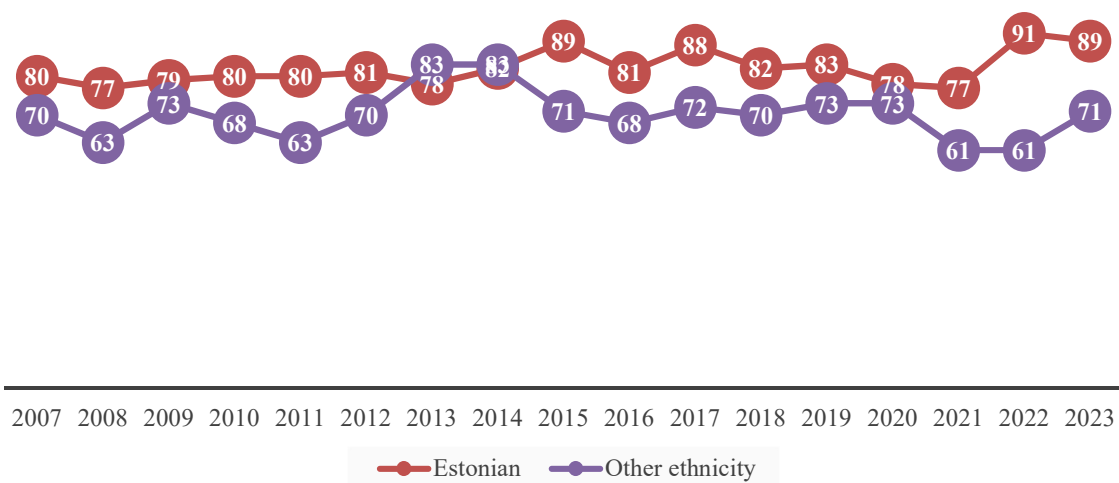


Figure 20. The percentage of supporters of armed resistance by ethnicity (%). N = all respondents).

³ The difference is within the margin of error (+/- 2.83).

4.2 Willingness to participate in defence activities

Around two-thirds of residents would be willing to participate in defence activities according to their skills and abilities (Figure 21). 34% of Estonian residents would be definitely willing to participate and 30% would be rather willing, whereas 14% are rather not willing and 13% of residents definitely not willing.

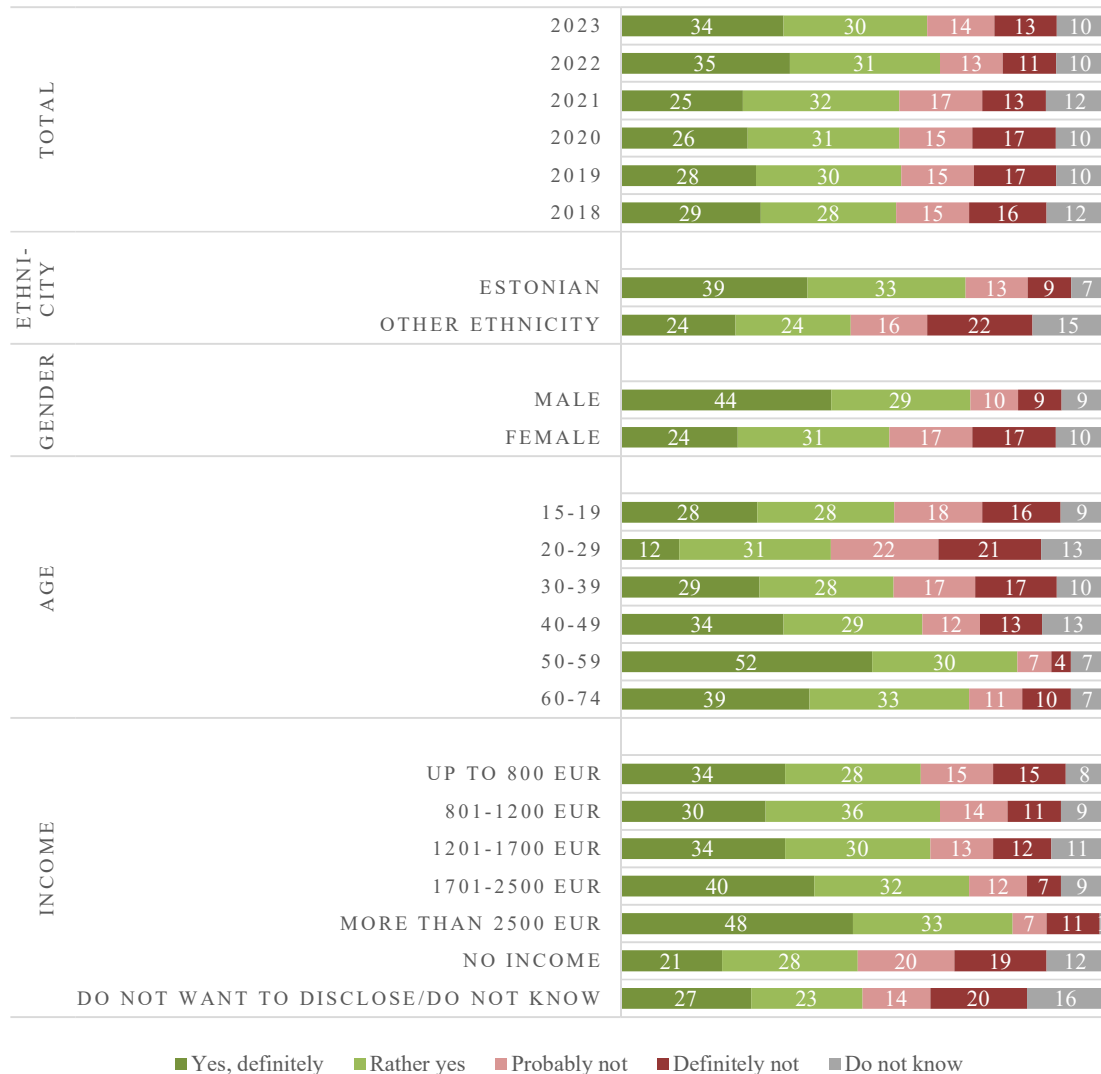


Figure 21. Willingness to participate in defence activities if Estonia was attacked (%). N = all respondents).

Overall, willingness to participate in defence activities did not change significantly from 2018 to 2021, but it was noticeable that the percentage of those who were rather willing was increasing at the expense of those who were definitely willing to participate. After the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine in February 2022, the percentage of residents willing to definitely participate in defence activities in the event of an attack against Estonia increased. In comparison with the previous year, there have been no significant changes in the willingness to participate in defence activities in 2023.

Three-fourths of Estonians and a little less than half of other ethnicities would be definitely or rather willing to participate in defence activities in 2023.

Since participating in national defence is primarily associated with armed resistance, training for which has mostly been received by men, the willingness to participate is lower among women. The gap between men and women appeared primarily in definite willingness, which was expressed by 24% of women and 44% of men.

Definite willingness to participate in defending Estonia in the event of a military attack is greatest among residents who are 50–59 years of age (52%) and lowest among those who are 20–29 years of age (12%). Defence willingness among the youngest age group has significantly decreased in comparison with 2022, when 22% of them were definitely willing to participate in defence activities. Now it is down to 12%.

Comparisons by income show that willingness to participate in national defence is highest among Estonian residents who earn a monthly income of over 2500 euros (48%).

There were no (statistically) significant differences by region or education level in the willingness to defend Estonia in the event of a military attack.

Active defence willingness of male citizens is above the population's average: 74% are definitely or rather willing to participate in defence activities in 2023, with 80% of male citizens of Estonian ethnicity and 53% of male citizens of other ethnicities being willing (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of male Estonian citizens willing to participate in defence activities in the event of an attack by age and ethnicity (% , definitely/rather willing; N = 524).

	TOTAL	15-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Estonian men with Estonian citizenship	80	64	83	92	87
Men of other ethnicities with Estonian citizenship ⁴	53	32	55	63	86
All men with Estonian citizenship	74	57	72	87	87

In 2023, the willingness of male citizens of Estonian ethnicity to participate in defence activities decreased by 6% in comparison with the previous year, while the willingness of male citizens of other ethnicities remained stable.

By age, the defence willingness of male Estonian citizens of Estonian ethnicity is highest among those who are 50–64 years of age (92%). Too few citizens of other ethnicities participated in the study to make conclusions about them by age.

Looking at the change in defence willingness over time by ethnicity and citizenship, it appears that while the gap in the defence willingness of Estonians and citizens of other ethnicities was extensive in 2000, the differences were significantly smaller between 2001 and 2007 (Figure 22). Since 2008, however, there have yet again been significant differences by ethnicity in willingness to participate in national defence. These changes in assessments may have been influenced by the events of the Bronze Night, the Russo-Georgian War and economic recession.

⁴ The sample size of men of other ethnicities with Estonian citizenship was 123 people and samples within age groups were too small (15–34 years of age n = 28; 50–64 n = 19; 65+ n = 7) to draw reliable conclusions about the defence willingness of men of other ethnicities with Estonian citizenship by age.

The defence willingness of citizens of other ethnicities started to increase in 2013 and 2014 but decreased again to below 50% in 2015 and 2016, the years after the annexation of Crimea. Between 2017 and 2020, at least half of citizens of other ethnicities demonstrated willingness to participate in national defence, but their willingness decreased in 2021 to the same level as that of non-citizens of other ethnicities (around 40%).

From 2016 to 2021, the active defence willingness of Estonians remained at 63–65% and increased to 76% after the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. The willingness of citizens of other ethnicities to participate in defence activities in the event of an attack increased by 5%. However, the willingness of non-citizens of other ethnicities did not change significantly.

In 2023, the willingness of Estonians to participate in defence activities in the event of an attack has somewhat decreased (–4%). The willingness of Estonian citizens of another ethnicity has remained stable, while the defence willingness of other ethnicities without Estonian citizenship has grown rapidly (+14%). Here it is important to note that of these other ethnicities without Estonian citizenship, 39% had Russian, 15% Ukrainian and 13% third country citizenship. 33% had undefined citizenship.

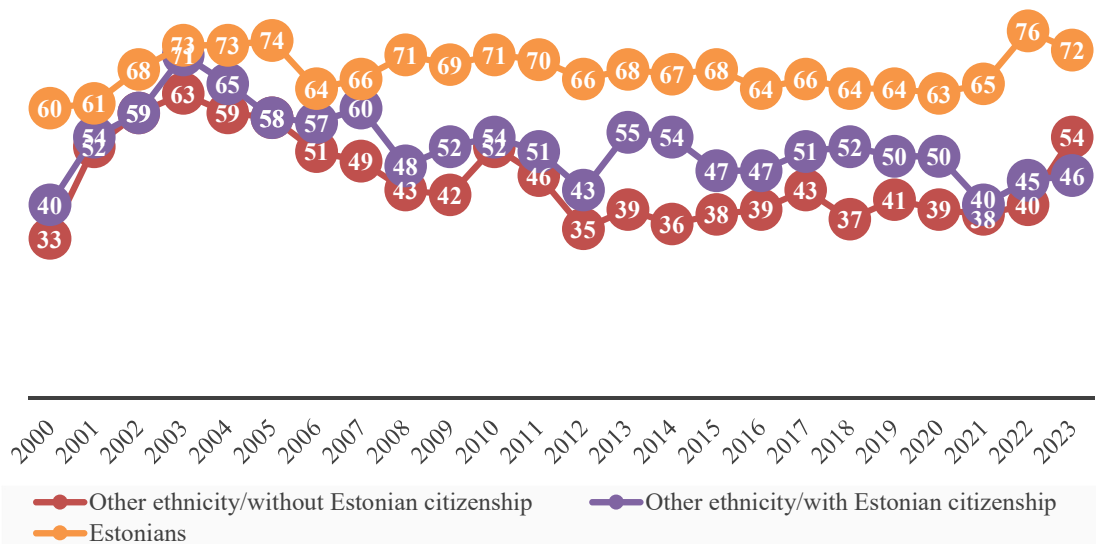


Figure 22. Percentage of residents willing to participate in defence activities in the event of an attack; comparison of Estonian and Russian speaking residents from 2000 to 2023 (% definitely/rather willing; N = all respondents).

4.3 Course of action if Estonia was under military attack

If Estonia was attacked, 11% of residents would most likely participate in military defence activities, 24% would participate in military defence in an auxiliary capacity, 30% would participate in non-military defence activities, 9% would not participate in defence activities, but would remain in Estonia, and 17% would try to leave Estonia (Figure 23). A tenth of Estonian residents were not able to predict their behaviour in this situation.

Men are primarily the ones willing to participate in military defence activities in the event of an attack, with Estonians, residents who are 50–59 years of age, inhabitants of Western and Northern Estonia and Estonian residents with a net income of over 2500 euros also being more

willing than the average resident. Men, Estonians and residents who are 50–59 years of age are also overwhelmingly willing to participate in military defence activities in an auxiliary role (e.g. rear support, logistics, etc.). Inhabitants of Western and Central Estonia and Estonian residents with a monthly income of over 2500 or 1701–2500 euros are also more willing than the average resident.

Women, residents who are 15–19 and 50–59 years of age, inhabitants of Central, North-Eastern and Southern Estonia and Estonian residents with lower income (up to 1200 euros) are most willing to participate in non-military defence activities, such as in the medical field or in the organisation of evacuation. Estonians are also somewhat more willing to participate in non-military defence activities than respondents of other ethnicities.

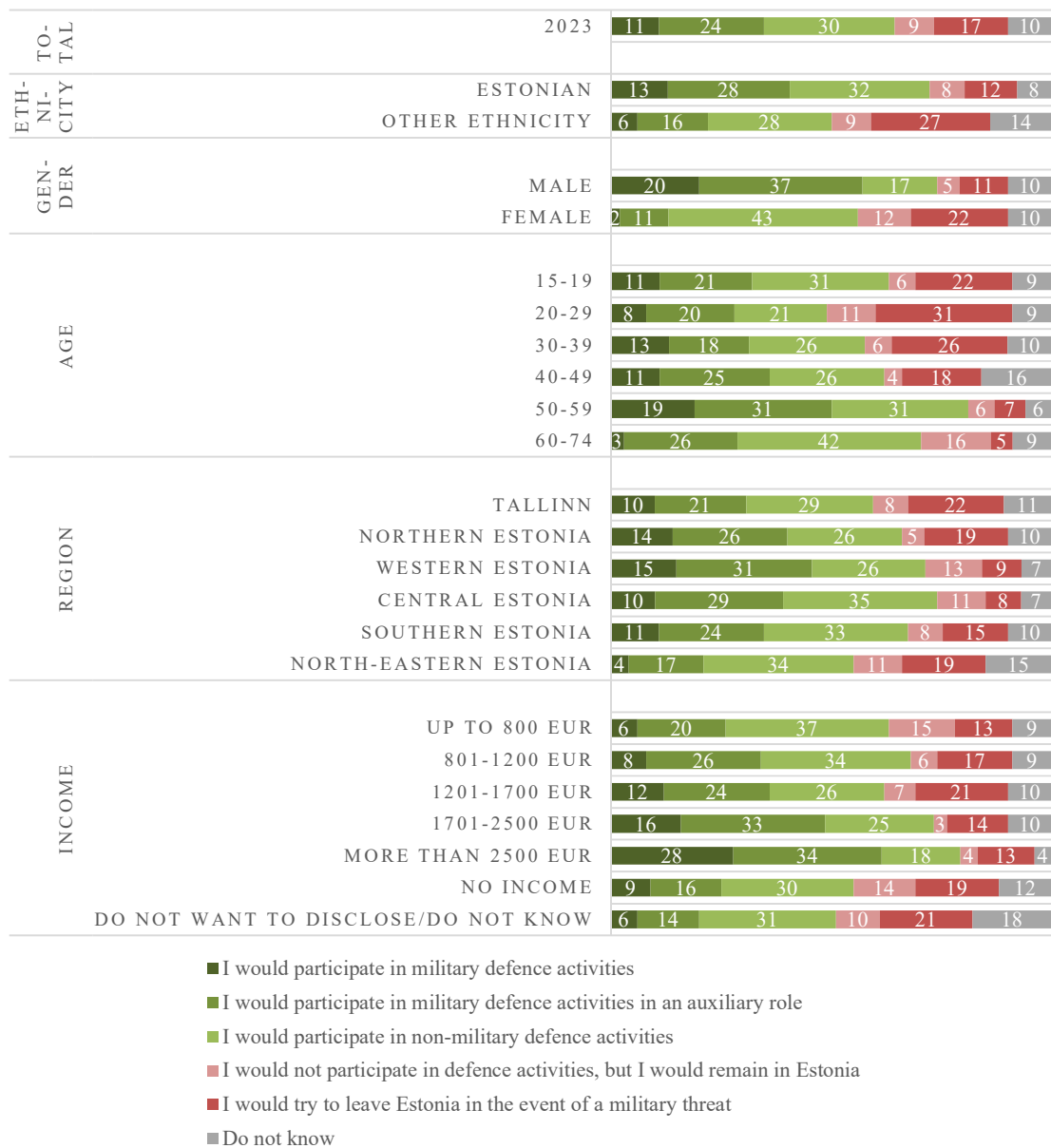


Figure 23. The most probable course of action if Estonia was attacked 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

Women, residents who are 60–74 years of age, inhabitants of Western Estonia and Estonian residents with a net income of up to 800 euros or no income are more likely than the average citizen to not participate in defence activities, but to still remain in Estonia in the event of an attack. Respondents of other ethnicities, women, residents who are 20–29 years of age, inhabitants of Tallinn, Northern and North-Eastern Estonia and Estonian residents with a monthly income of 1201–1700 euros are most likely to try to leave Estonia in the event of a war.

If Estonia was attacked, 61% of Estonian residents would be definitely or rather willing to hand over a personal or company car, other technical equipment, buildings, farmlands and other property to the Defence Forces for use (Figure 24). There have been no significant changes in this area during the previous year.

Men, Estonians, young people (15–19 years of age), those aged 50 and older and high-income (over 1701 euros) Estonian residents are most willing to hand over personal or company property to the Defence Forces for use. By region, the inhabitants of Tallinn and North-Eastern Estonia were the least likely to hand over property.

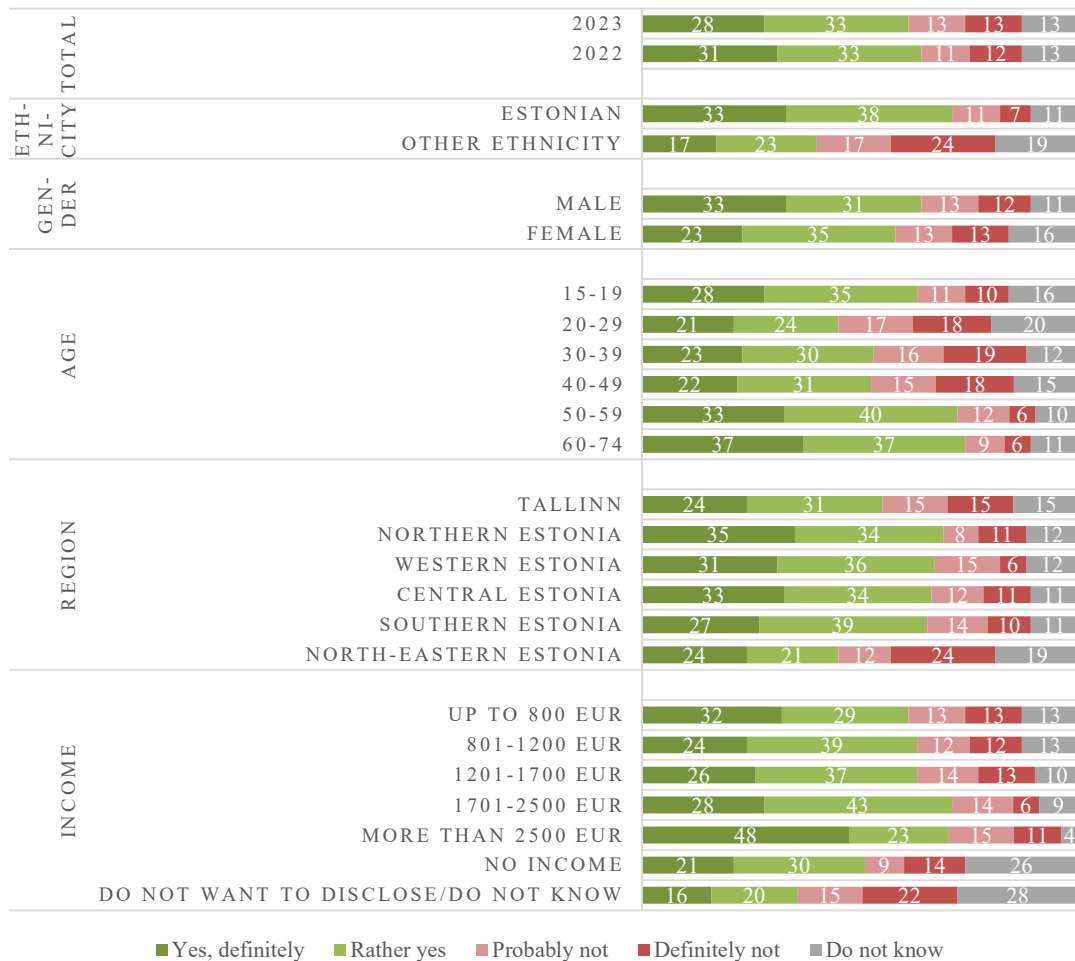


Figure 24. Willingness to hand over a personal or company car, other technical materials, buildings, farmlands, etc. to the Defence Forces for use if Estonian was attacked, 2023 (% , N = all respondents)

4.4 Ability to act in event of a potential attack

Estonian residents continue to rate their awareness of how to act in the event of a potential attack by a foreign state as fairly low in 2023. Only around a third believe they are rather or completely informed on what they could do in this situation to defend the state (Figure 25). 58% of Estonian residents estimate that they have insufficient knowledge on the necessary way to act in the event of an attack by a foreign country.

In 2022, the percentage of Estonians who know nothing about how to act in the event of an attack from a foreign country decreased significantly. There were no significant changes in Estonian residents' awareness of how to defend the state in the event of an attack in 2023 when compared to the previous year. However, the percentage of Estonian residents who consider themselves completely or rather sufficiently informed about how to act in the event of an attack by a foreign state has slightly increased every year since 2019 (from 24% to 34%).

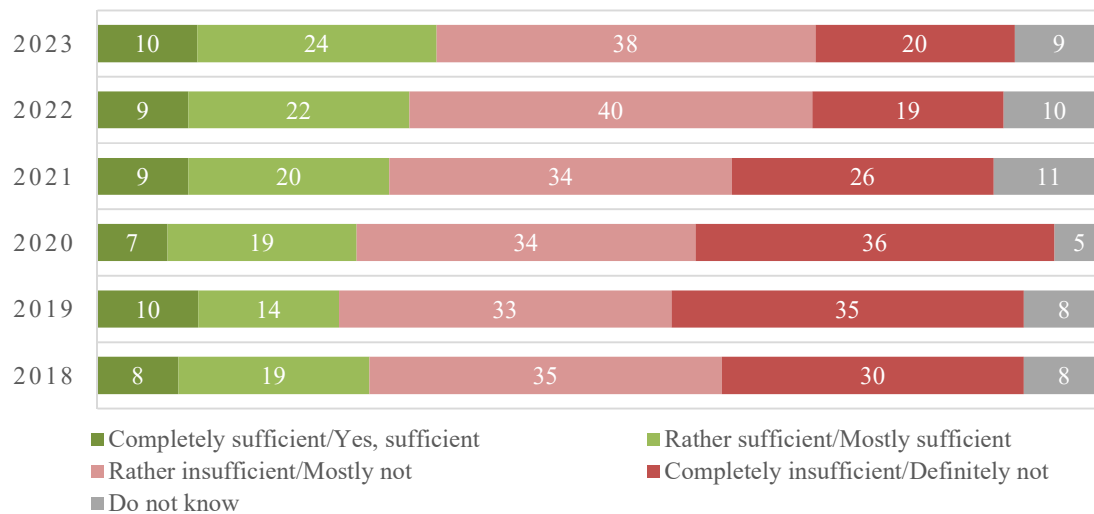


Figure 25. Awareness of what could be done to defend Estonia if Estonia was threatened by an attack from a foreign enemy (by year; %, N = all respondents).

Estonians (36%), men (42%), residents who are 50–74 years of age (39–41%), residents with a net monthly income of over 1701–2500 euros (39%) and inhabitants of Central Estonia (43%) are most likely to rate their awareness of what to do in the event of an attack by a foreign state completely or rather sufficient in 2023 (Figure 26).

Other ethnicities (25%), inhabitants of North-Eastern Estonia (23%) and residents with no income (30%) stood out the most for having completely insufficient knowledge on the necessary behaviour in the event of an attack by a foreign enemy.

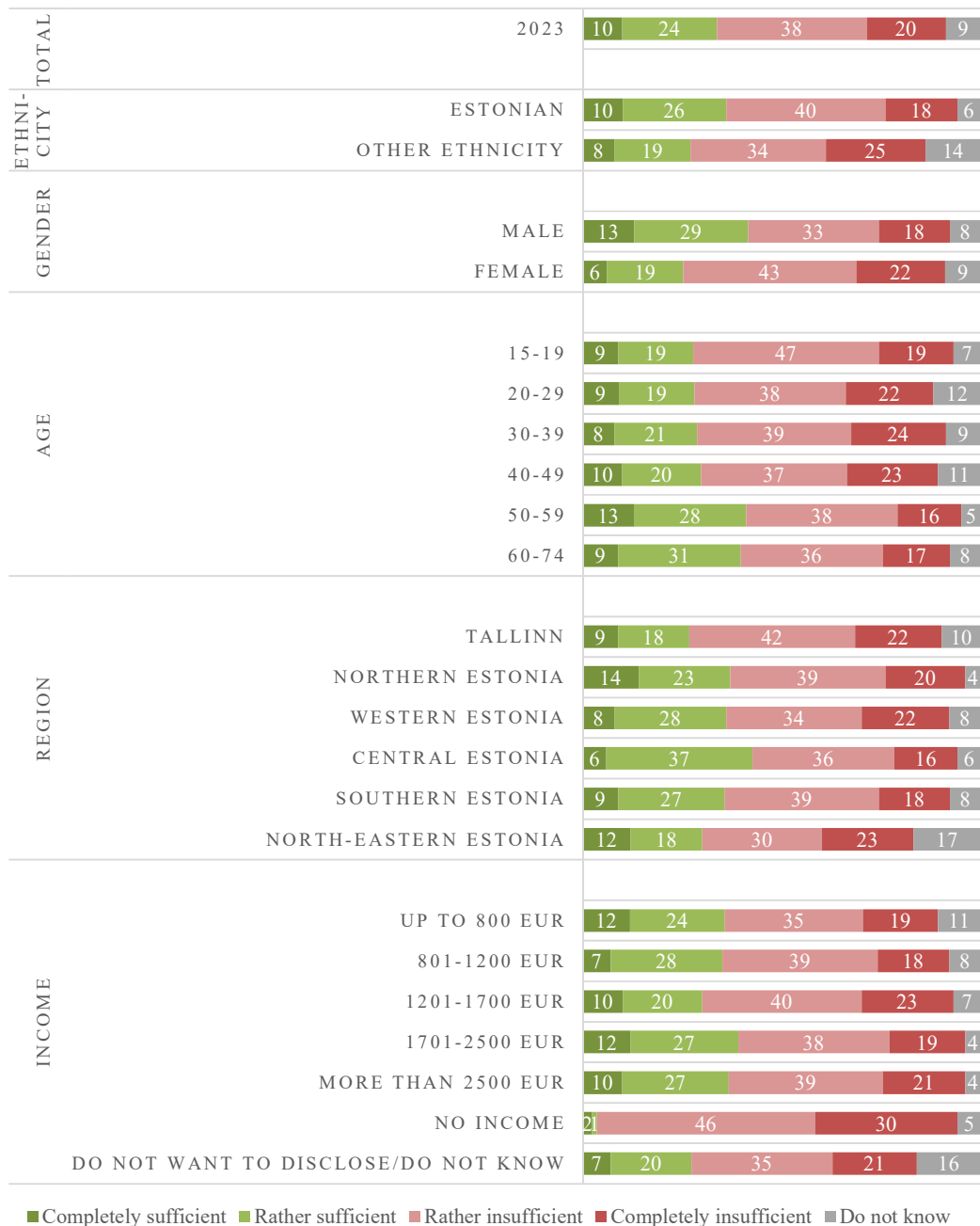


Figure 26. Awareness of what could be done to defend Estonia if Estonia was threatened by an attack from a foreign enemy in 2023 (by socio-demographic characteristics; %, N = all respondents).

4.5 Information needs

To find out which topics people need the most information on to be able to act in the event of an attack by a foreign enemy, the respondents were asked to choose what were for them the three most important topics out of the ten provided. Respondents could also add to the list they were provided.

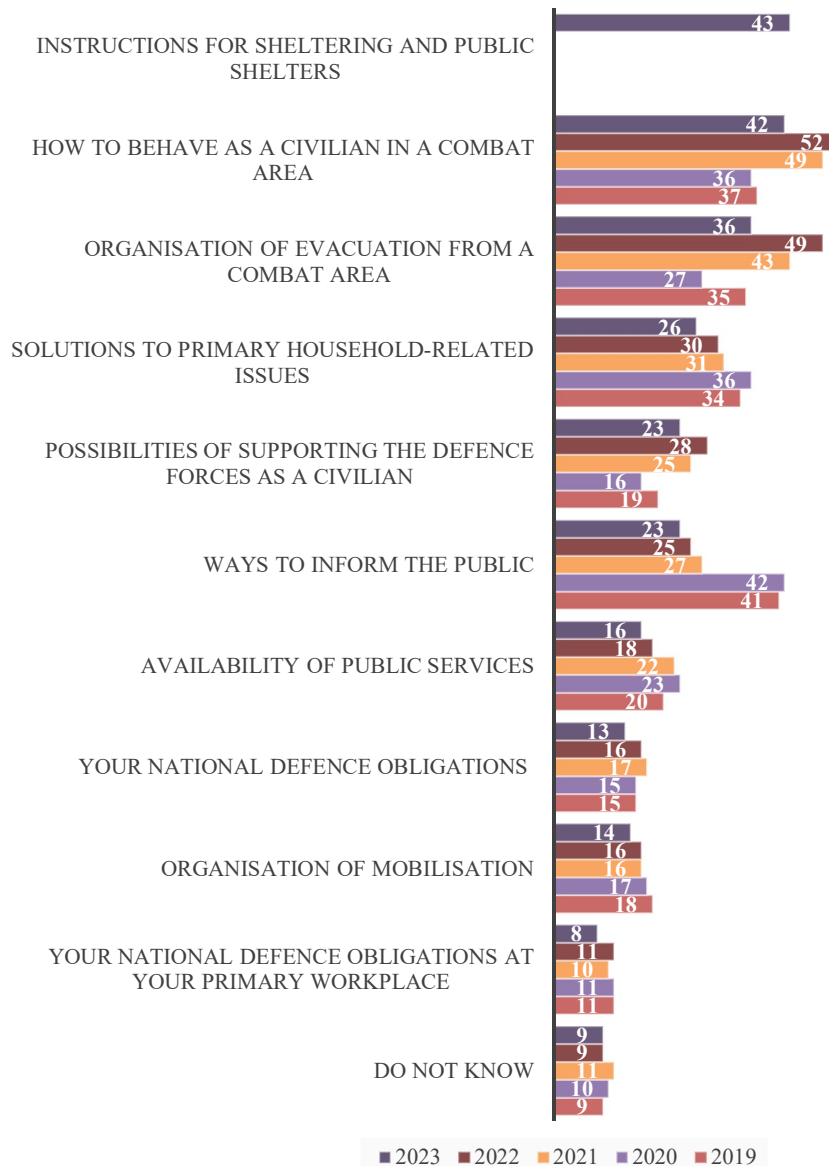


Figure 27. Necessity of information on the state's activities and personal life arrangements in the event of a potential threat of attack by a foreign enemy from 2019 to 2023 (%; N = all respondents).

In 2023, the topics on which Estonian residents need the most additional information on when it comes to how to behave in the event of an attack by a foreign enemy are instructions regarding sheltering and shelter places (43%) and instructions on how to behave as a civilian in a combat area (42%) (Figure 27). Other topics on which more information is needed includes the organisation of evacuation (36%).

Instructions for sheltering and shelter places, a new topic included in the options in 2023, was the topic respondents wished the most additional information for, therefore other topics were mentioned to a lesser extent. The need for information about the organisation of evacuation (-13%) and on how to behave as a civilian in a combat area (-13%) experienced the largest decrease.

5. Defence capability of Estonia

5.1 Assessments of the defence capability of Estonia

The residents' faith in Estonia's defence capability remained stable between 2018 and 2020, without a significant decline or increase (Figure 28). After the drastic events in Ukraine in 2022, the belief that Estonia is definitely or rather able to protect itself until arrival of allied help has increased to its highest level in the last 5 years – to 60%. In comparison with the previous year, the percentage of Estonian residents who believe Estonia can be defended until allies arrive in the event of an armed invasion by a foreign country has decreased in 2023 (–4%).

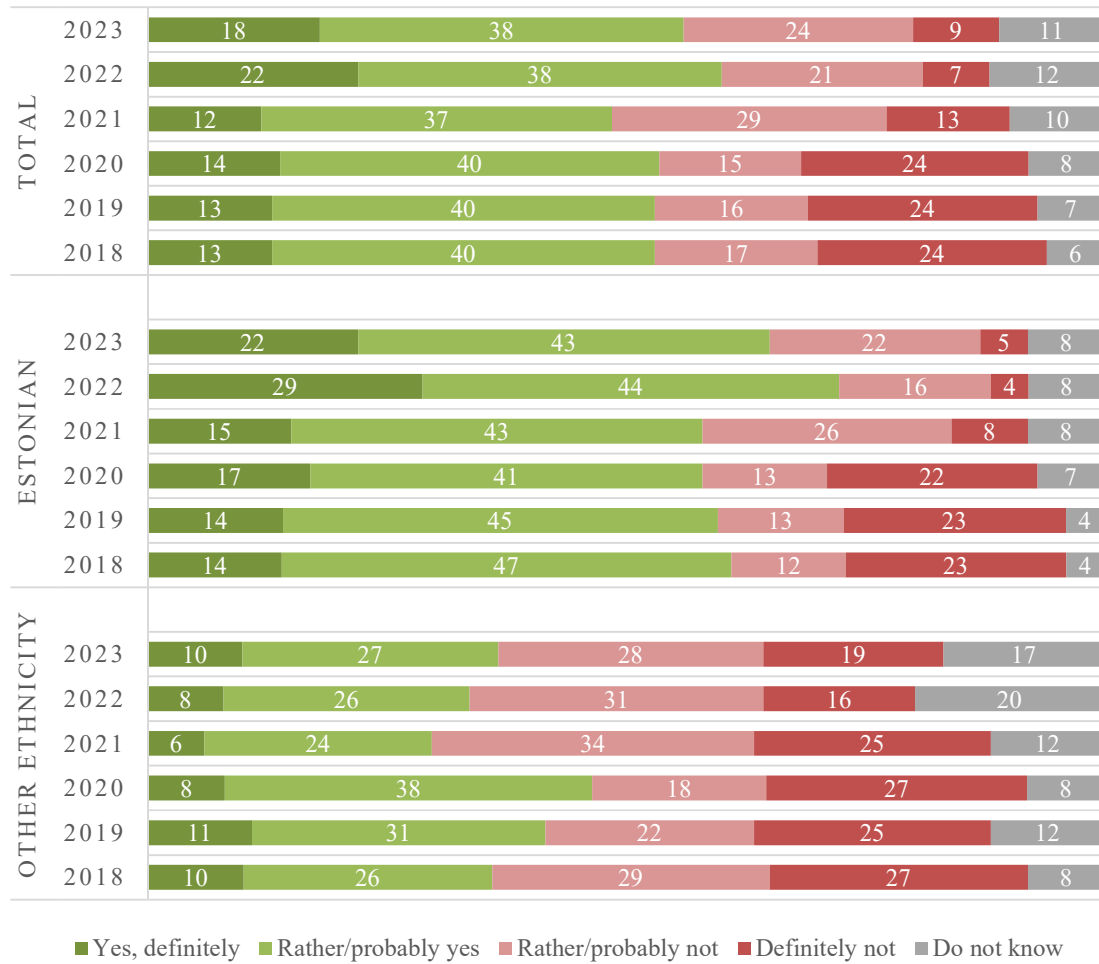


Figure 28. Assessments of Estonia's defence capability in the event of an armed attack by a foreign state from 2018 to 2023 (%; N = all respondents).

Faith in Estonia's independent defence capability is higher among Estonians and lower among other ethnicities: In 2023, 65% of Estonians and 37% of other ethnicities believe that Estonia is rather or definitely able to defend itself in the event of an armed attack by another state. In 2023, Estonians' belief in the defence capability of Estonia has decreased by 6% in comparison with the previous year. For other ethnicities, this figure continues to increase.

5.2. Opinions on the amount of defence expenditures

The attitude of Estonian people towards national defence funding has been supportive since the year the first survey took place (Figure 29).

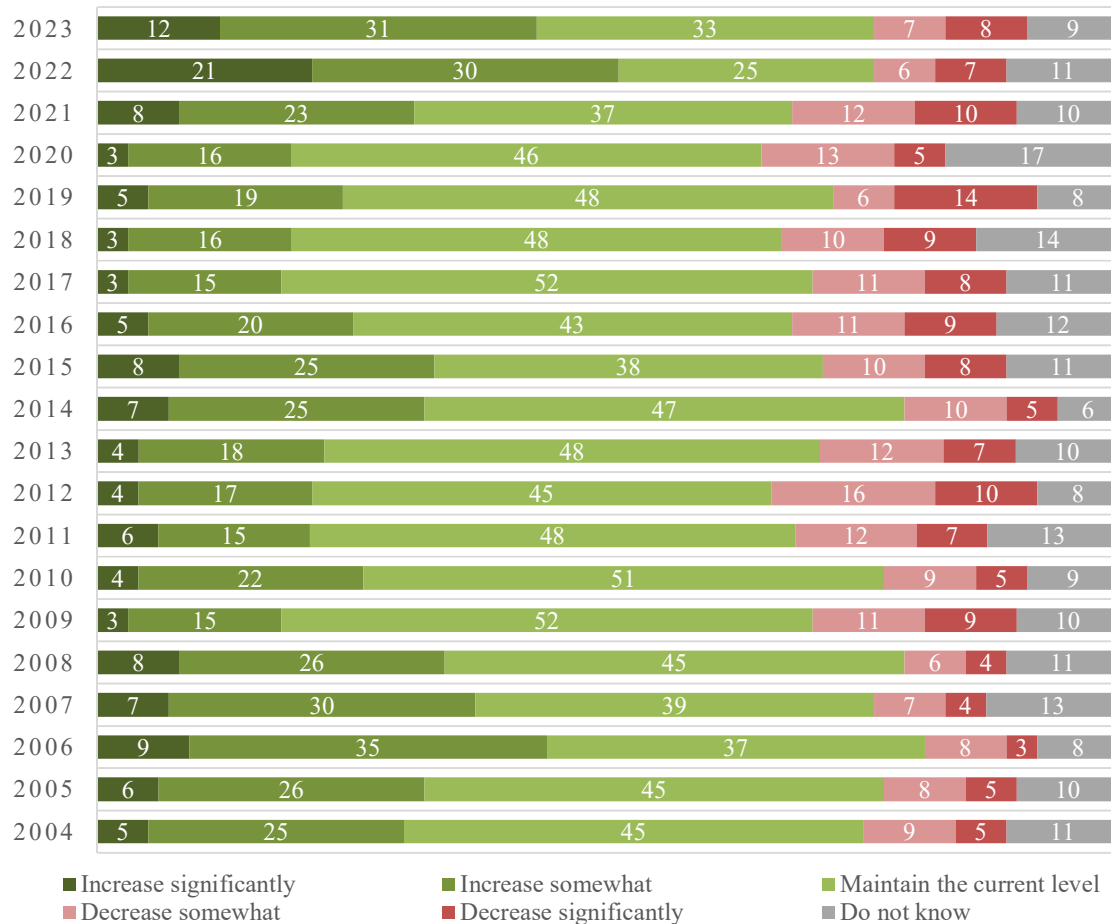


Figure 29. Opinions about Estonia's defence expenditures by year (% , N = all respondents).

After accession to NATO, there were a few years (particularly from 2006 to 2008) where increasing defence expenditures was considered necessary by a third or an even larger proportion of the population. Support for increasing defence expenditures decreased between 2009 and 2013 due to the economic recession.

Support for increased defence expenditures was lower between 2015 and 2020 when expenditures increased to at least 2% of GDP and the majority of residents were in favour of maintaining the current level.

After the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine in 2022, the percentage of those supporting increased defence expenditures rose to its highest level (51%) since 2004. After an increase in defence spending in 2022, there are more Estonian residents in 2023 than in the previous year who are in favour of maintaining defence expenditures at their current level (+8%). The percentage of those (9%) who support a significant increase in defence expenditures has decreased.

Estonians' and other ethnicities' understanding of what Estonia's defence expenditures should be like has been completely different for several years. Estonians have continuously been in favour of rather increasing defence expenditures, whereas other ethnicities have continuously been in favour of decreasing it (Figure 30).

In 2022, support for increasing defence expenditures grew among both Estonians and other ethnicities. Estonian support, however, increased at a more significant rate than other ethnicities support (+26% vs +7%). In 2023, other ethnicities' assessment of defence expenditures has remained unchanged, whereas among Estonians, support for increasing defence expenditures increased by 11%. The percentage of Estonians who support decreasing defence expenditures also grew a little (+3%).

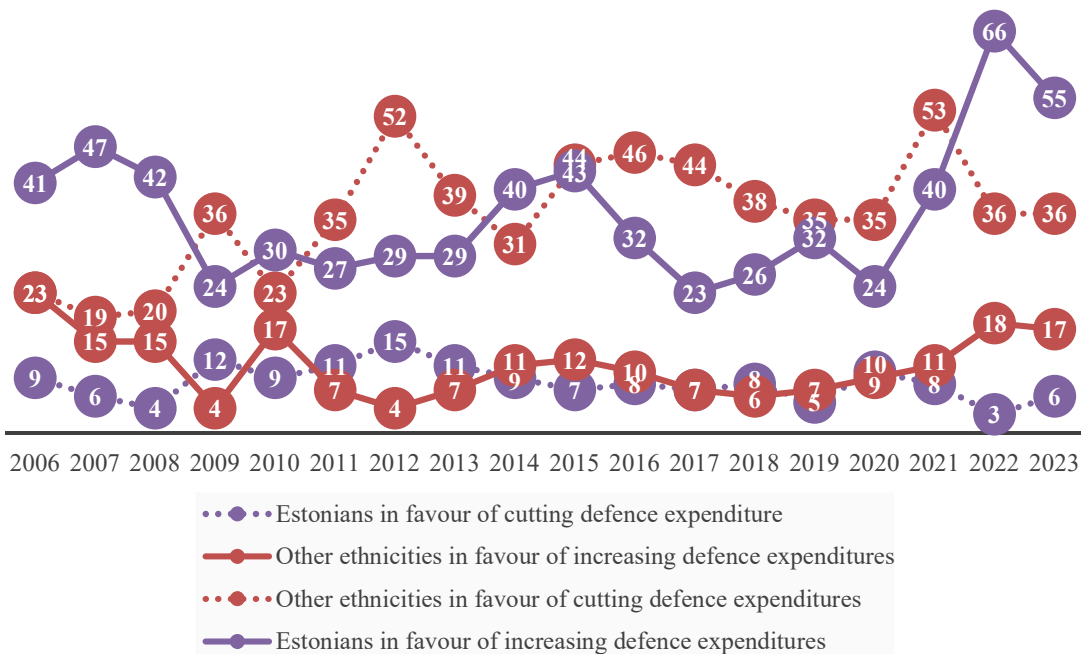


Figure 30. Opinions about Estonia's defence expenditure by year and ethnicity (% , N = all respondents).

5.3 Attitude towards activities related to the Defence Forces

Estonian residents generally have a favourable attitude towards activities related to the Defence Forces (Figure 31).

Calling up reservists for exercises is the most positively assessed activity (very and rather favourable opinion 80%). These are followed by allied air exercises and overflights in Estonian airspace (75%), movement of Defence Forces equipment (73%) and wearing a Defence Forces uniform in public places or events (71%). Around two-thirds of Estonian residents support Defence Forces exercises in the area they live in. A little over half support the expansion of military training areas.

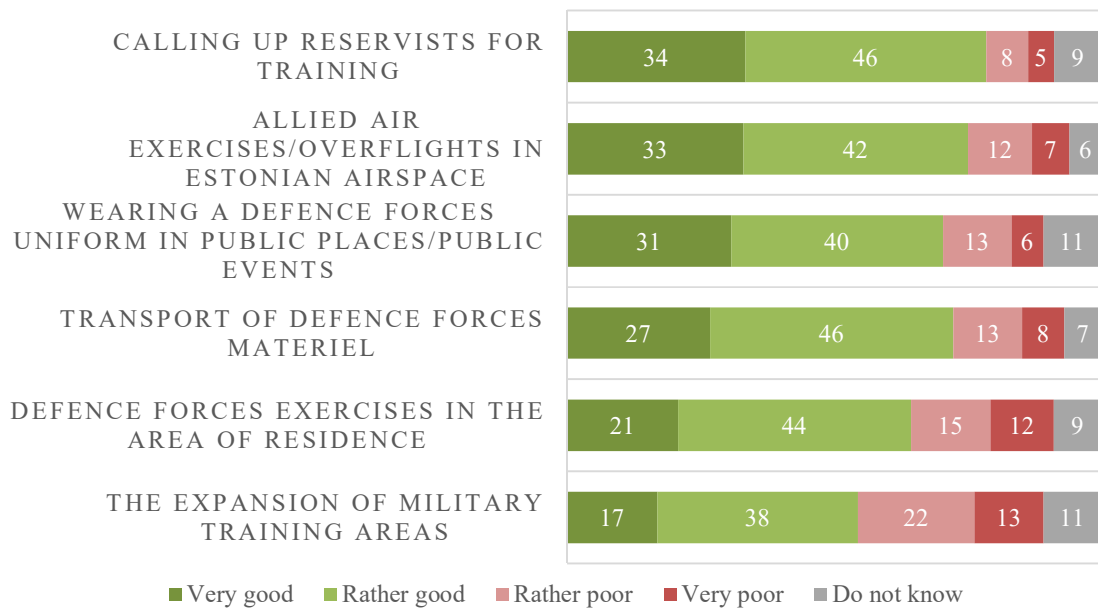


Figure 31. Attitude towards activities related to the Defence Forces (% , N = all respondents)

Estonians are more likely than other ethnicities to have more favourable attitudes towards all Defence Forces related activities examined in this study (Figure 32). The biggest gap turned out to be the attitude towards transport of Defence Forces materiel and allied air exercises and overflights in Estonian airspace (a difference of 37%).

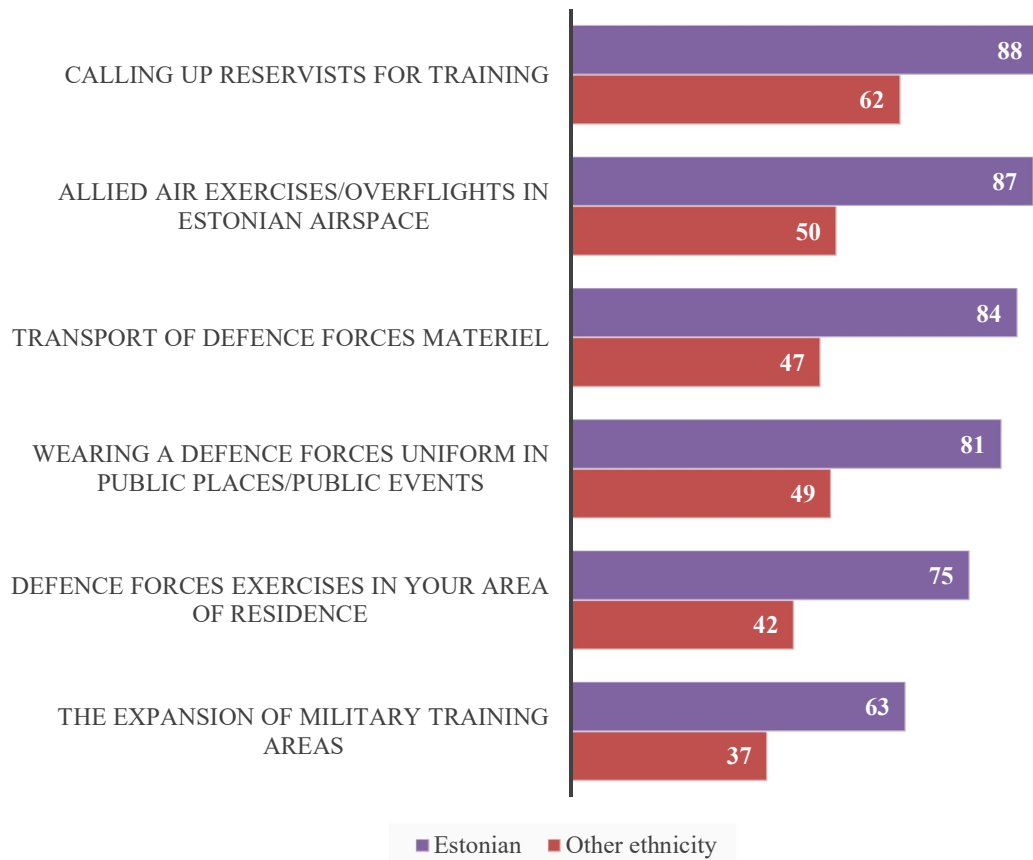


Figure 32. Attitude towards activities related to the Defence Forces by ethnicity (% , N = all respondents)

Inhabitants of Northern, Westerns and Central Estonia have the most favourable attitudes towards the expansion of military training areas. Support is somewhat lower in the capital, however (Figure 33). The only region where the expansion of training areas has more opponents than supporters is North-Eastern Estonia. Despite the controversy caused by the plan to establish the Nursipalu training ground in Võru county, Southern Estonia still has more supporters than opponents of expansion (50% vs. 39%).

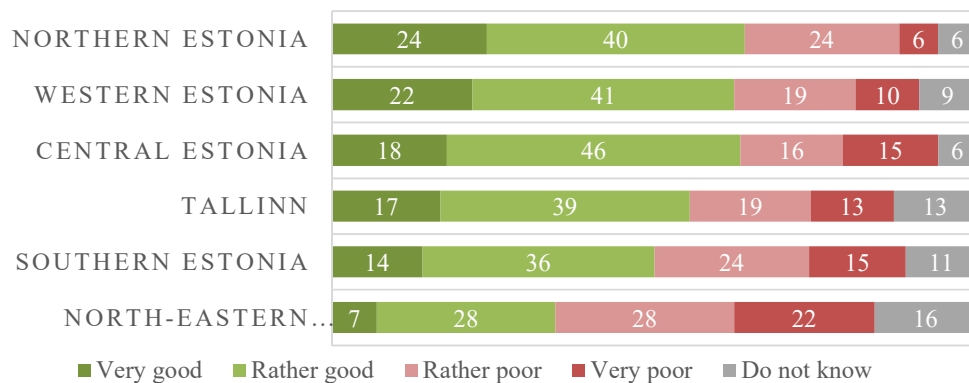


Figure 33. Attitude towards the expansion of training areas by region (% , N = all respondents)

5.4. Assessments of the security of the Estonian border

In 2023, two-thirds of Estonian residents believe the state border to be very or rather well protected, while around a fourth of residents expressed critical views on the matter (Figure 34).

In 2023, in comparison with the previous year, the percentage of respondents who give a positive assessment of state border security has increased, especially in the case of a rather well protected assessment. The percentage of respondents who are critical of the situation has decreased significantly.

Respondents of other ethnicities, those who are 15–19 and 50–74 years of age and Estonian residents with an income less than 800 euros are most likely to consider the Estonian state border to be well-protected.

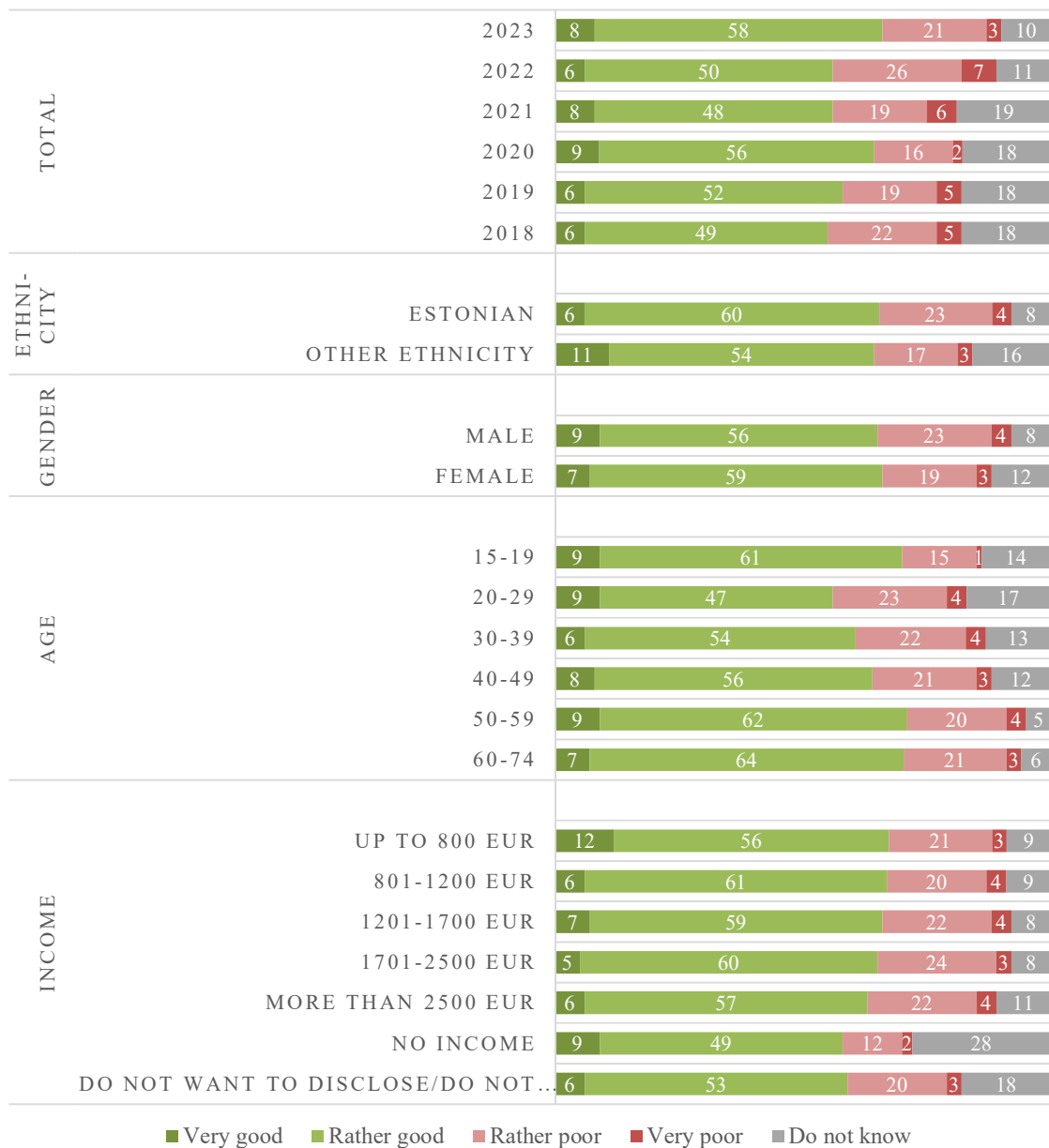


Figure 34. Assessments of the security of the Estonian border (% , N = all respondents).

5.5 Assessments of the development of Estonia's national defence

2023 was the first time that Estonian residents were asked to give assessments on how well the Estonian state has developed national defence in the previous years. Results show that 16% are very satisfied with the developments, more than half are rather satisfied, 15% believe that developments have been poorly implemented and 17% had no opinion (Figure 35).

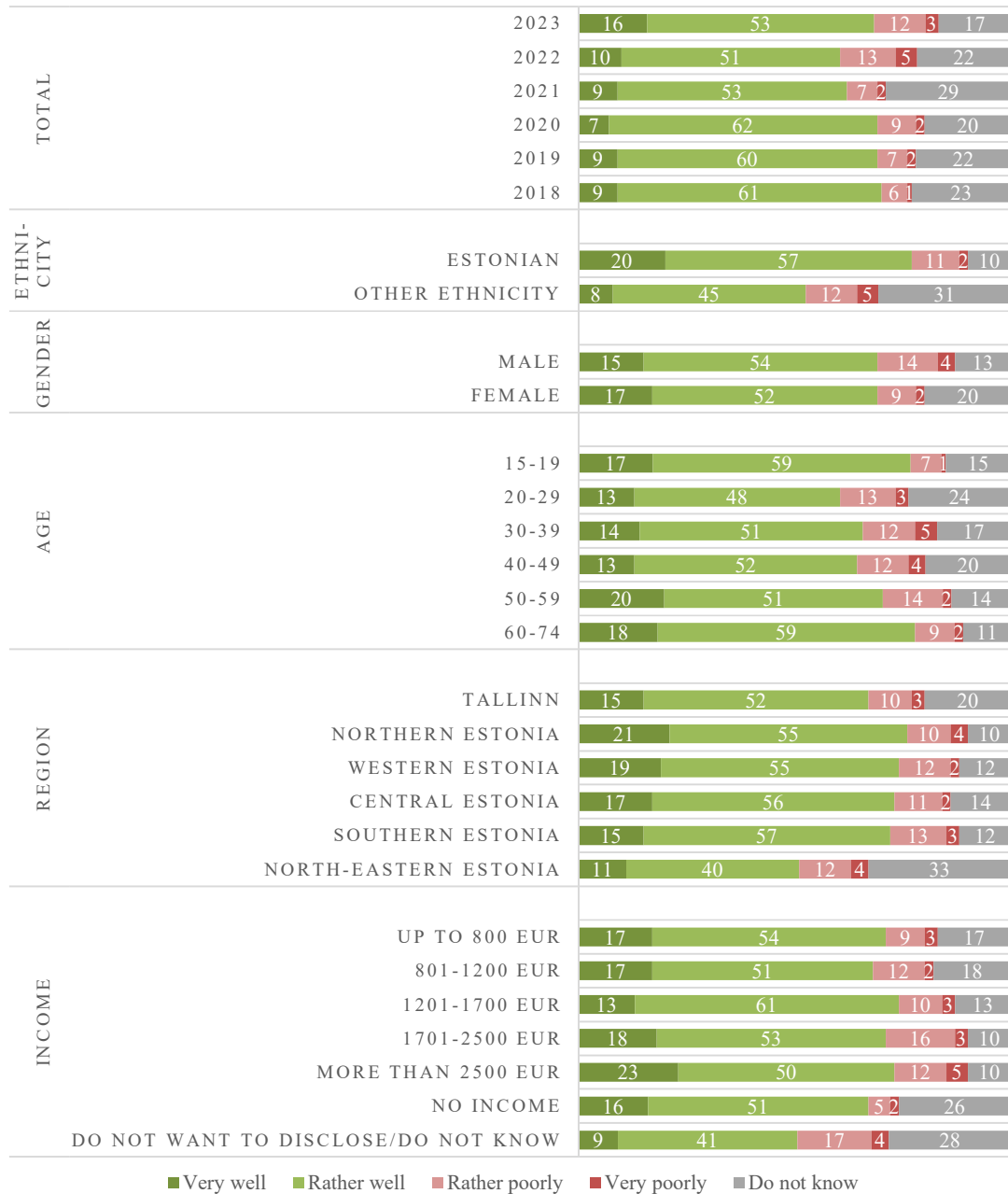


Figure 35. Assessments of the development of Estonian national defence during the previous years (% , N = all respondents).

Estonians are far more likely to be satisfied with the development of national defence than other ethnicities. By age, the youngest (15–19 years of age) and the oldest (60–74 years of age) were most satisfied. By region, the most exceptional case was North-Eastern Estonia where only half the residents were satisfied with the development of national defence and a third had no opinion on the matter. Similar differences also manifested to a lesser degree in the case of Tallinn.

Estonian residents earning a monthly income of over 2500 euros were also most satisfied with the development of national defence over the previous years. Men were more likely to express dissatisfaction than women, while a higher percentage of women had no opinions on the matter.

6. Organisation of Estonian national defence

The next chapter is about various issues related to the organisation of Estonian national defence: attitude towards conscript service, conscript service evasion and assessments of the defence concept.

6.1 Attitude towards conscript service

6.1.1 Necessity of conscript service for young men

From 2018 to 2020, support for conscript service for young men was very high among Estonian residents, but in 2021–2022 this somewhat decreased. In 2023, however, a positive change can be seen once again, as 87% consider conscript service for young men definitely or rather necessary, while less than a tenth of residents consider it rather or definitely unnecessary (Figures 36 and 37).

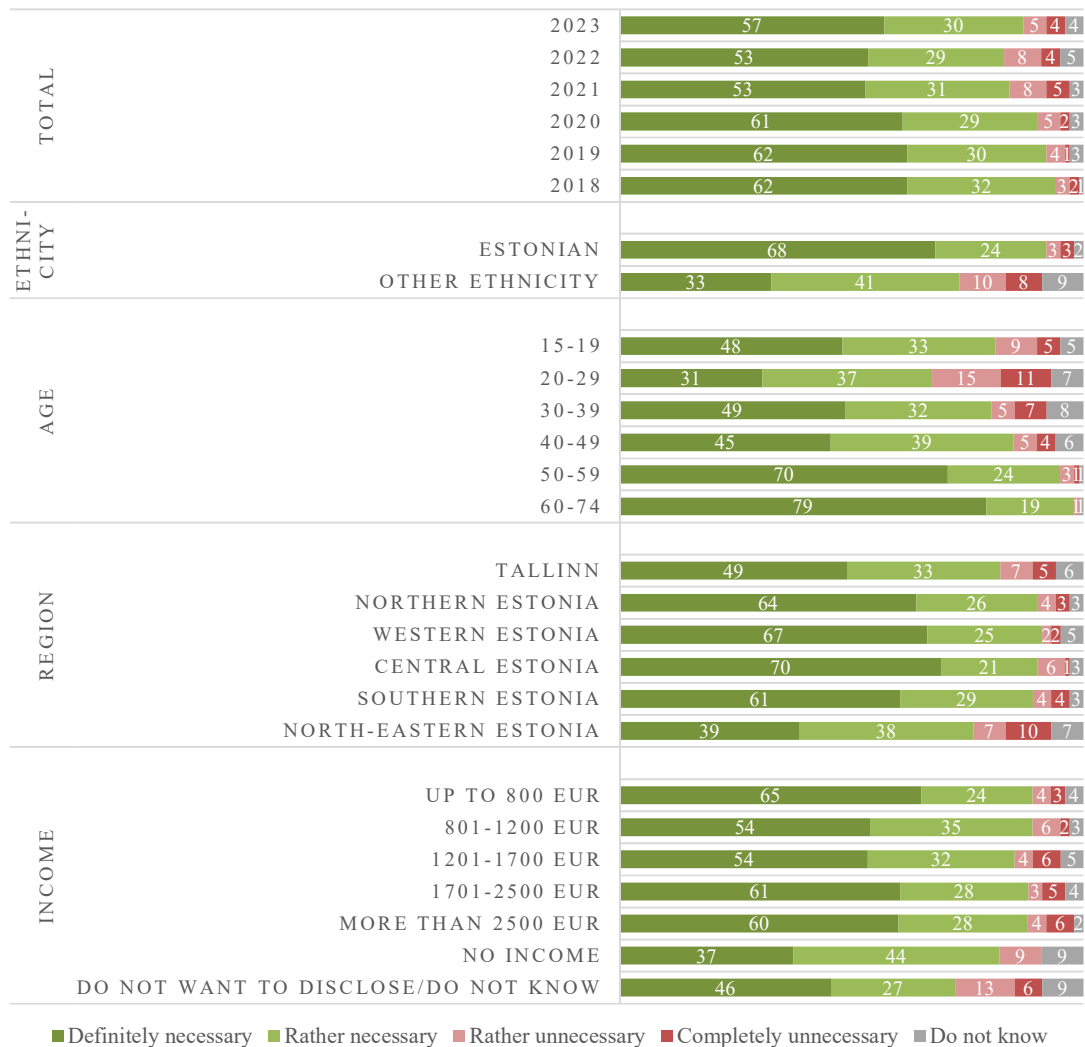


Figure 36. Attitude towards the necessity of conscript service for young males (%; N = all respondents).

In 2023, 92% of Estonians and 74% of other ethnicities believe that completing conscript service is necessary for young men. In comparison with 2022, the percentage of other ethnicities who support conscript service has increased by 7%.

The following groups are most likely to consider it necessary for young men to complete conscript service: residents who are 60–74 years of age (79%) and 50–59 years of age (70%), residents with a monthly income of up to 800 euros (65%) and inhabitants of Central Estonia (70%).

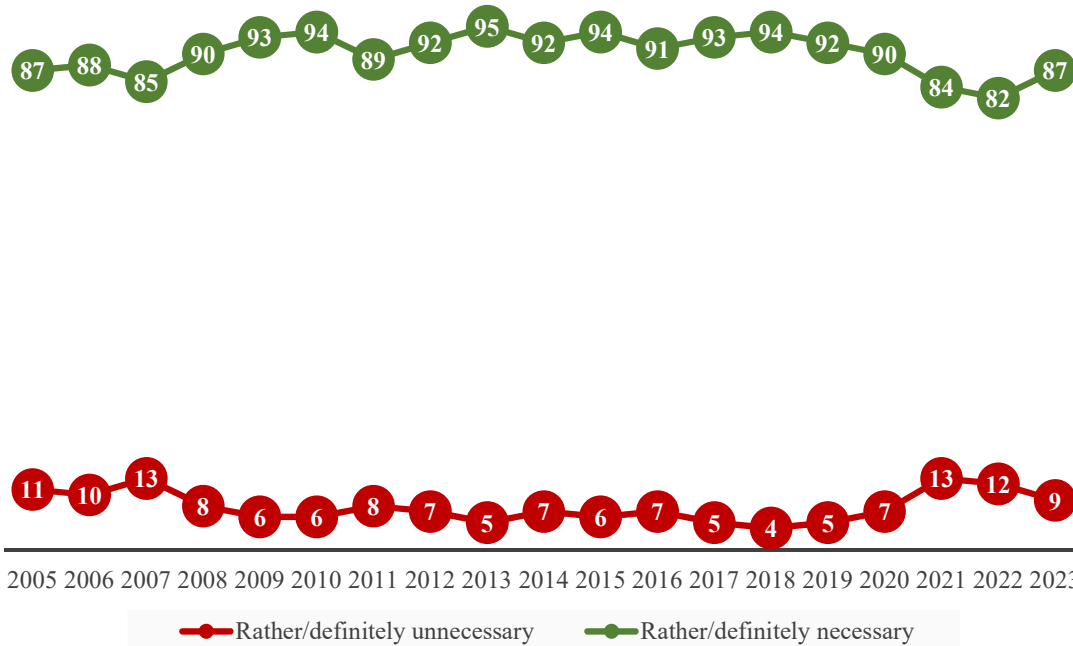


Figure 37. Attitude towards the necessity of conscript service for young men by year (% , N = all respondents).

6.1.2 Conscript service evasion

In 2023, 55% of Estonian residents disapprove of the conscript service evasion: 36% have a rather negative opinion of evasion and 19% condemn it completely (Figure 38).

Since 2018, negative attitudes towards conscript service evasion have slightly decreased every year (from 67% to 55%) and the percentage of those who are understanding of it has increased (from 27% to 38%). 2023 also includes a more lenient attitude towards conscript service evasion, as a 5% change in favour of an understanding attitude has occurred.

The following groups are most likely to condemn conscript service evasion: Estonians (59%), residents who are 60–74 years of age (75%) and 50–59 years of age (67%), inhabitants of Central, Western and Northern Estonia (61-63%) and Estonian residents who earn a monthly income of over 2500 euros.

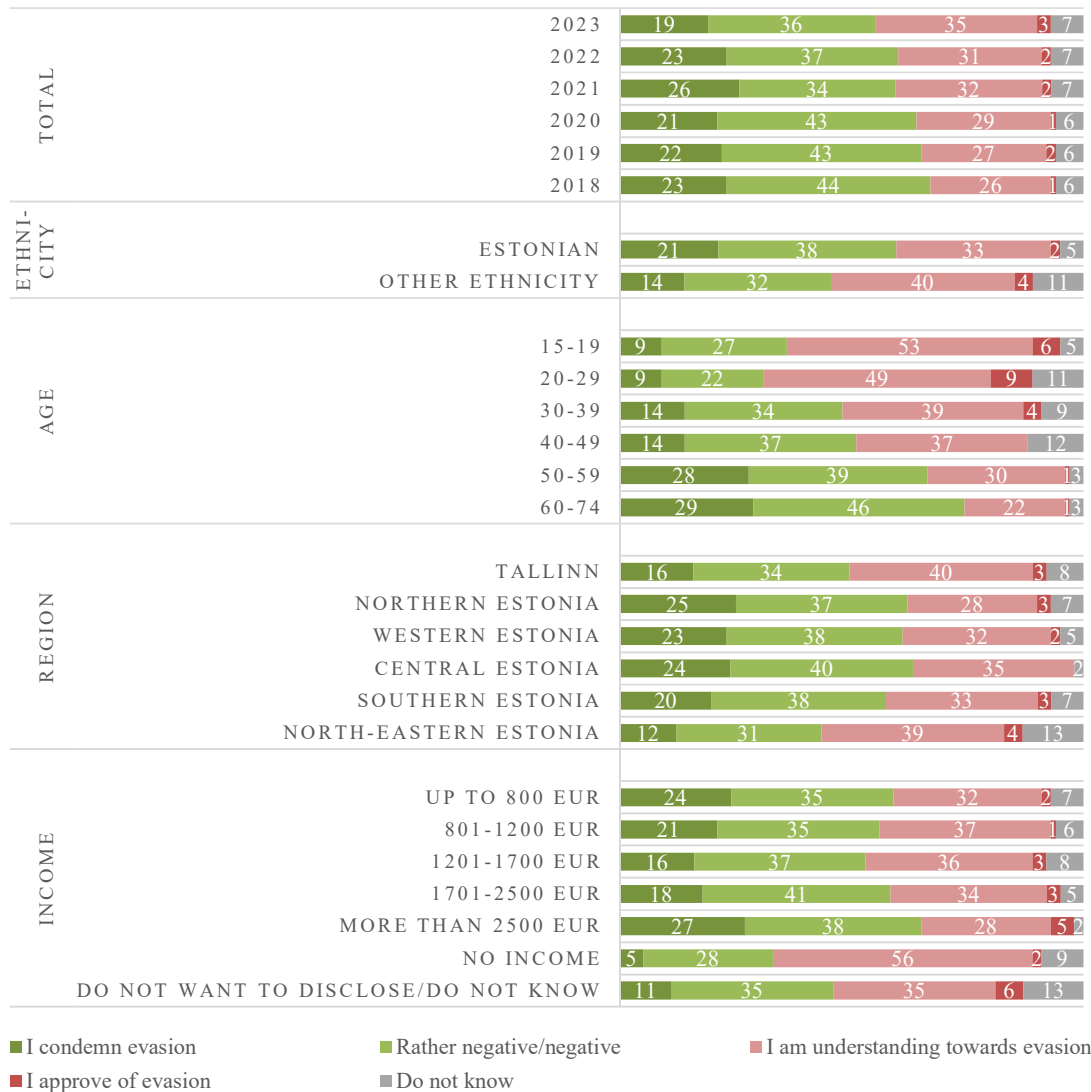


Figure 38. Attitude towards conscript service evasion (% , N = all respondents).

6.1.3 Conscript service for women

Support for mandatory conscript service for women is low (6%). However, around 80% of Estonia's population does believe that women should have the opportunity to do conscript service voluntarily (Figure 39). In that case, there is also more support for women undergoing conscript service with the same rules as for men (44%), instead of having a different programme (35%). 12% of Estonian residents believe that women should not undergo conscript service at all.

Support for mandatory conscript service for women is higher among Estonians than among other ethnicities and higher among men than among women. By age, the strongest support is found among those aged 20 to 29 years (14%) and by income among those Estonian residents whose monthly income is over 2500 euros (17%).

The groups most supportive of women completing conscript service on the same grounds as men are also men, Estonians, as well as inhabitants of Western Estonia (54%). Young people are also more likely to have this position, as indicated by the large percentage of supporters among residents who are 15–19 years of age (59%), residents with a primary or basic education (55%) and residents with no income (59%).

Other ethnicities (23%) and inhabitants of North-Eastern Estonia (26%) are more likely than the average person to hold the opinion that women should not complete conscript service.

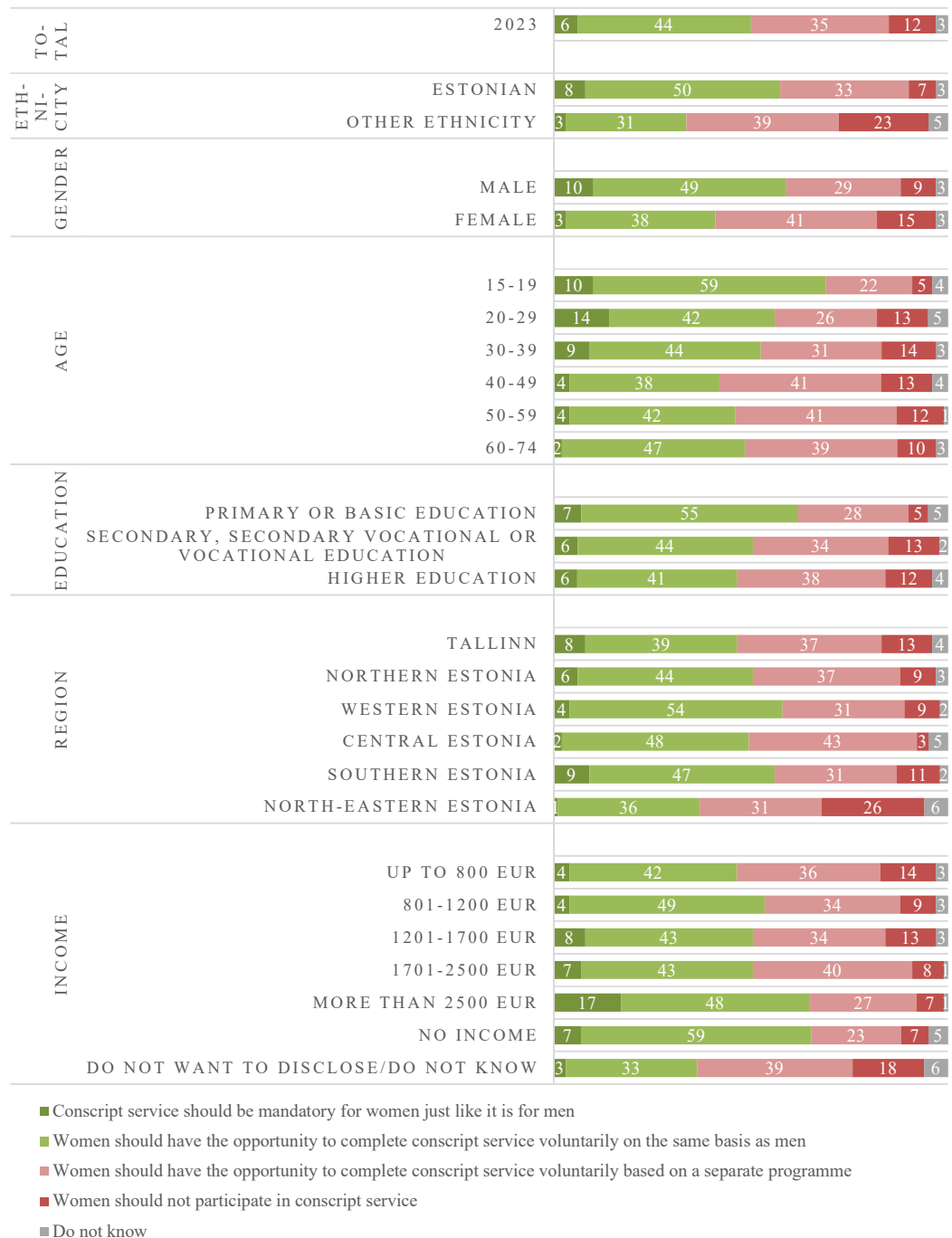
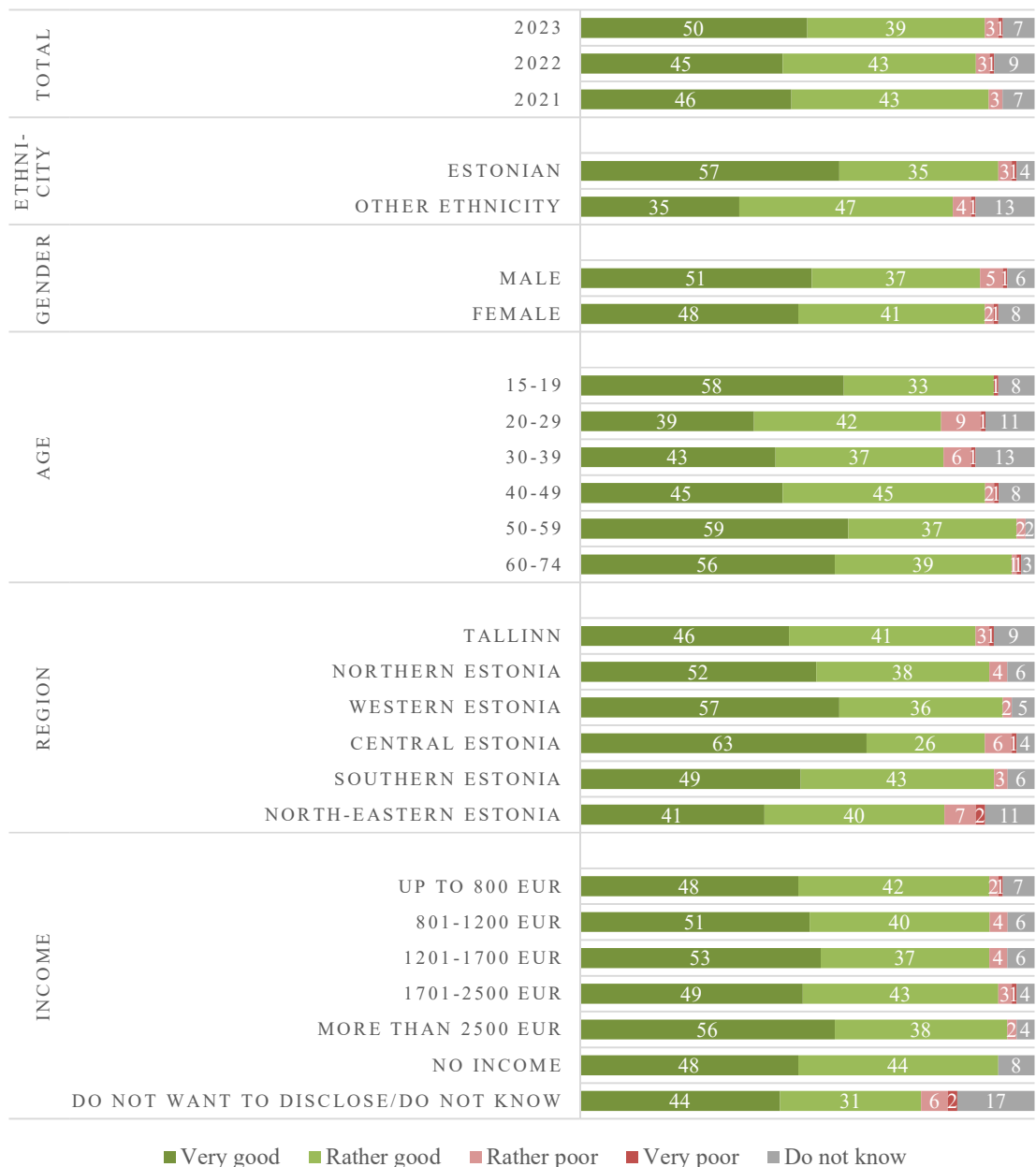


Figure 39. Attitude towards female participation in conscript service (% , N = all respondents)

6.2 Attitude towards professional servicemen

In 2023, 89% of residents in total have a favourable attitude towards professional servicemen, with 50% being very well and 39% rather well disposed (Figure 40). Only 4% of residents have a negative attitude towards professional servicemen, while 7% are unsure.

In comparison with the previous year, the percentage of residents who have a very good opinion of professional servicemen has grown by 5%. Estonians, residents who are 15–19 years of age, residents who are 50 years of age and older, residents who have a monthly income of over 2500 euros, as well as inhabitants of Central Estonia have a very favourable attitude towards professional servicemen.



■ Very good
 ■ Rather good
 ■ Rather poor
 ■ Very poor
 ■ Do not know

Figure 40. Attitude towards professional servicemen (%). (N = all respondents).

6.3 Attitude towards service in the reserves

In 2023, reservists are not as positively regarded as professional servicemen (-7%), but the total percentage of those holding favourable attitudes was still 85%, with only 4% of Estonian residents holding negative attitudes (Figure 41).

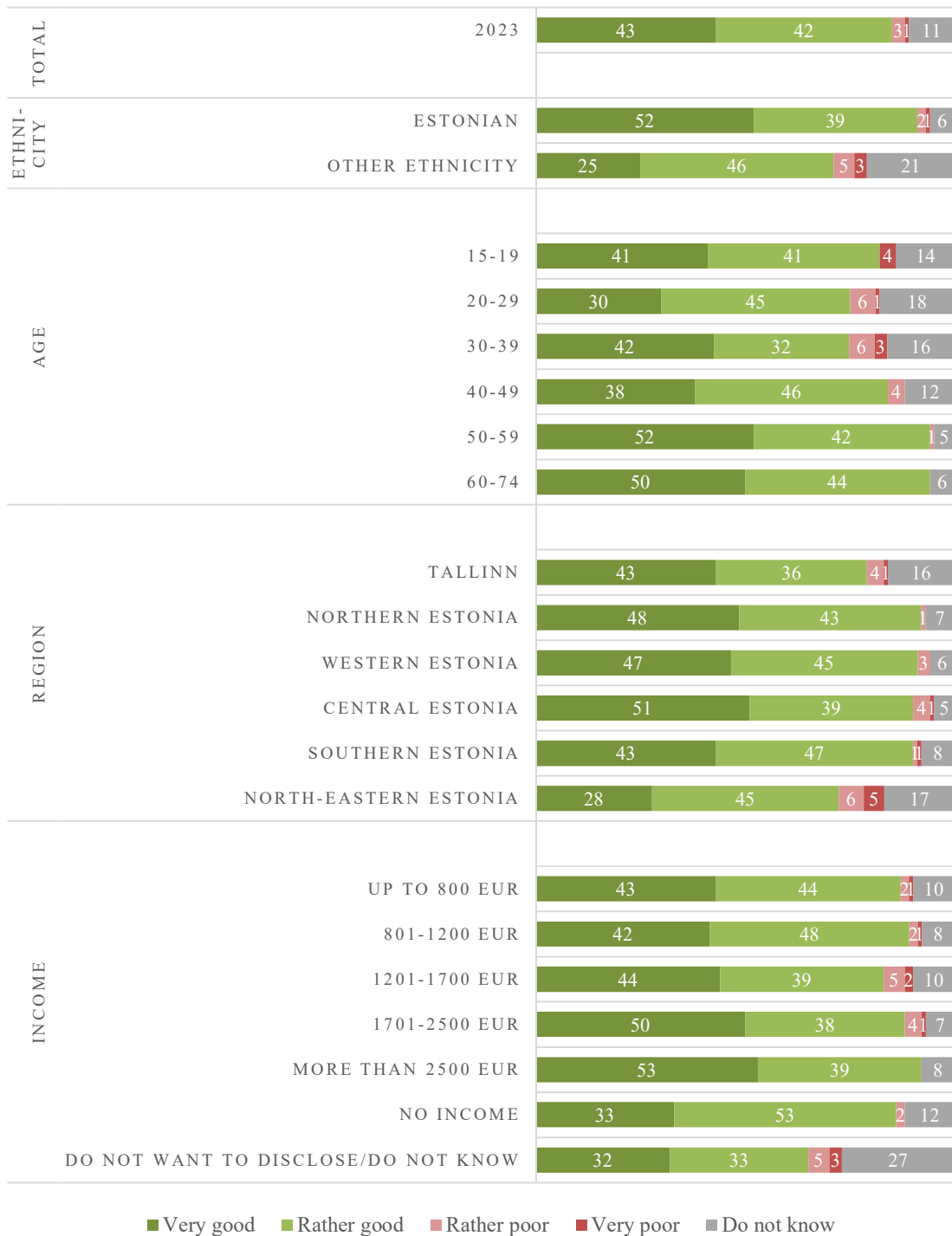


Figure 41. Attitude towards reservists (%). N = all respondents.

Estonians, residents who are 50 years of age and older, residents who have a monthly income of over 2500 euros and inhabitants of Central Estonia are most likely to have a very favourable attitude towards professional servicemen.

Estonian residents are most likely to have experience with service in the reserve and reservists through friends and acquaintances. A third mentioned that someone in their circle of acquaintances is a reservist (Figure 42). A little under a fifth have a life partner or other close person who is a reservist, 14% have a coworker who is a reservist and 11% are reservists themselves. 28% had no experience with reservists.

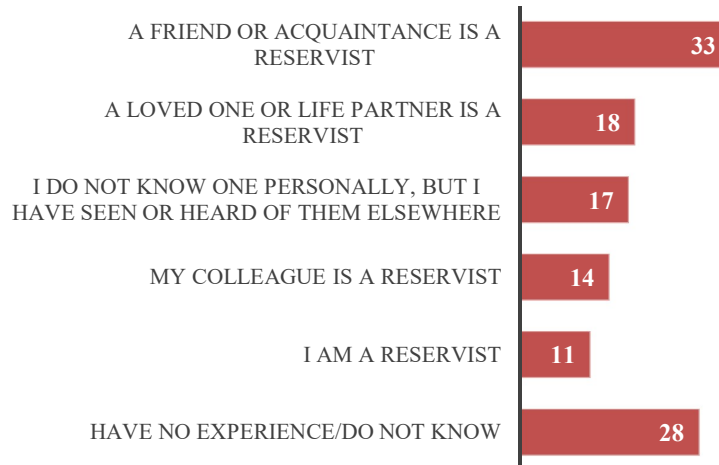


Figure 42. Experience with service in the reserves and reservists (%; multiple responses; N = all respondents)

Estonians are twice as likely than other ethnicities to have reservist friends or acquaintances and they are also more often in the reserves themselves or have a close one in the reserves (Figure 43).

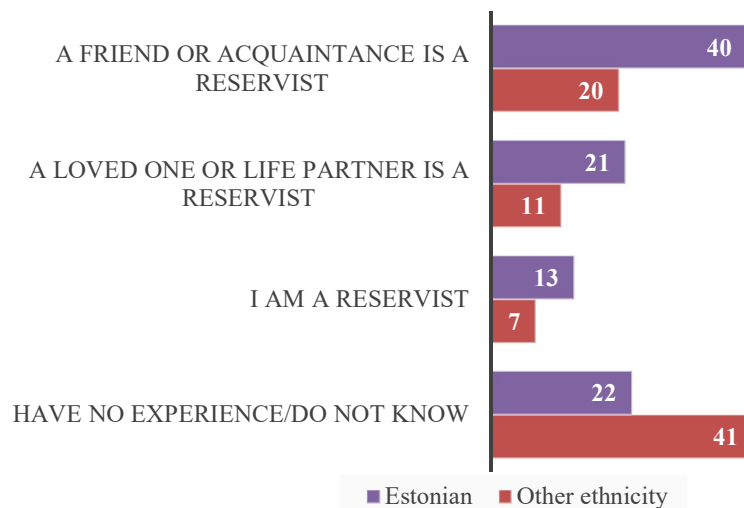


Figure 43. Experience with service in the reserves and reservists by ethnicity (%; multiple responses; N = all respondents)

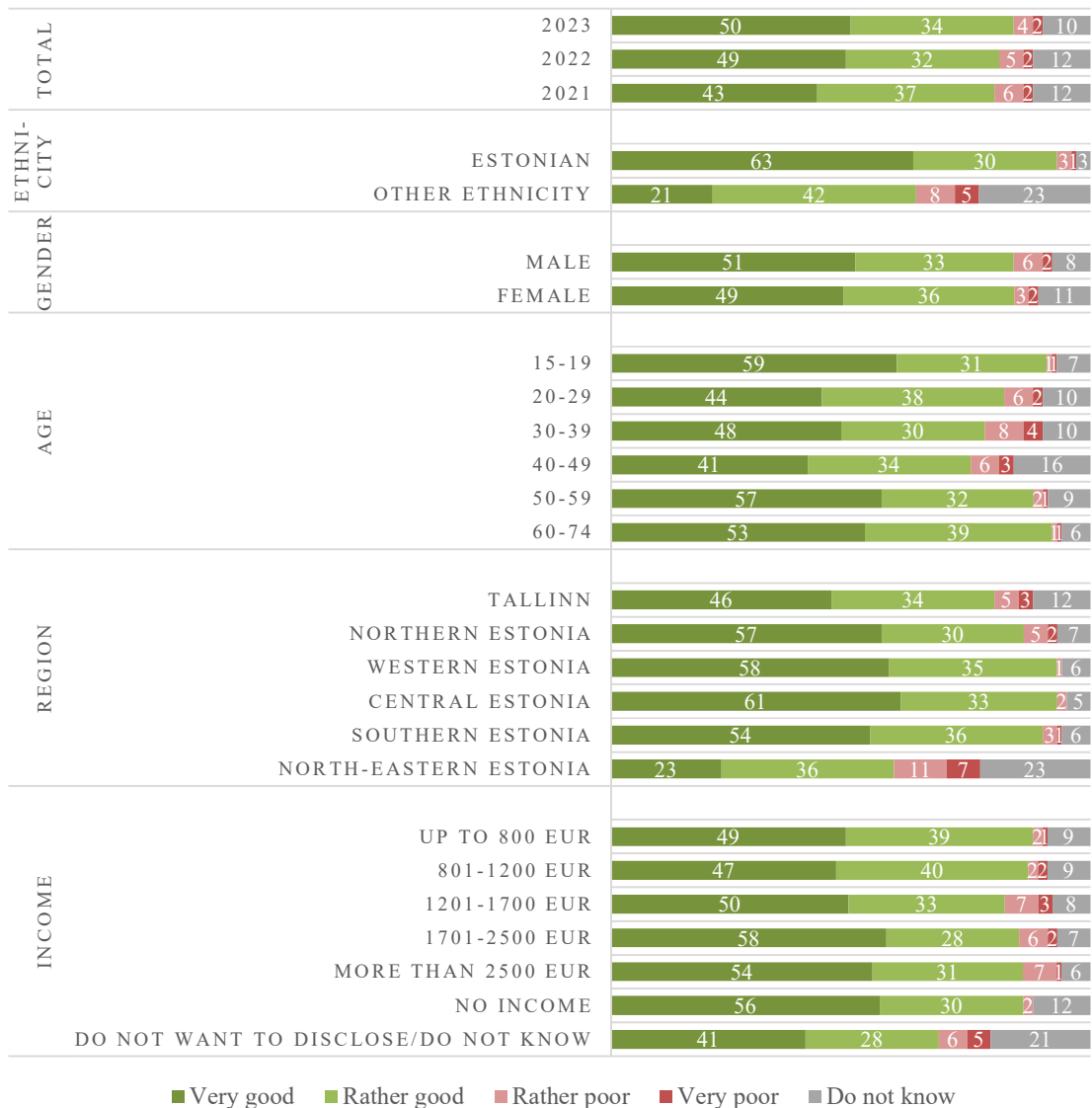
7. National defence organisations

7.1 Attitude towards volunteer members of the Defence League

The attitude towards volunteer members of the Defence League continues to be positive in 2023 (Figure 44). 84% of Estonian residents have a very favourable or rather favourable opinion of Defence League volunteer members, while 6% have a negative opinion.

In comparison with the previous year, there were no significant changes in the attitude towards volunteer members of the Defence League in 2023.

Estonians, residents who are 15–19 years of age or 50–59 years of age, residents earning a monthly income of 1701–2500 euros and inhabitants of Central Estonia have the most favourable attitudes towards volunteer members of the Defence League in 2023.



■ Very good ■ Rather good ■ Rather poor ■ Very poor ■ Do not know

Figure 44. Attitude towards volunteer members of the Defence League in 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

7.2 Functions of the Defence League

To determine the people’s understanding of the priorities of the Defence League, the respondents were asked to select three functions from the list provided that they consider to be the most important among the activities of the Defence League. The results were recorded in the following order: the first, the second and the third most important function (Figure 45).

In 2023, residents believe the most important duties of the Defence League are preparing for the organised defence of the population in the event of emergency situations, participating in rescue activities in the event of accidents or catastrophes and constant readiness for the state’s military defence (Figures 43–44).

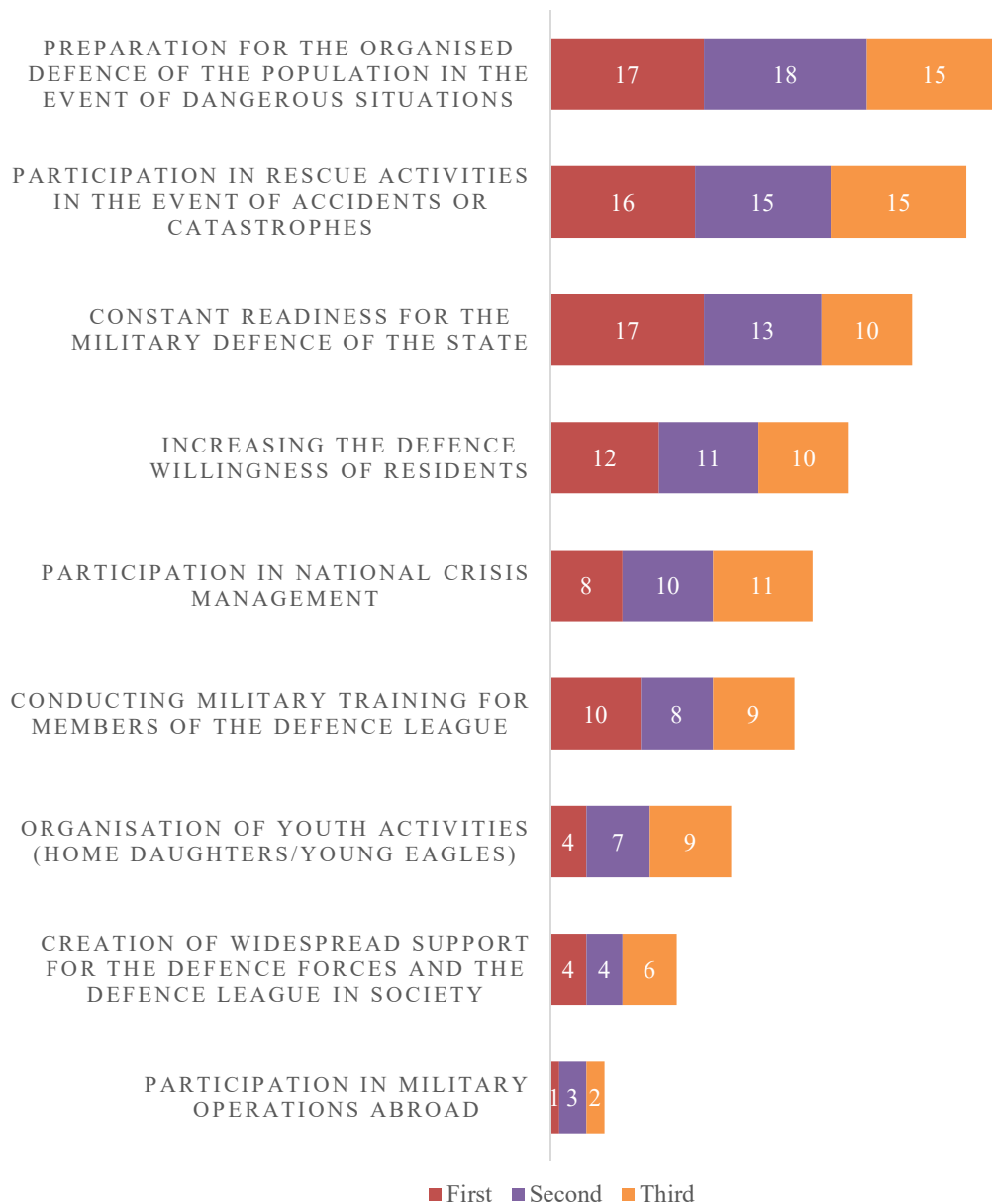


Figure 45. Assessments of the three primary functions of the Defence League in 2023 (% , 3 choices ranked by importance, N = all respondents).

There have been no significant changes in assessments of the Defence League's three most important functions during the previous year (Figure 46). In comparison with the previous year, Estonian residents are somewhat less likely to consider conducting military exercises for members of the Defence League (-4%) and organising youth hobby activities (-3%) as functions of the Defence League in 2023.

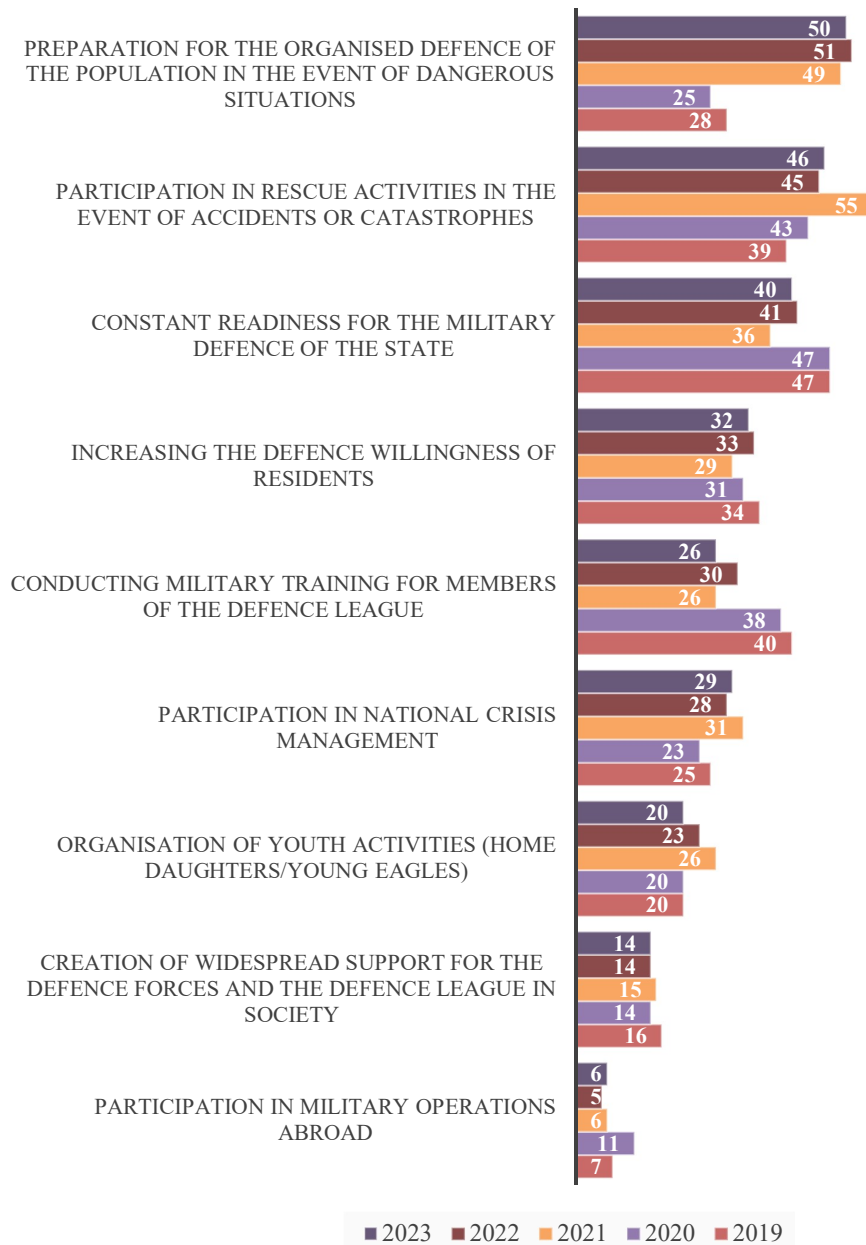


Figure 46. Assessments of the primary functions of the Defence League from 2019 to 2023 (%), *N* = all respondents).

When comparing Estonians' and other ethnicities' understanding of the Defence League's functions, it appears that Estonians more frequently prioritise constant readiness for the military defence of the state, increasing the population's defence willingness and conducting military training for its members (Figure 47).

Other ethnicities, however, mostly believe the primary function of the Defence League is participation in rescue activities in the event of accidents or catastrophes. They are also more likely to not have an opinion on the matter ("don't know").



Figure 47. Assessments of the primary functions of the Defence League in 2023 by ethnicity (%; N = all respondents).

7.3. Experience with national defence structures

Estonian residents were also asked about their and their close ones' experience with national defence structures.

In 2023, 58% of residents have experience with conscript service in the Defence Forces through family or friends, 46% with reservist training and voluntary reserve officer training courses in the Defence Forces, 37% with active service in the Defence Forces, 33% with Defence League and/or Naiskodukaitse (Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation) activities, 29% with national defence education and 21% with Noored Kotkad (Estonian Defence League Boys Organization) and Kodutütred (Estonian Defence League Girls Organization) (Figure 48). The most frequent personal experiences include national defence education at school (12%) and conscript service in the Defence Forces (11%).

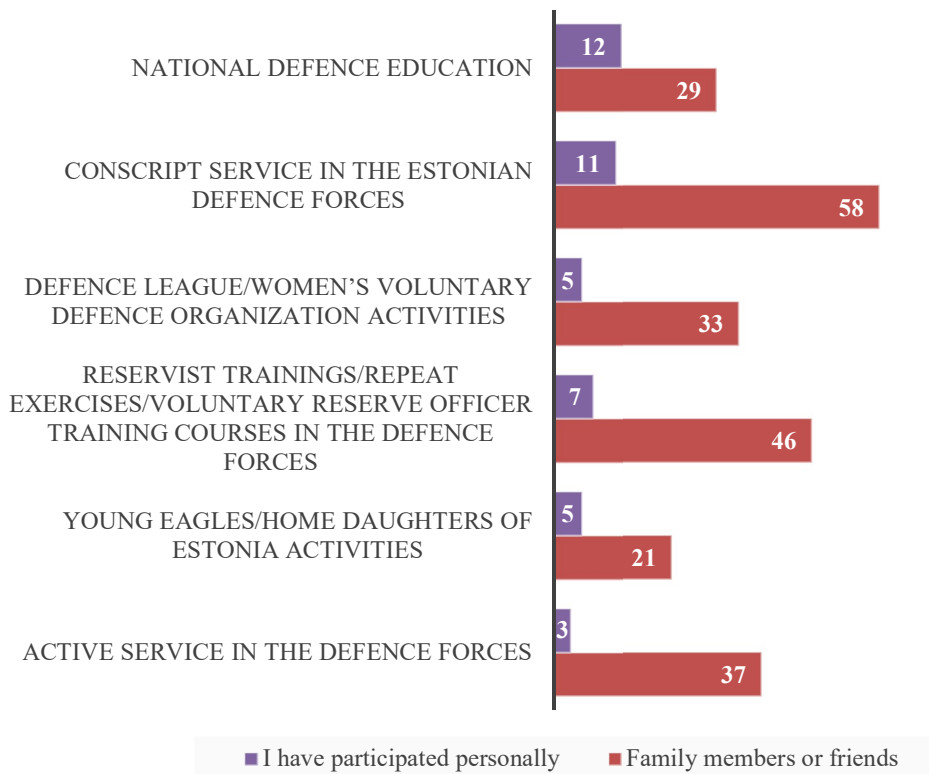


Figure 48. Experience with national defence structures in 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

In comparison with the previous year, there have been no significant changes in personal experience with national defence structures in 2023, but Estonian residents have had significantly more experience through family or friends with active service in the Defence Forces (+11%) and with reservist training and/or voluntary reserve officer training courses in the Defence Forces (+9%) than earlier.

7.4. Attitude towards joining the Defence League and Naiskodukaitse

Estonian residents who have not participated in Defence League or Naiskodukaitse (Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation) activities were asked how they would react if they were asked to join the organisations.

Of the residents who have not personally participated in the activities of either of these organisations, 7% believe that they would definitely say yes to a proposal to join and 27% would rather say yes, 28% would rather not join and 23% would definitely not join (Figure 49).

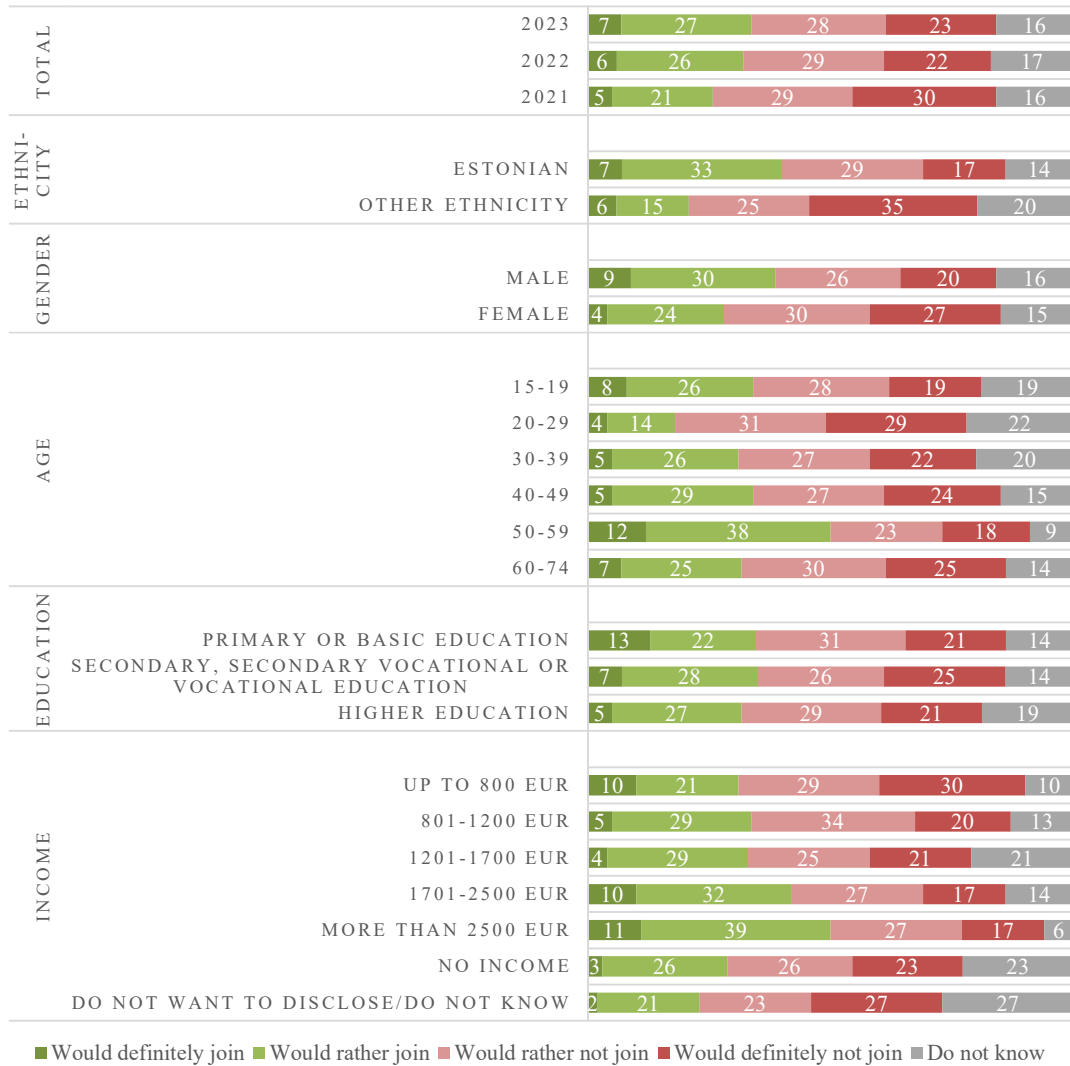


Figure 49. Attitude towards joining the Defence League and Naiskodukaitse in 2023 (%), N = 1144).

In comparison with 2022, there have been no significant changes in the readiness to join either the Defence League or Naiskodukaitse in 2023.

In 2023, the following groups would most likely consider joining the Defence League or Naiskodukaitse if proposed to join: Estonians, residents who are 50–59 years of age, residents with a primary or basic education and residents with an income of over 2500 euros.

8. NATO

8.1. Attitude towards NATO membership

In 2023, 82% of Estonian residents are in favour of Estonia's membership in NATO, with 63% being definitely in favour and 19% rather in favour (Figure 50). However, 11% of residents are against NATO membership and 7% are unsure on this matter.

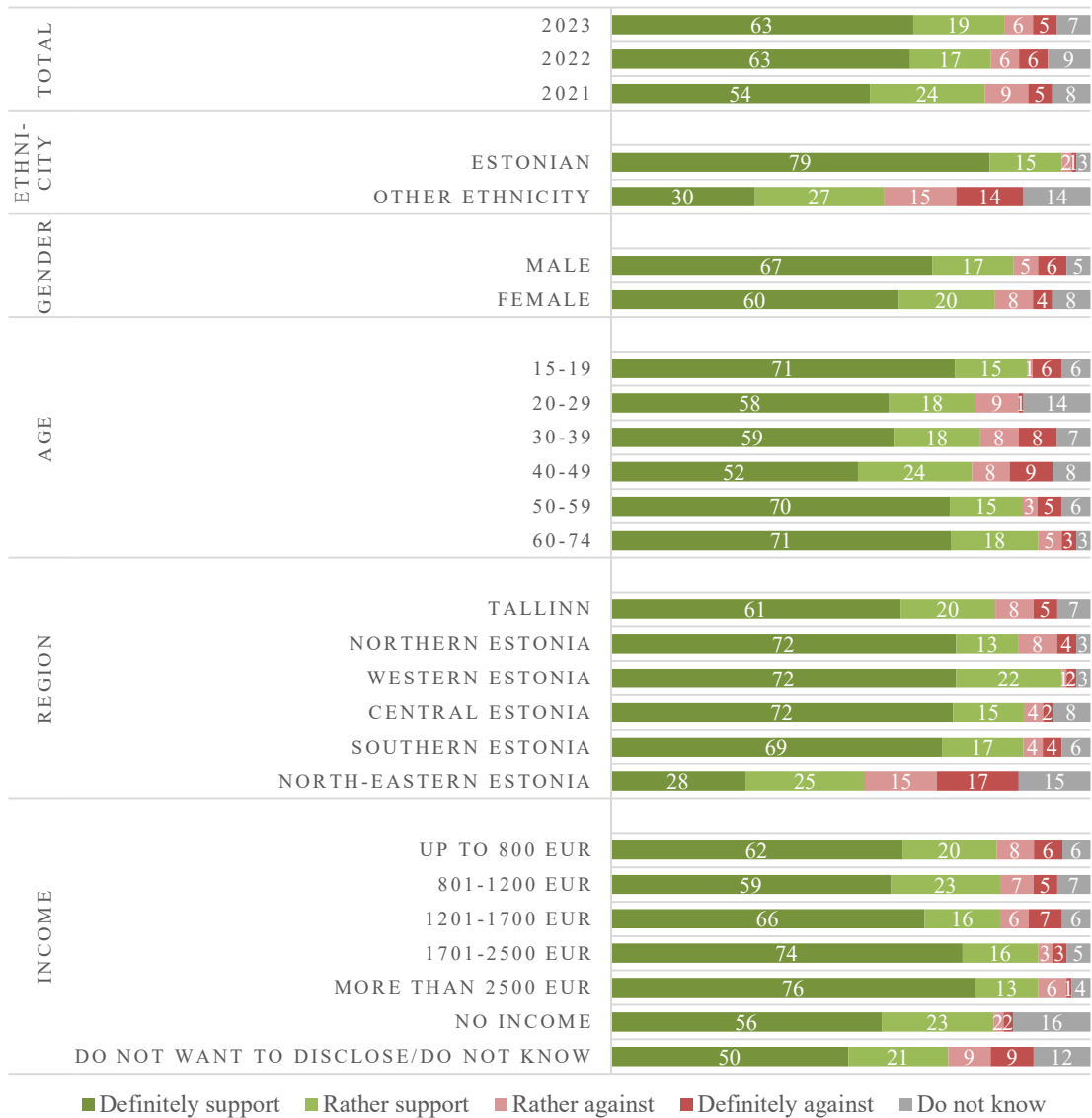


Figure 50. Attitude towards NATO membership (%). N = all respondents.

In terms of ethnicities, NATO membership is supported the most by Estonians (94%), whereas other ethnicities are much less in favour (57%). The following groups are most likely to definitely support Estonia's membership in NATO: men (84%), residents who are 60–74 years of age (90%), residents with an income over 1700 euros (89%) and inhabitants of Western Estonia (94%).

In addition to other ethnicities (29%), residents who are aged 30–49 years of age (16-17%) and inhabitants of North-Eastern Estonia (32%) are most likely to oppose Estonia’s membership in NATO.

Between 2000 and 2005, support for membership among residents remained below 70% (Figure 51). The percentage of supporters between 2006 and 2021 has consistently remained above 70%. Support for NATO membership has been increasing over the previous years, reaching 82% in 2023.

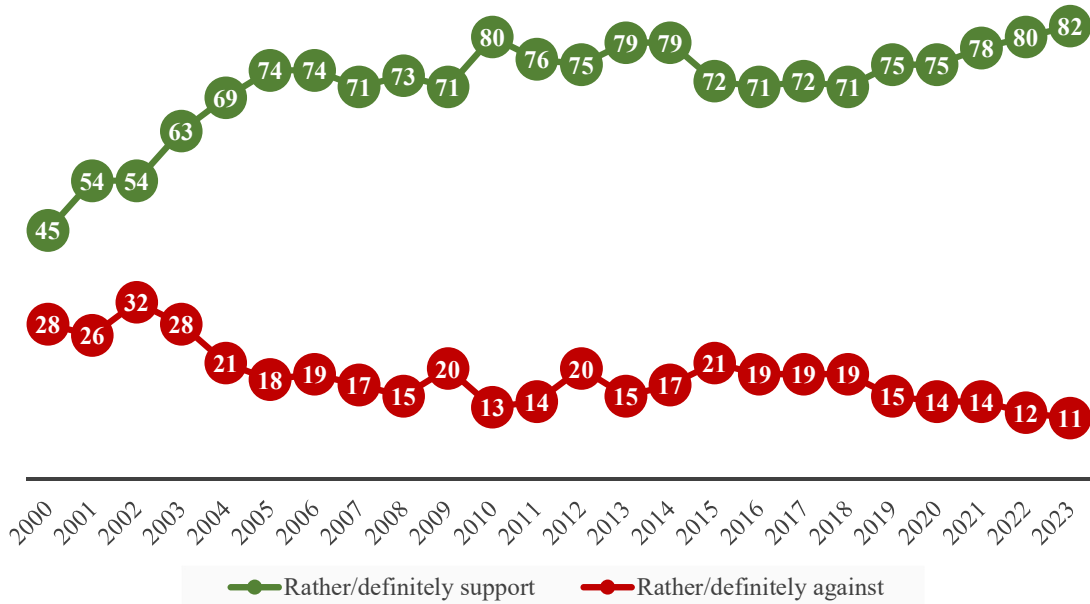


Figure 51. Attitude towards joining NATO/being a member of NATO by year (% , N = all respondents).

In all the years the survey has been conducted, Estonians have supported NATO membership most (Figure 52). In 2023, 94% of Estonians and 57% of other ethnicities are in favour of NATO membership. While Estonian support for NATO membership has remained at the same level in comparison with the previous year, there has been a 7% increase in support among other ethnicities. A similar increase in support also occurred last year.

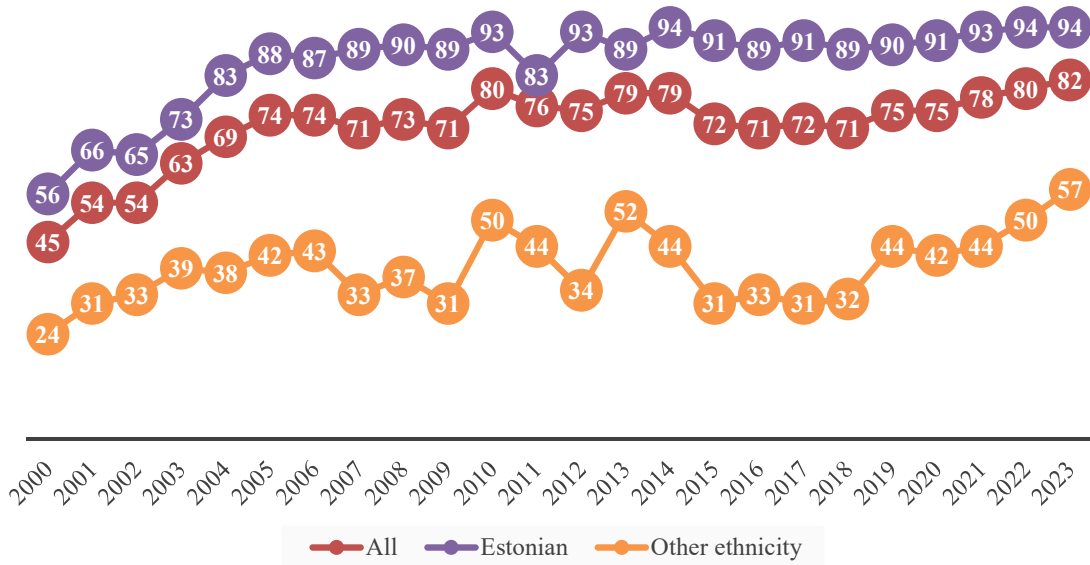


Figure 52. Attitude towards joining NATO/being a member of NATO by year and ethnicity (%; N = all respondents).

8.2. NATO’s assistance to Estonia in the event of a potential threat

In 2023, 30% of residents believe that NATO membership helps to prevent military conflicts (Figure 53). Around half of Estonian residents believe that NATO would provide direct military assistance to Estonia if a conflict were to erupt. A tenth believe that NATO would not go further than political and diplomatic support and 7% of residents believe NATO would not provide any assistance to Estonia.

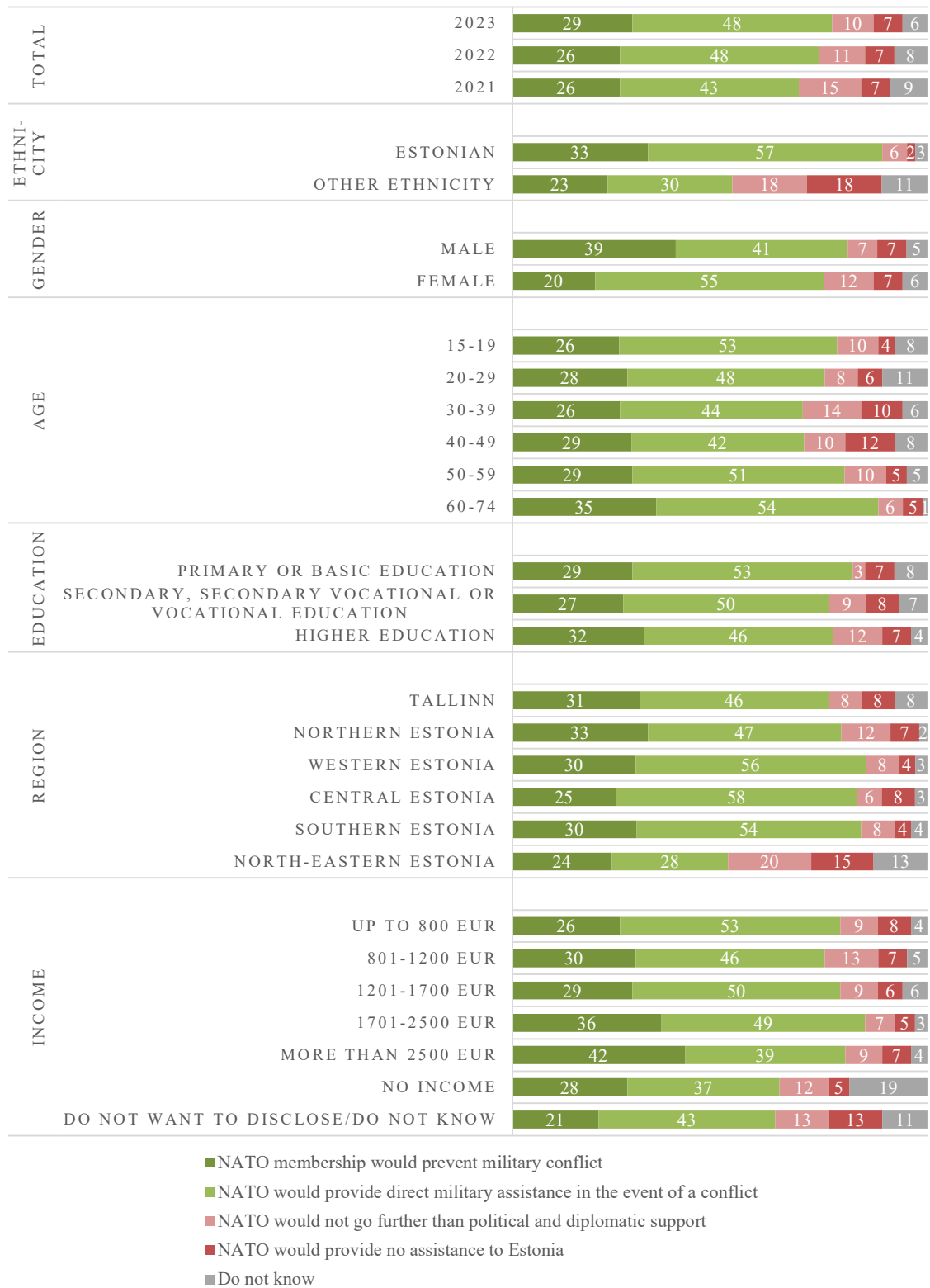


Figure 53. Assessments of the role of NATO in ensuring the security of Estonia if the country was faced with a military threat, 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

In comparison with other ethnicities, Estonians are significantly more likely to believe that NATO membership will prevent military conflict and that NATO would provide direct military assistance in the event of a conflict. Respondents of other ethnicities are more likely to believe that NATO would not go further than political or diplomatic support in the event of a conflict and that Estonia would receive no assistance from NATO.

Men are more likely to believe that NATO membership would prevent military conflict, while women are more likely to believe that NATO would provide direct military assistance in the event of a conflict.

By age, the oldest group, i.e. residents who are 60–74 years of age, have the most favourable attitude towards NATO behaviour. By income, it is residents with a net income of more than 2500 euros.

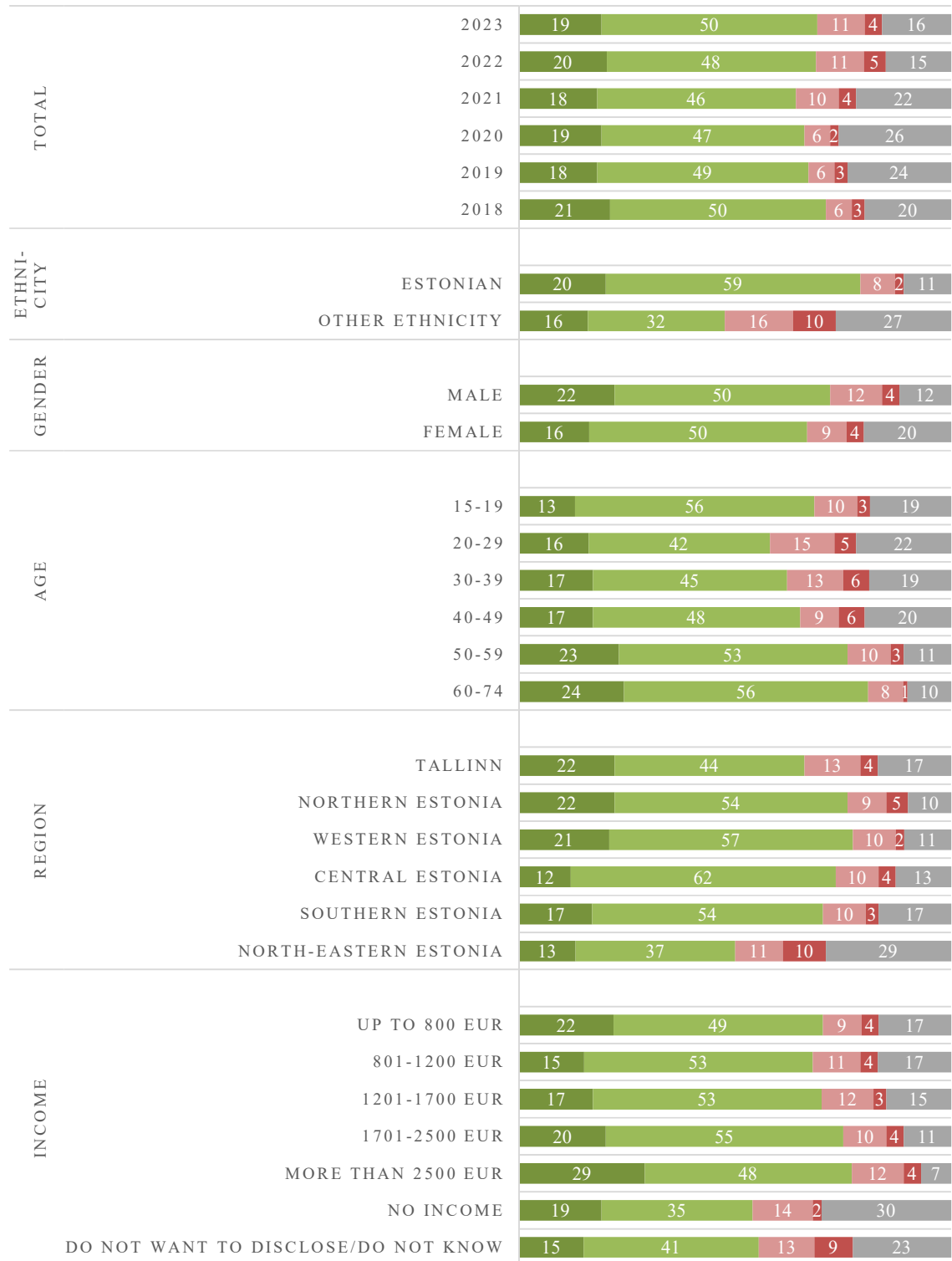
When comparing by regions, the residents of North-Eastern Estonia believe more often than on average that NATO's assistance would be limited to only diplomatic support or that Estonia would not receive any assistance from NATO.

8.3. Assessments of actions taken by NATO to ensure the security of Estonia

In 2023, around a fifth of Estonian residents believe that the steps taken by NATO to ensure Estonian security were completely sufficient, while half consider them rather sufficient (Figure 54). No significant changes occurred in attitude when compared to the previous year.

In 2023, 79% of Estonians believe that NATO's actions to ensure the security of Estonia are sufficient, whereas just 48% of other ethnicities agree.

Men are more likely than women to consider NATO's contribution to ensuring Estonia's security completely sufficient. Residents who are 60–74 years of age, residents with a monthly income of over 2500 euros and inhabitants of Northern and Western Estonia have the most positive assessments of NATO's contributions.



■ Completely sufficient
 ■ Rather sufficient
 ■ Rather insufficient
 ■ Completely insufficient
 ■ Do not know

Figure 54. Residents' assessments of NATO's contribution to ensure the security of Estonia (%; N = all respondents).

Support for the presence of NATO allied forces in Estonia has increased during the past five years – in 2023, 53% definitely support it and 27% are rather supportive of it (Figure 55).

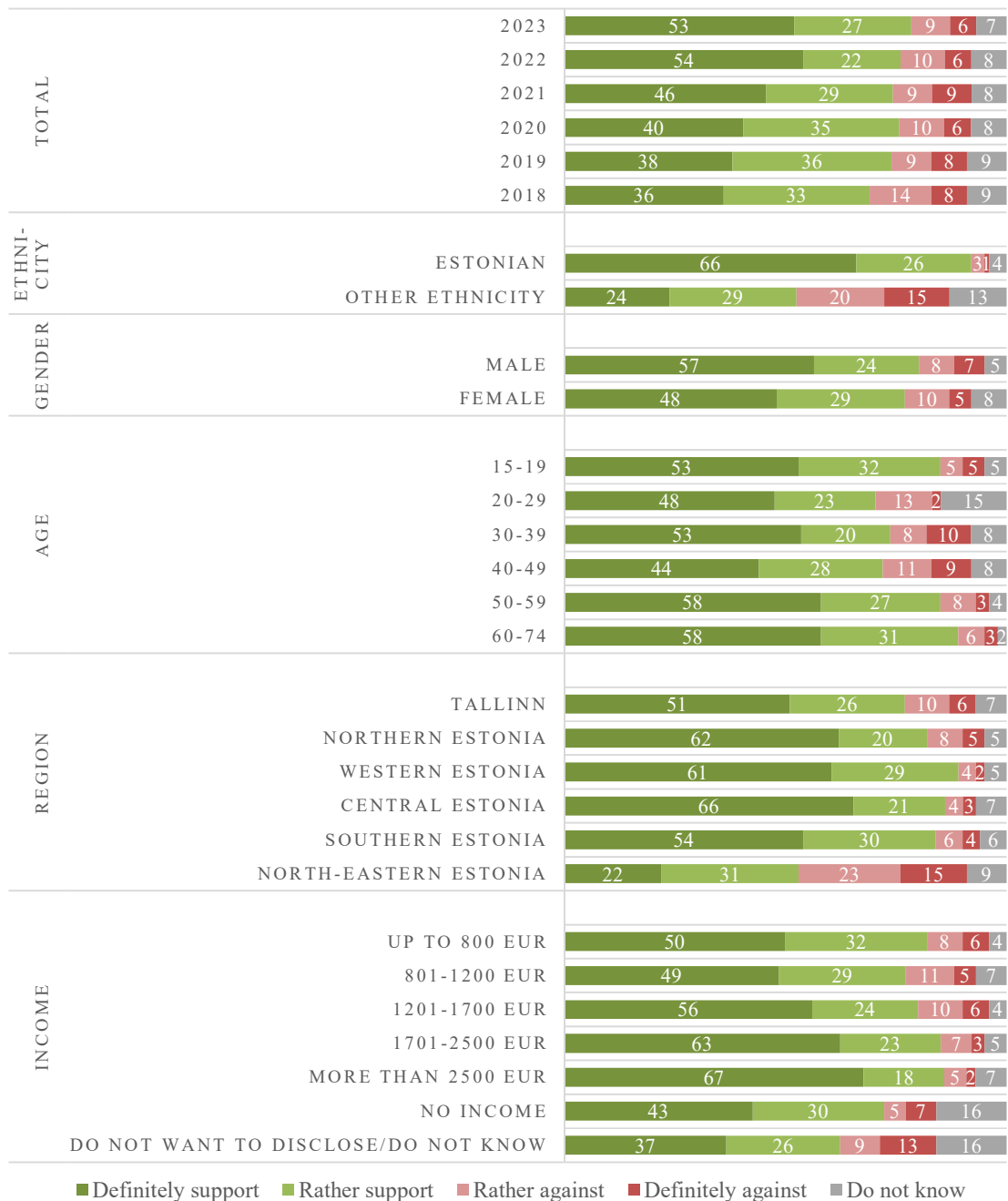


Figure 55. Residents' attitudes towards the presence of NATO allied forces in Estonia (%). *N* = all respondents).

92% of Estonians support the presence of NATO allied forces. This support is significantly lower among other ethnicities (53%), but on the other hand this has grown by 10% during the previous year. Only 4% of Estonians do not support the presence of NATO allied forces. This same figure is 35% among other ethnicities.

Men are slightly more supportive than women of the presence of NATO allied forces in Estonia. By age, residents who are 50–74 years of age are the most supportive. By income, the most supportive are residents with a monthly income of over 2500 euros. North-Eastern Estonia is the most exceptional region, as 38% of its inhabitants are opposed to the presence of NATO allied troops.

8.4 Assessments of the soldiers of the NATO battle group

In 2023, the soldiers of the NATO battle group continue to be most often seen as professional (46%) and they are considered friendly (30%), capable (27%), well-intentioned (25%), polite (20%) and dedicated (18%) (Figure 56). Negative adjectives are associated with the NATO battle group soldiers quite rarely.

A few percent also believe that the NATO battle group soldiers are stubborn, hostile, unprofessional, incompetent and not cooperative (1–2%). It was also equally rare for residents to consider them happy (2%).

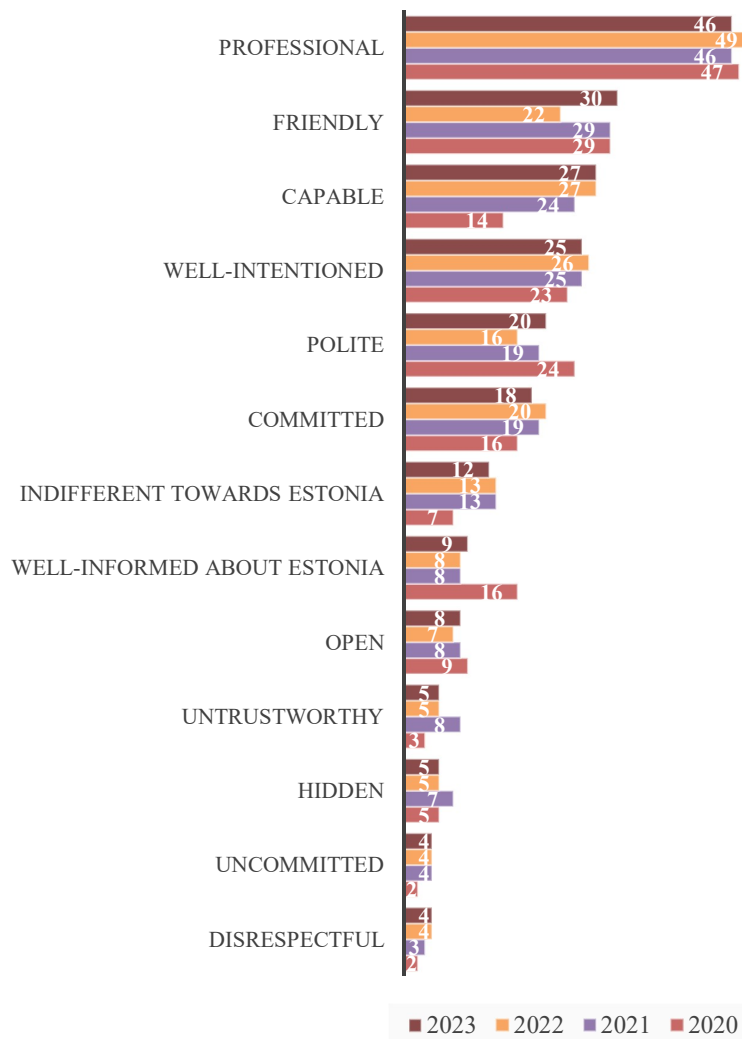


Figure 56. Assessments of the soldiers of the NATO battle group from 2020 to 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

In comparison with 2021, the image of the battle group soldiers deployed in Estonia has not changed significantly. The biggest change in 2022 in comparison with the previous year was that NATO soldiers were less often seen as friendly (−7%), but by 2023 the assessments of their friendliness have improved again (+8%). In comparison with 2022, the soldiers are also considered polite somewhat more often in 2023 (+4%).

The assessments of Estonians and other ethnicities on the image of NATO soldiers is quite polarised. Respondents of other ethnicities mostly use negative adjectives to describe NATO allied forces, but they do use positive ones as well. NATO allied forces are most often seen as indifferent towards Estonia by other ethnicities (25%), but they are also seen as professional (26%) (Figure 57).

Estonians mostly use positive adjectives to describe the soldiers of the NATO battle group. They most often view representatives of the allied forces as professional (56%), friendly (37%), capable (34%), well-intentioned (30%), dedicated (24%) and polite (24%).

Respondents of other ethnicities often also lack a clear image of them (37% did not provide an answer). The percentage of Estonians who are unsure is somewhat lower (24%).

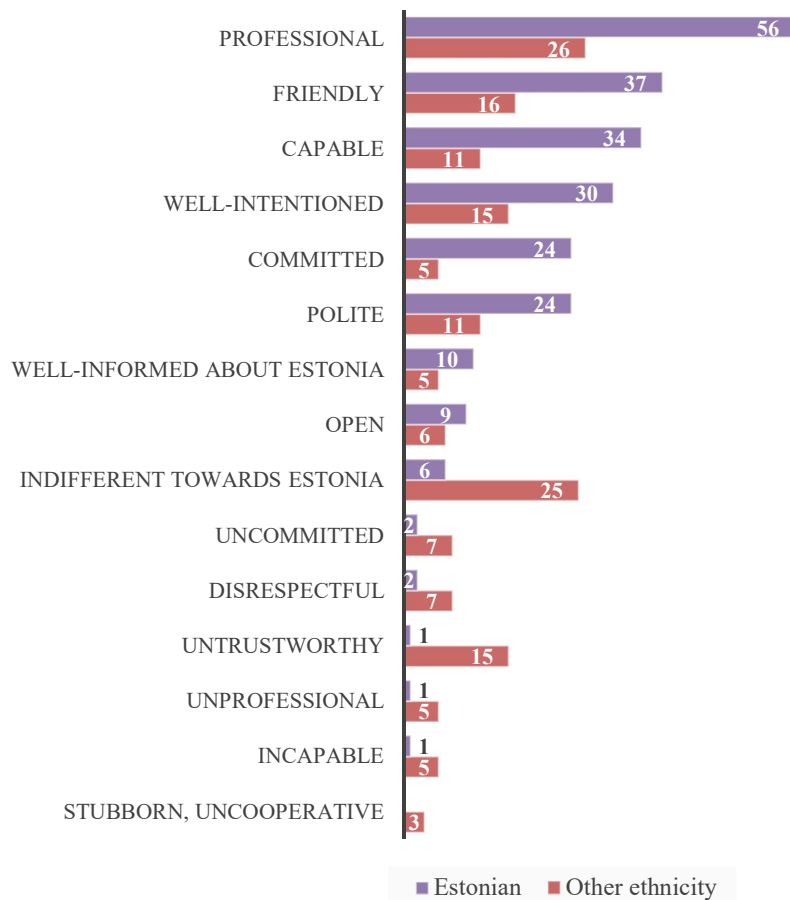


Figure 57. Assessments of NATO battle group soldiers in 2023 by ethnicity (%), *N* = all respondents).

9. International military operations

The following part analyses the population's attitude towards participation in international military operations, i.e. how necessary Estonia's participation is in these types of operations and for what reasons Estonia should participate in foreign missions.

9.1. Attitude towards Estonia's participation in international military operations

The population's attitude towards the necessity of Estonia's participation in international military operations continues to be positive in 2023, with 61% being in support, 29% being in opposition and a tenth having no opinion on the matter (Figure 58). No significant changes occurred when compared to the previous year.

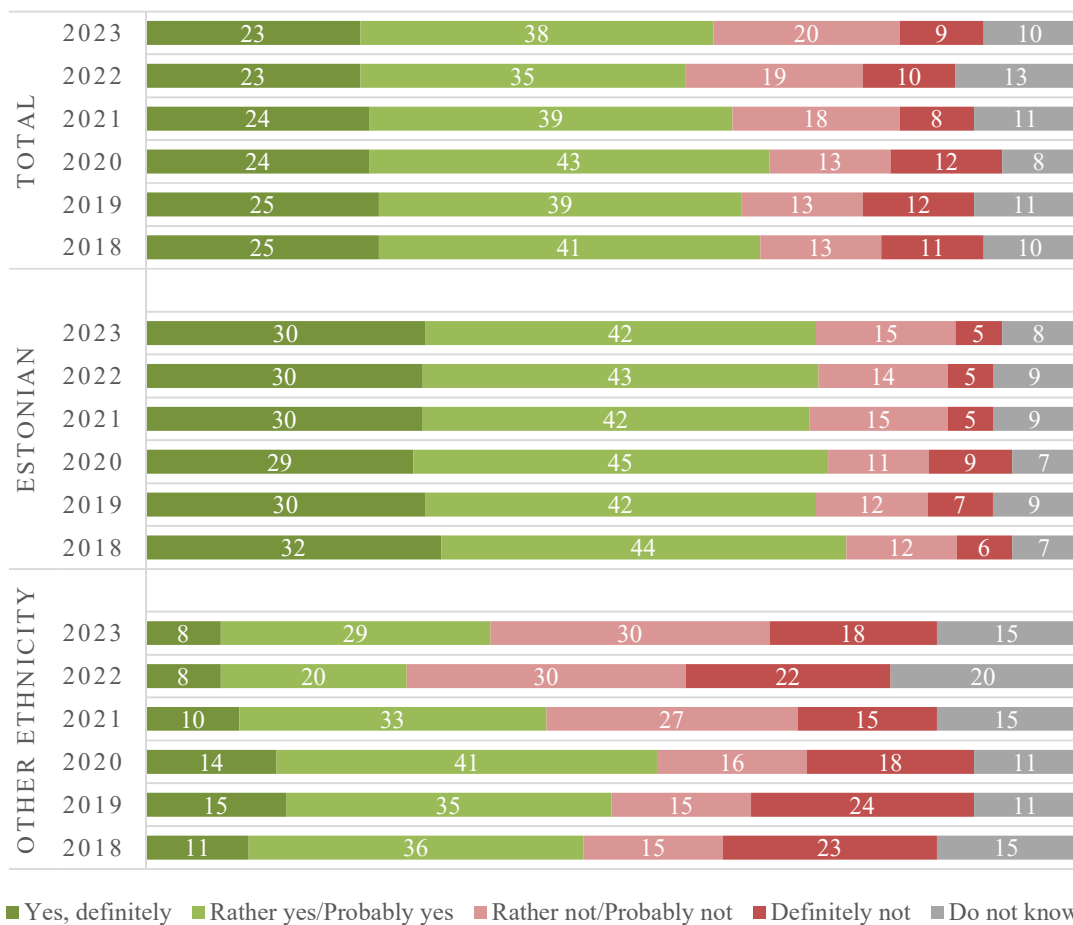


Figure 58. Assessment of the need for units of the Estonian Defence Forces to participate in military operations in the world's hot spots (% , N = all respondents).

Support for participation in international military operations has been consistently higher among Estonians than among other ethnicities. Respondents of other ethnicities support significantly decreased in 2022 when Russia's war in Ukraine escalated, but in 2023 their support for participation in international military operations has also increased (+9%).

9.2 Arguments for participation in international operations

Respondents were provided with a list and asked to select three of the most important reasons Estonia should participate in international military operations. The results were recorded in a ranked order, i.e. which is the first, the second and the third most important reason.

The most important reasons selected are that it gives Estonian soldiers real battle experience and ensures NATO's assistance in the event of potential threats (Figure 59).

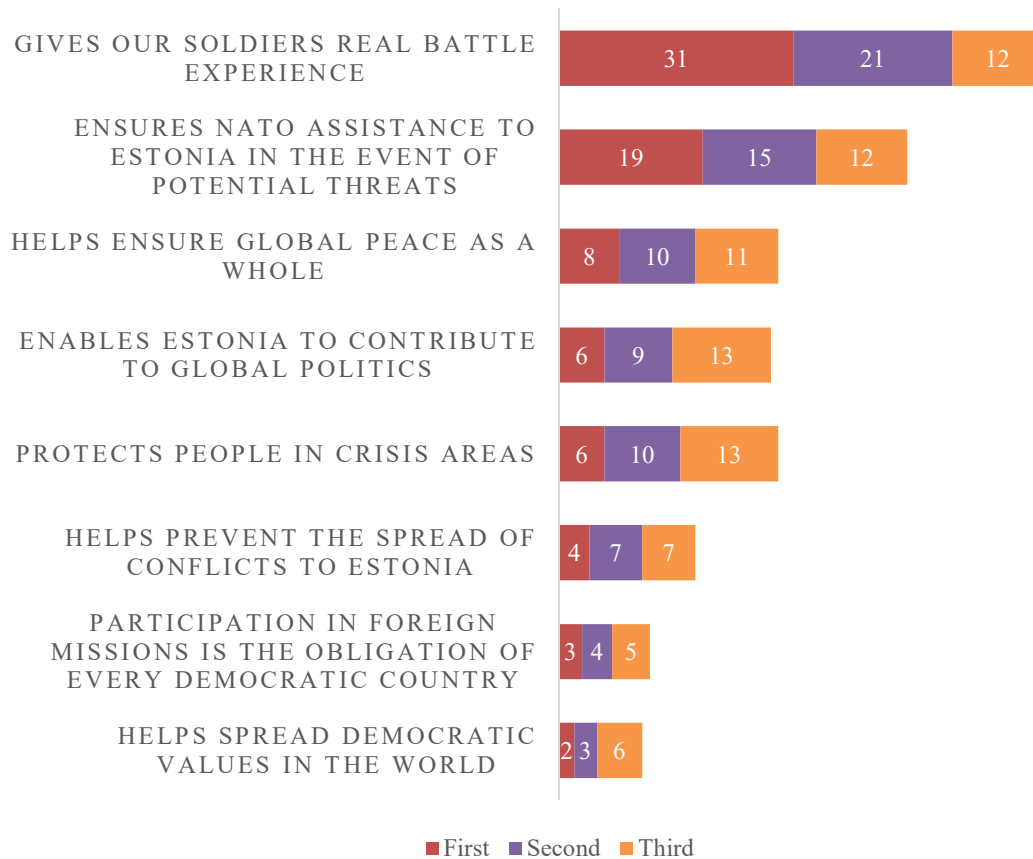


Figure 59. The most important reasons Estonia should participate in international military operations in 2023 (% , 3 choices ranked by importance, N = all respondents).

Over the last few years, residents' assessments of the most important reasons to participate in international missions have remained relatively unchanged (Figure 60).

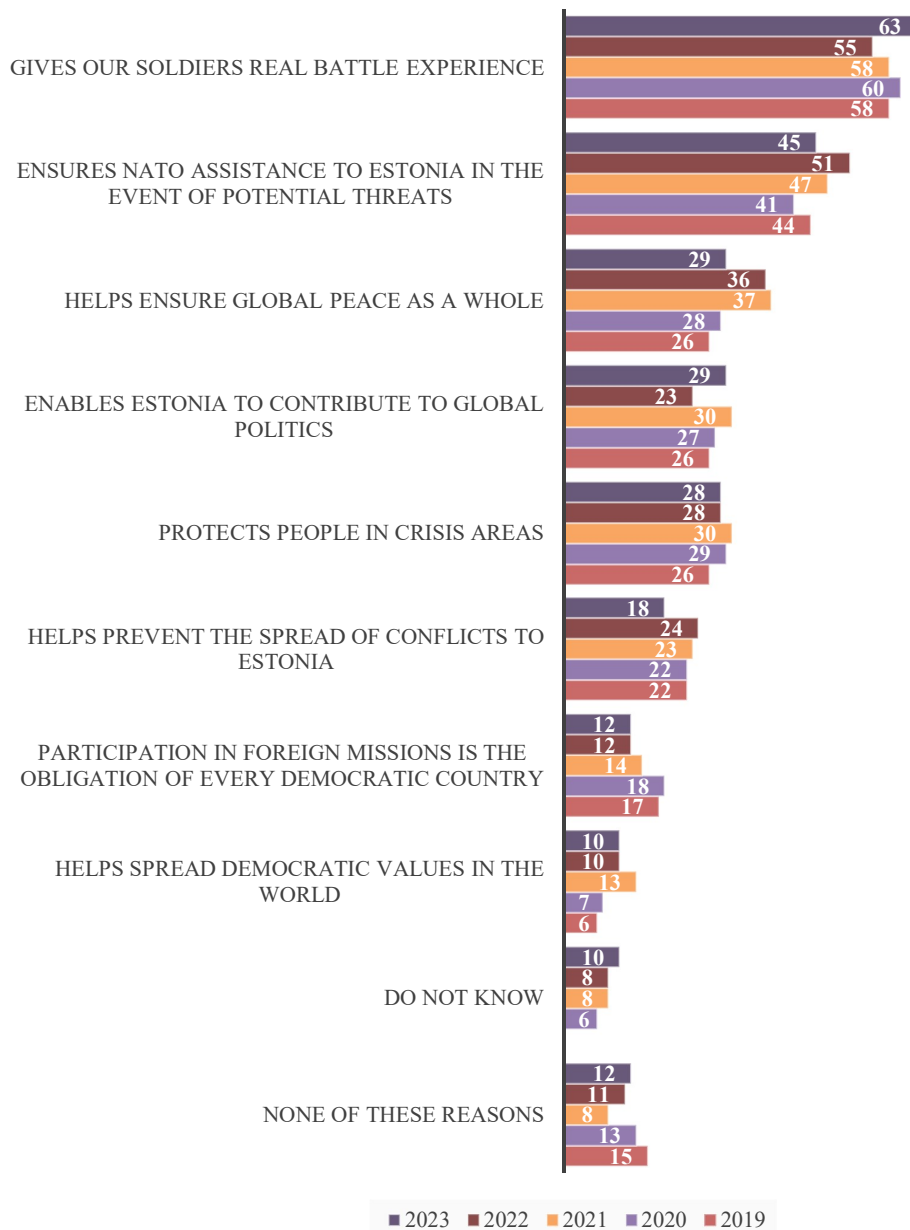


Figure 60. The most important reasons Estonia should participate in international military operations from 2019 to 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

In 2023, our soldiers getting real combat experience (+8%) and Estonia getting an opportunity to contribute to global politics (+6%) are considered more important than previously. A lower percentage, however, brought out contributing to peace in the world through international military operations (−7%), ensuring NATO support in the event of potential threats to Estonia (−6%) and helping to prevent conflicts from spreading to Estonia (−6%).

12% of residents believe that nothing justifies participation in international missions.

10. National defence education in schools

In 2023, there was a change in Estonian residents' attitude towards organising national defence education in secondary education institutions. Whereas earlier it was rather seen as a voluntary course, then this year support for its being a mandatory course is slightly prevailing (Figure 61).

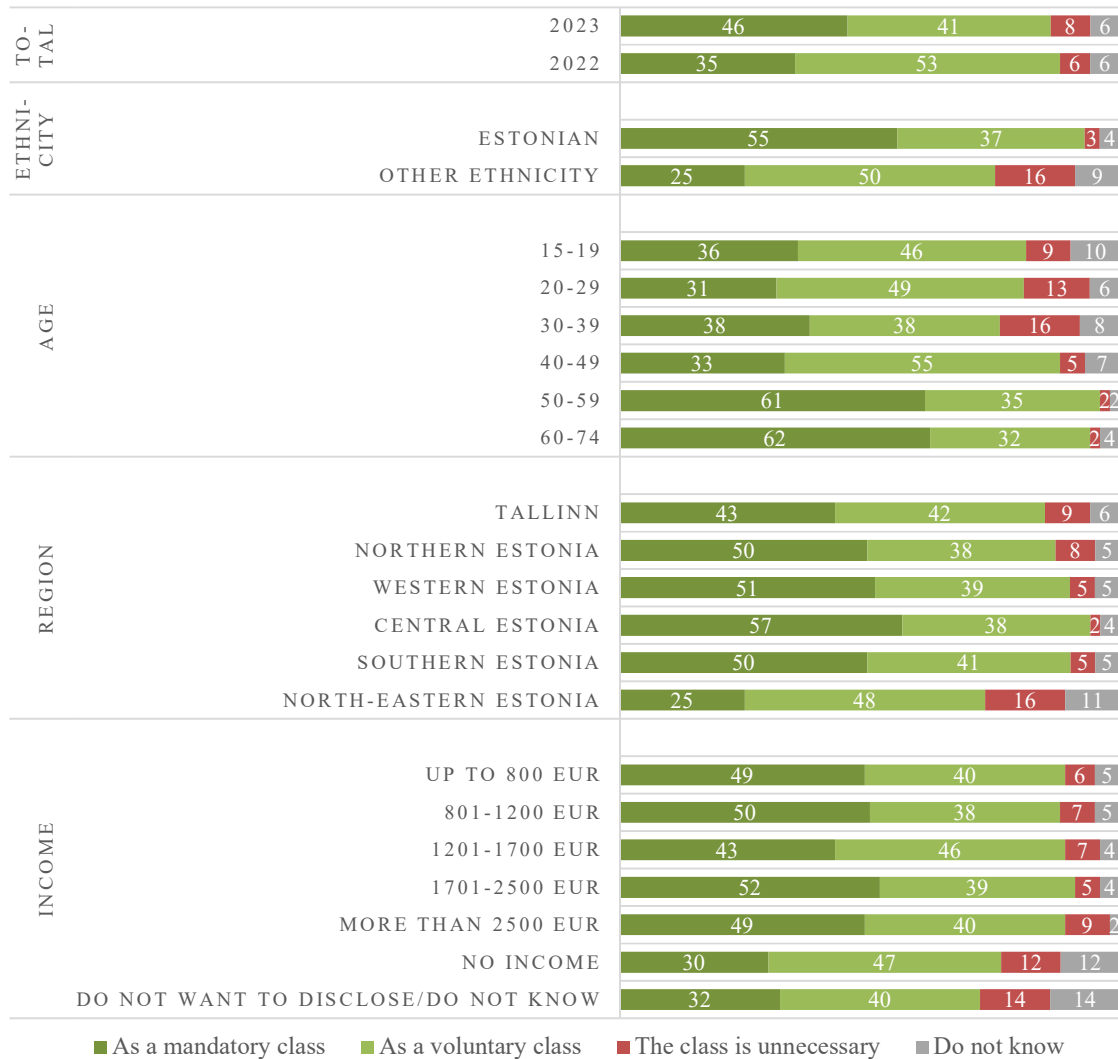


Figure 61. Attitudes towards implementation of national defence education in secondary education institutions in 2023 (%), N = all respondents).

Around half of Estonian residents believe that national defence education should be a mandatory course in secondary education institutions (high school or vocational school), more than 40% of residents preferred it as a voluntary course, 8% believed that the course was unnecessary and 6% had no opinion on the matter.

Estonians, residents who are 50–74 years of age and inhabitants of Central Estonia are more likely to prefer national defence education as a mandatory course in secondary education institutions. Residents with a monthly income of 1201–1700 euros were least likely out of all income groups to support national defence education as a mandatory course.

11. Media consumption

To assess the relationship between media consumption and attitudes towards national defence, the questionnaire also included an extensive section on media consumption. The survey determined the frequency of following various media channels and assessments of the importance of various media channels in obtaining national defence information.

11.1 Consumption of information channels

Of Estonian news portals, the most followed are Eesti Päevaleht/Delfi (73%), Postimees (72%) and ERR (71%) (Figure 62). Russian news portals, online versions of newspapers and the portal Uued Uudised are followed the least (15–18%).

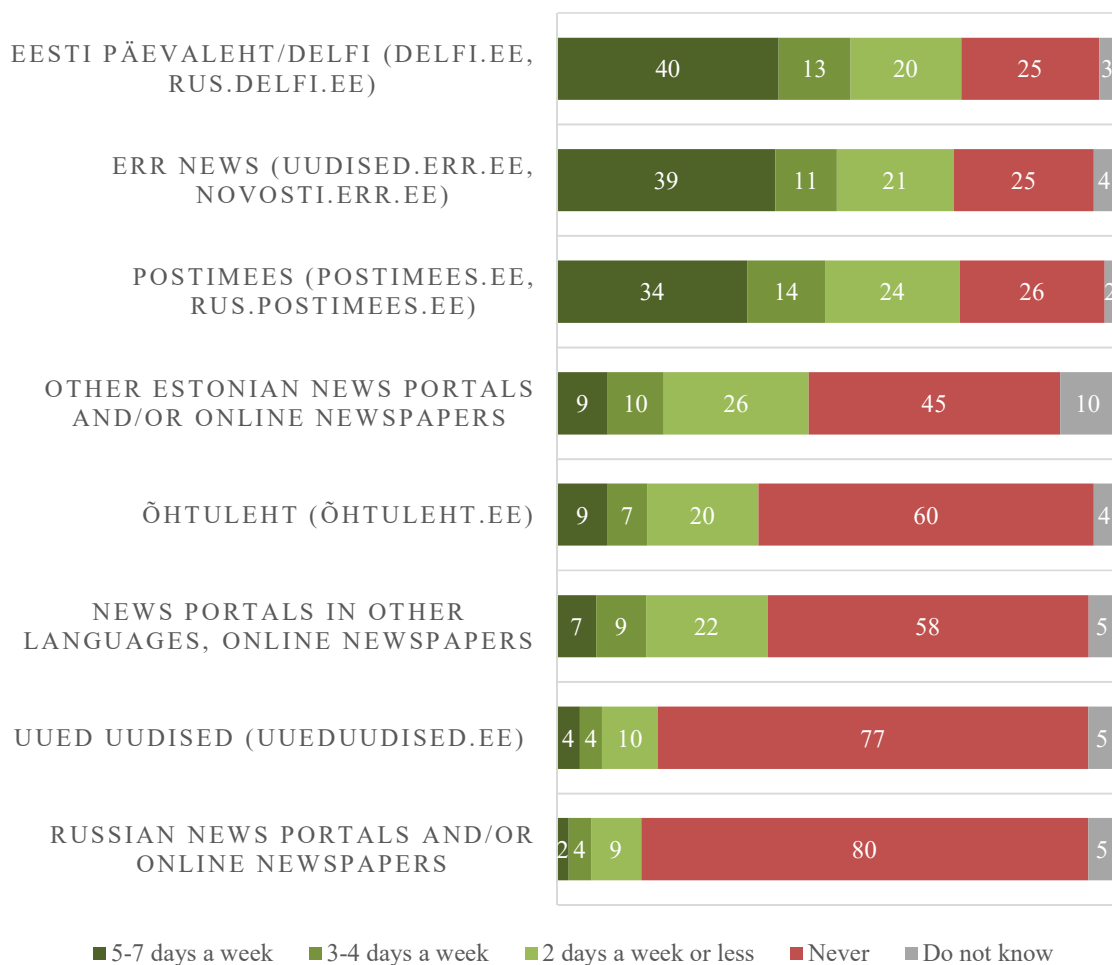


Figure 62. The frequency of following news portals and online newspapers in 2023 (%). N = all respondents).

Other ethnicities are significantly less likely than Estonians to follow all Estonian news portals and more likely to follow Russian news portals (Figure 63). Only in the case of reading Postimees were there no significant differences between ethnicities.

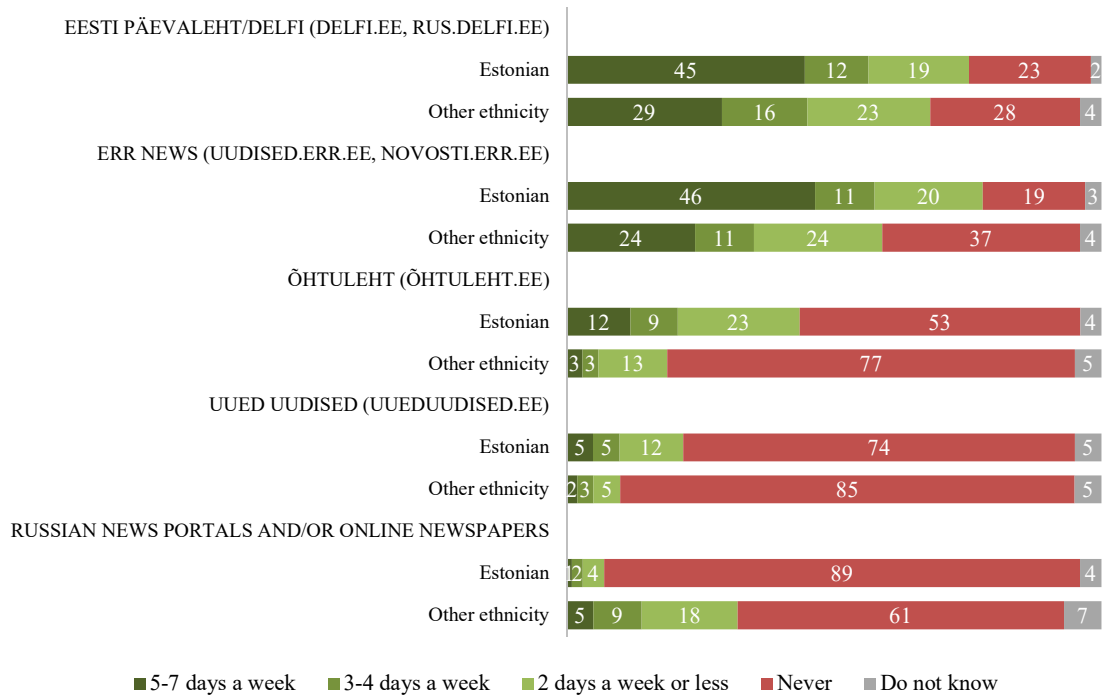


Figure 63. The frequency of following news portals and online newspapers in 2023 by ethnicity (%; N = all respondents).

The most frequently followed social media channels are YouTube (90%) and Facebook (83%), and direct messaging applications are also widely used (83%) (Figure 64). Instagram (51%) and blogs (29%) are used somewhat less. Other social media channels are used by a quarter of Estonian residents or even less.

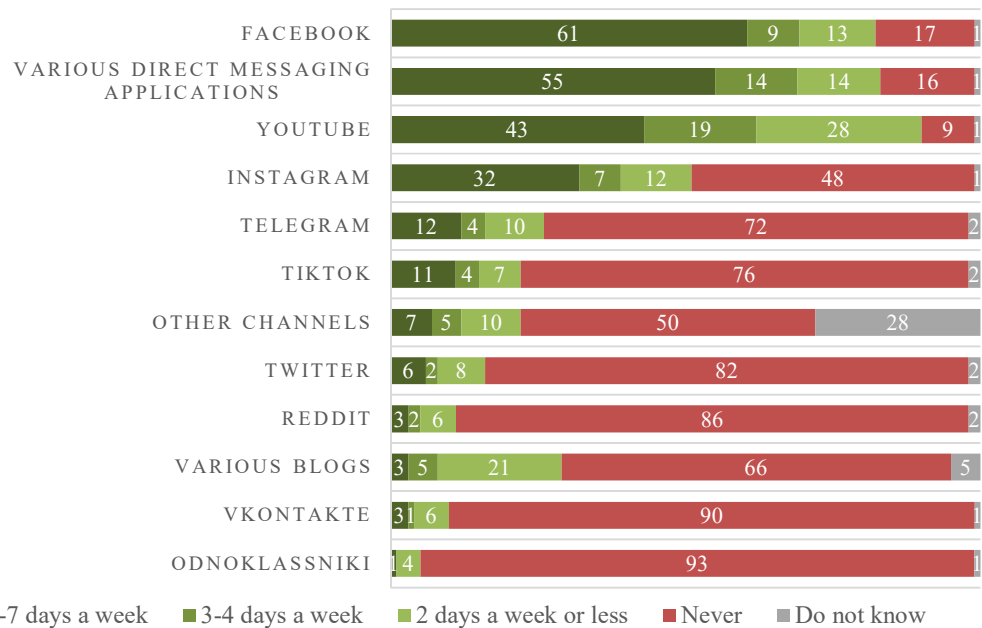


Figure 64. The frequency of following social media channels in 2023 (%; N = all respondents).

Other ethnicities use social media channels more often than Estonians and their consumption is also more varied – in addition to the other channels, they follow Telegram, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki more often than Estonians (Figure 65).

8% of Estonians and 2% of other ethnicities do not use any social media channels.

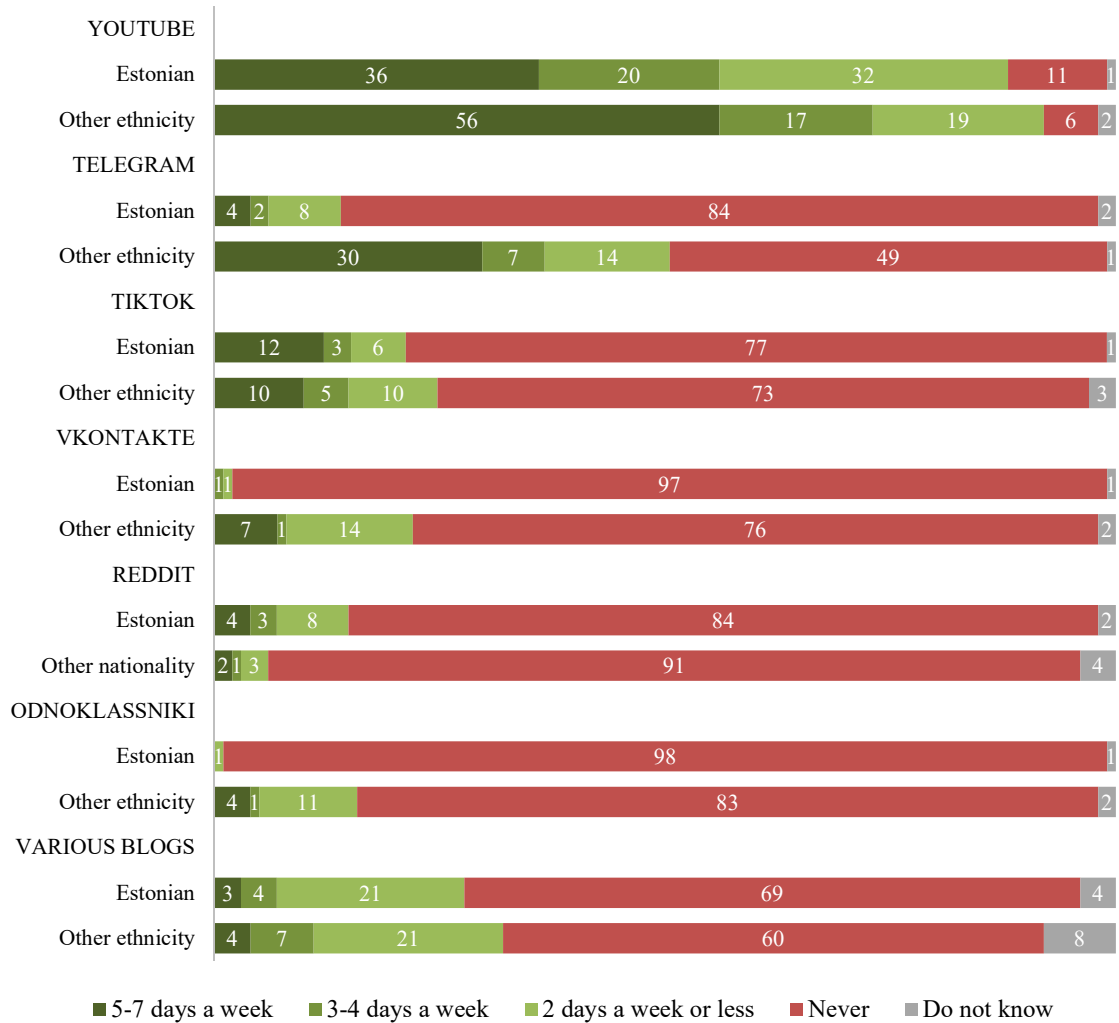


Figure 65. The frequency of following social media channels in 2023 by ethnicity (%). N = all respondents).

In terms of television and radio channels, the most followed among Estonian residents are ETV's Estonian-language shows (73%), Kanal 2 (61%) and TV3 (59%) (Figure 66). The audiences for other channels are around half of Estonian residents or less.

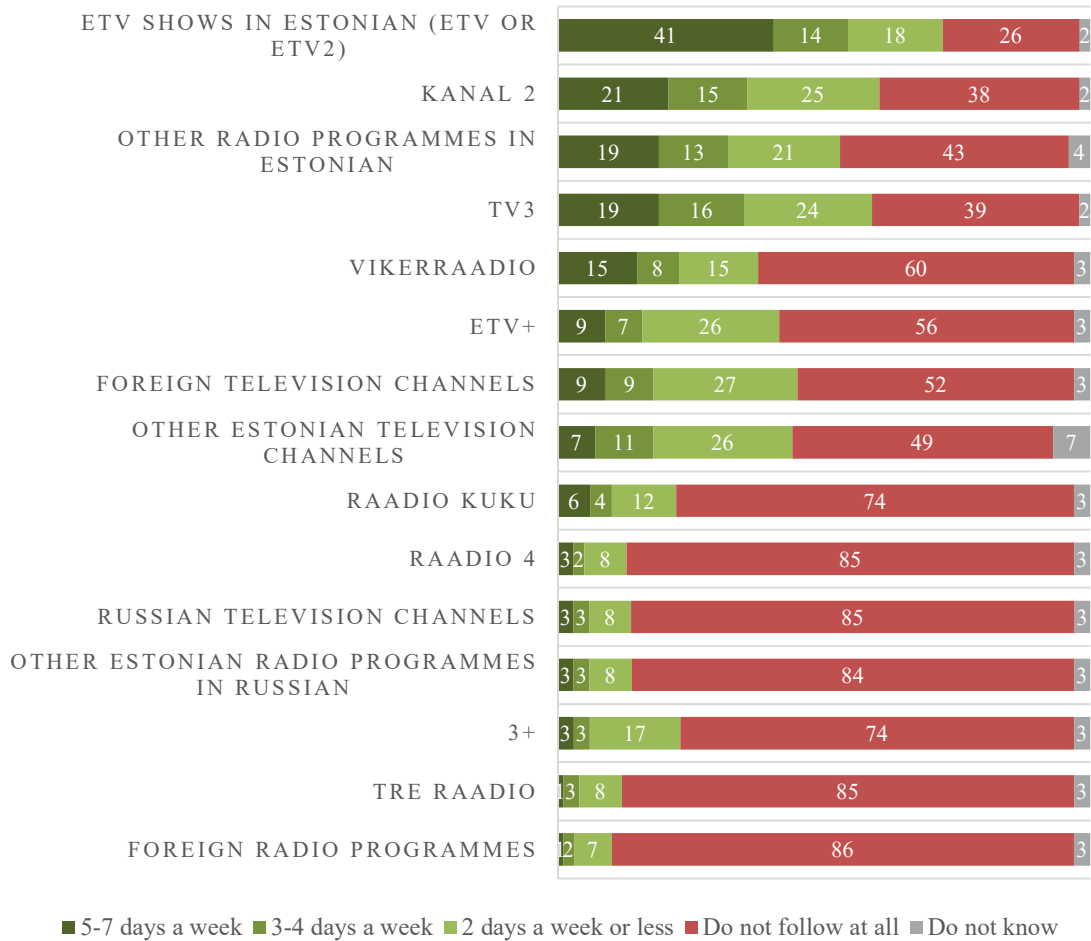


Figure 66. The frequency of following television and radio channels in 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

Estonians primarily follow Estonian-language channels, whereas responders of other ethnicities follow others as well (Figure 67). Estonians most often follow ETV's Estonian-language shows (86%), Kanal 2 (77%) and TV3 (77%). The television channels that other ethnicities most often follow are ETV+ (51%), ETV's Estonian-language shows (42%) and television channels from other foreign countries (36%).

After the implementation of restrictions imposed in the aftermath of the escalation of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022, the viewership of Russian television channels among other ethnicities has decreased from 63% to 24%.

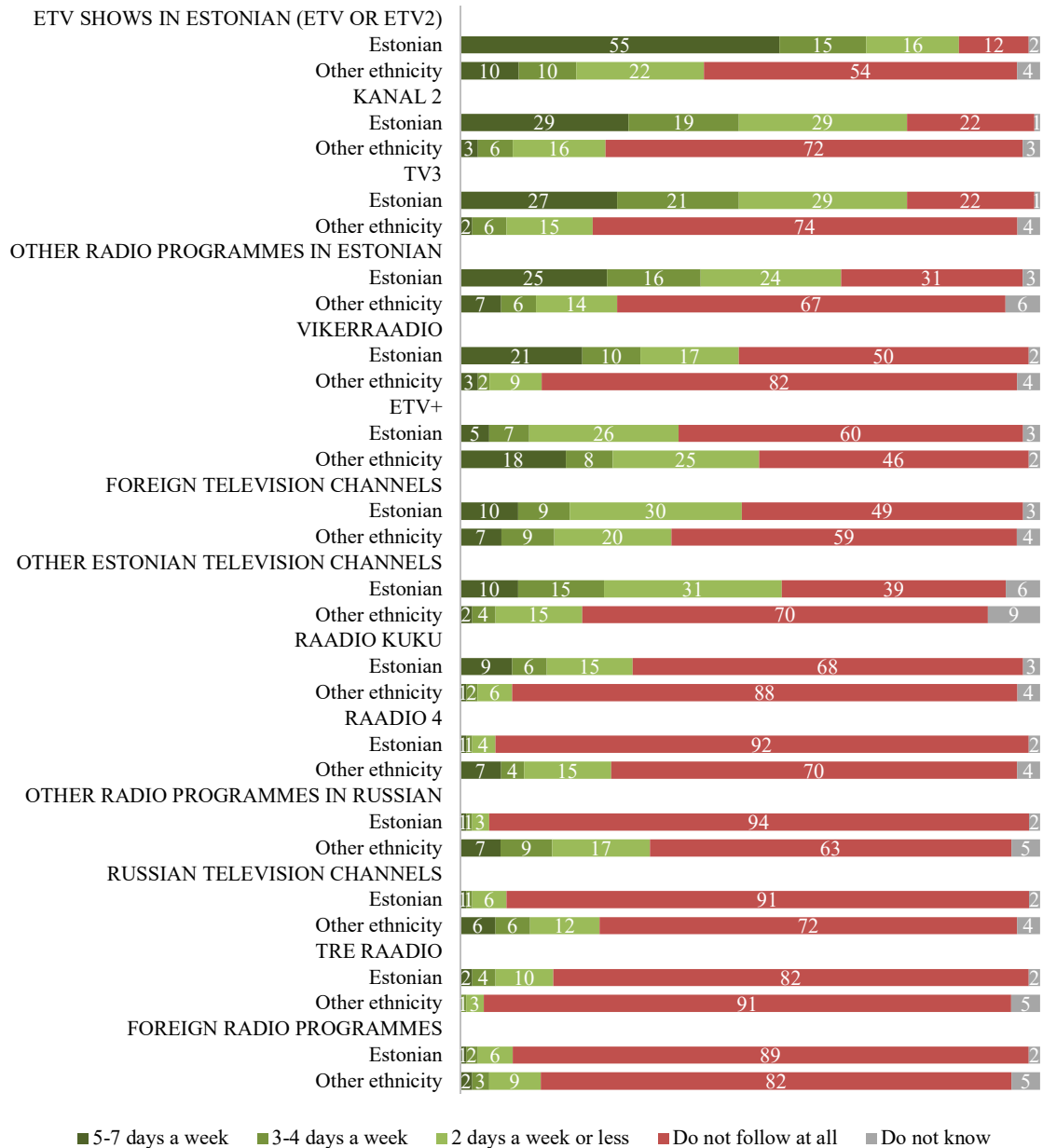


Figure 67. The frequency of following television and radio channels in 2023 by ethnicity (%; N = all respondents).

11.2. Importance of information channels in obtaining information related to national defence

Finally, the respondents were asked how important they consider various information channels in obtaining information about national defence.

The most important sources of national defence information are television (very or rather important for 88%), news portals (87%) and radio (83%) (Figure 68). No significant changes were found when compared to 2022.

Printed and street advertisements continue to be most frequently considered rather or completely unimportant (57% and 55% respectively).

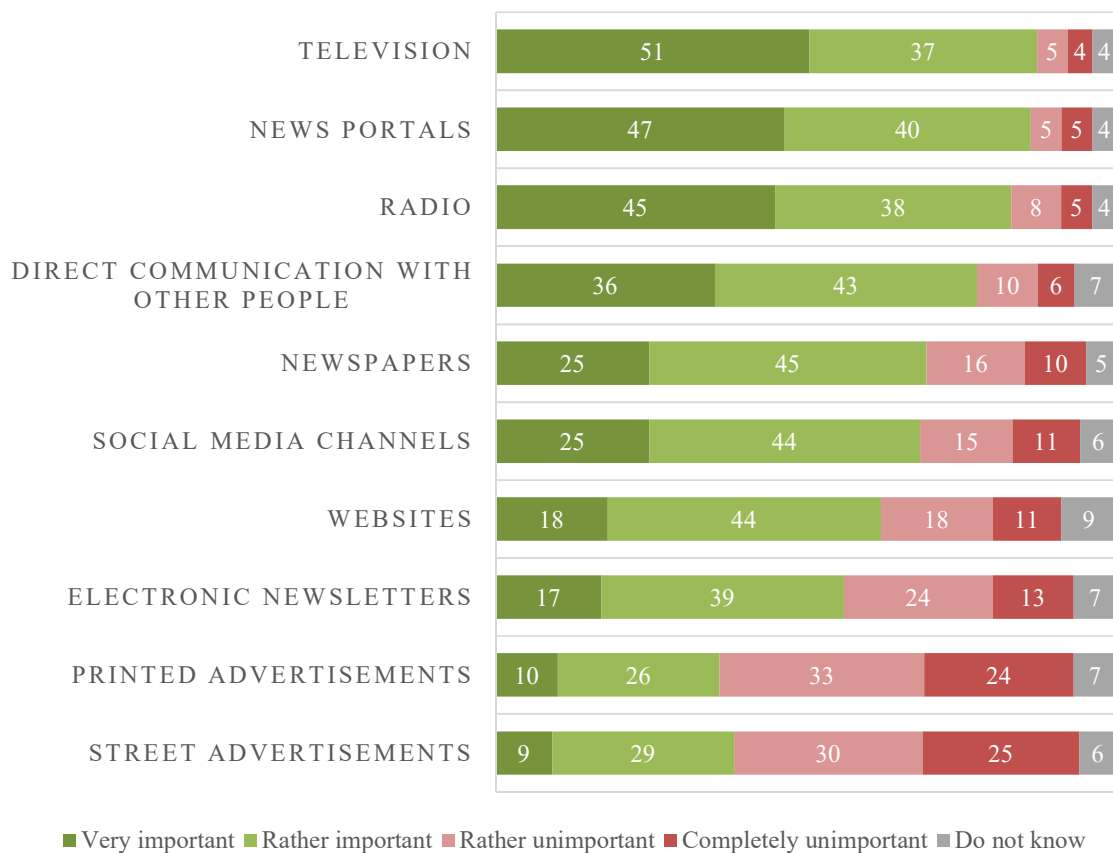


Figure 68. Assessments of the importance of media channels as a source of national defence information in 2023 (% , N = all respondents).

In comparison with other ethnicities, Estonians consider almost all channels (except for street advertisements) more important in spreading national defence information. Newspapers, television, radio and news portals see the largest differences between ethnicities (Figure 69). In the case of social media, however, there were no significant differences between ethnicities in preferences for channels.

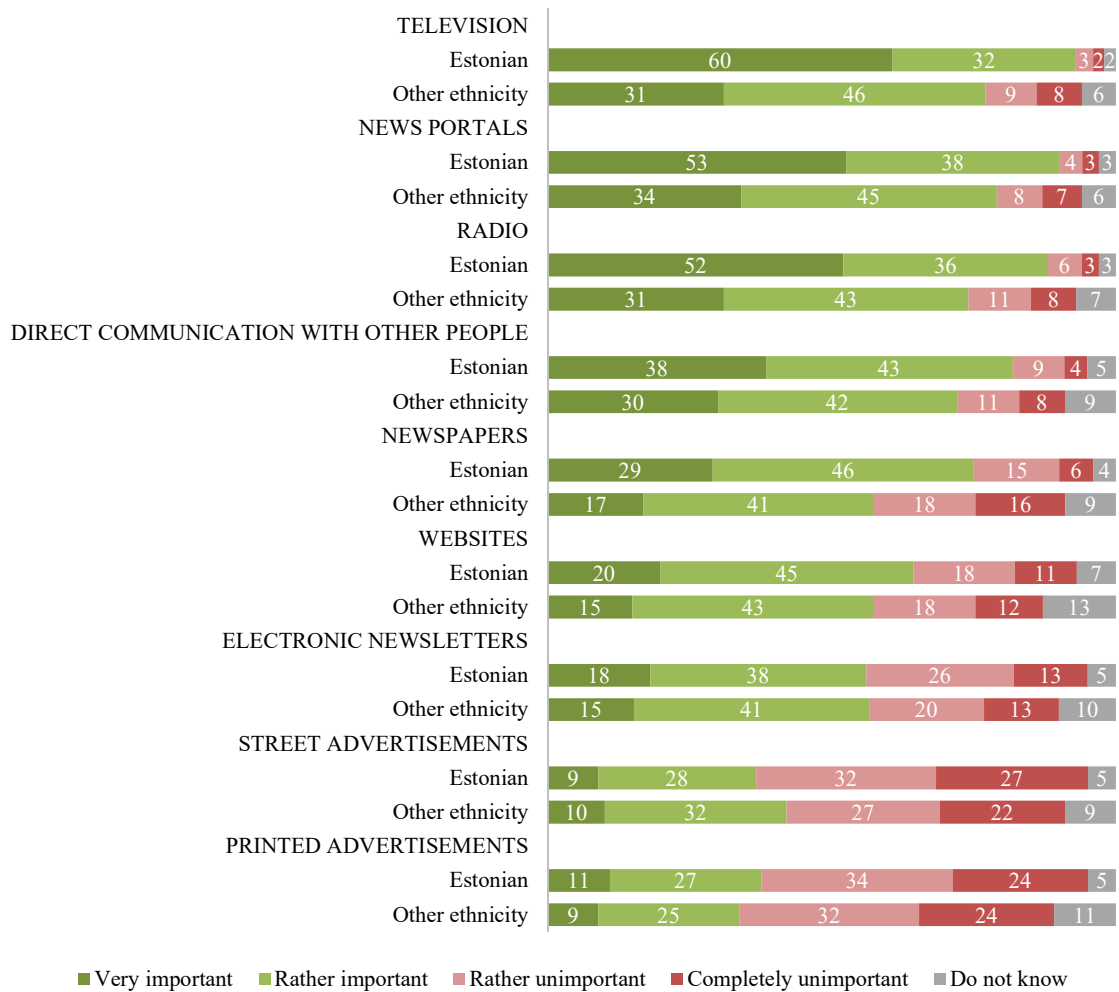


Figure 69. Assessments of the importance of media channels as a source of national defence information in 2023 by ethnicity (% , N = all respondents).