

Institutions and Trust in the State

The research on resilience was inspired by a number of existing studies on resilience (various country indices are monitored on a long-term basis, for example, by the Fund for Peace, which maintains its own State Resilience Index). These studies, however, typically focus primarily on the resilience of states. Our research differs in that it seeks to examine how each individual person contributes to overall resilience. The aim of this text is to summarise and interpret findings related to the functioning of governmental institutions and citizens' trust in their states. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that trust in institutions is understood here in a broad sense: we do not focus solely on core elements of government communication, but also on trust in local government, emergency services, and other aspects of the state as they are experienced by citizens in everyday interactions. For this reason, we also work, for example, with trust in employers.

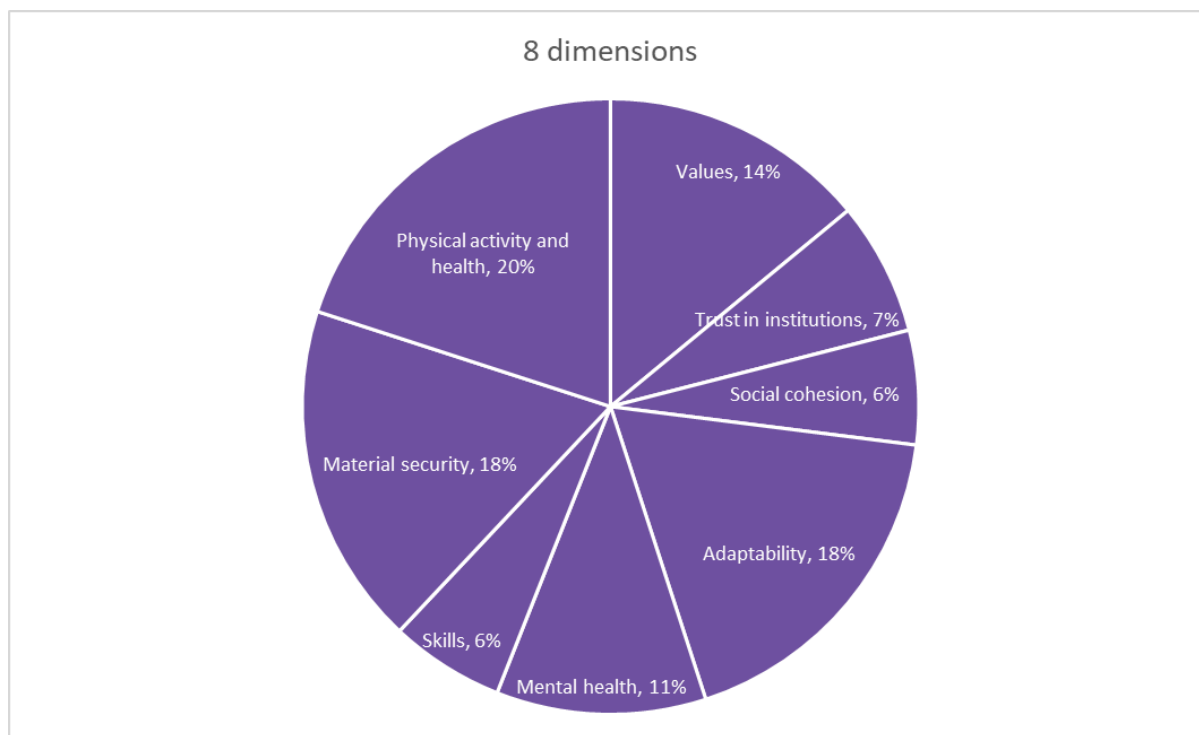
Particular emphasis is placed on the results for the Czech Republic. In some cases, these are complemented by data from our research conducted in other countries, specifically Slovakia, Germany, and Sweden.

Methodology

The IIR was constructed as the sum of 60 items across eight dimensions (with a maximum attainable score of 226 points). Individual items were scaled and converted into standardized scores. Sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education) were not included in the index. The target population consisted of individuals aged 16–75 years. Representative samples were collected in the Czech Republic (N = 1,235; CAWI 620, CAPI 615; data collection conducted between 23 and 29 May 2025 by the SC&C agency).

The dimensions and their respective weights were as follows:

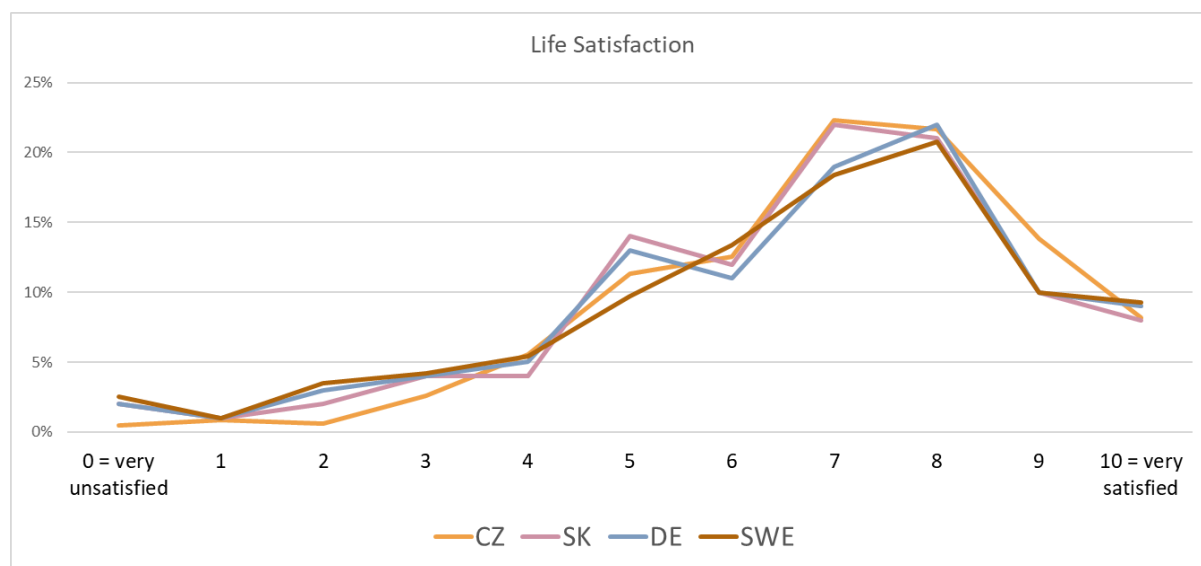
Values (14 %), Trust in institutions (7 %), Social cohesion (6 %), Adaptability (18 %), Mental health (11 %), Skills (6 %), Material security (18 %), and Physical activity and health (20 %).



How Resilience Is Reflected in Our Satisfaction

The way we perceive the community in which we live is reflected in our value orientations as well as in our overall approach to society. At the same time, it is possible to be satisfied with one's personal life while not identifying with the political system in which one lives. In our research, however, we sought to examine the extent to which these two variables are interconnected. To what degree does society shape an individual's personal outlook, and conversely, what influence does the individual exert on society? It is also important to emphasise that this analysis operates in a highly subjective domain. The data in this area are based on respondents' personal attitudes and subjective perceptions.

As shown in Figure 2, overall life satisfaction is very similar across all countries studied, with the Czech Republic exhibiting a slightly higher level.



Average life satisfaction scores: Czech Republic 7.0, Slovakia 6.7, Germany 6.6, and Sweden 6.6.

Life Satisfaction

Average life satisfaction scores are as follows: Czech Republic 7.0, Slovakia 6.7, Germany 6.6, and Sweden 6.6. The proportion of respondents assigning a high rating (8–10) reaches 44 % in the Czech Republic, 39 % in Slovakia, 41 % in Germany, and 40 % in Sweden.

The following findings focus more closely on attitudes and values. When asked to choose between freedom and equality, a majority of the population in all four countries—between 54% and 57 %—prioritises freedom, while 29 % to 33 % prioritise equality. The most important value across all four countries is a sense of security (average scores ranging from 8.5 to 9.1 on a 0–10 scale). Feelings of success or excitement rank among the least important values, particularly in Germany and Sweden (average scores of 6.4–6.7). The strong emphasis on freedom can be regarded as particularly important—and to a large extent positive—given that it is a universal value considered essential by a majority of respondents in all countries studied. Although the absolute figure may not appear exceptionally high at first glance, its significance becomes evident when contrasted with the value of equality, which is considered essential by only 29 % to 33 % of respondents.

The predominance of a preference for freedom over equality can be understood as a highly important and consequential trend in the context of ongoing societal transformations and the current geopolitical situation.

A particularly positive finding is that the majority of respondents in all countries surveyed identify freedom as a key value, which constitutes an important stabilising element of democratic systems. A strong preference for freedom enhances societal resilience to authoritarian tendencies, supports pluralism and open public debate, and limits the space for political actors seeking to concentrate power or weaken checks and balances. As Thomas Carothers and Brendan Hartnett note in their analysis *Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding* (*Journal of Democracy*, 2024), the erosion of institutions that protect civil liberties—rather than unsatisfactory socioeconomic outcomes—represents the most significant trigger of democratic decline. A strong societal orientation toward the value of freedom can therefore function as a substantial safeguard against such processes.

The Present Generation in the Context of the Past

Another noteworthy finding is the comparison of the current situation with the lived reality of previous generations. The results indicate that only in the Czech Republic is the present perceived as better than the past. By contrast, a marked decline in optimism and strongly negative assessments are evident particularly in Sweden and Slovakia. In the case of Slovakia, several possible explanations can be identified, ranging from economic conditions and current political tensions to the long-term emigration of educated and socially active elites. In Sweden, the level of scepticism is exceptionally pronounced, and these findings will require further analysis in the context of ongoing social and political changes that may be shaping this trend.

		CZ	SK	DE	SWE
Compared with your parents, do you live today in a world that is:	Better	43 %	24 %	29 %	29 %
	The same	21 %	19 %	30 %	21 %
	Worse	36 %	58 %	41 %	50 %

At present, the Czech Republic has the highest proportion of respondents who perceive the contemporary world as offering greater advantages than the past.

By contrast, a pronounced decline in optimism and a predominantly negative perception are evident particularly in Sweden and Slovakia. In the case of Slovakia, several possible explanations can be identified, ranging from economic conditions and current political tensions to the long-term emigration of social and intellectual elites. In Sweden, the level of scepticism is exceptionally pronounced, and these findings will require further analysis in the context of ongoing social and political developments. One potentially relevant factor is large-scale migration and its public perception in Sweden which, in combination with integration challenges

and public debates on crime, may form part of the broader context underlying the decline in optimism.

(For example, a study published in 2021 focusing on migration and public opinion in Sweden documents that while public narratives surrounding migration have remained largely positive, they have shown a tendency to become more negative in recent years.)

		CZ	SK	DE	SWE
And what kind of world do you think awaits today's children?	Better	19 %	11 %	13 %	17 %
	The same	25 %	21 %	25 %	24 %
	Worse	55 %	69 %	62 %	59 %

Pessimism about the future has also affected the Czech Republic, albeit to the smallest extent, while Slovakia perceives the future in the most pessimistic terms.

Among all the countries studied, Slovakia exhibits the highest level of pessimism, with expectations for the future being the most negative. At the same time, a certain degree of scepticism and negative expectations can be observed across all countries surveyed. These findings are further complemented by data on caution and trust toward other people. The highest levels of interpersonal trust are observed in Sweden, whereas the lowest levels are again found in Slovakia. Particularly striking is the very high degree of distrust toward others reported by up to 79% of Slovak respondents.

		CZ	SK	DE	SWE
Based on your life experience, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that one must be very careful when dealing with others?	Most people can be trusted	27 %	14 %	30 %	39 %
	One must be very careful when dealing with others	68 %	79 %	62 %	55 %
	Don't know	5 %	7 %	9 %	6 %

Caution toward others is the dominant attitude in all countries examined, being most pronounced in Slovakia and least evident in Sweden.

Another important finding, alongside the growing level of distrust in society, concerns individuals' perceptions of social support. In our research, this aspect is captured through a question asking how many people in one's immediate environment an individual can rely on or turn to for help in times of need. These data largely correspond with a long-term trend observed across the European Union, namely the gradual reduction in household size. In the Czech Republic, for example, single-person households already account for 32 % of all households. Over the past 20 years, the average household size has declined from 2.52 to 2.30 persons, while the share of single-person households has increased from 23 % to nearly 32 % (Brabcová, 2025), representing a significant change in the social structure.

From the perspective of national stability and future development, these figures are relatively alarming. As many as 45% of Slovak respondents report that, in case of need, they could rely on only one or two people. Relatively high proportions are also observed in Germany. In the Czech Republic and Sweden, this applies to approximately one third of the population. On the other hand, there is also a segment of the population that maintains a relatively extensive network of contacts and benefits from a higher level of social support.

For governments and public policy-makers, it is nevertheless crucial to recognise that a substantial share of the population has a very limited social support base. These individuals may be more susceptible to feelings of isolation, insecurity, and vulnerability, which directly affects both their personal resilience and overall societal stability. In the context of demographic change, population ageing, and the transformation of family structures, this is a factor that should be systematically monitored and addressed within public policy.

		CZ	SK	DE	SWE
How Many People Around You Would Help You in an Emergency?	No one	6 %	7 %	5 %	5 %
	1–2	33 %	45 %	40 %	34 %
	3–5	38 %	29 %	38 %	34 %
	6 a více	23 %	19 %	17 %	26 %

How many people would help us when it is needed?

The SOLVO resilience study shows that Sweden exhibits the highest level of trust in institutions among all the countries examined. This finding is consistent with international data, such as OECD figures from 2024, according to which approximately 43 % of the Swedish population expresses high or medium trust in the national government—well above the OECD average. In

comparison with the Czech Republic, Germany, and Slovakia, Sweden thus consistently demonstrates higher institutional stability and a stronger level of citizens' trust in the functioning of the state.

The level of trust measured in the SOLVO study is higher than that reported in OECD data. This difference can be attributed partly to methodological variations, but primarily to the differing focus of the two surveys. The OECD measures trust in narrowly defined political institutions, such as the national government, parliament, public administration, or political parties—institutions that tend to rank among the least trusted in most Western countries. By contrast, the SOLVO study captures a broader conception of institutional trust, encompassing additional components of state and public life, including the police, courts, schools, the military, local self-government, and even trust in employers. These institutions have traditionally enjoyed higher reputational standing and more stable public perceptions, which naturally elevates the overall level of trust recorded in the SOLVO research.

Overall, average trust in institutions is highest in Sweden and lowest in Slovakia, while Germany and the Czech Republic show identical results. It is particularly informative to examine more detailed data that focus on individual items included in the survey.

Average trust in institutions in the surveyed countries

CZ	SK	DE	SWE
44 %	37 %	44 %	51 %

It emerges that in all countries examined, emergency services—particularly firefighters and medical professionals—command the highest levels of trust. High levels of trust are also evident in the military and the police, especially in the Czech Republic and Sweden. In Sweden, courts and the institutions of the monarchy are also rated relatively positively. By contrast, Slovak respondents express the lowest level of trust in the judiciary among all countries studied. Very low levels of trust are observed with respect to governments in all countries, and similarly pronounced distrust is directed toward public service media—except in Sweden, where these media are perceived significantly more positively. Across countries, the most negative evaluations are attributed to lower chambers of parliament and social media platforms.

Trust in the emergency response system is high, but this is largely to be expected. It stems in particular from direct or indirect personal experience, as well as from the fact that citizens tend to hold realistic expectations toward institutions such as firefighters. In the case of governments or politicians, by contrast, citizens often hold exaggerated or unrealistic expectations, which in turn contribute to frustration and disappointment.

(Scale 0–10)

Ranking (overall):

1. **Doctors and firefighters**
2. **Employer**
3. **Police**
4. **Armed forces**
5. **National bank**

Institution	CZ	SK	DE	SWE
Army	6.3	5.5	5.0	6.6
Police	6.6	5.2	6.2	6.7
Courts	6.0	4.5	5.8	6.4
Current Government	3.7	3.1	4.1	5.1
President / King	5.0	3.8	4.6	5.9
Chamber of Deputies	3.9	3.1	4.4	5.0
Senate	3.9	—	4.2	—
Regional governments	5.4	4.5	4.9	5.2
Local government (municipality / city)	5.8	5.0	5.2	5.2
Public service media	4.6	4.2	5.0	5.7
Ombudsman	5.4	4.6	4.7	5.4
Employers of the respondents	6.6	6.2	7.8	7.5
Firefighters	8.5	8.0	8.0	8.1
Emergency services	8.6	7.8	8.0	8.1
National bank	6.3	5.5	5.3	6.0
Social networks (Facebook, X.com, Instagram)	3.5	3.7	3.4	3.7

Key Findings

Institutions and trust in the state constitute fundamental components of overall societal resilience, with substantial differences observed across countries. While overall life satisfaction is relatively similar in all countries examined, value orientations and perceptions of how society functions differ markedly. Across all countries, a strong orientation toward the value of freedom prevails. As noted by Carothers and Hartnett (*Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding*, 2024), this represents an important safeguard against democratic decline, as the weakening of institutions that protect freedoms is often the primary trigger of democratic erosion.

The Czech Republic is the only country in which the present is perceived more positively than the past, whereas Sweden—and especially Slovakia—exhibit pronounced pessimism. This outlook is partly linked to political polarisation and economic uncertainty, and in the case of Sweden also to growing concerns related to migration and security. Distrust is also reflected in interpersonal relationships: as many as 45% of Slovak respondents report that, in an emergency, they can rely on only one or two people, which is alarming from the perspective of long-term societal stability. Average trust in institutions is highest in Sweden and lowest in Slovakia. Our aim was to capture a broader institutional context, including the police, schools, and emergency services, which are evaluated significantly more positively by the public.

Across all countries, firefighters, medical professionals, and other emergency services receive the highest levels of trust, while governments, parliaments, social media platforms, and in some countries public service media receive the most negative evaluations. These findings confirm that societal resilience is shaped not only by state performance, but also by how citizens perceive values, institutional stability, interpersonal relations, and their own living conditions—and that a strong and trustworthy institutional foundation constitutes a key line of defence against destabilising trends.

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