

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIRCULAR ECONOMY IMPLEMENTATION

ENGAGING YOUTH  
IN THE TRANSITION

JUNE 2022

**“Circular economy - sustainable competencies  
for youth” (CESCY project)**

These recommendations are the third intellectual output of the Circular Economy - Sustainable Competencies for Youth ("CESCY") Project, cofounded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and written by the partners in said project, as follows:

## Lowmerism OÜ

mayri@lowmerism.com  
Mayri Tiido  
Liisa Aavik

## Common Gold

jjc.beer@gmail.com  
Sjaak de Beer  
Welmer Goudt



[https://www.mentesempreendedoras.com/](https://www.mentesempreendedoras.com/geral@mentesempreendedoras.com)  
[geral@mentesempreendedoras.com](mailto:geral@mentesempreendedoras.com)  
Nathalia Gaiarim



[www.aegee.org](http://www.aegee.org)  
[headoffice@aegee.org](mailto:headoffice@aegee.org)  
Marié-Celine Falisse  
Frederick Ryan Wallace

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# Recommendations for Circular Economy Implementation: Engaging Youth in the Transition

“Circular Economy – Sustainable Competences for Youth” (CESCY) Intellectual Output Three.

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## Introduction

Over the last five years, the circular economy has become a staple topic in the European Union and among its member states' policymakers. The EU launched its second Circular Economy Action Plan in 2020 with 35 actions listed aiming to prevent waste and keep resources in the economy as long as possible.

The stakeholders currently included in the conversations are EU and national policymakers as well as industry representatives. Perhaps it's not possible to engage the whole society at once, but it is high time to include young people in the conversation and transition. Today's youth are the ones who will play a crucial role in implementing and living in the circular economy which makes it evident that we need to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills now.

Over the last years, the CESCYP (Circular Economy – Sustainable Competencies for Youth) project team has researched the current status quo of the circular economy, interviewed 50 entrepreneurs across Europe, and identified skills and competencies that are needed for implementing a circular economy.

In addition, from December 2021 to March 2022, the project team conducted an online consultation<sup>1</sup> that reached 200 young people aged 18-30 across Europe. The consultation was used to understand the attitudes and opinions of young people on the matter. The answers given in the survey were assessed using a 7-point scale, in which 4 was neutral and 5, 6 & 7 were important to very important. The results of the survey can be found in Annex 2.

The purpose of this document is to create recommendations regarding circular economy competencies for four main stakeholders:

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<sup>1</sup> Annex 2: Results of the survey

## Recommendations for Circular Economy Implementation: Engaging Youth in the Transition

- Educational institutions;
- Enterprises / employers;
- Youth organisations;
- Local and national policymakers.

These recommendations can be used by youth organisations, youth workers and young people themselves to lobby for better inclusion and opportunities for the youth regarding the transition towards a circular economy.

## Recommendations to Educational Institutions

The right to access quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning applies to all citizens, as enshrined within the European Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>2</sup> This means that every European citizen has encounters with educational institutions several times throughout their lifetime. They are exposed to new knowledge, skills, and attitudes that shape them and influence their choices. Therefore, education can have a lot of power over a person and on a broader scale in society from key competencies to values. We believe that educational institutions have an important role to play in helping young people getting equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills for the future.

### **Our recommendations to educational institutions are the following:**

- We strongly recommend to include sustainability and circular economy topics and examples in curriculums at all levels from broad perspectives to specific ones.
  - *With younger age groups, we suggest discussing the 5R (refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, rot) model and how we can prevent waste in our daily lives. Circular company visits can be a part of class excursions at all levels. Senior levels can work on the circular economy meaning, model and business examples. The examples can be added to the national programme by educational ministries.*
- We encourage educational institutions to consider establishing mandatory subjects on sustainability and circular economy topics at different education levels to offer a common base for every young person in Europe.
  - *The subjects can include systems thinking and an introduction to a circular economy. The national curriculums should be created by educational ministries.*

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<sup>2</sup> European Education Area Explained, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about/eea-explained>

- We encourage educational institutions to carry out initiatives supporting the competencies gained in sustainability and circular economy.
  - *Example: Learn&Hack (5-day training course on circular economy for youth), challenge-based learning, experience-based learning, hackathons.*
- We strongly recommend creating special curriculums and degrees related to the field of sustainability to prepare young people for the labour market – sustainable design, circular economy, and restoration of natural systems.
- We highly advise putting in place sustainable and circular economy policies and compatible behaviours and practices. In addition to offering classes and education on the topic, we encourage every institution to “walk the talk” by implementing sustainable and circular practices on their premises.
  - *Examples: waste sorting, Repair Cafés, swapping and renting among employees and students.*
- We recommend developing and reinforcing cross-sector collaboration, including collaboration with youth organisations and the business sector, with the aim to enhance coordinated efforts toward providing a broad range of complementary opportunities to formal education for young people to acquire and develop circular economy competencies, for example, non-formal learning, on-the-job training, etc.
  - *This can include internships in sustainable companies, visits from a company representative, tours in companies and company challenges.*

## Recommendations to Youth Organisations

Although youth organisations are not the only actors who can support young people in acquiring circular economy competencies, youth organisations are usually best positioned to reach out to young people outside of the formal education systems, encourage and support youth initiatives, and provide valuable non-formal education opportunities. Therefore, we believe youth organisations must play a key role in preparing the youth for the ongoing transition towards more sustainable societies and a circular economy.

### **Our recommendations to youth organisations are the following:**

- We recommend that youth organisations offer open, safe and inclusive spaces for young people to discuss and share their concerns and ideas on the topics of sustainability and circular economy, allowing for and encouraging the development of initiatives with and by young people in these fields.
- We encourage youth organisations to provide capacity-building opportunities (e.g. training events, workshops, hackathons) using non-formal education with the aim to train youth workers and support young people in acquiring and developing sustainable and circular economy competencies.
  - *In the context of circular economy, relevant competencies include the following: ethics, vision, motivation for a circular economy, lateral thinking, knowledge and critical understanding of sustainability, circular economy and circular business models, systems thinking, design thinking, participative project management, adaptability and flexibility, problem-solving, teamwork and collaboration, assertive and empathic communication, participatory and engaging leadership, activating change, working in complex environments and situations.*
- We strongly encourage youth organisations to actively reach out to young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to raise awareness and support young people in identifying relevant and accurate information about sustainable and



circular practices, and to keep the youth informed about opportunities to develop and acquire circular economy competencies.

- We recommend that youth organisations develop and reinforce cross-sector collaboration, including collaboration with educational institutions and the business sector, with the aim to enhance coordinated efforts toward providing a broad range of additional opportunities (formal education, non-formal learning, on-the-job training, etc.) for young people to acquire and develop circular economy competencies.
  - *The “Learn&Hack” hackathons organised in the framework of the CESCYP project are an example of cross-sectoral cooperation involving youth organisations and companies. Learn more about these hackathons in the CESCYP manual for youth workers.*
- We encourage youth organisations active in the field of policy and advocacy to consider young people’s needs to acquire and develop circular economy competencies when advocating for education-related and/or sustainability-related policies in any sector of relevance.
- We strongly encourage youth organisations to lead by example and show the way toward a more sustainable economy by implementing and mainstreaming circular practices and policies in their daily operations as well as when organising/hosting events and other activities.

## Recommendations to Businesses

Technological advancements and climate change, among others, are contributing to the change of paradigm in work culture as well. Young people nowadays are not only looking for just a job, but for a job with a higher purpose which can help to develop themselves personally and professionally. In addition to that, young people are increasingly looking for companies that also are taking steps toward environmental sustainability and circularity. Therefore we find it important that businesses take a systemic approach toward sustainability and circularity, and include youth in that process.

### **Our recommendations to businesses are the following:**

- We strongly recommend businesses of all sizes embrace circularity as the new norm. The survey results indicate that aspects such as higher purpose, environmental and social responsibility are deemed more important than a salary. Therefore, in order to attract and bind young talents to a company, there has to be responsibility taken beyond conducting business as usual. This can be done by incorporating circular practices into the core of the business and by offering constant training and support on circular topics to the employees. There are a couple of competencies that we especially recommend businesses focus on in the training of employees. These include, but are not limited to, complex problem-solving skills, resource management skills, system thinking skills, and technical skills.
- We encourage businesses to arrange a more apprenticeship style, on-the-job training for the employees working in a core circular environment, such as recycling, reusing and refurbishing. These kinds of jobs require more technical skills, therefore more intensive collaboration is required with vocational education and local repair partners such as Repair Cafés or Circular Craft Centres (Circulaire Ambachtcentra).

- We recommend businesses to make jobs more inclusive by valuing and enabling employees' full participation in all the organisational activities. As a circular economy often requires a systems change then engaging employees in the decision-making is the way to go. We recommend these organisations to increase job inclusivity by decentralising decision-making power and creating diverse teams in which employees from different disciplines work closely together. This fosters creativity and increases the innovation capacity of the organisation. In the context of bigger organisations, an elected committee and IT infrastructure may be required to support this decentralised decision-making process.
  - *Example: organising a company-wide contest in which all employees are asked to submit their ideas on how to improve the organisation internally or its external impact. Winning ideas receive a budget, working hours and coaching to implement them.*
- We strongly encourage partnering up with local universities to complement and give practical output to the theoretical knowledge gained in education. Young people have the visionary qualities to think beyond path dependencies that big corporations find themselves in. Moreover, it gives companies an opportunity to get in touch with impact-driven young talent and present themselves as an employer who cares about the future. An ongoing dialogue between businesses and organisations is important to improve the students' career perspectives and bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- To further harvest the potential of youth, we recommend businesses of all sizes to pursue partnerships with youth organisations in the domain of non-formal education. This could be done through innovative events which bring together young people with real-life circularity challenges. Events like these create an open space where different value chain partners and governments can experiment with circular innovation and new ways of collaboration. This way, young people offer the capacity to explore the circular business opportunities that lie between the boundaries of organisations.

## Recommendations to Policymakers

In governance, there is always the debate about what and how much to regulate. People and businesses love to have their freedoms and in that regard, European Union countries are mostly enjoying the free movement of goods and people. In addition, it is currently accompanied by the basis of an economic market - supply and demand. This has served us well and brought us innovation and prosperity, but in times of climate crisis, the importance of the right policies supporting the transition to a circular economy can't be underestimated. An overview of the existing policies in the European Union can be found in Annex 1.

### **Our recommendations to policymakers are the following:**

- We strongly recommend putting in place state-wide, regional and local long-term strategies related to circular economy implementation. Doing so will give a concrete vision and direction to all the members of the society (citizens and businesses) which in return will shape their choices and actions. This is especially beneficial for young people who are making study and career choices, so they will know that the topics of sustainability and circular economy are here to stay and will influence their lives for decades to come.
- We encourage establishing special funding and programmes for young people related to acquiring circular economy competencies in order to support business model innovation and entrepreneurship. Young people tend to be more risk-taking, visionary and bold in their decision-making, hence there's great potential in finding solutions through them.
- We encourage prioritising NGOs and initiatives, especially the ones focusing on youth and working on non-formal education, circular economy and sustainability and supporting them with regular funding. Youth NGOs can shape the attitudes and values of thousands of young people through their activities and non-formal

education trainings. In the transition process to a more circular world, they can play a crucial role in influencing how young people see the world.

- We recommend using the levers of laws and regulations to support companies who offer circular economy opportunities for young people as adapting to climate change and its risks is an inevitable step.
- We encourage supporting and carrying out wide-ranging awareness campaigns to engage youth and citizens altogether in the circular economy matters. The awareness of and readiness for a circular economy vary a lot in different European countries, therefore it's necessary to put effort into raising the awareness levels.
- We recommend establishing funding and programmes for educators and teachers to get knowledgeable on circular economy topics. Educators and teachers have encounters with young people daily basis, which puts them in the perfect position to trigger interest and pass on knowledge on a circular economy to young people from different ages and backgrounds.

## Annex 1: Existing policies at the EU level

In regards to sustainable and circular economy competencies, there are two key overarching EU initiatives worth mentioning that address the population as a whole:

- the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#), adopted by the European Commission in March 2020 as one of the main building blocks of the European Green Deal (European Commission DG ENV, 2020);
- the [European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#), a five-year plan launched by the European Commission in July 2020 with the aim to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and put them to use (European Commission DG EMPL, 2020).

In the context of this paper, the following actions being or to be implemented through these two EU initiatives show particular relevance:

- *Pact for Skills* (European Skills Agenda - Action 1);
- *Skills to support the twin transitions* (European Skills Agenda - Action 6)
- *Increasing STEM graduates and fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills* (European Skills Agenda - Action 7);
- *Supporting the circular economy transition through the Skills Agenda, the forthcoming Action Plan for Social Economy, the Pact for Skills and the European Social Fund Plus* (Circular Economy Action Plan - making the circular economy work for people, regions and cities).

As the European Skills Agenda and the Circular Economy Action Plan tend to overlap in regards to competencies, we chose to address the different actions following the structure of the Skills Agenda.

- [Pact for Skills](#)

The [\*\*Pact for Skills\*\*](#), which is the first flagship action under the European Skills Agenda, was launched by the European Commission in November 2020 with the aim to structure and organise skills development across Europe, while bringing together government authorities, public institutions, employment services, education and training providers and other stakeholders active at different levels in Europe. The Pact for Skills also aims to deliver on the ambitions of the green and digital transitions and to encourage public and private organisations to take concrete action to upskill and reskill people in Europe (European Commission Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, 2021).

Based on numbers published by the European Commission in December 2021, more than 500 organisations have signed up to the Pact for Skills, partnerships in several sectors have pledged to reskill or upskill more than 1.5 million workers, and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships has received 366 pledges offering more than 1 million apprenticeships so far.

- Skills to support the twin transition

This action aims to support the acquisition of skills to accompany the green and digital transitions in jobs and beyond. This section outlines relevant steps taken so far (April 2022)..

In January 2022, the European Commission published a [\*\*proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability\*\*](#) which aims to support EU Member States, schools, higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations and other education providers in equipping learners with the understanding of and skills on sustainability, climate change and the environment. In addition, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission published a new [\*\*European competence framework on sustainability\*\*](#) which maps out the competencies needed for the green transition. These competences include for instance initiative-taking, respecting nature and understanding the impact everyday actions and decisions have on the environment and the global climate (European Commission Press Corner, 2022).

In March 2022, the European Commission published a [\*\*taxonomy of skills for the green transition\*\*](#) which should contribute to a common understanding of skills needed for a successful and fair green transition in the labour market. This classification system includes 381 skills, 185 knowledge concepts and **5** transversal skills. The green skills that form this taxonomy include, among others, conducting energy audits, measuring the sustainability of tourism activities, and training staff on recycling programmes, while green knowledge concepts include for instance emission standards and ecological principles. When it comes to green transversal skills, examples include the evaluation of

the environmental impact of personal behaviour and the adoption of ways to boost biodiversity and animal welfare (European Commission DG EMPL, 2022).

- Increasing the number of STEM graduates and fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills

This action aims, on the one hand, to increase the number of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) graduates in Europe and, on the other hand, to foster entrepreneurial and transversal skills. In the context of this paper, the latter is particularly relevant.

In December 2021, the European Commission adopted a new [Social Economy Action Plan](#) with the objective to help the social economy thrive in Europe and to support businesses, organisations and other entities that put people and the environment at the centre of their mission (European Commission DG EMPL, 2021). Through this action plan, the European Commission acknowledges the need for upskilling and reskilling among workers and intends, among other measures, to set up a **European Competence Centre for Social Innovation** in order to provide capacity building and facilitate mutual learning among relevant authorities and support structures.

When it comes to entrepreneurship skills, the European Commission aims to provide support in funding programmes for entrepreneurial skills-related activities, for European mobility of entrepreneurs and for systematic use of the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework. This action also aims to promote entrepreneurship skills at all levels of education and training in order to provide students with the right knowledge and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial activity (European Commission DG EMPL, 2020).

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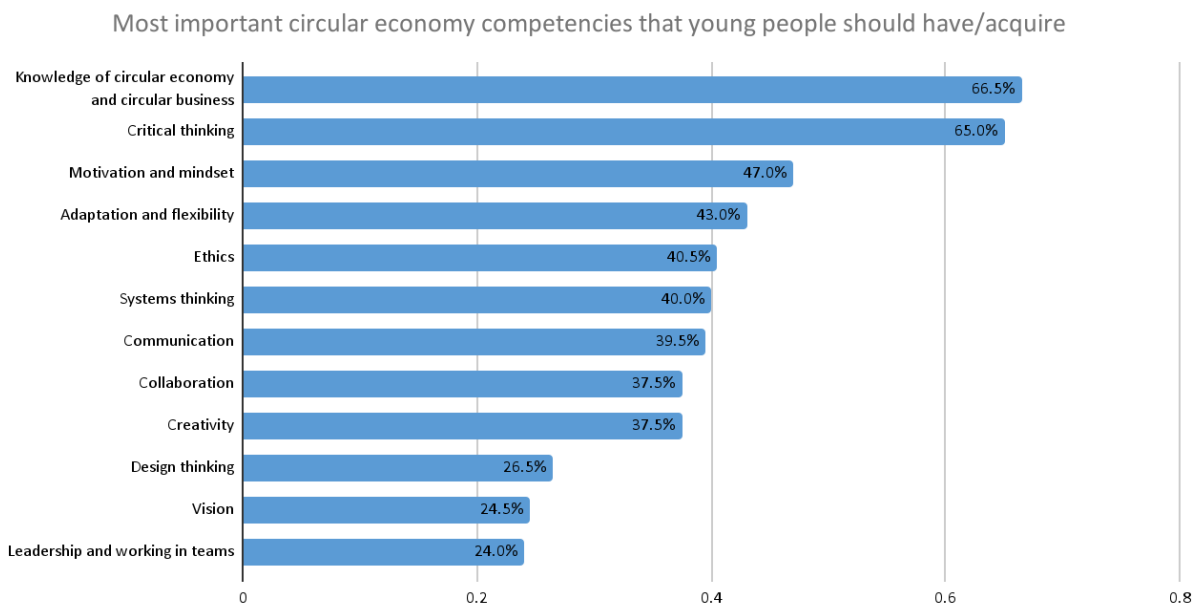
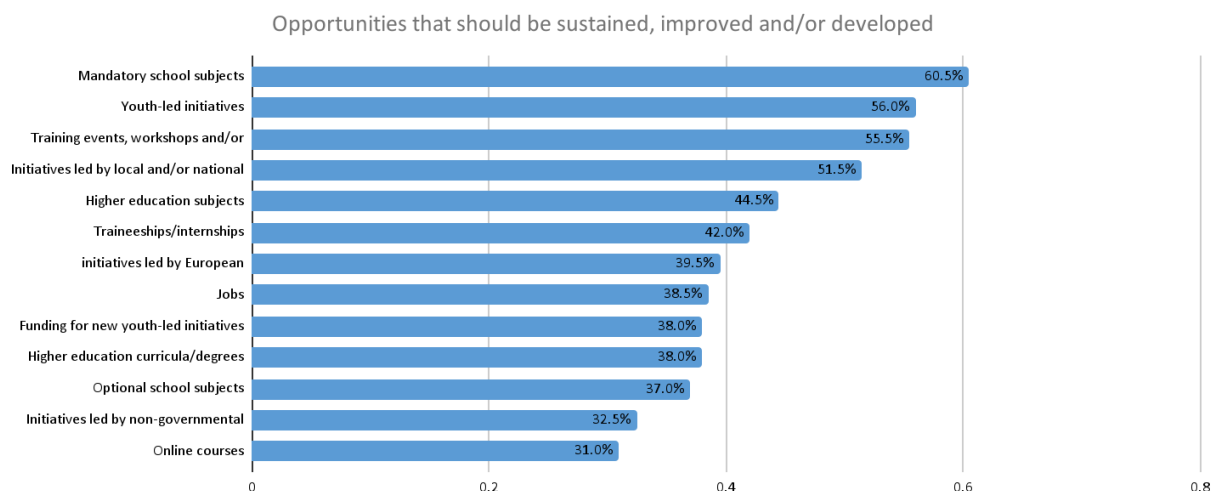


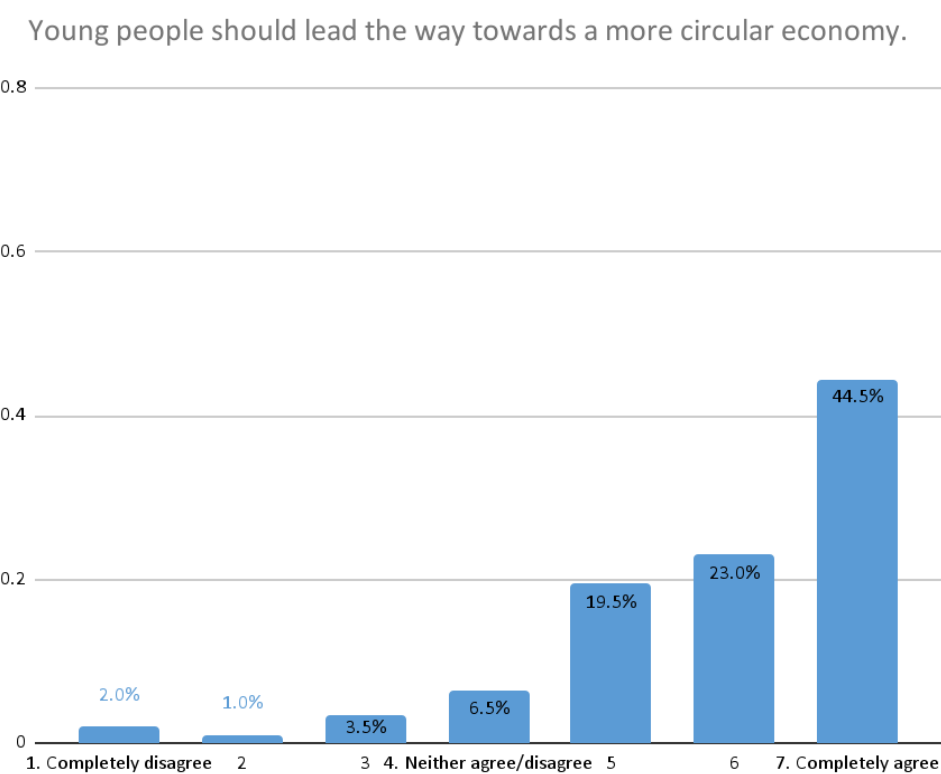
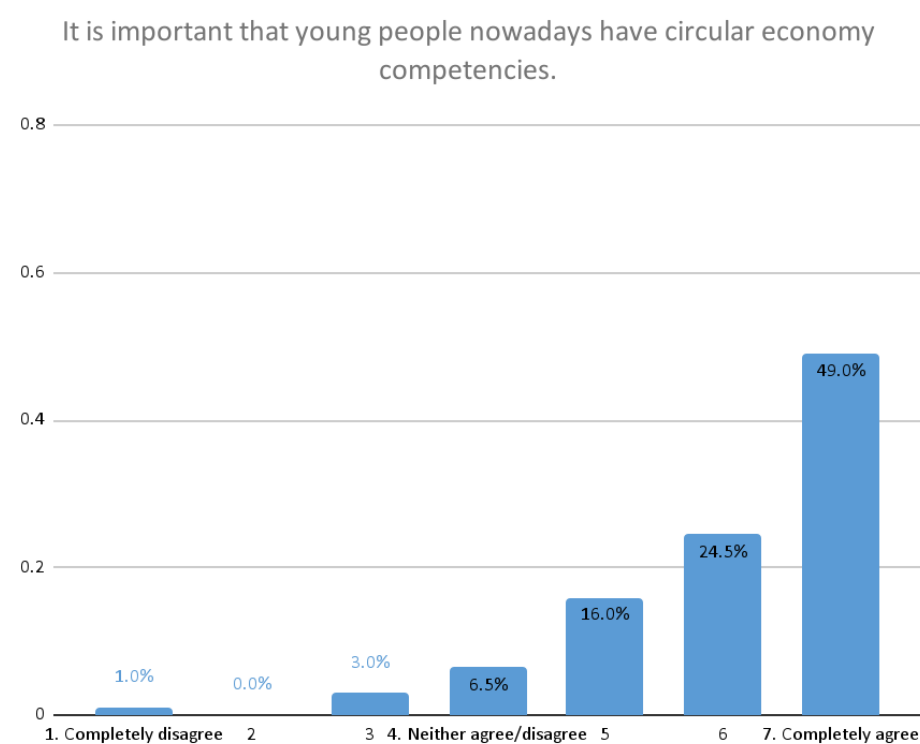
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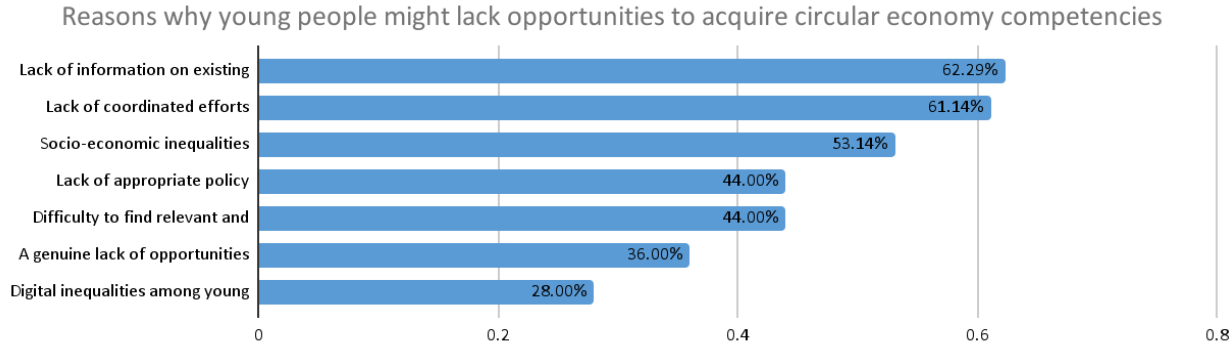
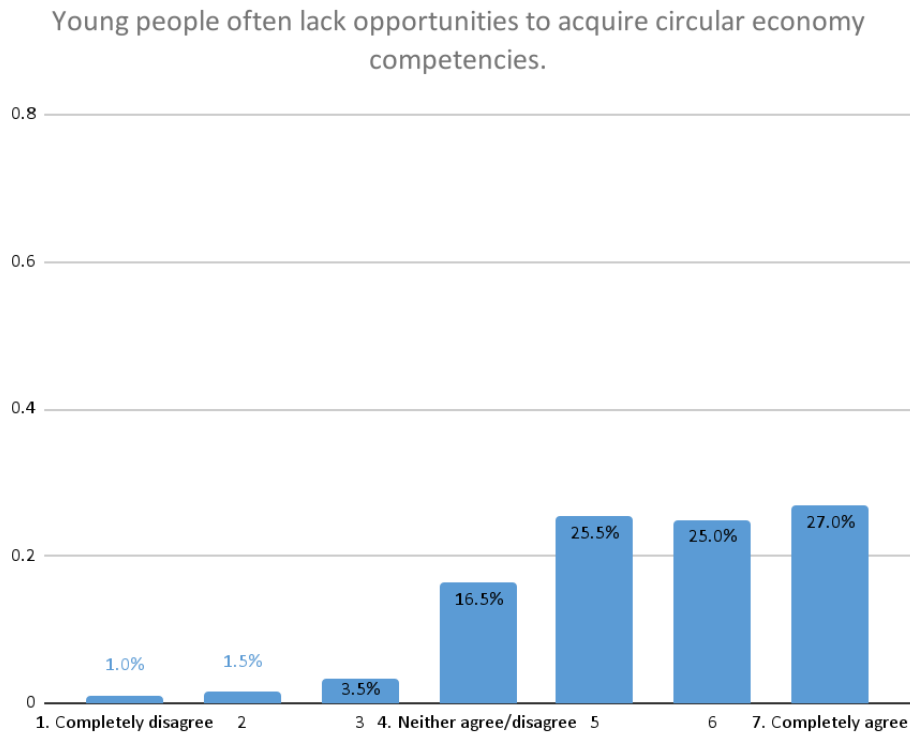
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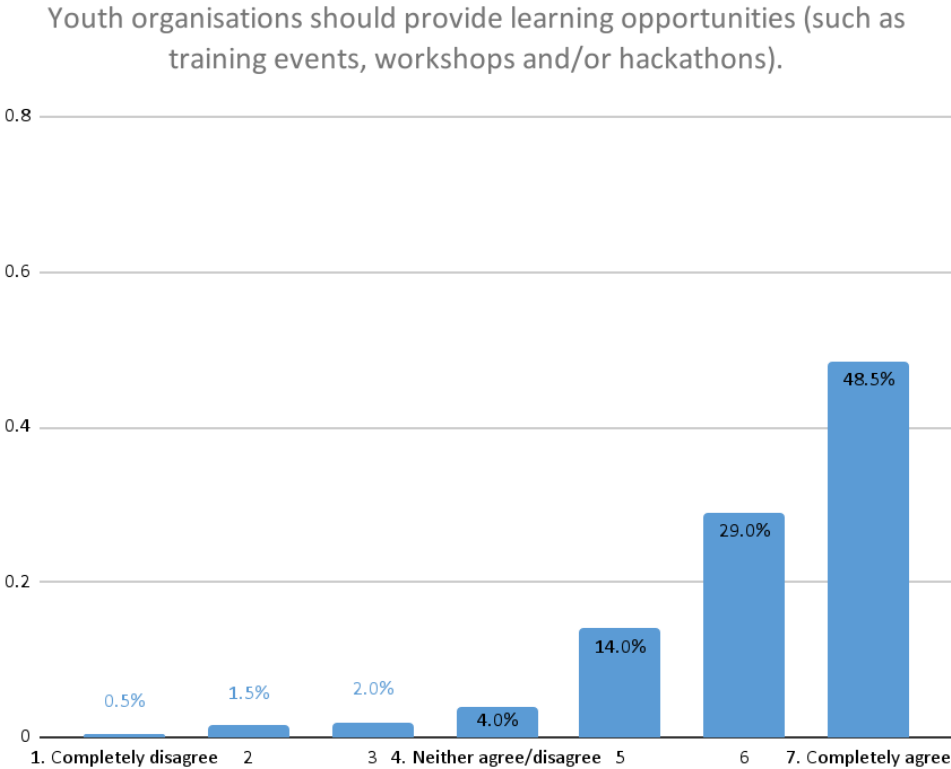
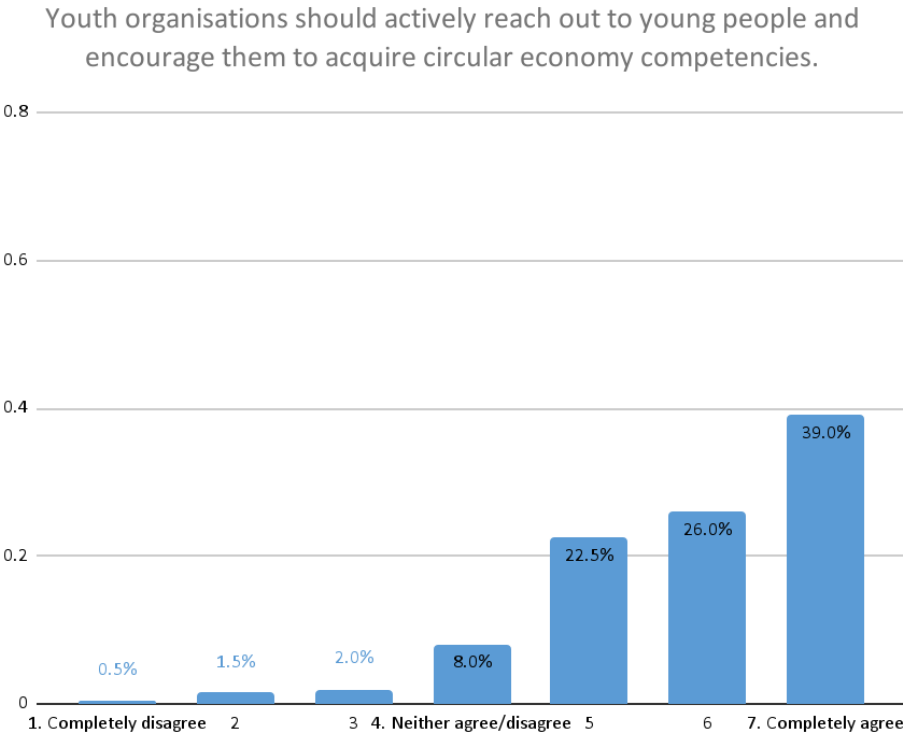
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## Annex 2: Survey responses in graphs

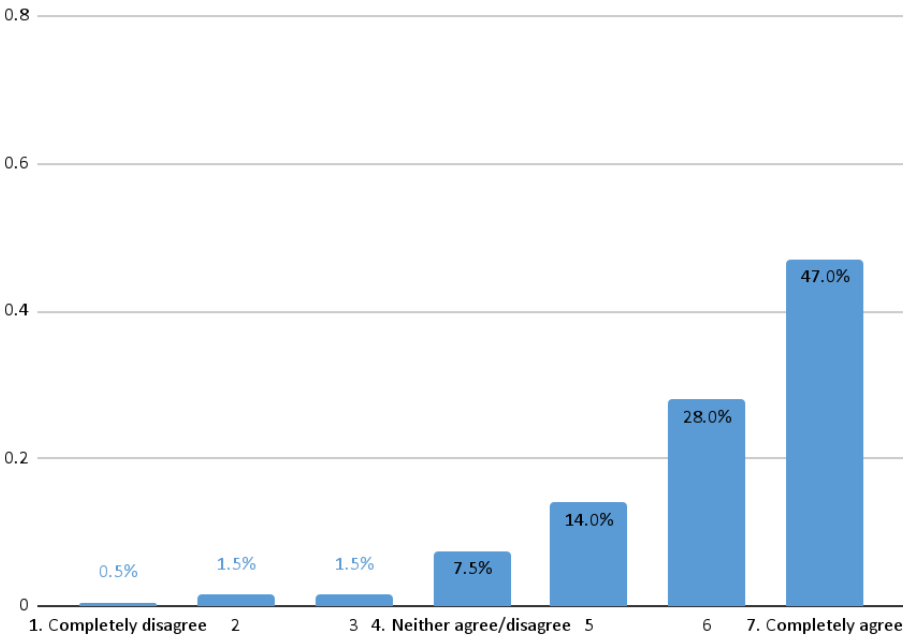




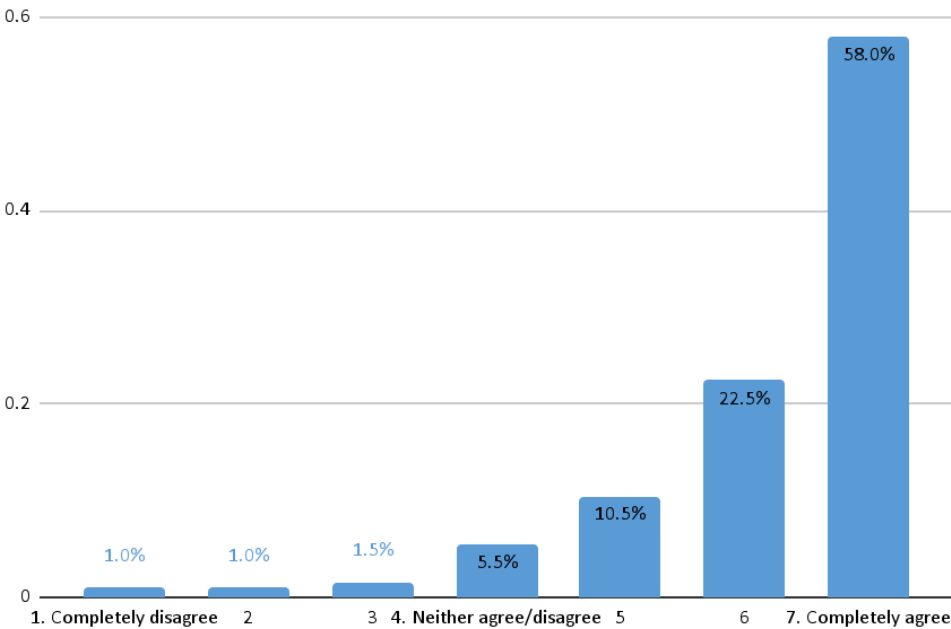




Youth organisations should lead by example when it comes to implementing circular practices.

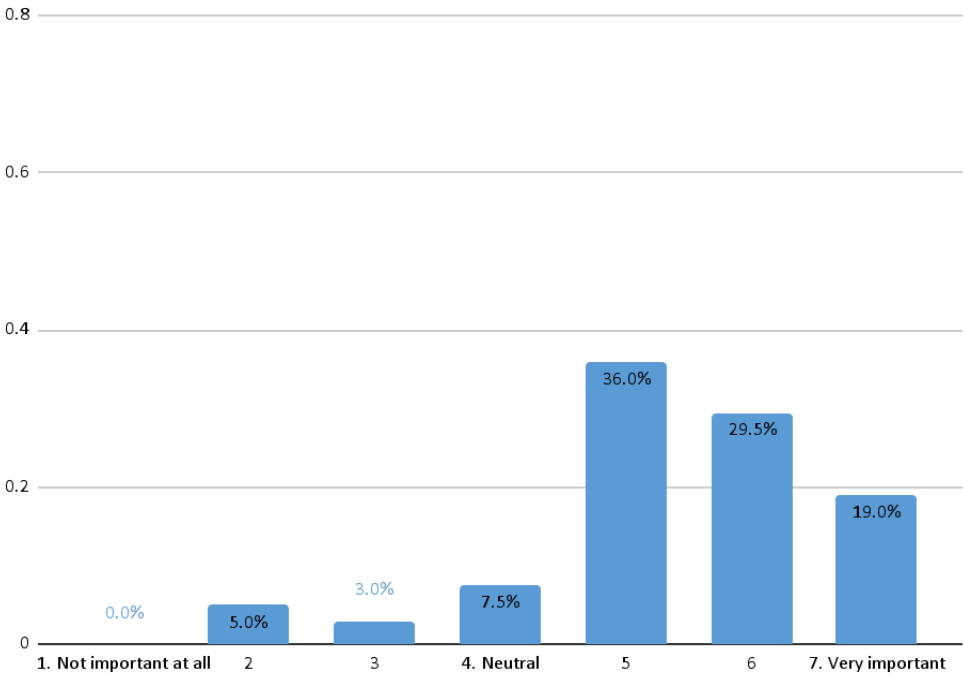


In order to enhance opportunities for young people to acquire circular economy competencies, youth organisations should cooperate with education institutions (such as schools and universities).

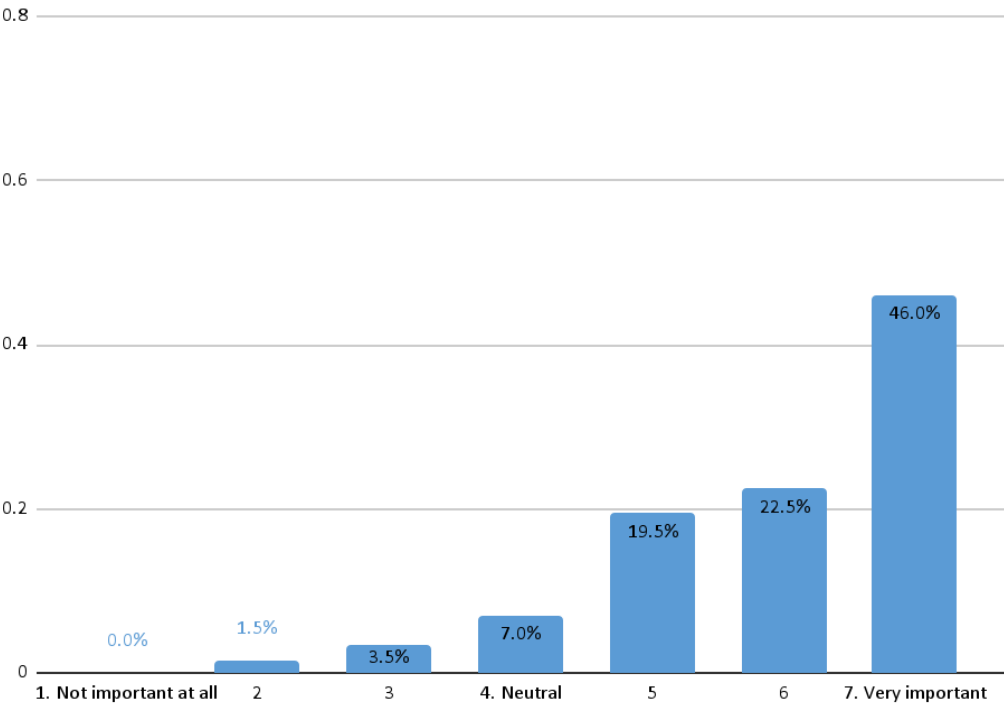


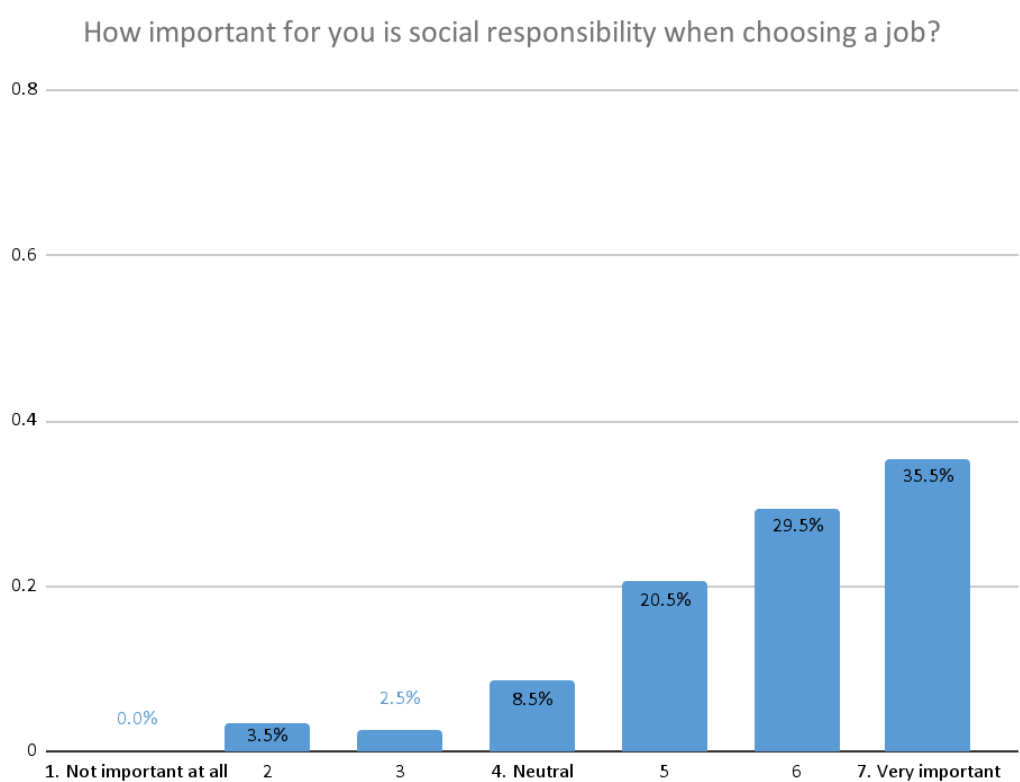
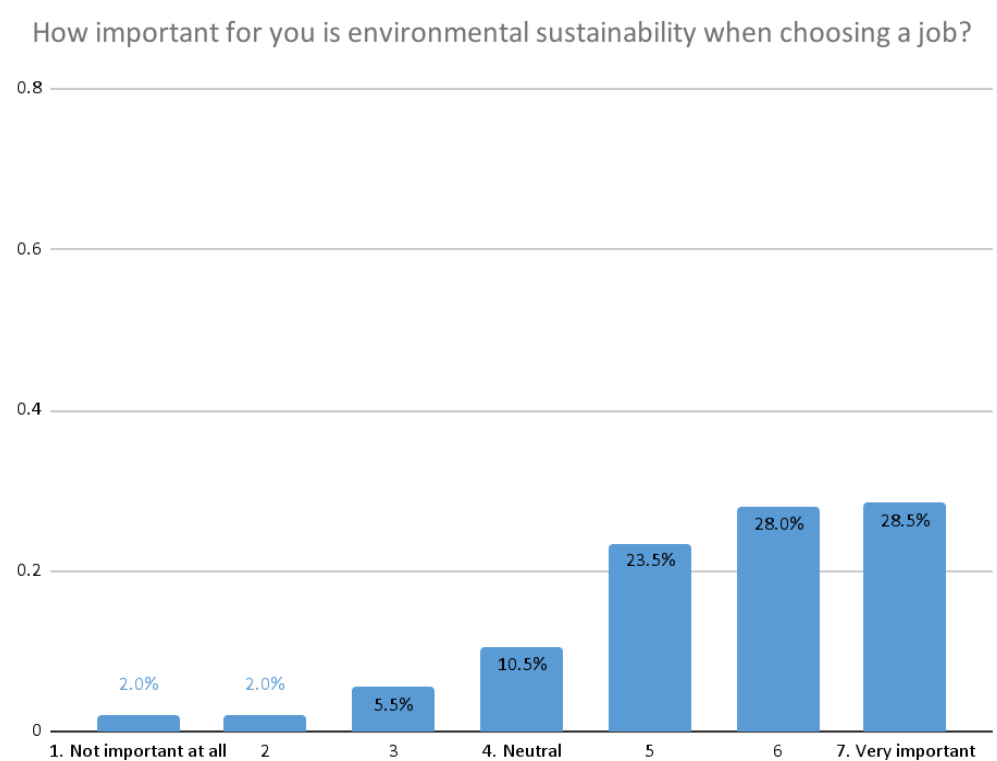
Recommendations for Circular Economy Implementation: Engaging Youth in the Transition

How important for you is the salary when choosing a job?



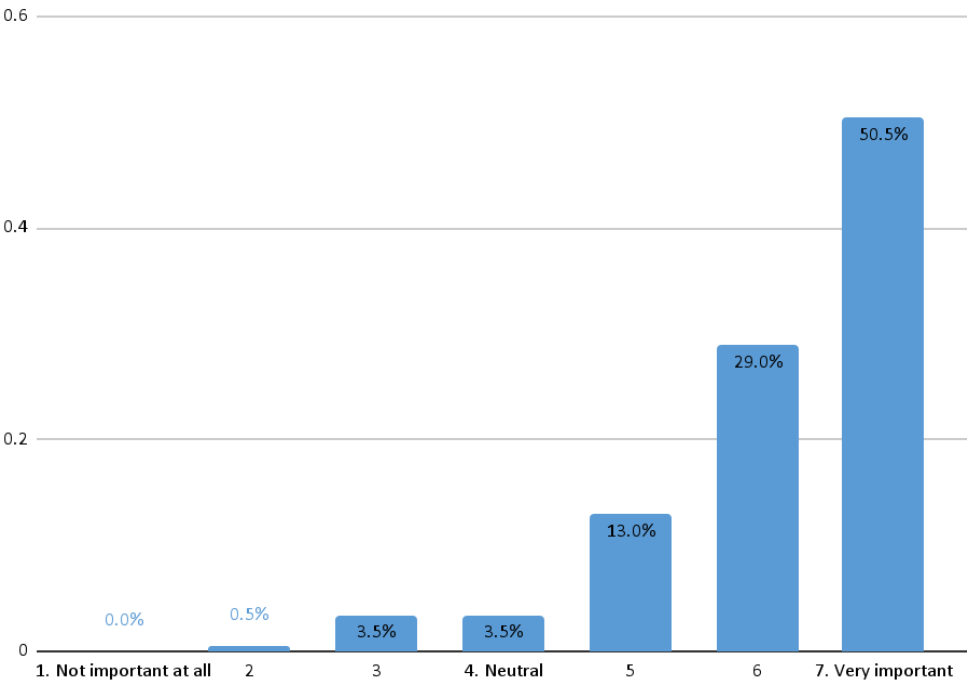
How important for you is meaning/higher purpose when choosing a job?



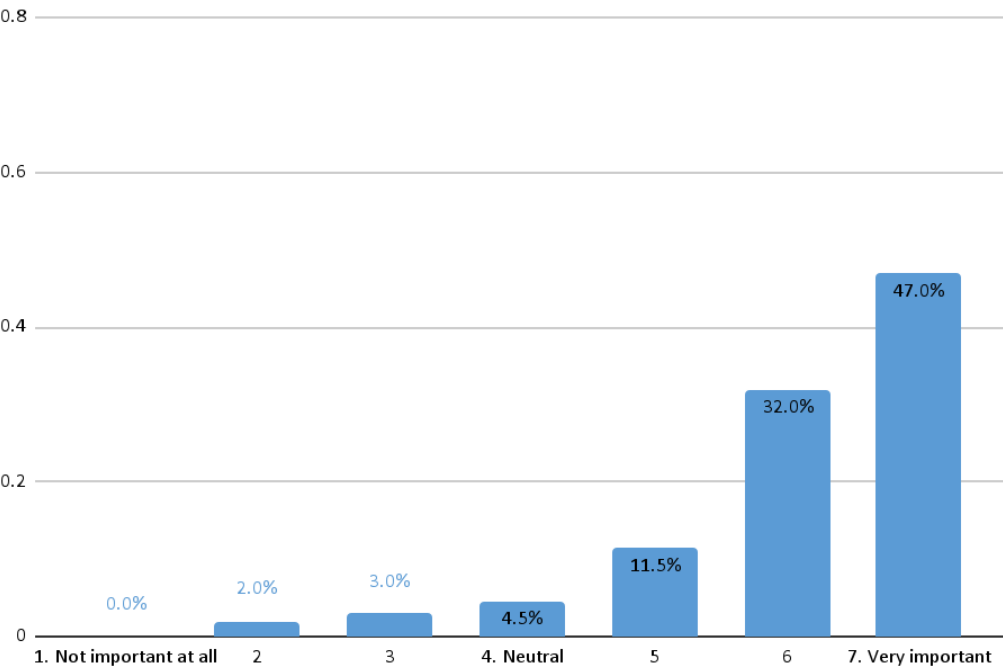




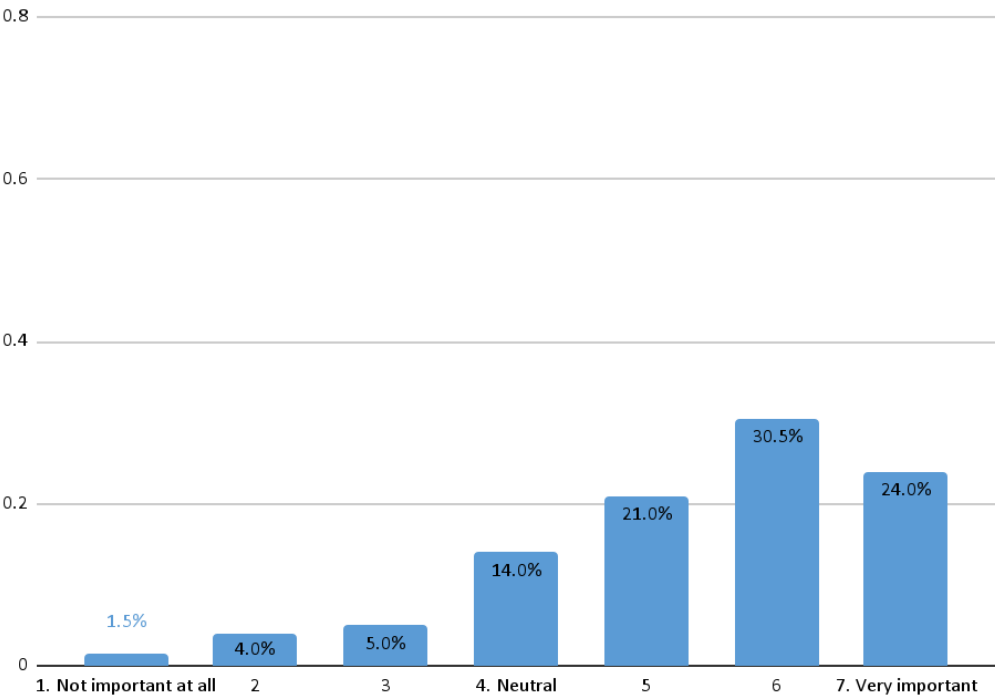
How important for you is the work environment when choosing a job?



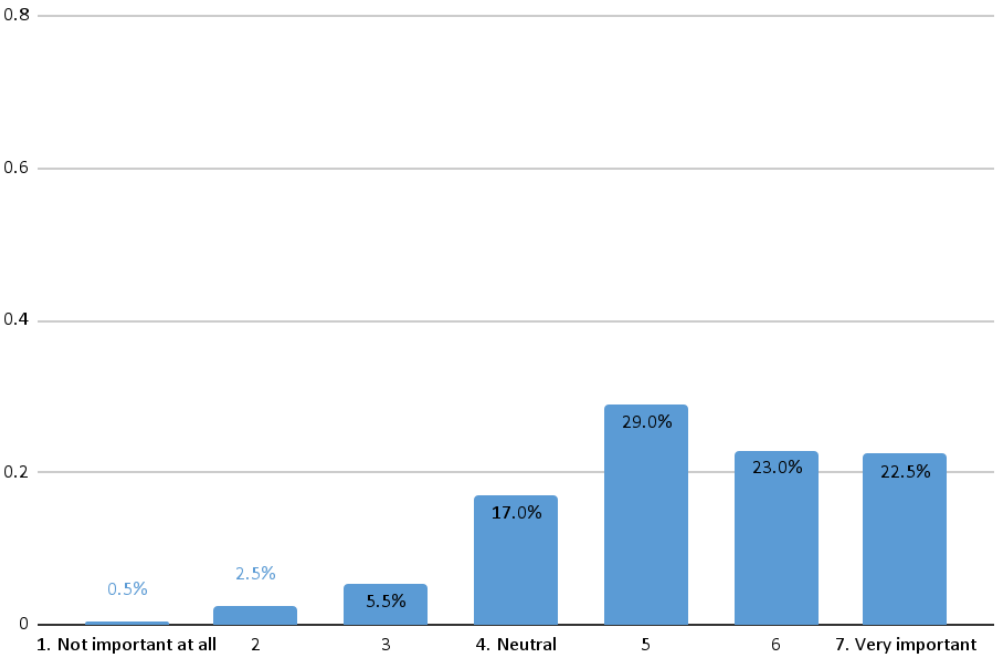
How important for you is personal/professional development when choosing a job?

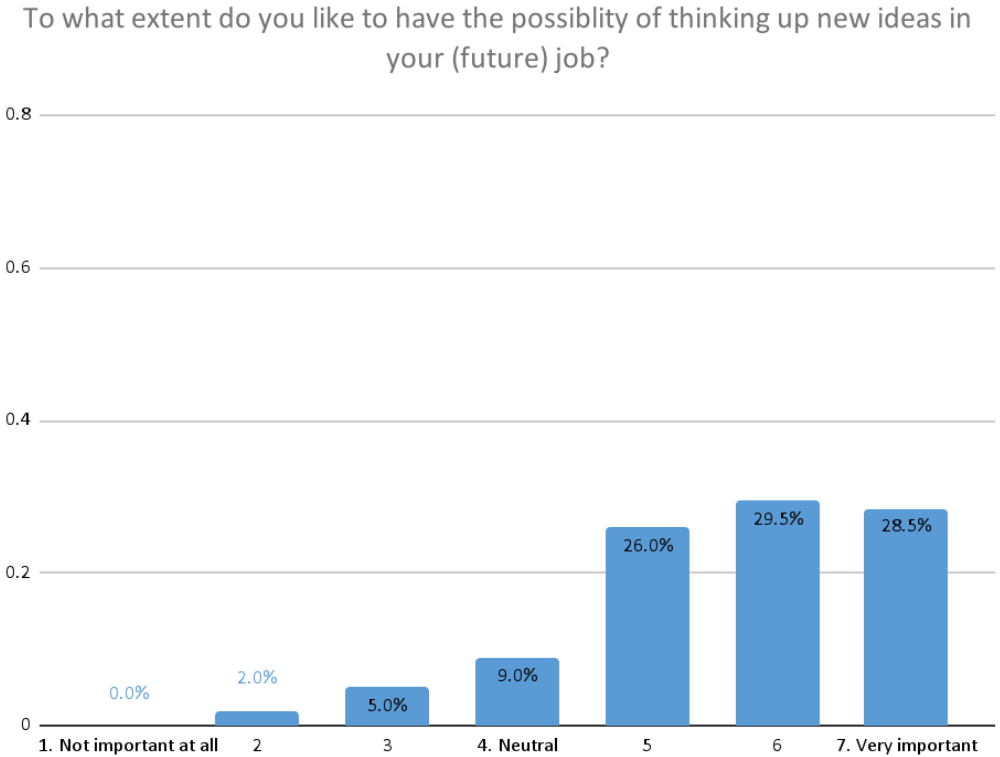
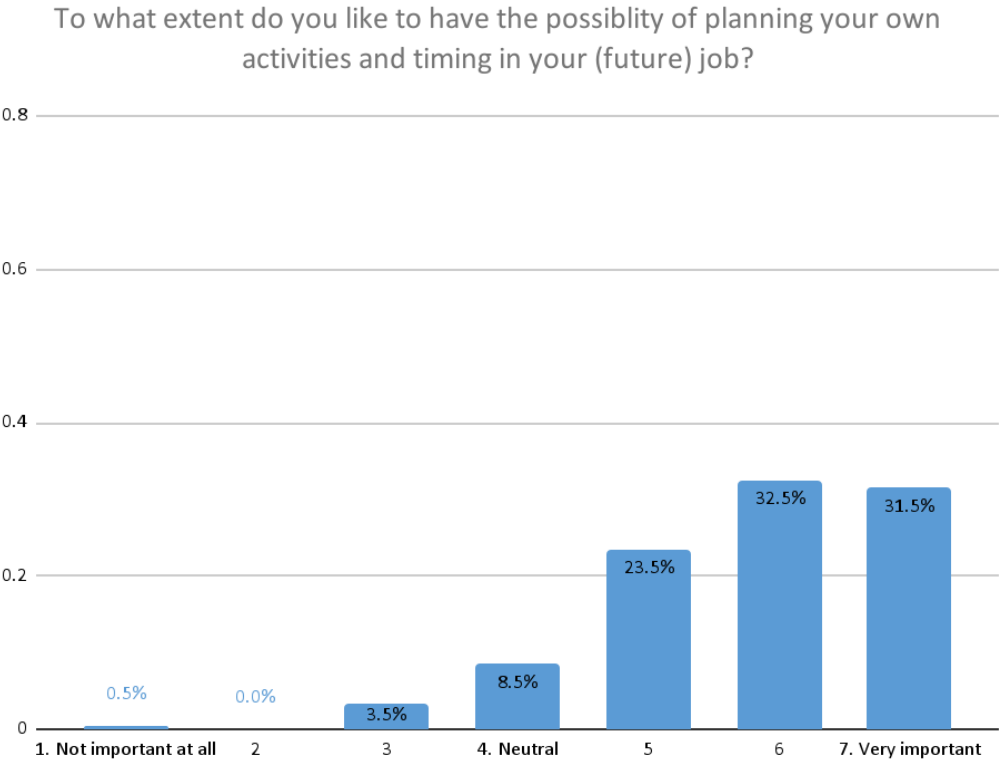


How important for you is inclusion in decision-making when choosing a job?

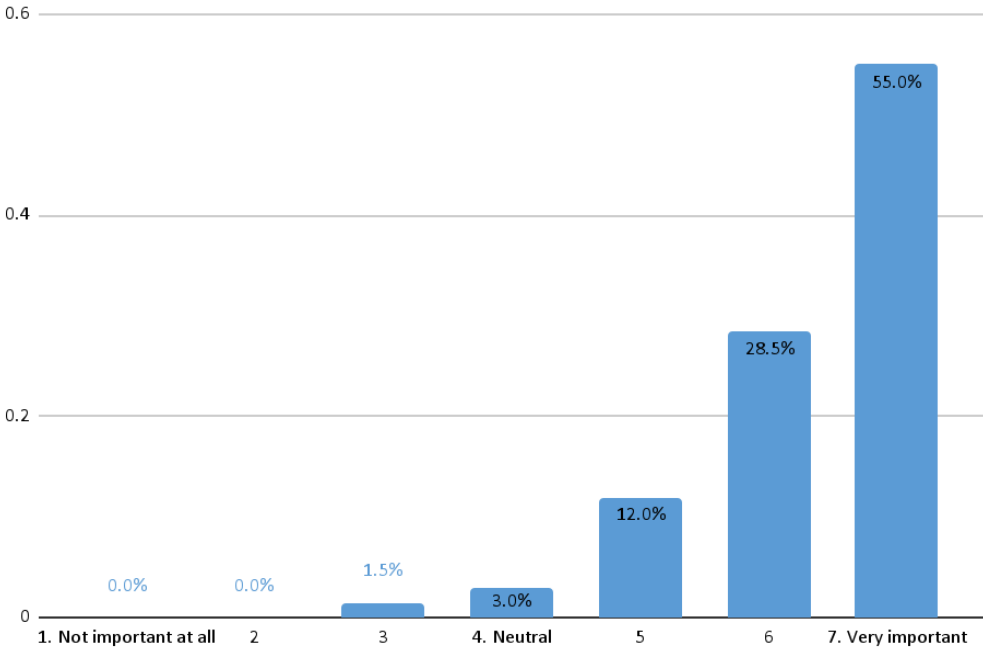


To what extent do you like to have the possibility of being creative in your (future) job?

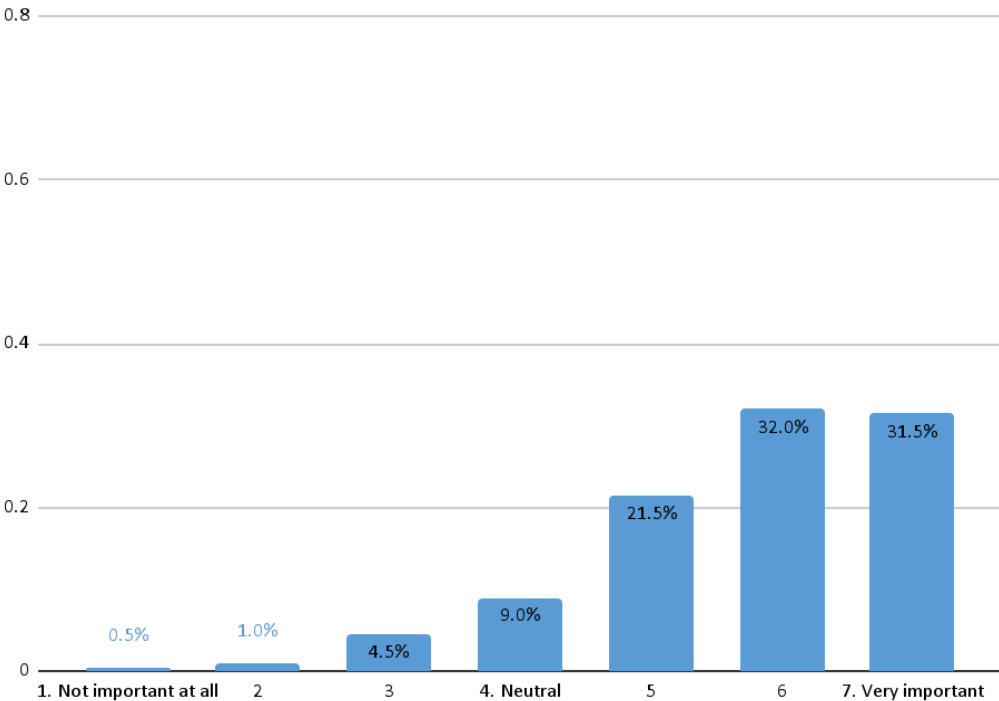




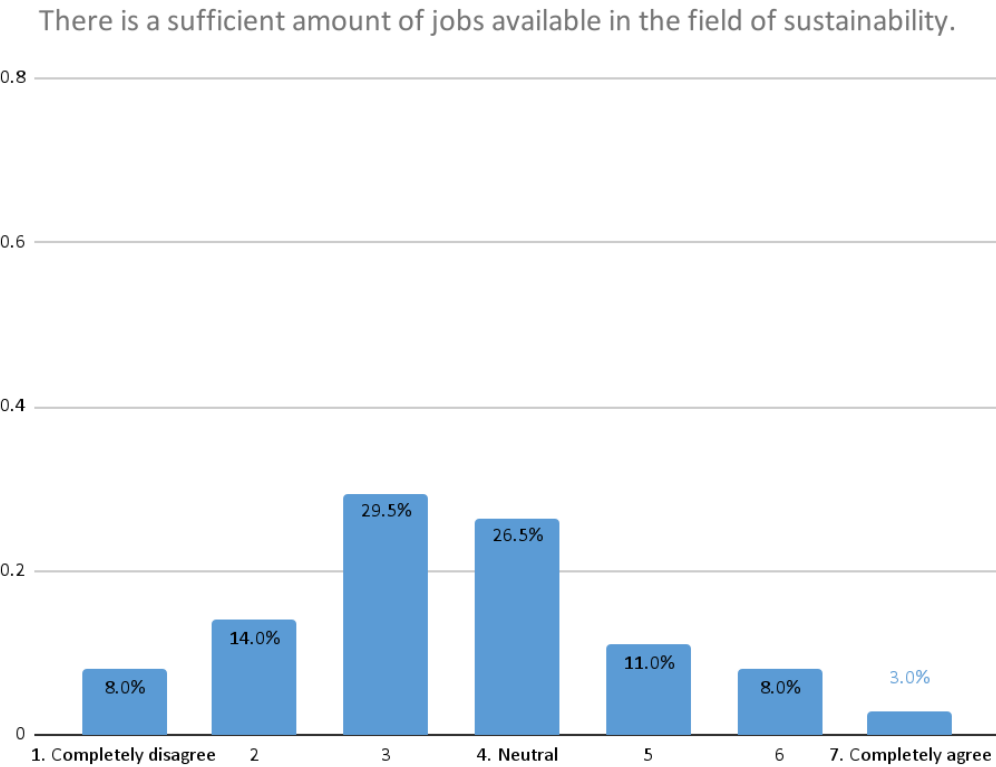
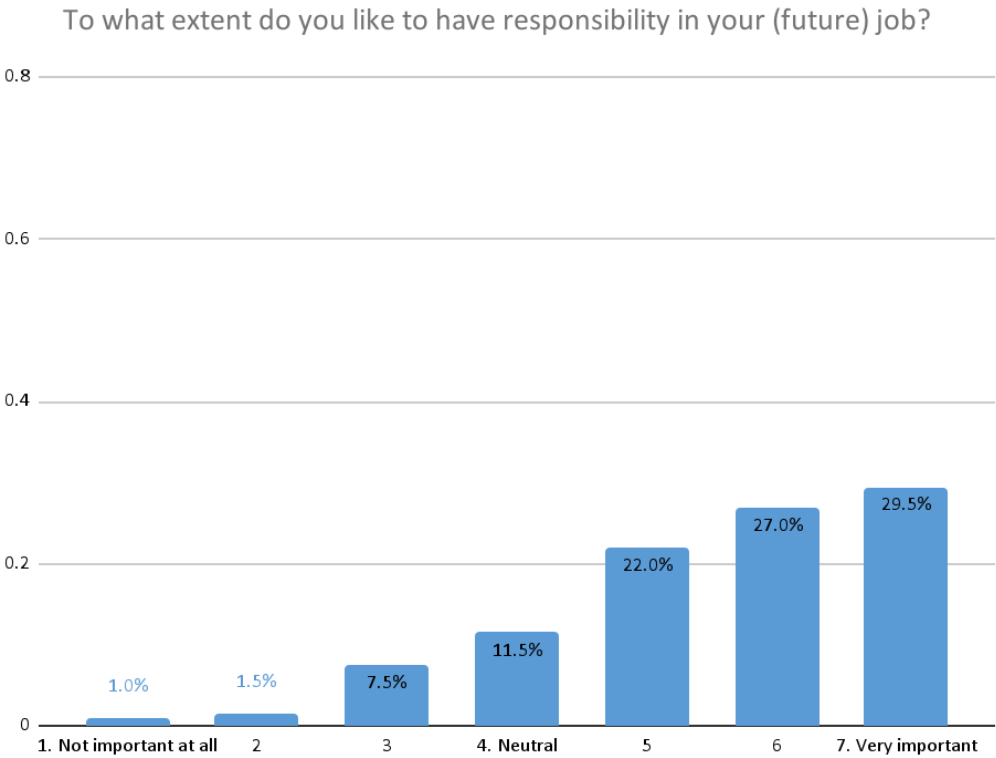
To what extent do you like to have the possibility of learning new things in your (future) job?



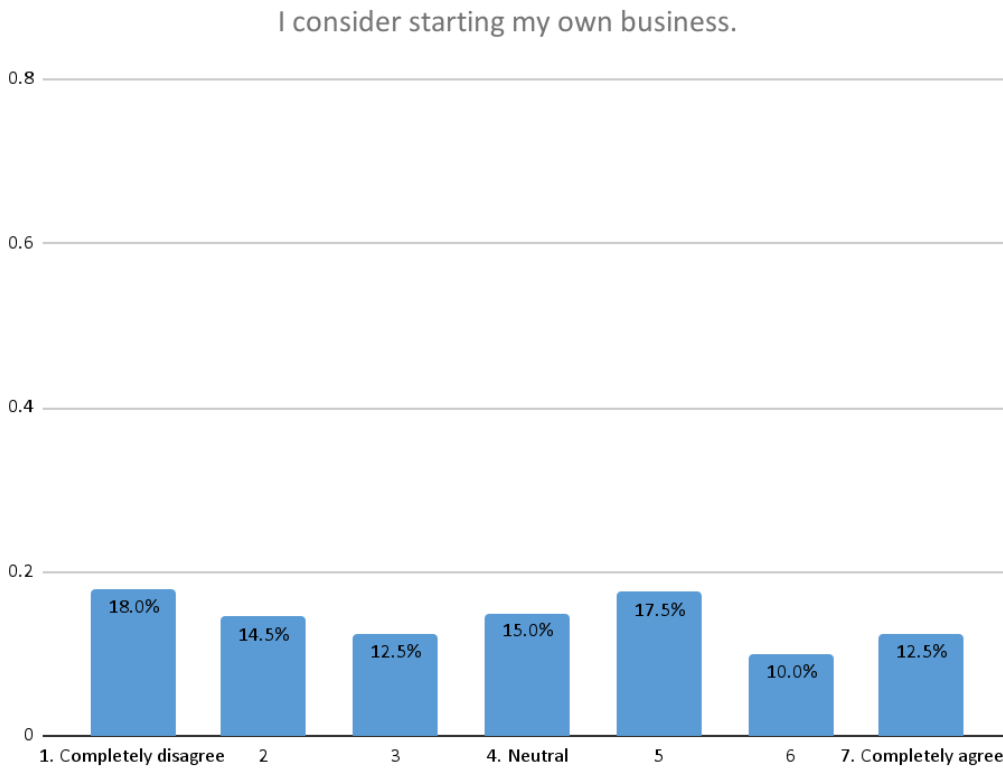
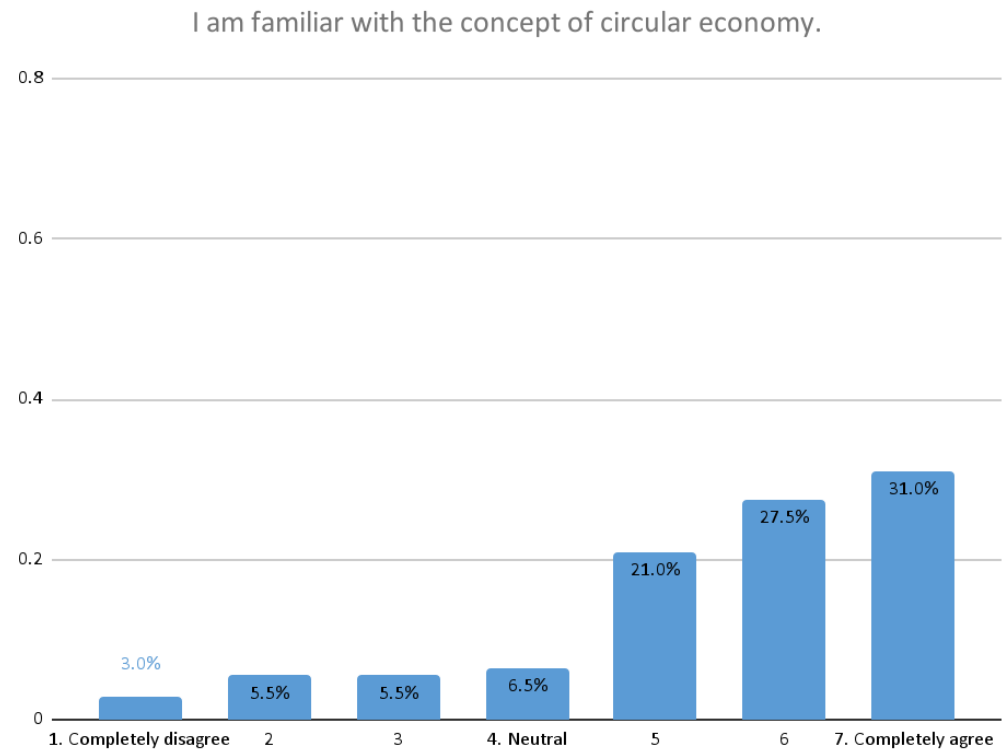
To what extent do you like to have autonomy in your (future) job?

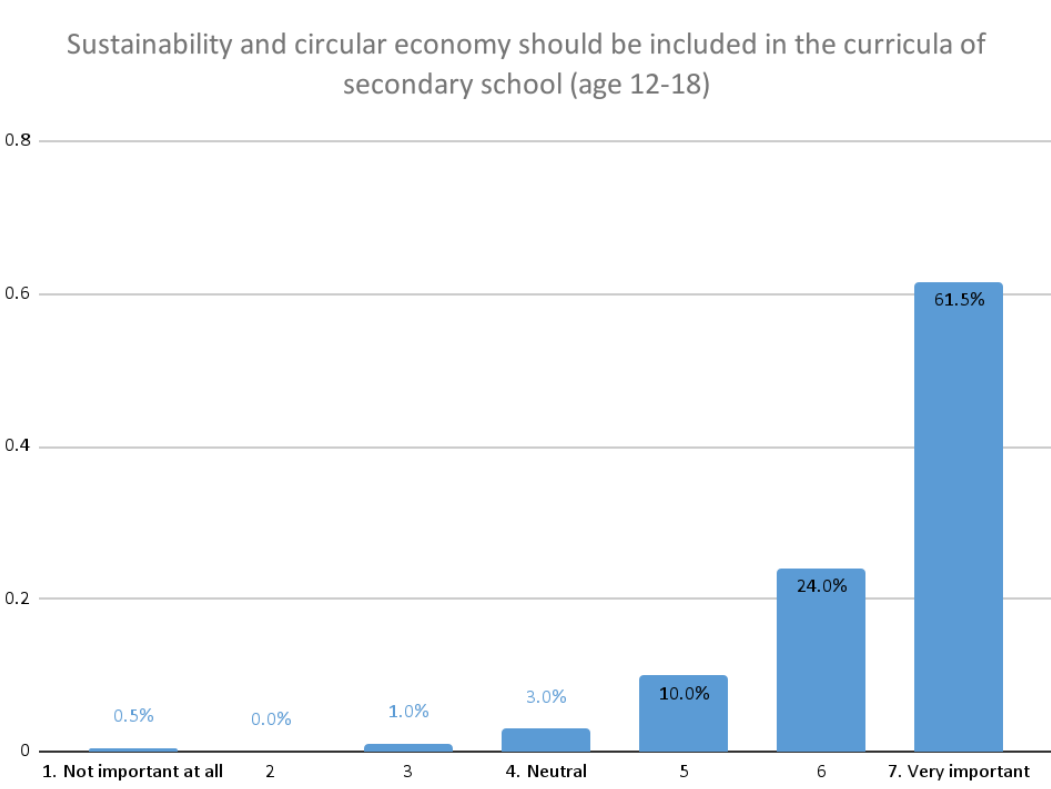
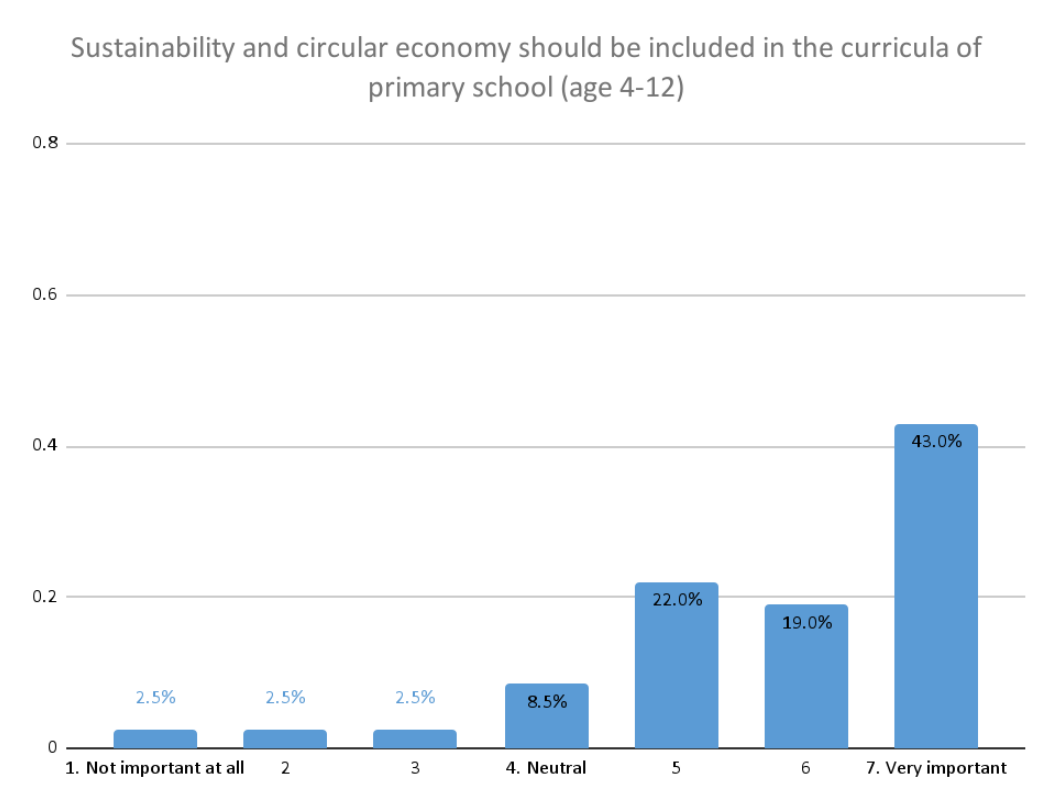


Recommendations for Circular Economy Implementation: Engaging Youth in the Transition

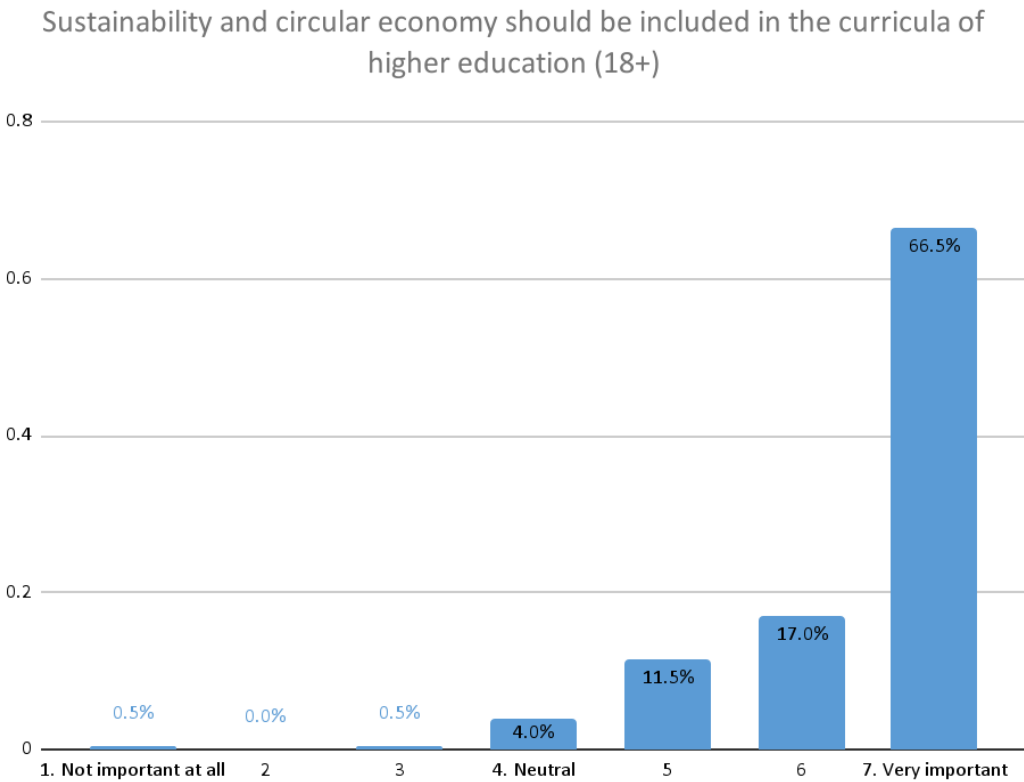
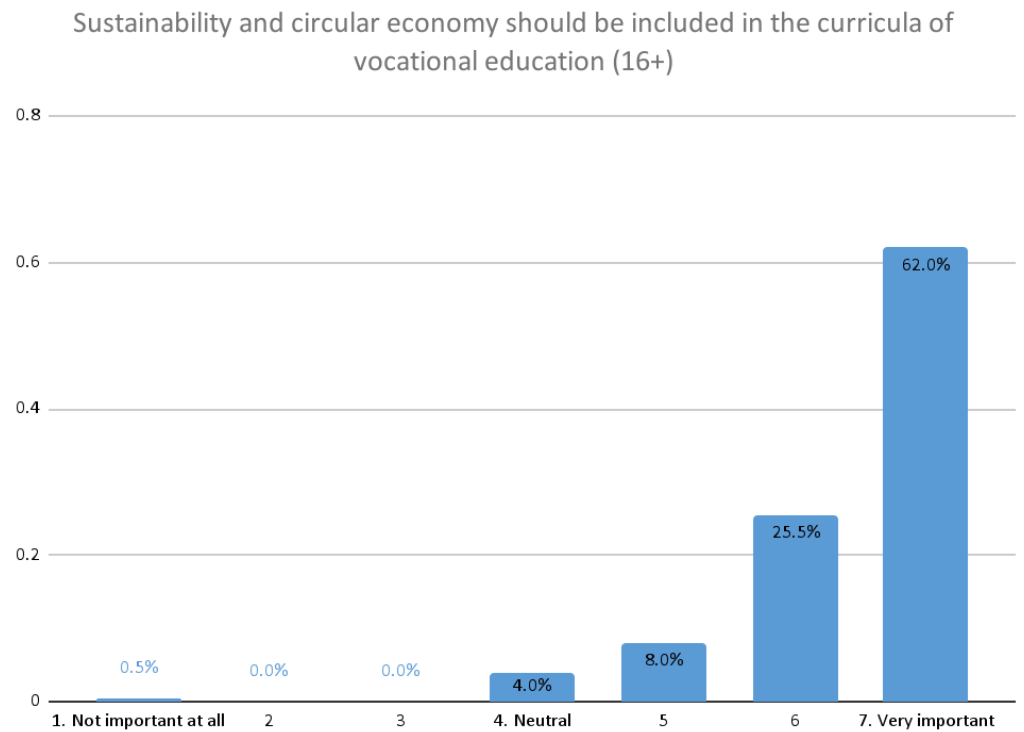


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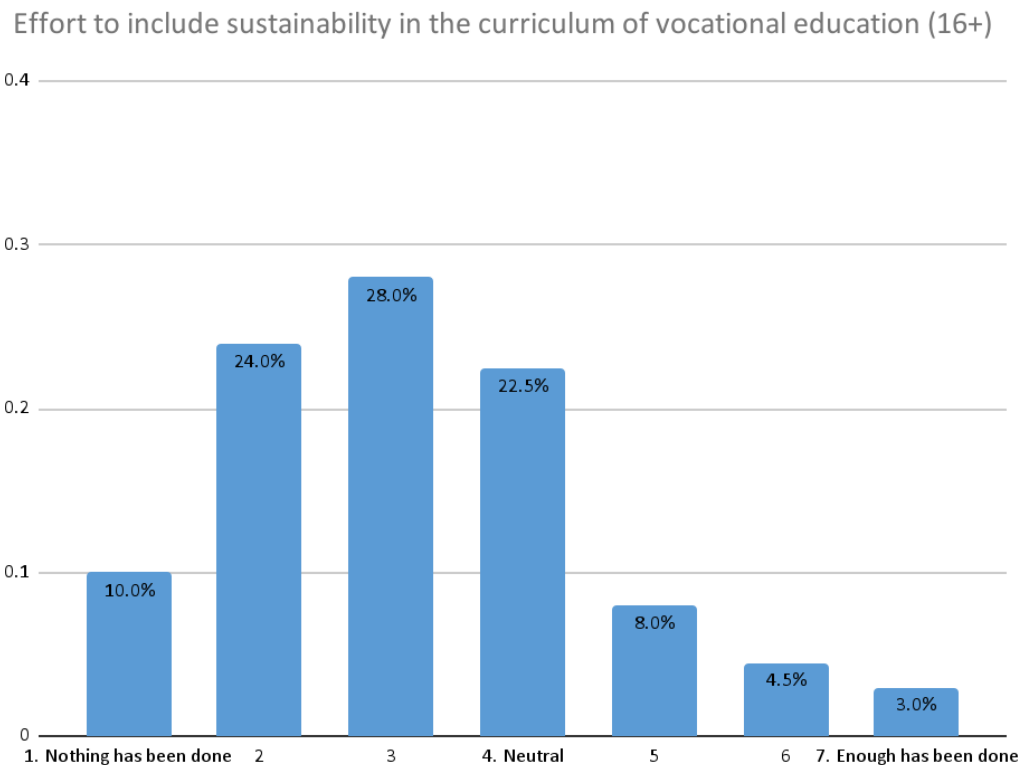
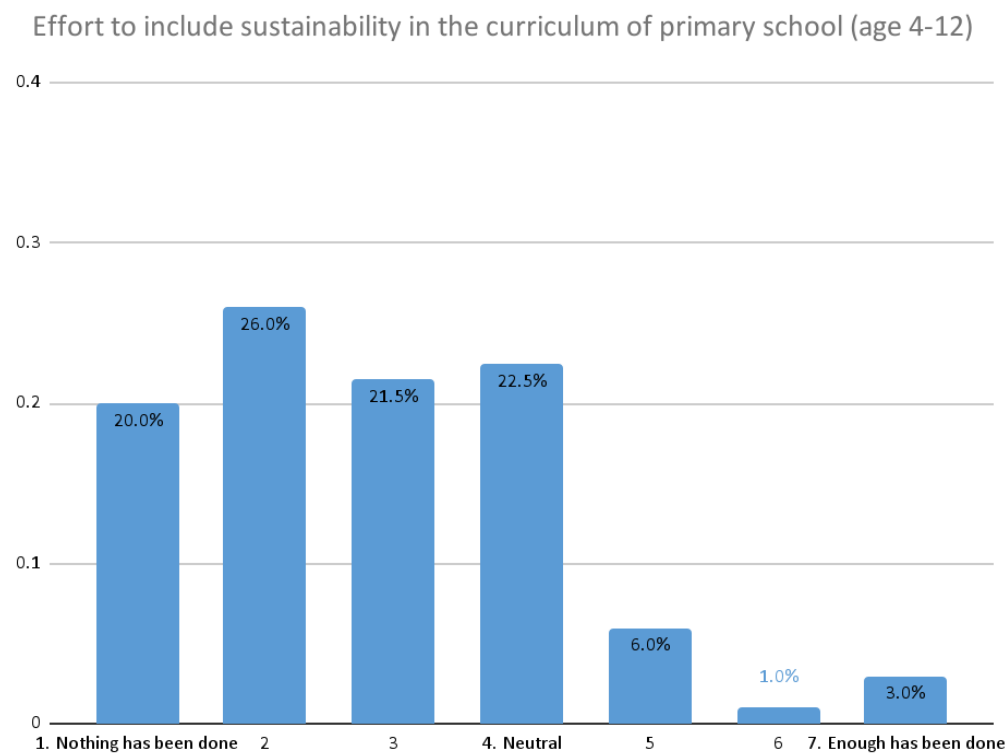




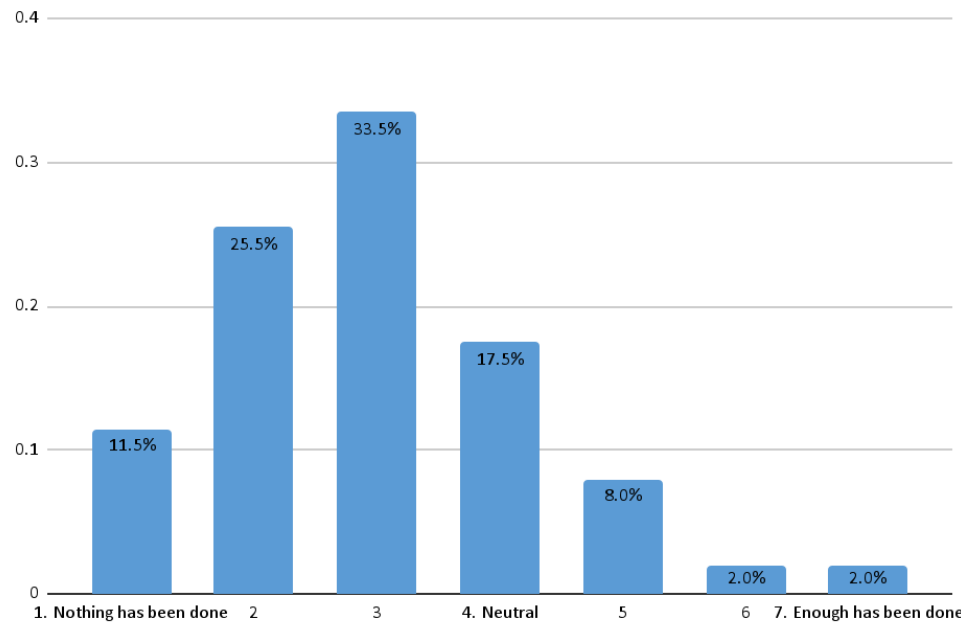
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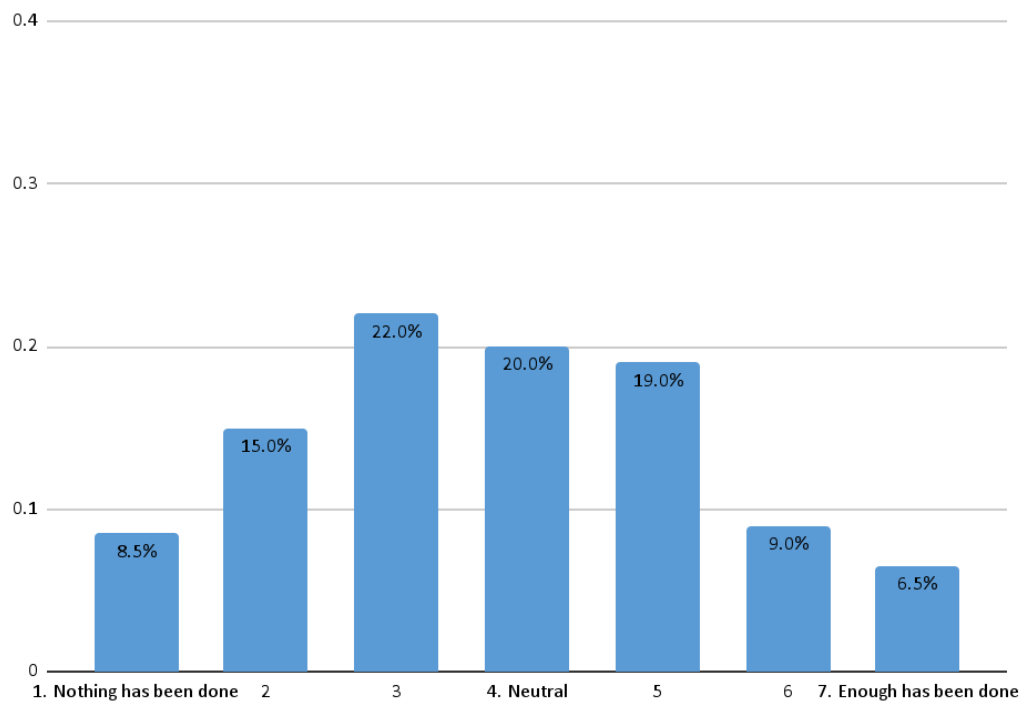




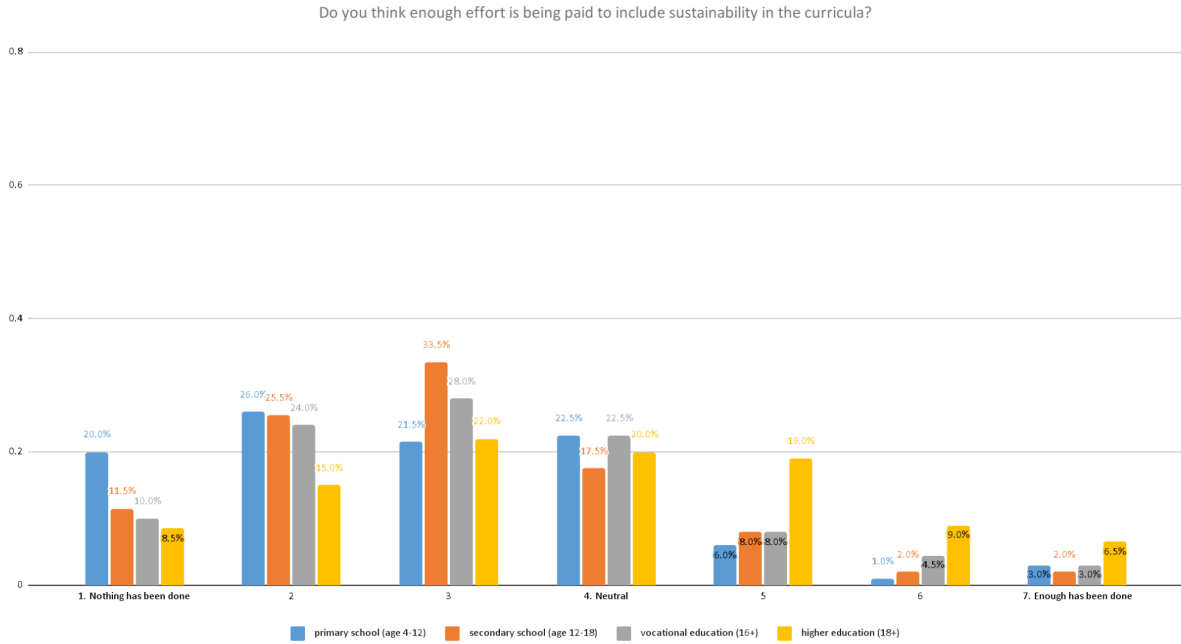
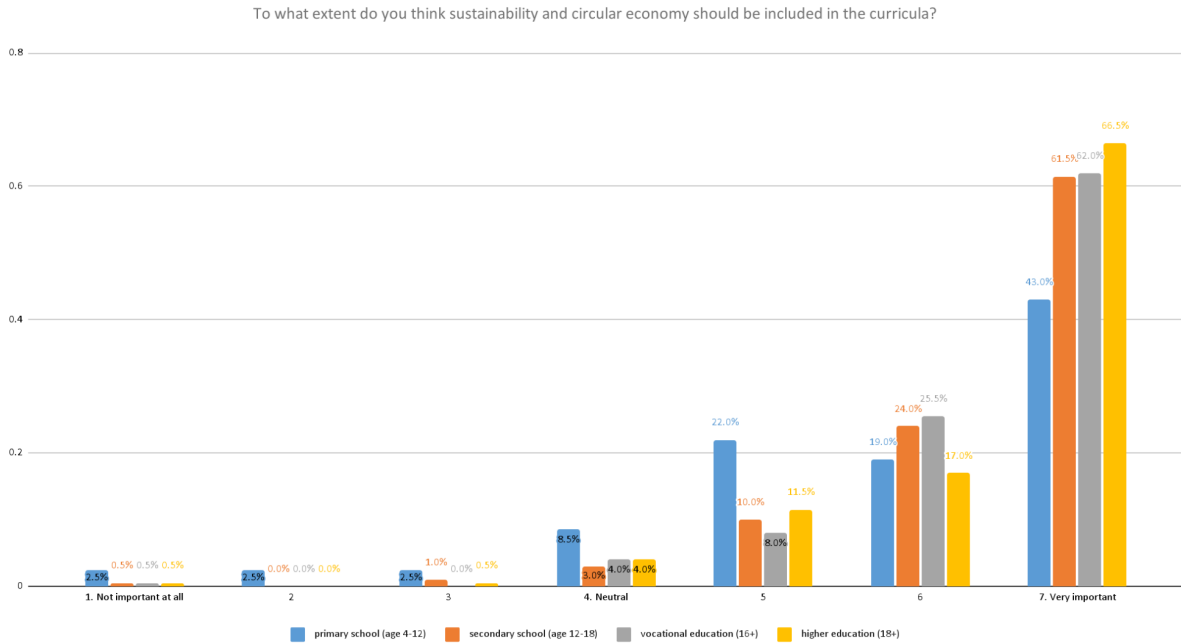
Effort to include sustainability in the curriculum of secondary school (age 12-18)

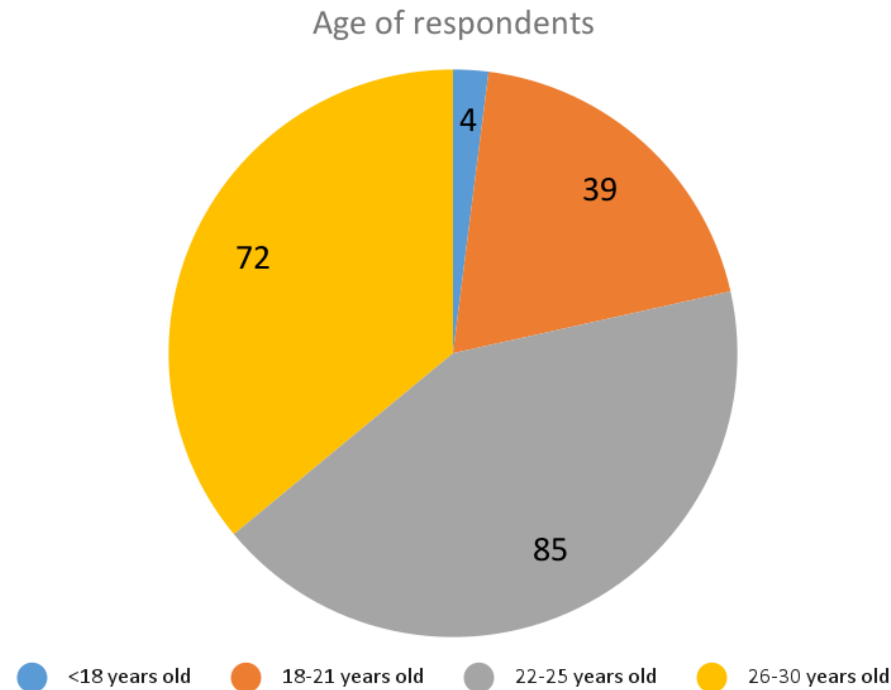


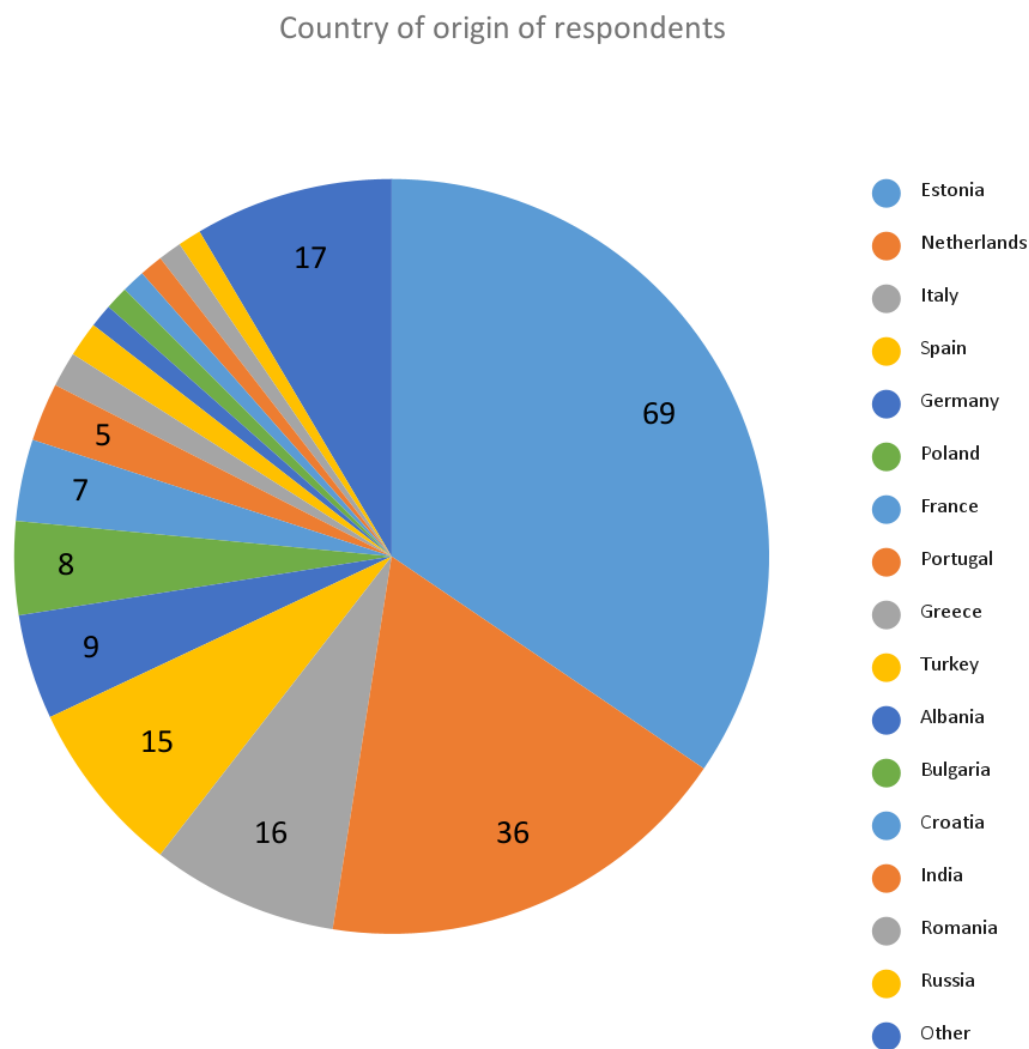
Effort to include sustainability in the curriculum of higher education (18+)



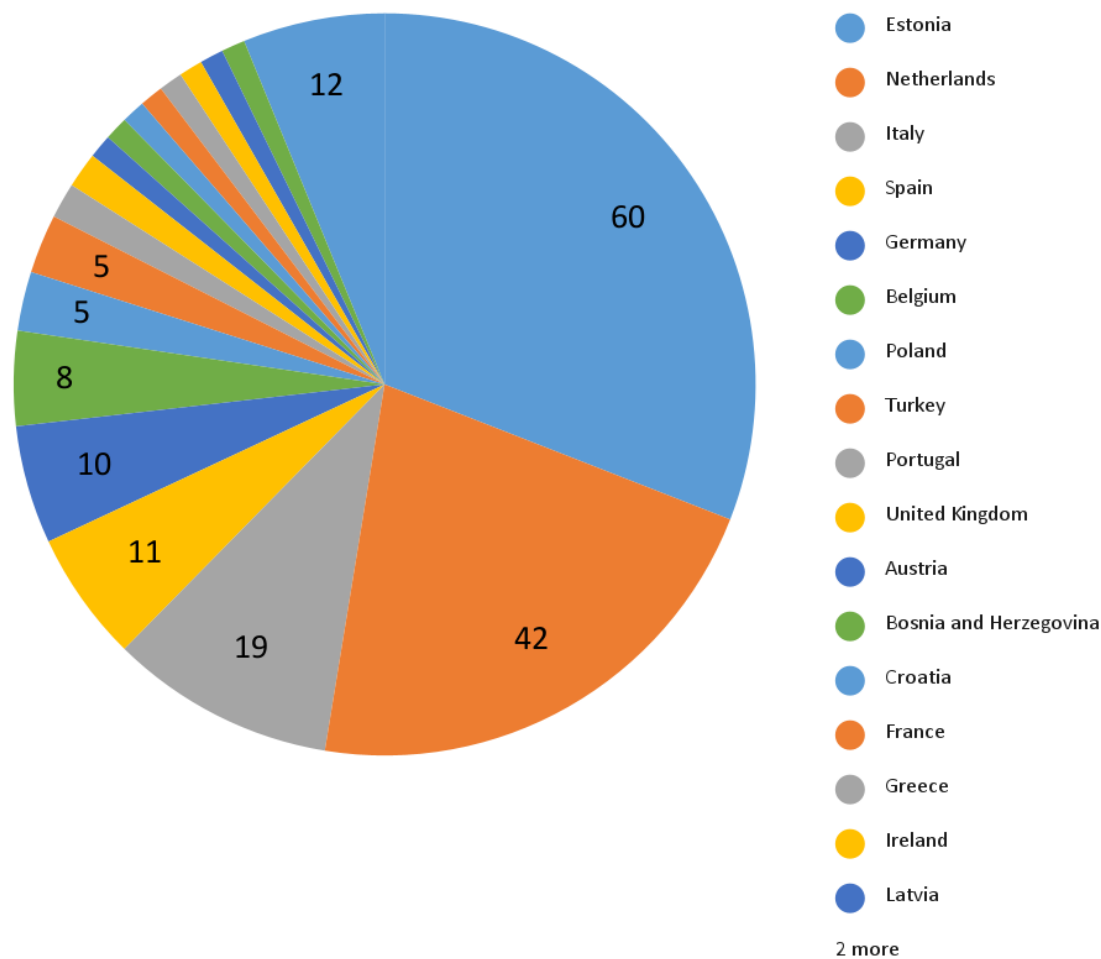
# Recommendations for Circular Economy Implementation: Engaging Youth in the Transition







Country of residence of respondents



## Recommendations for Circular Economy Implementation: Engaging Youth in the Transition

