



RIIGIKANTSELEI

Russian-language COVID-19 crisis communication:

lessons learned and new
challenges

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Our starting point in February 2020

Unfortunately:

- Not all Estonian ministries and boards have a Russian-language website and only few do regular communication.
- Among those who did not have it was the Health Board, a key institution during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Estonian crisis legislation, including the Emergency Act, was not available in Russian.
- Russian-speaking media-consumers in Estonia are characterized by diversified media consumption, no strong leader in the media market to be trusted.
- High-rated Estonian News on the First Baltic Channel disappeared from the air in the midst of the crisis.

Our starting point in February 2020

Fortunately:

- The idea of an inter-agency Communication Centre was created at the StratCom team of Government Office a couple of years before and tested during the exercises.
- Health Board, Ministry of Social Affairs, Police Department and some other key institutions had good Russian-speaking experts. The charismatic and reliable doctor Arkadi Popov was appointed as the medical manager of the Health Board (24.03.2020).
- Emergency Services and Government Office were active in Russian-language social media - one of the most important sources of information for Russian community (48% and 77% of younger generation).
- The public Russian-language TV channel ETV+ was launched in 2015.

Situation mapping: Public opinion monitoring

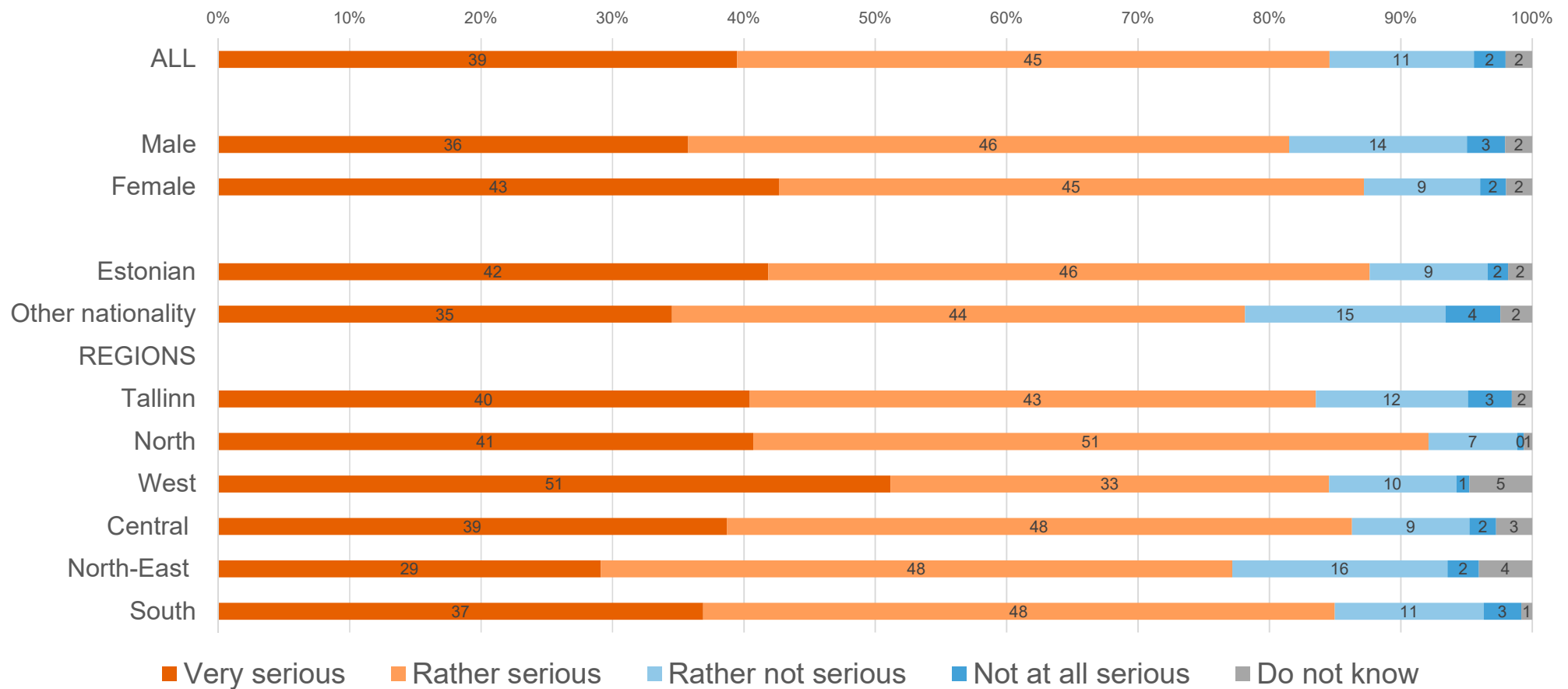
- Continuous monitoring from Week 1 of emergency situation (ES)
- Representative sample 1250 – 2000 respondents, regional focus (North-East, other)
- Weekly reports during ES, monthly during summer, currently bi-weekly
- Monitoring topics:

Base comms impact measure indicators	Rotating focus themes
Information sources and level of information	Mental health
Trust towards government institutions	Domestic violence
Perceived risk	Contact tracing app HOIA
Support for current / planned restrictions	COVID-19 vaccine
Following instructions and preventive behaviors	Attitude towards wearing mask
Socio-economic impact	Other topics as required

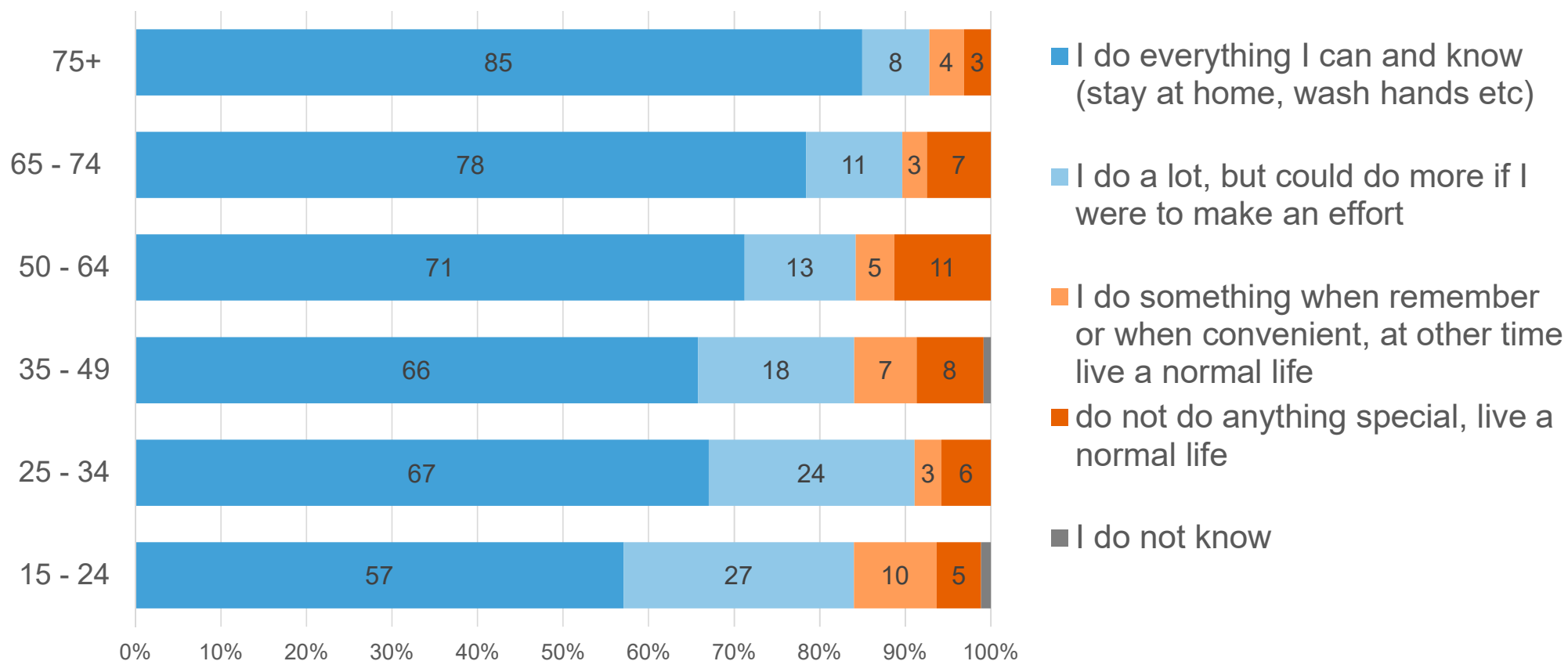
Initial public opinion

- **Strong overall initial mobilisation** – 85% consider situation serious, 89% supported announcing ES, 94% consider to be well informed, 70% claim to follow all official instructions
- **Estonian-Russian information space:** attention was needed to increase engagement and level of information among Russian-speaking population
- **Age:** younger people have significantly lower risk perception and diligence in following official instructions – increased risk for spreading COVID-19
- **Regional differences:** lower risk perception, level of information in North-East region. Less support for government measures, less staying at home (economic reasons)
- **Economic impact:** especially high concern about loss in earnings / employment among Russian-speakers and in North-East region of Estonia
- Stronger information about **kriis.ee** web and **1247 helpline availability**

Perceived seriousness of situation: March 19 2020



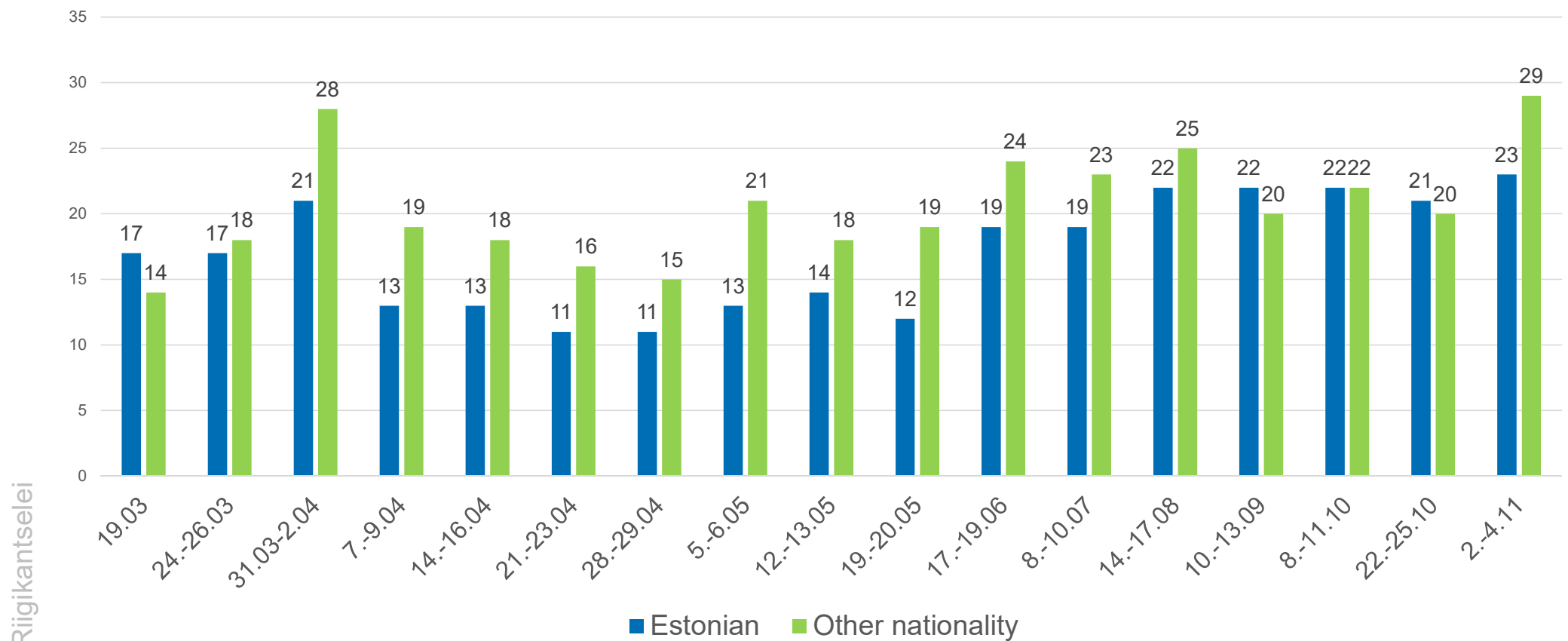
Following official instructions to prevent spread of COVID-19



Important information sources by nationality

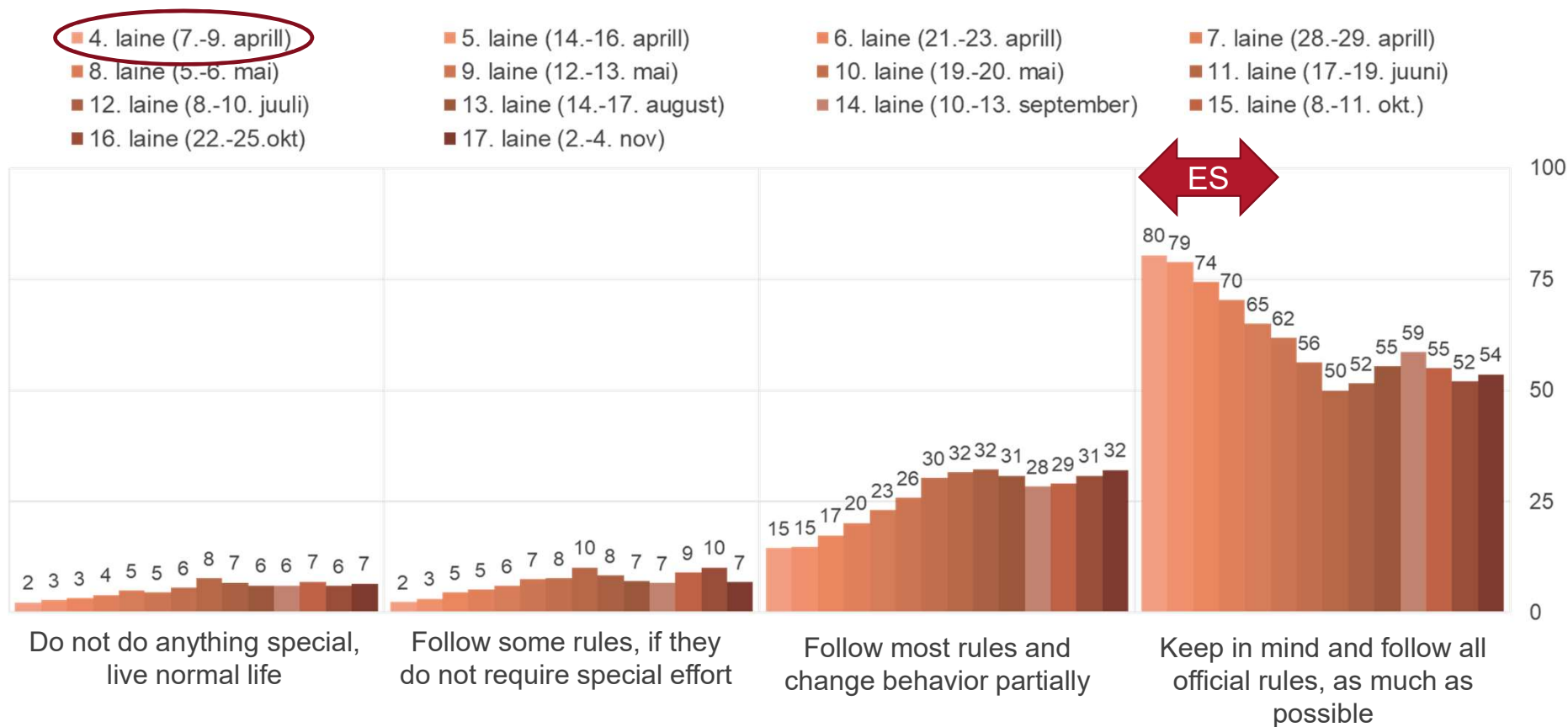
	Estonian	Other nat. March	Other nat. November
Estonian web portals (Delfi.ee, postimees.ee)	50	63	61
Social media	25	35	28 ↓
State institution portals, nt kriis.ee või terviseamet.ee	17	14	29 ↑
Estonian Public Broadcasting portal err.ee	35	28	23
Radio	28	14	21
ETV / ETV+ news and programs	61	28	16/14 (30)
Search from internet	8	20	14 ↓
Relatives, friends, neighbours	8	11	16
Russian Federation TV channels	0	19	13 ↓
International web portals	6	14	11
Other Estonian TV news and channels	15	7	6
Newspapers	15	4	5
Free helpline 1247	7	3	2

State institutions' pages kriis.ee or terviseamet.ee importance as information source



Following official instructions for preventing COVID-19

To prevent the spread of coronavirus each person may do a lot (eg keep the distance from others, stay at home when sick, wash hands etc). Which of the following describes your behavior the most?

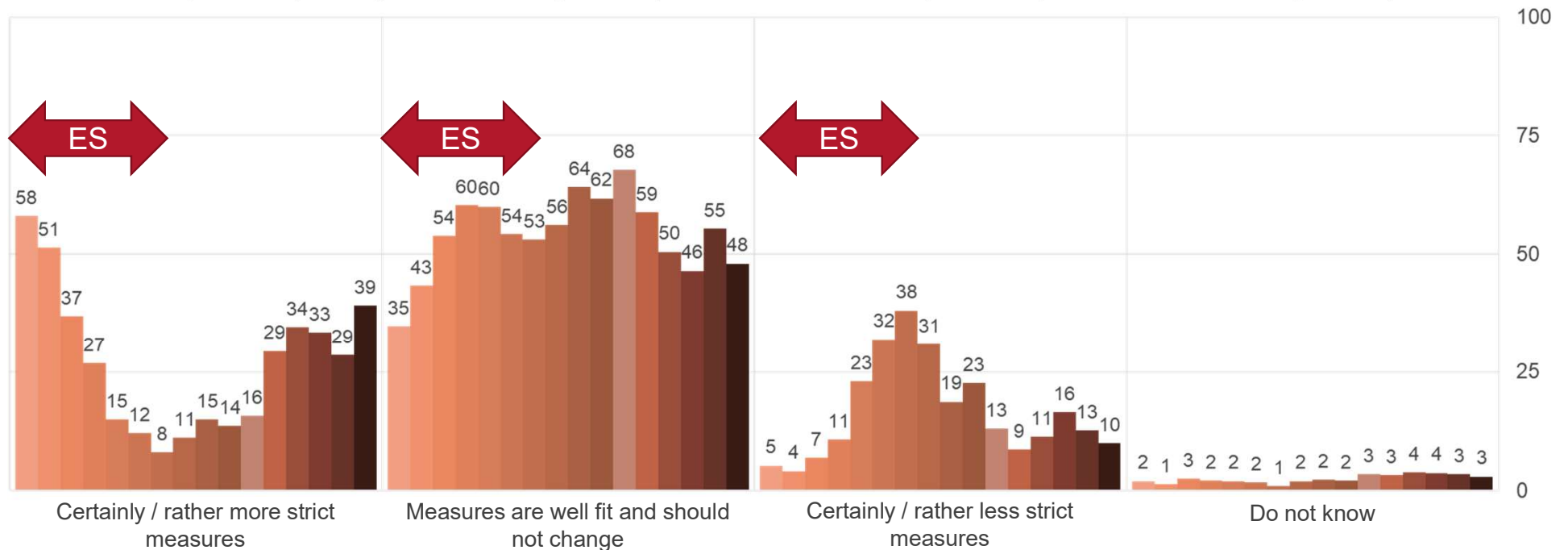


Support for existing restrictions and measures

How do you evaluate currently enforced COVID-19 measures – should they be changed?

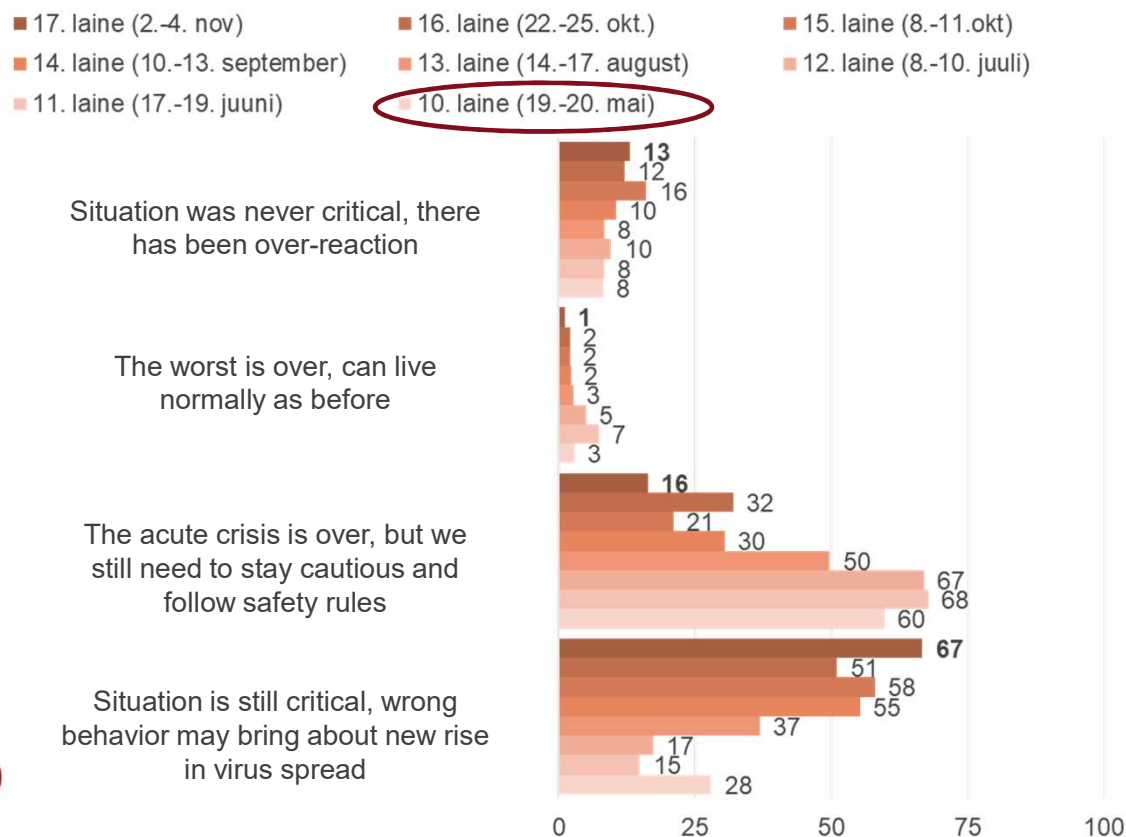
The measures should be...

- 2. laine (24.-26- märts)
- 3. laine (31. märts- 2. aprill)
- 4. laine (7.-9. aprill)
- 5. laine (14.-16. aprill)
- 6. laine (21.-23. aprill)
- 7. laine (28.-29. aprill)
- 8. laine (5.-6. mai)
- 9. laine (12.-13. mai)
- 10. laine (19.-20. mai)
- 11. laine (17.-19. juuni)
- 12. laine (8.-10. juuli)
- 13. laine (14.-17. august)
- 14. laine (10.-13. september)
- 15. laine (8.-11. okt.)
- 16. laine (22.-25. okt.)
- 17. laine (2.-4. nov)

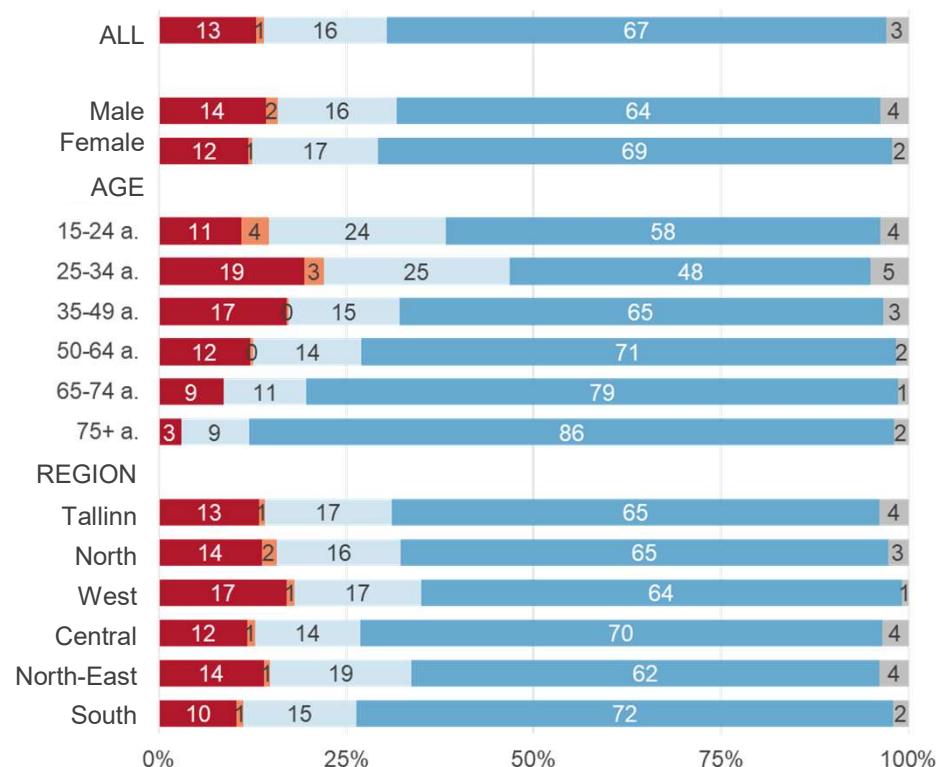


Perceived risk related to COVID-19 situation after the ES

Which of the following describes the most the current COVID-19-related situation in Estonia?



- Situation was never critical, there has been over-reaction
- The worst is over, can live normally as before
- The acute crisis is over, but we still need to stay cautious and follow safety rules
- Situation is still critical, wrong behavior may bring about new rise in virus spread
- I do not know



* „I do not know“- responses not included in the graph, have remained within 1-3% in all survey sets

The key to success during the state of emergency in spring 2020

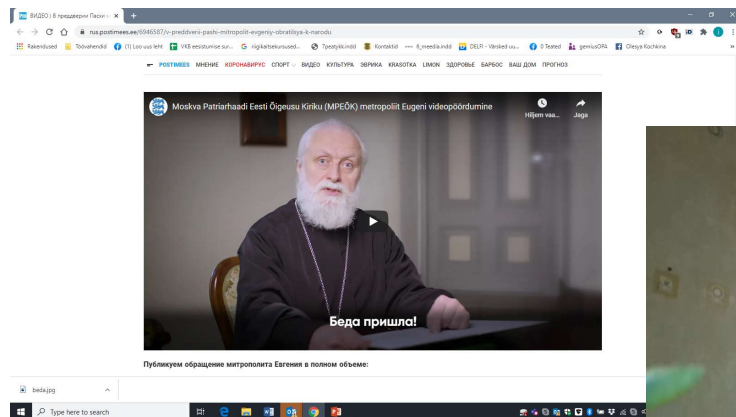
- Joint efforts of the public, private and non-profit sector, good cooperation.
- Focus on results instead of formal approach.
- People were very interested in crisis-related information.
- Favourable global situation - the same basic messages from both Russian and Western information spaces.
- Opportunity to rely on regular opinion polls.

The most important activities during the state of emergency

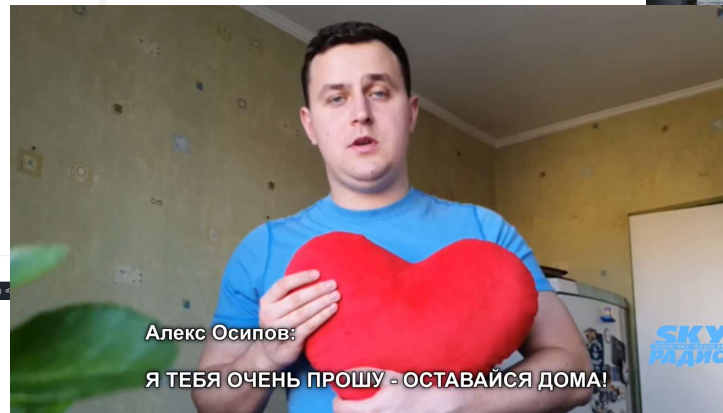
- Targeting information for different groups within Russian community, also for those who (almost) did not use media channels, including SMS message sent to the whole population of Estonia in three languages (25.03.2020).
- Crisis briefings of authorities on public broadcasting channels, all the most important information materials, legal acts, campaigns and even state-approved automated chatbot SUVE were translated into Russian. Russian-language website and newsletter for Health Board were a joint effort by Communication Centre team.
- Creation, development and vigorous advertising of unified official information channels (website kriis.ee, crisis briefings of authorities, State Helpline 1247).

Some video memories of COVID spring

Ministry of the Interior &
The Estonian Orthodox
Church of the Moscow
Patriarchate



Sky Radio



Estonian Rescue Board



Initial success => long-term impact?

Will the lessons and experience of the spring crisis lead to positive changes in informing the Russian-speaking population in the long-term perspective?

- **Government communication channels integration** based on shared content management system grows out from the initial success of the State Helpline 1247.
- **Consolidation of the Russian language communication expertise** in the government institutions.
- **Crisis communication center upgrade** – based on real-life test for planned structure and operating concept

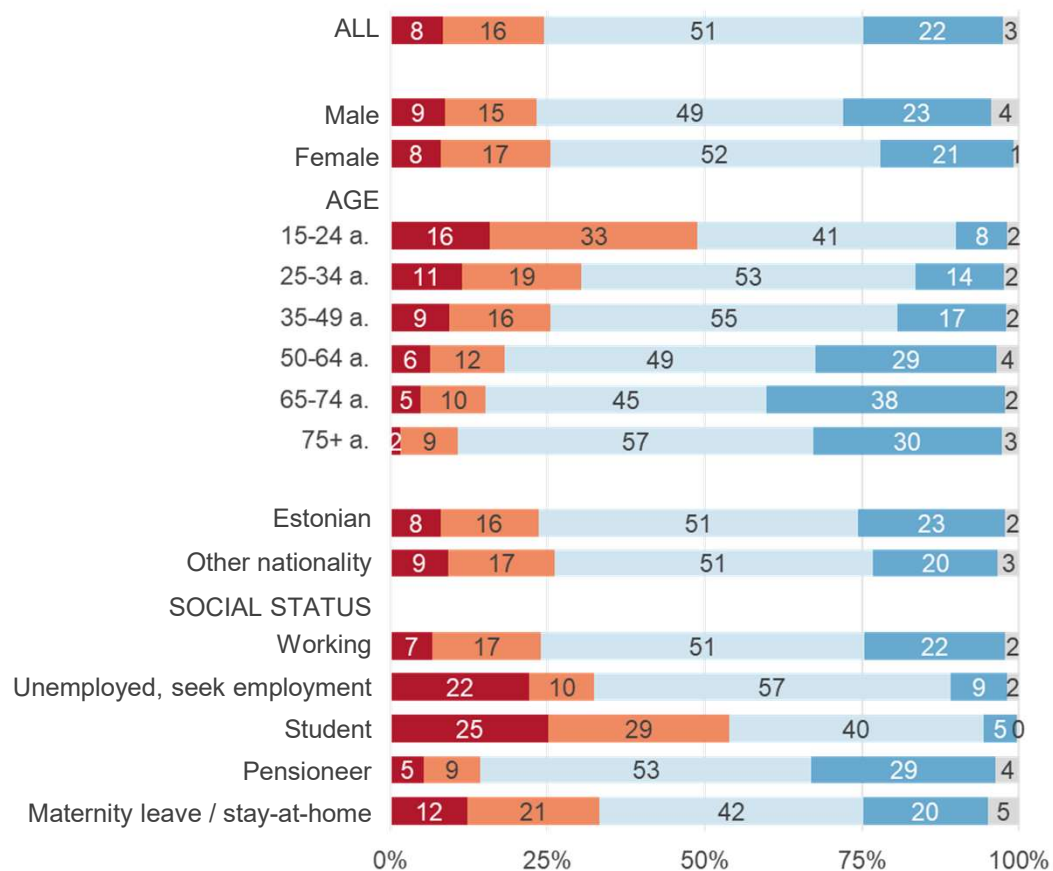
A new wave and new challenges

- **Population's fatigue** from constant restrictions (especially younger generation - YOLO)
 - Long-term **increased stress levels**
 - **Repeating messages** less efficient in grabbing attention
 - Fairly soft first wave – more difficult to **mobilise to follow instructions** later
- **Increasing economic impact**, disproportionately stronger for minorities, elderly
- **Less favourable international context** – protests, other themes competing for attention
- **General vs detailed communication**, providing answers to particular even most complicated questions.

Increased stress and tension levels

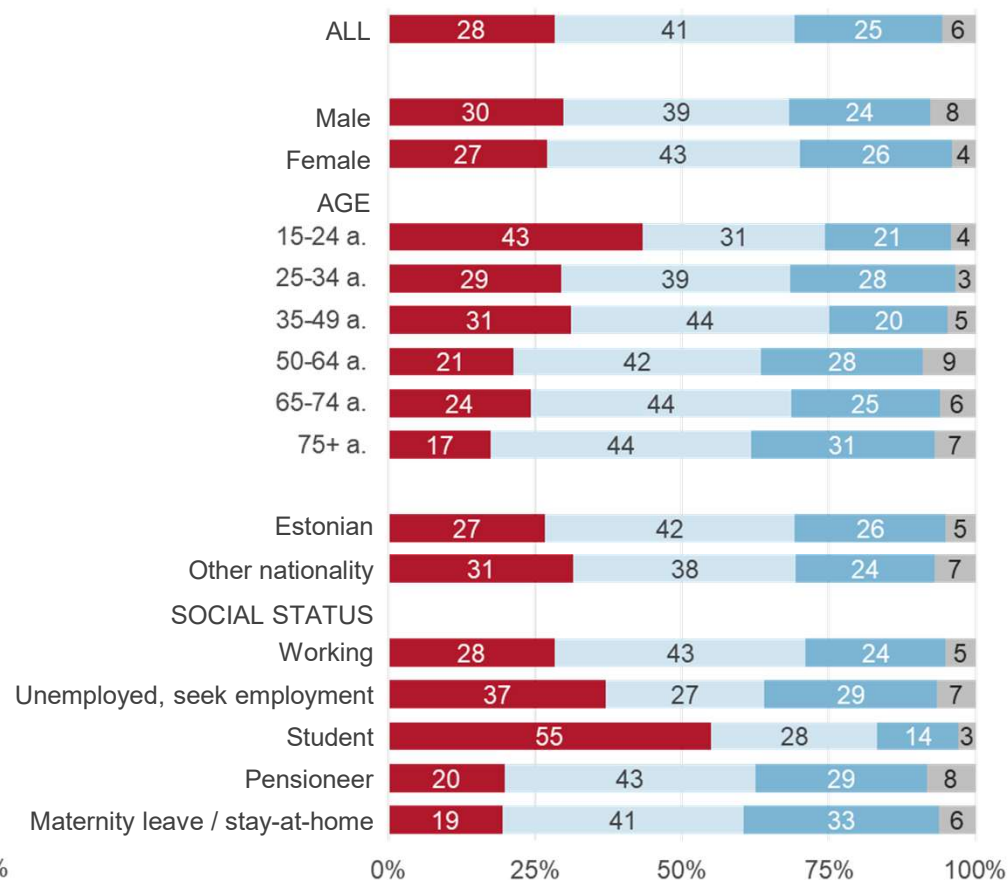
Have you been under stress or tension during past 30 days?

- Yes, to very large extent
- Yes, to large extent
- Yes, to little extent
- No, not at all
- I do not know



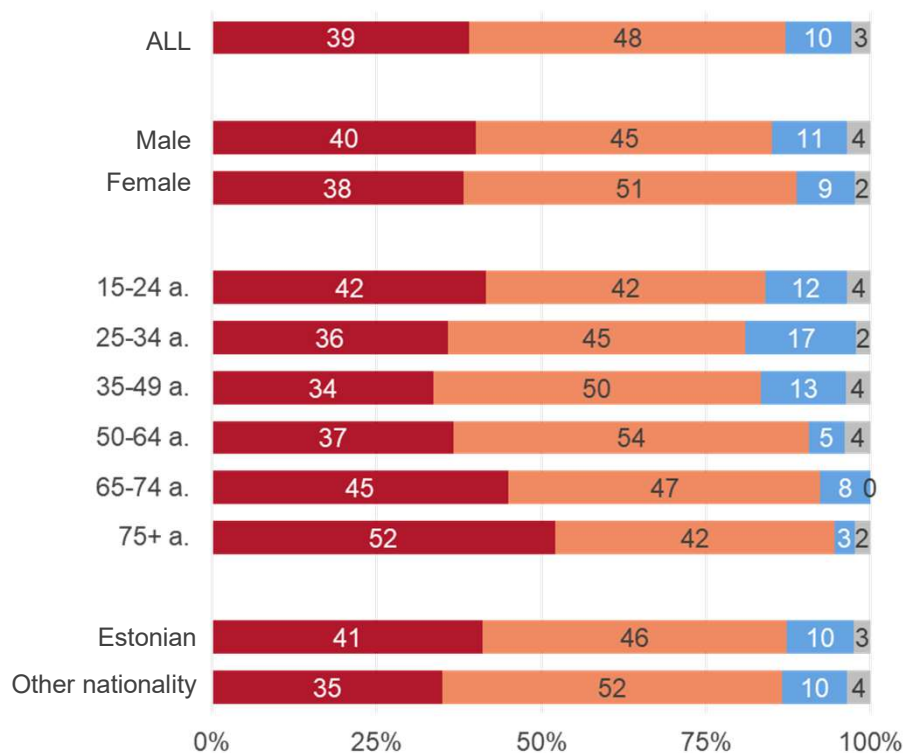
Has your stress or tension level increased compared to previous couple of months?

- Significantly / slightly increased
- Same, has not changed
- Significantly / slightly decreased
- I do not know

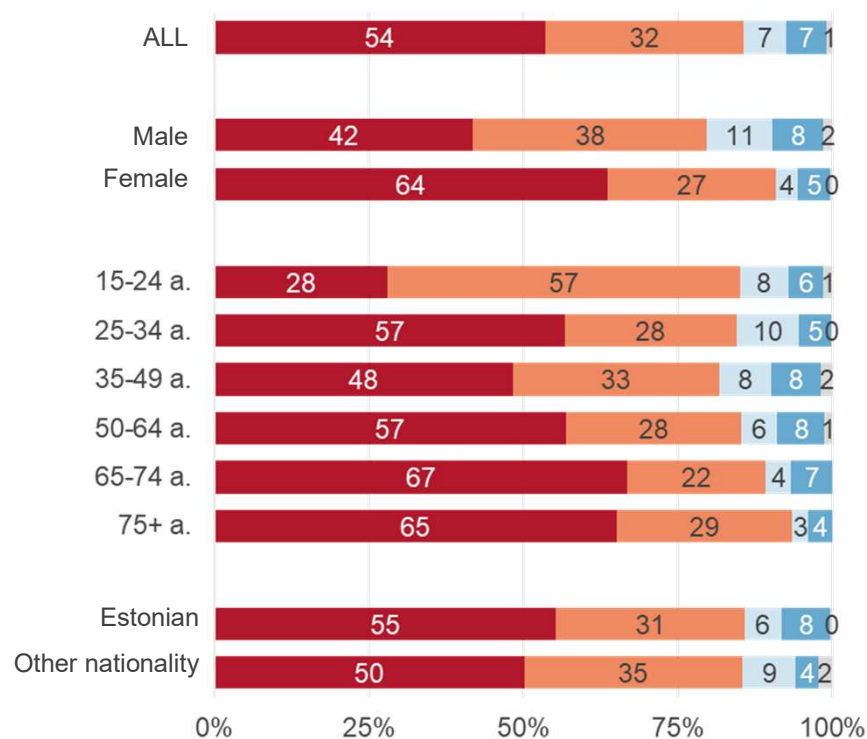


Support for existing measures and following of instructions

- More strict
- Measures are well fit and should not change
- Less strict
- I do not know



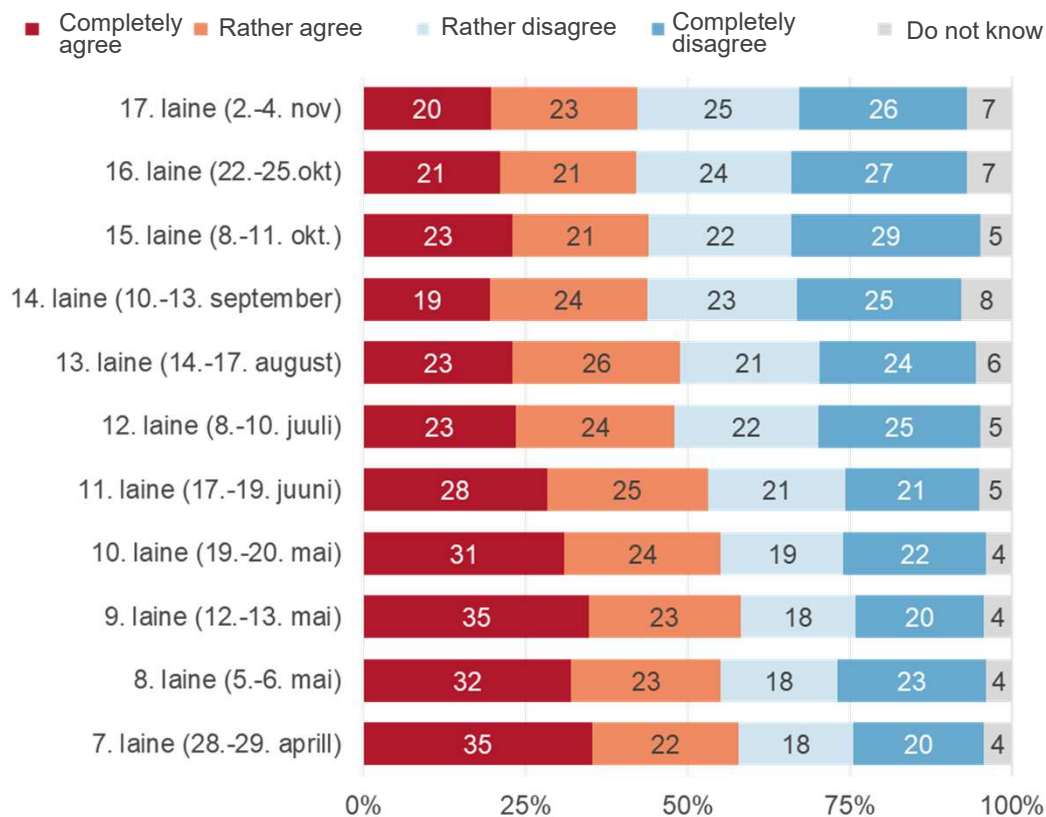
- Keep in mind and follow all official rules, as much as possible
- Follow most rules and change behavior partially
- Follow some rules, if they do not require special effort
- Do not do anything special, live normal life
- I do not know



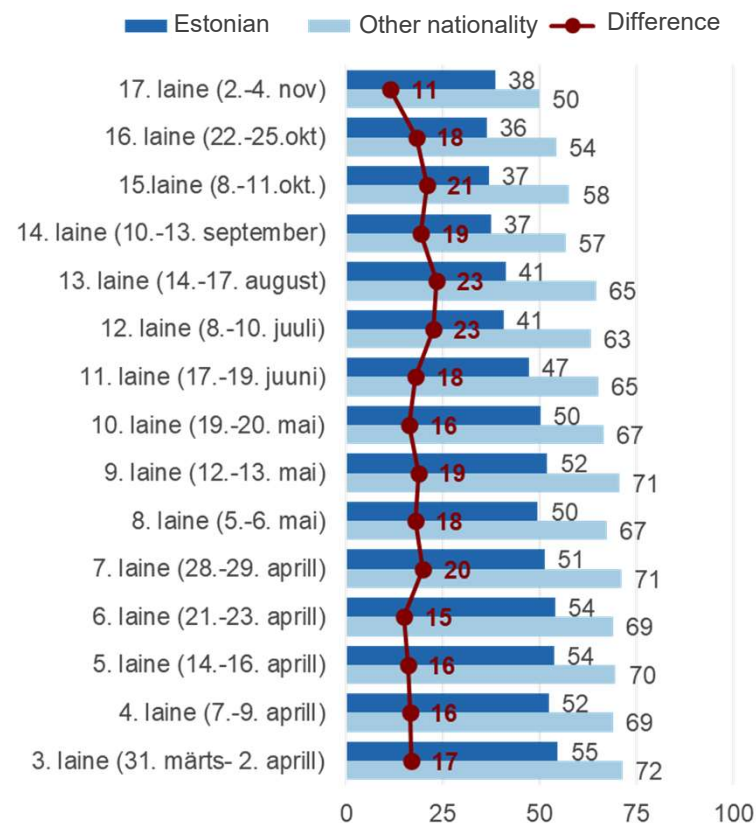
COVID-19 related situation impact on income

To what extent do you agree with the following statement.

Coronavirus-related situation has decreased the income of me / my family.



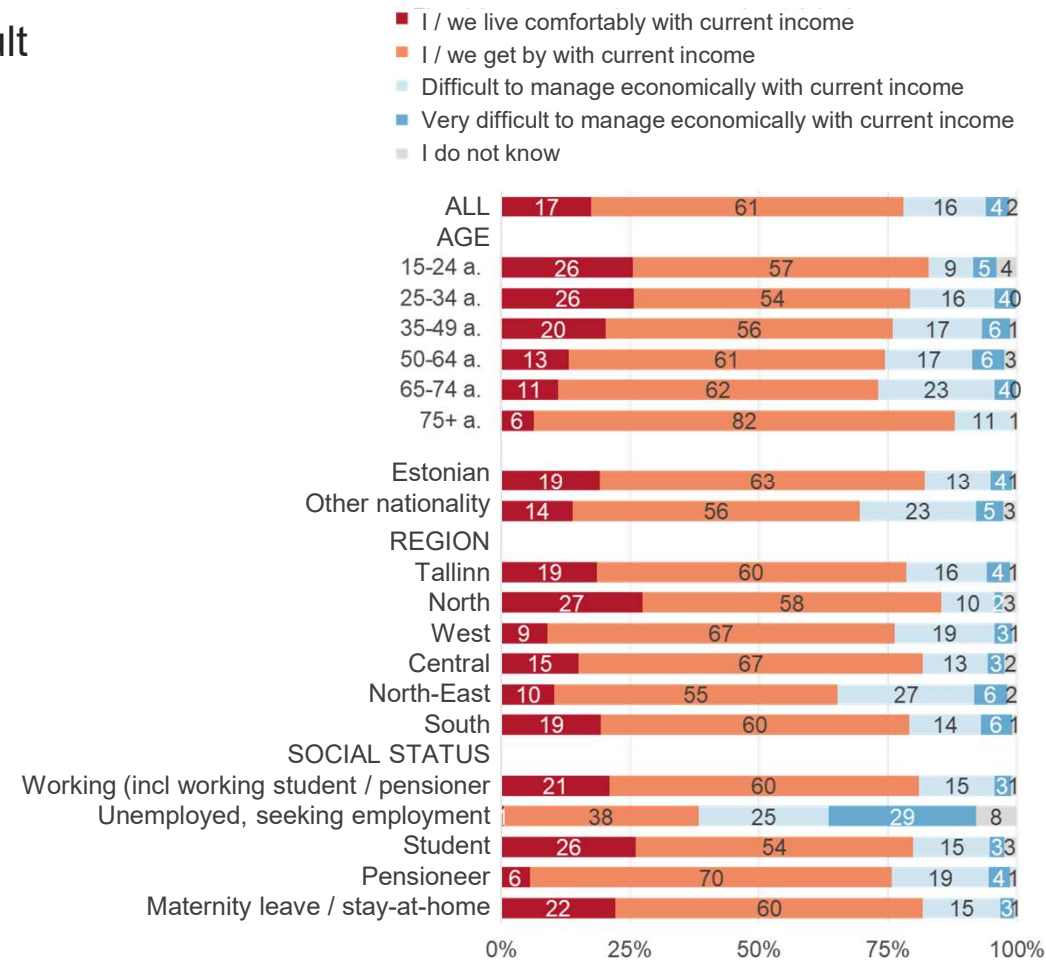
The percentage of respondents saying „completely agree“ or „rather agree“ among Estonians and other ethnicity, and the inter-group difference (red line)



Economic subsistence

- 42% have felt the decrease in income as a result of COVID-19 related situation
- 20% of population have (severe) difficulties managing with current household income
- Stronger negative impact on ethnic minorities, elderly, unemployed or simple labourers
- Difficulty in economic subsistence related to:
 - Increased stress levels, related to financial issues
 - Low interest for or avoiding information on COVID-19
 - Support for less restrictions
 - Less COVID-19 preventive behaviour
 - Refusal to wear masks
 - Lower COVID-19 risk perception

Which of the following in your opinion best describes the level of economic subsistence of your household?





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Thank you!

It's time for a discussion now!

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