



# DESK RESEARCH EUROPEAN YOUTH IN 2021

## IMPRESSUM

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# INTRODUCTION





The **European Youth Event 2021 (EYE 2021)** represents not only a unique occasion for European youth to meet and discuss their place within the EU in a very key moment of its history, but it is also an opportunity for policymakers and EU citizens to look back at the last troubled years of global pandemic and understand its consequences on the younger members of our society.

The **Conference about the Future of Europe** has provided a platform for young people to share and exchange their thoughts about the EU of the future. Through the youthideas.eu website young Europeans have already submitted their propositions and ideas. During EYE 2021, they will have the chance to consolidate these ideas with the advice of experts from all over the European Union.

Few weeks ahead EYE 2021, this report aims to provide the European Parliament with a portrait of European youth today, on a range of key issues: the state of the economy, priorities, the main problems they face, their perception of the pandemic and its consequences, but also, of course, their opinion of the European Union, and of the values that should be defended by the institutions. For each of these topics, the opinion of young aged 16 to 30 years old will be described, at EU, national and sociodemographic level, but also compared with that of Europeans aged 31 and older. In doing so, this work adds another piece to the picture of the European youth which will ultimately come out of the EYE 2021 event. By investigating young EU citizens' opinions about a set of key issues and future challenges for the EU, this report may represent another precious source of advice for participants in the EYE 2021 conference.

The current report employs data collected through different opinion surveys conducted **between November 2019 and June 2021**. By looking at these data, this desk research investigates young Europeans' opinions about the EU, while tracing a portrait of the pandemic's effects on this population. The scope of the research is that of building a comparative assessment of the pandemic's consequences and of young people's view of the EU taking into consideration:

- Differences between the distinct **age groups**, and between young (16-30) and older citizens (31+);
- Geographical and cultural variations between the **27 EU Member States**;
- Elements of divergence depending on **socio-demographic variables**, such as gender, but also age (comparing for example the 16-20 to the 26-30 age groups) and educational levels.

The analysis proposed below offers food for thought for a wider consideration of what being a young European in 2021 means, whether a unique European youth really exists and, if so, what are the main concerns of this young generation of citizens and how the EU can respond to them.

### Methodology used for this Desk research

This research employs data issued from the following surveys. All but one are Eurobarometer surveys, conducted face to face in respondents' homes. Since the start of the pandemic, face-to-face interviews are complemented with interviews ones where face to face was not possible.

|   |                        |                      |
|---|------------------------|----------------------|
| <a href="#">Kantar International Survey</a>                       | May-June 2021          | Online               |
| <a href="#">Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament</a> | March-April 2021       | Face to face, online |
| <a href="#">Standard Eurobarometer 94</a>                         | February-March 2021    | Face to face, online |
| <a href="#">Parlemeter 94.2</a>                                   | November-December 2020 | Face to face, online |
| <a href="#">Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe</a>            | October-November 2020  | Face to face, online |
| <a href="#">Standard Eurobarometer 93</a>                         | July-August 2020       | Face to face, online |
| <a href="#">Standard Eurobarometer 92</a>                         | November 2019          | Face to face         |

This analysis is done for the European Parliament (Youth Outreach Unit and Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, POMU) in view of the European Youth Event (EYE) 2021. This desk research has been conducted by the Centre Kantar sur le Futur de l'Europe.<sup>1</sup>

All the results are presented in the accompanying Power Point Presentation published here: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer>

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<sup>1</sup> Established within Kantar Public, a global consulting and research business, the 'Centre Kantar sur le Futur de L'Europe' brings together a pan-European team of researchers with expertise in political and opinion polling, social and economic trends, and migration. The Centre aims to contribute to the quality of public debate through Kantar's analysis and knowledge of public opinion and political change in Europe and its member countries.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





**Analysing young Europeans in this very particular historical moment means taking a realistic picture of the cultural and socio-economic boundaries which divide European citizens across age and Member States.** The coronavirus pandemic has introduced new issues and highlighted, or even exacerbated, already existing ones. However, this report also portrays a new generation of Europeans, optimistic and resolute in facing the current crisis and in overcoming other global challenges, like climate change. This report investigated young EU citizens' opinions about a set of key issues and future challenges for the EU, as summarized below.

### **The EU, today and tomorrow**

Young Europeans are fully aware of the advantages that derive from their membership to the EU, especially in terms of mobility, but also with respect to democracy and civil rights. When it comes to the EU and what it means to European youth today and tomorrow, young Europeans clearly have a more favorable opinion of the EU with freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU as most-cited subjects on what the EU means to them. Young people feel generally attached to the European Union, despite large variations between countries as young people's consideration of the EU varies from country to country depending on each Member State's history and on their specific relationship with the Union. As an example, the migratory crisis has shaped young peoples' opinions about the EU in the bordering states along the Balkan route or on the Mediterranean Sea where the EU is more associated with lack of control at the external borders.

The main assets of the EU according to European youth are also more positive than the 31+ population with items such as respect for democracy, human rights and rule of law ranking high as main assets of the EU. A large majority of the young Europeans express feeling of (moderate) attachment to the European Union.

Looking at the future of the EU about one third of young Europeans identify culture as most likely to create a feeling of community in the EU as youth increasingly share similar cultural references. Like the 31+ population, comparable living standards are identified as a helpful step for the future of Europe. Important challenges remain, though, such as economic inequalities between Member States, or the management of immigration. Despite these pressing issues, the attractiveness of the EU, especially as a place of economic and social wellbeing, associated with good standard of livings, remains high. This suggests that thirty years after the Maastricht Treaty the European project is still largely supported by young Europeans. As this generation of EU citizens increasingly shares the same cultural references, the future of the EU lies also in its ability to mediate its common cultural tradition.

**#DEMOCRACY #RIGHTS #CULTURE #RULE OF LAW**

### **Most important topics and values**

Compared to older Europeans, young EU citizens place more importance on the topic of the environment, and they are more preoccupied with issues of human rights and gender equality. Otherwise, young Europeans' concerns are generally in line with those of the rest of the population both at national and European Union level. Their preoccupations and priorities at the national level reflect those at the European and global level, with similar differences between countries and within specific socio-demographic groups. National and individual wealth are especially determinant in explaining variations in young people's priorities, with poorer countries and less educated individuals being less likely to prioritise the climate and more concerned with economic issues. These patterns reveal that Europe's youths place more importance on topics directly affecting them, such as unemployment, or that may concern them in the future, such as the environment and climate change.

European youth are more likely to be of the opinion that the European Parliament should prioritise the climate, gender equality, human rights and digitalisation compared to the older. These topics come second to public health, which is put forward by both younger and older respondents as the number one priority for the European Parliament to tackle.

**#SOCIAL #ENVIRONMENT #ECONOMY #EDUCATION #DIGITAL #SECURITY #SOCIETY**

### **Climate change and the environment**

While the topic of health has moved to first place as a national concern due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, climate change remains of high concern for young Europeans. As they are likely to be more directly affected by climate change, youths are more likely than 31+ to prioritise the climate over other key subjects.

A European Green Deal may represent an occasion for the EU to prove that young Europeans' future is a key priority of the Union. If such initiative had to come into effect, young Europeans would like to prioritise the development of renewable energies and the fight against plastic waste, including the issue of single use of plastic. The European Parliament has recently intervened on this subject by banning single-use plastic items by 2021. This decision is an example of a positive development of the EU's environmental policy which responds to young people's priorities.

**#SUSTAINABILITY #ENVIRONMENT**

### **Economy and jobs**

Overall, young people negatively evaluate their national economic and employment situation. Although their opinion is slightly more positive than that of older Europeans, two third of EU youths consider the state of their national economy as bad, and an equally high share of them evaluate the employment situation negatively. This judgment also reflects the state of young people's financial and employment situations. Only close to six in ten young people in Europe consider their own employment situation as good, and three out of ten declare that their household's financial situation is bad. Economic problems are more pronounced in the Southern European countries and territories with a lower GDP-per capita. Countries which highly rely on tourism, these economies have suffered a bigger blow during the pandemic, which has



## Desk Research European Youth in 2021

impacted especially their youngest population. The least educated youth, together with women, are those who are paying the biggest price in this crisis. This is informed by the fact that, any jobs where young people and women are highly represented, like temporary jobs in the hospitality sector, have been lost due to the closures implemented to curb the pandemic. The extraordinary social security measures implemented by the various governments to sustain the sectors most impacted by the pandemic and avoid uncontrolled unemployment included freezes on layoffs and ad-hoc benefits. However, as these exceptional measures are progressively coming to an end, the real consequences of the economic crisis, especially on the younger, might further surface.

### **#ECONOMY #WORK**

#### **Young Europeans and the media**

One of the things on which young and older Europeans seem to differ the most, is their use of media and technology. Although the digital revolution has changed the habits of almost everyone in Western societies, the fact that the younger generations have lived this revolution from a very young age makes them much more exposed to internet-based technology compared to older people. Media consumption is increasingly digital with online internet being used on a daily basis by 93% of European youngsters. Online social networks' consumption is most probably one of the main drivers of internet consumption among young Europeans.

When it comes to social networks, for example, young Europeans seem to be more aware consumers compared to older people, with high usage of multiple platforms to select their preferred platforms and being early adopters of niche emerging online social media networks. Among these, image-based apps, like Instagram and TikTok, remain specifically popular among the younger. The large use of internet-based media by young people is reflected also in their habits during the confinements. For the younger, screen time and social media use have increased to a greater extent than for the older.

### **#DIGITAL**

#### **The EU and the world**

The young Europeans of 2021 grew up in a largely globalised world. Majority of European youth consider globalisation as positive, perhaps because, relatively to older citizens, they are more able to take advantage of the positive externalities of this phenomenon, for example in terms of economic growth. Notwithstanding, EU youth are also very conscious of some of the challenges posed by issues such as uncontrolled economic growth, and of the role of the EU in facing global matters such as climate change as indicated earlier.

Majority of young Europeans consider the European Union a place of stability and are aware of the privileged position of the EU within an interconnected and yet largely unstable world. They see the EU as a place of peace, stability, and freedom of opinion and consider the EU an institution which embodies values to a greater extent than other countries of the world. This reaffirms young Europeans' awareness of the benefits of living in the EU compared to the rest of the world. However, the instability which has plagued some EU countries over the last decade, and which has been felt by younger citizens in those countries, should remind us of the importance for the EU to remain a guarantor of the values that European youth feel the European Union embodies such as peace, freedom of opinion and tolerance and openness to others. **#WORLD**

# I. THE EU, TODAY AND TOMORROW



This section proposes an **overview of young Europeans' consideration of the European Union** and it does so by looking comparatively at two distinct age groups: **young European citizens aged 16-30 years old**, and those older than 30. After assessing **what the EU means** to young Europeans and **what its main assets are** according to them, this first part proceeds by evaluating **youth' attachment to the European Union**. Moreover, it will assess which one, among different subjects, is the most likely **to create a feeling of community**, according to young people. The section ends by looking at the **future developments of the EU** and by considering which might be the most useful for the future of the European Union according to its young citizens.

## 1.1. What the EU means to European youth

**The young Europeans of 2021 represent the first generation that fully grew up after the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union as it is nowadays.** Moreover, the process of European integration has expanded the number of young people living within the borders of the Union. The specific timing of the EU integration process in each country and the global events which have unfolded in the last three decades, have produced considerations which differ from Member State to Member State.

### A favourable opinion of the EU, more pronounced among the younger

**Overall, young Europeans first associate the EU to positive items and things they can benefit from: when asked what the EU means to them, a majority of Europeans aged 16 to 30 (58%) link it to freedom to travel, work and study anywhere in the EU<sup>2</sup>.** The single currency is their second most cited item (39%). These two advantages brought by the EU are not only the ones which defined young Europeans' lives the most, but also two of the most tangible consequences of European unification. That may explain why, together with peace (34%), they are the three most cited subjects by both young and older respondents.

**In general, young Europeans tend to hold more favourable opinions of the EU compared to older respondents.** The 16-30 age group is sensibly more likely to mention cultural diversity (31%, +7 percentage points), democracy (26%, +3 pp), economic prosperity (21%, +3 pp) and social protection (16%, +5 pp) compared to the 31+ age group. On the contrary, compared to the younger, older Europeans tend to link the EU to a greater extent to negative issues like bureaucracy (22%, +8 pp), waste of money (22%, +10 pp), and not enough control at the external borders (21%, +7 pp). Moreover, 13% of older respondents associate the EU to more crime and loss of cultural identity, respectively 7 and 6 percentage points more than younger respondents.

### What does the EU mean to you personally?

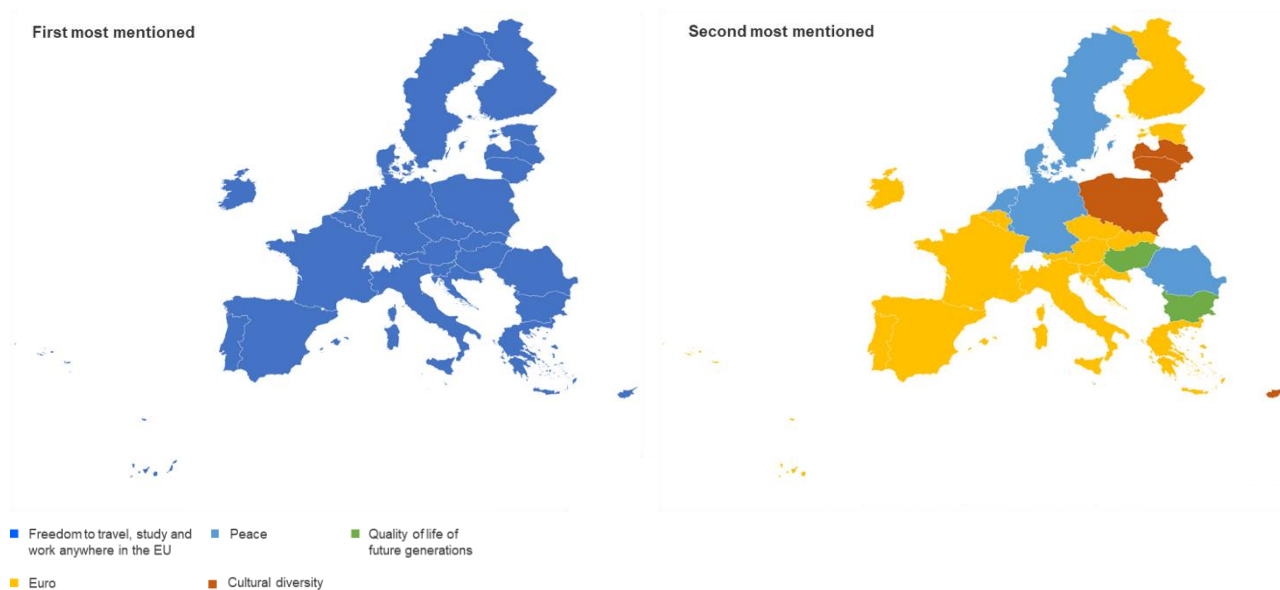


Figure 1. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020 Results for young aged 16-30

<sup>2</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020



### A consideration of the EU marked by each country's specific relationship with the Union

**As said, young people's consideration of the EU varies from country to country depending on each Member State's history and on their specific relationship with the Union.** If one looks at the Peace value, this is much more likely to be cited in Germany (52%) and Ireland (40%), where Peace has been preferred by young respondents, while Spain has one of the lowest percentages of young people who chose this value (14%).

Other country differences between young Europeans' views of the EU appear when looking at the Social protection and Democracy values. **Young people in Eastern European states like Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, and Poland are less likely to link the EU to social protection, but they are relatively more likely to associate it to democracy**, perhaps a consequence of those countries' past behind the iron curtain. Overall, Democracy, like the other positive items, is generally more mentioned by EU youth in the Northern countries.

**If young Europeans in Northern Europe are more willing to link the EU to a positive item, that is less the case in some Southern or Western European countries.** Italy (16%), France (17%), and Belgium (17%) are three of the Member States where young people are the least likely to link the EU to the item Quality of life for future generations. In those countries, young people are also very unlikely to link the EU to economic prosperity. Only 11% of youth in Italy and 14% in France do so, as much as in Greece. 24% of young people in Greece also link the EU to unemployment. It is possible that for young Europeans living in early EU Member States, like Italy, France and Belgium, the positive externalities of European membership have become less evident, contributing to a feeling of dissatisfaction towards the EU. In Italy and Greece, the 2011 sovereign-debt crisis, and its handling by the European institutions, may have also fostered a negative image of the EU among young people.

**The migratory crisis has also shaped young peoples' opinions about the EU in the bordering states along the Balkan route or on the Mediterranean Sea.** In Greece (40%) and Malta (33%), important proportions of the 16-30 associate the EU to lack of control at the external borders. In Austria 22% of the 16-30 associate the EU to loss of cultural identity and 23% to more crime. In this country, 30% of youth also think that the EU represents a waste of money. This belief is particularly diffused also in less-Euro-sceptic countries like Sweden (22%) and Finland (19%).

## 1.2. Main assets of the EU

**Youth's positive view towards the EU is also reflected in what they consider as the main assets of the Union.** 32% young Europeans think that the respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law is the main asset of the EU and this opinion is shared by an equal number of Europeans aged 31+.<sup>3</sup> In wealthier countries, like Sweden (55%), the Netherlands (54%), Germany (47%), or Denmark (43%), young people are more likely to mention this subject.

The economic, industrial, and trading power of the EU is the second most cited item by Europeans aged 16 to 30 (28%). On third place, 26% of EU youth consider the standard of living of EU citizens a top asset of the Union. **In countries with a lower GDP pro-capita, such as Croatia (41%), Latvia (41%), Bulgaria (38%), and Lithuania (35%), young respondents are more likely to mention the standard of living of EU citizens as the main asset of the Union.** The solidarity between Member States is the fourth main asset according to young Europeans, chosen by 24% of them.

**The likelihood to consider a determinate feature as a main asset of the Union varies also depending on specific individual characteristics, like gender and educational level.** Women are less likely to consider the economic, industrial, and trading power of the EU as a main asset of the Union compared to men. Only 25% of them choose this asset compared to 31% of men. On the contrary, women are slightly more likely to mention the EU's ability to promote peace and democracy outside its borders (18% vs 15%), the social protection systems in the Member States (16% vs 13%) and the EU's capacity for research and innovation (15% vs 11%).

**Young people who left education at the age of 15 or earlier place greater value on the standard of living of EU citizens compared to longer educated individuals** (40% of them select this item, +16pp compared to those who left school at the age of 20 or later). On the contrary, those who studied until the age of 20 or older are more willing to consider the good relationships and solidarity between Member States, and the respect of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as two of the Union's main assets. Respectively 25% and 31% of youth in this category choose this item, versus 10% and 19% among the least educated.

<sup>3</sup> Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020

### 1.3. Attachment to the European Union

**A large majority of young Europeans are attached to the European Union.** For 46% this feeling is moderate, while 16% consider themselves “very attached” to the Union<sup>4</sup>. Young Europeans are more attached to the EU than their older counterparts, although by a little margin (+3 pp). An equal share of young and old Europeans (29%) consider themselves not very attached to the European Union.

**Youth in the Eastern European countries are more attached to the European Union.** Poland (82%), Latvia (78%), Hungary (75%), Bulgaria (72%) and Romania (71%) are the countries where young people express the highest attachment to the EU. The Netherlands (67%), Cyprus (55%) and Belgium (51%) are the only Member States where an absolute majority of youths do not feel attached (or very attached) to the European Union.

**The sense of attachment to the EU is stronger among students and young people who left education later.** 62% of young people who left education at the age of 20 or after describe themselves as fairly or very attached to the European Union versus 46% of those who left school at 15 or younger.

Youth living in large towns are more likely to be attached to the European Union compared to young people living in rural areas (66% vs 57%).

#### Please tell how attached you feel to...: The European Union

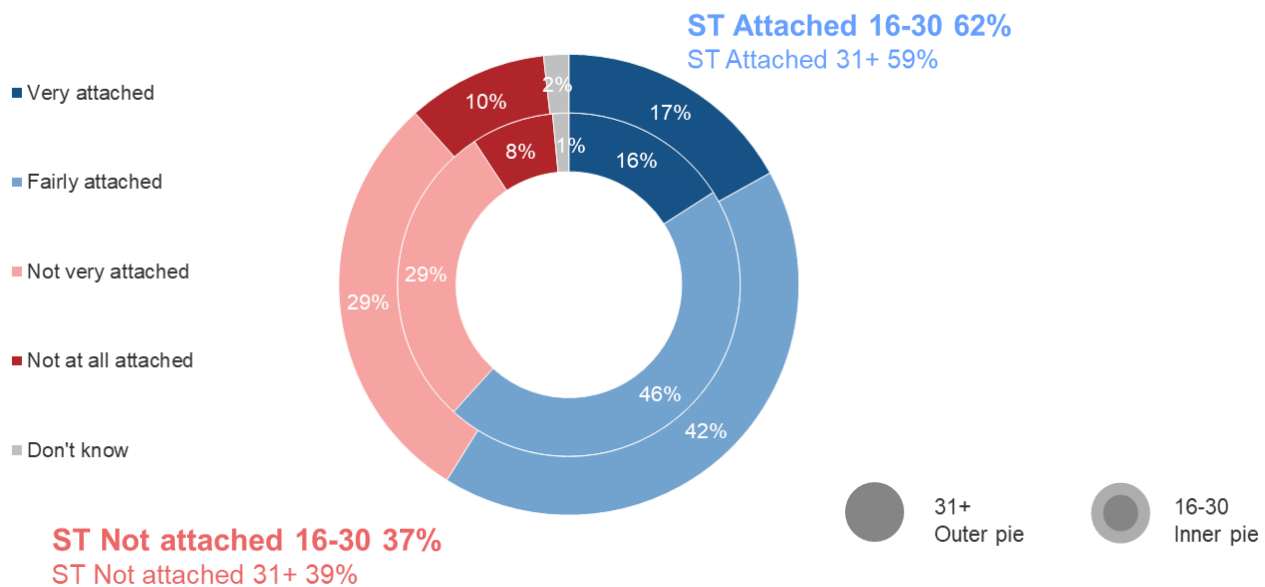


Figure 2. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>4</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

## 1.4. Feeling of community

**When asked to choose the subjects which are the most likely to create a feeling of community in the EU, 29% young Europeans look at culture and they choose it to a significantly larger extent than older Europeans (+5 pp)<sup>5</sup>.** Young Europeans share increasingly similar cultural references, especially when it comes to pop culture, and the internet might be favouring this process of cultural homogenisation within the EU.

Besides culture, EU youth think that economy (25%), values (24%), history (23%), and solidarity (21%), all largely contribute to creating a feeling of community in the European Union. **Values that are close to a young person's perspective are more likely to be considered by young Europeans as able to generate a feeling of community compared to older respondents.** That is the case for sports (20%, +8 pp) and education (19%, +5 pp). Older people are more likely to mention the rule of law (21%, +6 pp) or care for the environment (14%; +5 pp) as "bonding" subjects.

**In some countries, young people are more likely to mention determinate subjects as creating a feeling of community compared to others.** For example, youth in Ireland, Estonia, Hungary, Austria (20%) and Malta (20%) are more likely to mention Care for the environment. In Bulgaria (14%), Slovakia (13%), Luxembourg (12%), Greece (11%), Romania (11%) and Croatia (11%) they tend to choose Religion more than in other Member States. Sports is a popular item in France (29%), Portugal (27%), Belgium (23%), and Spain (22%), perhaps due to the cultural importance of football in these countries and its ability to create a feeling of community among these populations.

## 1.5. Most useful for the future of Europe

Young Europeans are those who will live and decide the future of Europe in the decades to come. Therefore, hearing their voice and opinion about the most useful developments for the future of the Union is of primary importance.

**EU youth think that having comparable living standard is the most helpful step that the European Union should undertake in the future.** 36% of them choose this subject, virtually as much as Europeans aged 31 and older (35%)<sup>6</sup>.

The second most valued item is Stronger solidarity among the EU Member States (28%), which is considered relatively less important by young Europeans compared to older ones (-3 pp). On the contrary, **common education standards are increasingly perceived as a need by this new generation of Europeans which are more and more accustomed to traveling between Member States for professional or study purposes:** 28% of them judge comparable education standards as most helpful for the future Europe, versus 20% of respondents aged 31 and older (+8 pp).

Older respondents place greater value on a common health policy (26%, +3 pp) compared to younger ones, while economic objectives such as energy independence (21%), deeper economic integration (16%), a stronger industrial capacity (15%) and the introduction of the Euro in all EU countries (8%) seem to occupy a relatively more marginal position both among young and older respondents.

### Youth envisage different future challenges for the EU, depending on their national concerns

A closer look at country differences in the responses reveals that young people's opinions about the future of Europe are not the same between Member States. For example, **the introduction of the euro in all EU countries is considered helpful mostly by young people from Member States where the single currency has not been established.** That is the case for Romania (34%), Hungary (18%), Croatia (17%), Poland (13%) and Czechia (12%). Inside the euro area, important shares of young respondents in Austria (22%), Latvia (13%) and Slovakia (12%) consider the introduction of the Euro to every EU country as important.

**A common health policy is considered significantly more important by young people in Western or Southern European states than in Northern or Eastern states.** These range from 32% in Portugal and the Netherlands, to 9% in Sweden, 10% in Czechia and 11% in Finland.

**In EU countries largely depending on foreign import for energy support, young people are more likely to consider energy independence a helpful development for the future of Europe.** This is particularly true for states that experienced tense diplomatic relations with Russia like Finland (47%), Estonia (39%), Sweden (33%), and some Eastern states, but also for countries like Italy (29%) which import a large share of their electricity.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020



The degree of economic development of each Member State, as well as the recent experience of a major economic crisis, may engender distinct opinions between young people in different European countries. In the Eastern European countries, and some Southern European countries, more young people consider comparable living standards as important for the future of Europe than in the Western and Northern European countries. Deeper economic integration is judged more helpful in some Eastern European countries and in Southern European states like Italy (32%), Portugal (31%) and Greece (26%).

Which two of the following would you consider to be most helpful for the future of Europe?

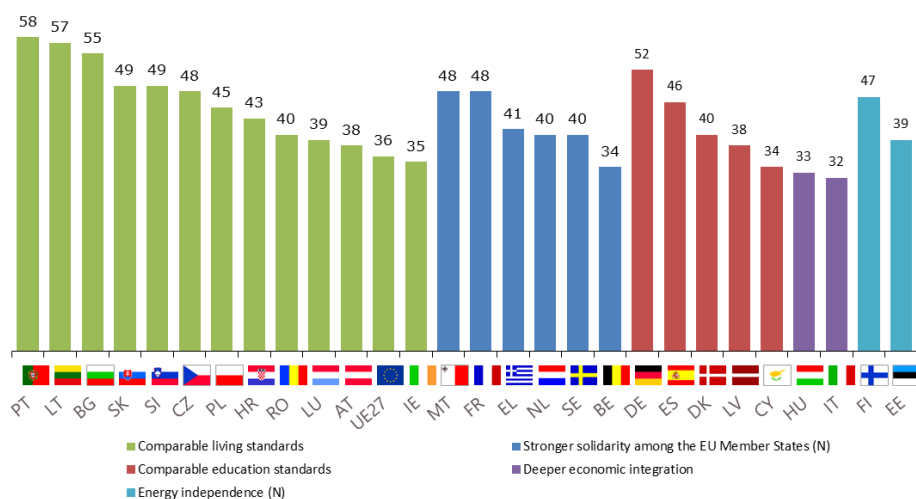


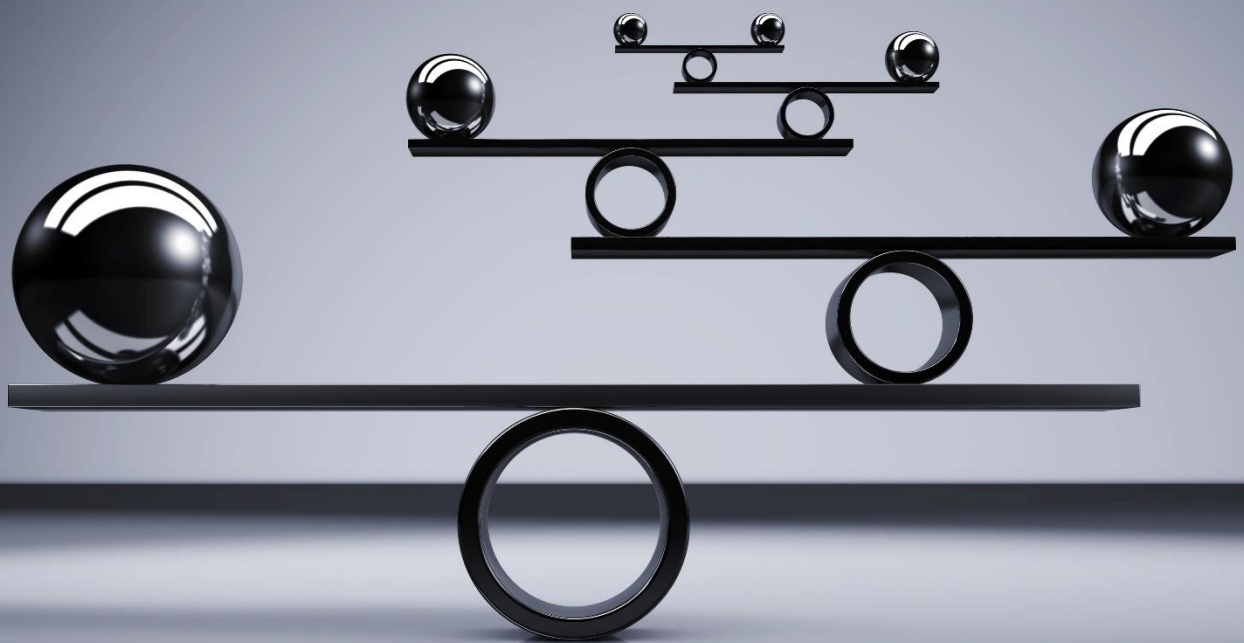
Figure 3. Source: Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020. Results for young aged 16-30

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Young Europeans are fully aware of the advantages that derive from their membership to the EU, especially in terms of mobility, but also of respect for democracy and civil rights. **Young people feel generally attached to the European Union, despite large variations between country.** Important challenges remain, though, such as economic inequalities between Member States, or the management of the immigration issue.

Despite these pressing issues, **the attractiveness of the EU, especially as a place of economic and social wellbeing,** associated with good standard of livings, remains high. This suggests that thirty years after the Maastricht Treaty the European project is still largely supported by young Europeans. As this generation of EU citizens increasingly shares the same cultural references, **the future of the EU lies also in its ability to mediate its common cultural tradition.**

## II. MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS AND VALUES



This section looks into the **most important topics and values** that the young in the EU hold in comparison to those aged 31 or more. It begins with an analysis of the **main concerns** that each age group has in terms of the most important issues that are currently being **faced by their country, as well as the European Union** more generally. Following, the **topics that the European Parliament should address** as a priority, as well as **what the EU budget should be spent on**, are scrutinised from the perspective of both age groups. In finalising the chapter, the areas of work that should be prioritised in order to **face global challenges** are discussed, as well as the **values the European Parliament should defend** as a matter of priority are examined from the position of the two aforementioned age groups.

## 2.1. Main concerns at the national level

A first look at the most important topics considered by EU youth shows that, when thinking of **the main issues faced by their country**, they hold a **similar pattern** than the rest of the population, with a distinct preference for items related to the environment and education. As an example, those aged between 16 and 30 years of age are most likely to place **health** (40%), **the economic situation** (32%), and **unemployment** (27%) as the top three issues faced by their country, similarly to those aged 31 years or more<sup>7</sup>.

However, the aforementioned discrepancies result from the fact that young Europeans place significantly greater importance on the education system than those aged 31 or more (17% vs 11% respectively), as well as unemployment (27% vs 24% respectively), and housing (8% vs. 5% respectively). These could arise from the fact that such issues are currently affecting Europe's youngest cohorts the most, and that environmental issues are expected to worsen in the coming decades, making such topics more salient for Europe's youth.

At the other end of the scale, young Europeans tend to place the least importance on problems of terrorism (3%) and energy supply (2%) when thinking of their own country. These results are the same also for the rest of the population in Europe.

### Country variations related to the recent experiences of crises

With regards to country differences, the recent impact of the coronavirus pandemic speaks from the observation that young Europeans are most likely to place high importance on issues that have affected their country the most. As an example, Italy (57%) holds the highest degree of young EU citizens naming **health** as the main issue facing their country, a possible result of being the first Member State to have had their health system seriously impacted by the pandemic.

Another example is that of the Southern European Member States concern for the state of the economy. These have the highest proportions of young EU citizens placing the **economic situation** as one of the most important issues faced by their country. Cyprus (54%), Greece (52%), Italy (47%), and Portugal (45%) have all been largely affected by the 2007/2008 economic and financial crisis. Its effects, from which these countries had not fully recovered, have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. This is reflected also on the importance placed on **unemployment**, with young Europeans in Cyprus (55%), Spain (49%), Italy (45%), and Greece (44%) most likely to select it as the most prominent issue.

Lastly, country differences are also seen in the importance placed on the topic of the **environment** and **climate change**. States that traditionally have led the discussion of transitioning towards more environmentally friendly societies hold the highest proportions young EU citizens stating it as the most important issue faced by their country. **Denmark** (41%), **the Netherlands** (34%), and **Sweden** (34%) are prime examples of such.

### What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?

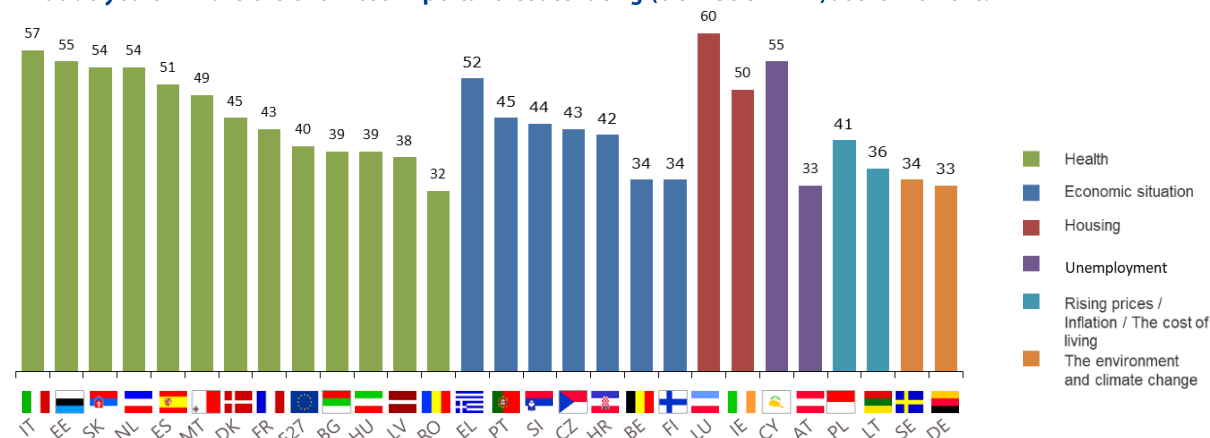


Figure 4. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30.

<sup>7</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

### Young women and working age youth are more concerned by the economic situation than young man and respondents aged under 26

A gender comparison between the distinct responses reveals that young European **women** are more likely than men to place high importance on three specific issues faced by their country: **health** (44% of women vs 37% of men), the **economic situation** (34% vs 30%), and **unemployment** (29% vs 26%). This may illustrate that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had a distinct impact between men and women, causing greater concern among the second.

Young people are distinctly concerned by certain issues, also depending on their age. For example, those aged 26 to 30 are more likely to mention the economic situation (35% vs 29% of those aged 16-20) and rising prices, inflation and the cost of living (18% vs 13% those aged 16-20). On the other hand, the youngest age cohorts are more likely to name the education system (20% vs 14% of those aged 26-30), and the environment and climate change (20% vs 15% of those aged 26-30).

The level of education also influences the topics that EU's youth deem important when thinking of their country. For example, unemployment is selected significantly more by those who have left **education** at the age of 15 or before (36%) than those who have studied until the age of 20 or later (23%). The opposite pattern is seen when considering **the education system**. Young respondents **who left education aged 20 or older** are more prone to name it as an important issue for their country than those who have left school at 15 years or earlier (17% vs. 9% respectively).

## 2.2. Main concerns at the European Union level

Moving into a broader view, when young Europeans were asked what they think the **most important issues currently facing the EU** are<sup>8</sup>, they place **health** (39%), **the economic situation** (36%) and **environment and climate change** (25%) at the first three places amongst a list of 13 choices. This pattern is reflected also in the responses of older Europeans (31+).

Some differences arise when it comes to environmental and social issues. Younger respondents are more prone to considering **the environment and climate change** as an important issue facing the EU (25% vs 19% of those aged 31 or more). Conversely, older respondents select more often **the state of Member States' public finances** (22% vs 18% of 16-30) or **immigration** (19% vs 16%) as a main concern. These patterns reveal that Europe's youth place more importance on topics directly affecting them, such as unemployment, or that may concern them in the future, such as the climate. As for older people, the topics that concern young EU citizens the least are taxation (4%), energy supply (3%), and pensions (3%).

### Similar concerns at the national and EU level

In some cases, the topics which concern young people at the national level are also reflected on their concerns at the European level. For example, Italy's youth remain the most likely to consider **health** (55%) one of their most important issues, also at the EU level. Young EU citizens are the most likely to consider **the environment and climate change** as the most important issues faced by the EU in Northern countries like **Sweden** (58%), **Denmark** (57%), **Luxembourg** (43%), and **the Netherlands** (40%). **Spain** (36%), **Cyprus** (28%), and **Italy** (25%) instead have the highest proportions of young people naming **unemployment** as the most pressing issue faced by the EU.

Young people in the Netherlands are the most likely to mention the **economic situation** (49%) as their main concern at the EU level. In this sense, the Netherlands represent an outlier with respect to the other Northern and Western European countries. In the Netherlands, concern for the economic situation is specific to younger respondents, the older ones being 14 percentage points less likely to express this opinion. This might be explained by the diffused sense of malaise felt by youth in the Netherlands during the lockdowns, which also led to violent protests.

Some gender differences observed at the national level persist also at the EU level. Young EU **women** are more likely than their male counterparts to consider the **economic situation** (38% vs 35% of men) and **unemployment** (19% vs 15% of men) as the most important issues currently faced by the EU. On the contrary, young **males** are more likely than women to name **the environment and climate change** (28% vs 22% of women).

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<sup>8</sup>Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021



### Different age, different concerns

Some differences concern the specific age groups within the younger population. **Respondents between the ages of 26 and 30** are more likely to consider that **the economic situation** (39% vs 35% of those aged 16-20), and **the state of Member States' public finances** (21% vs 16%) are the most important concerns facing the EU. Concerns about the state of the national economy might increase as young people enter the job market and become more aware of the risks and potential consequences of a financial crisis on their job and finances.

Finally, the level of education may also reveal significant differences. **Those who have stopped their studies at the age of 15 or before** are much more likely to consider that **crime** (21% vs 4% of those who left school at the age of 20 or after), and **rising prices, inflation and cost of living** (21% vs 11%) are the most pressing problems faced by the EU. Alternatively, young respondents **who have finished their studies aged 20 or older** are much more likely to select **the environment and climate change** (28% vs. 7% of those who spent 15 years or less), **the state of Member States' public finances** (21% vs. 5% of those who spent 15 years or less), and **the economic situation** (39% vs. 24% of those who spent 15 years or less).

### What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?

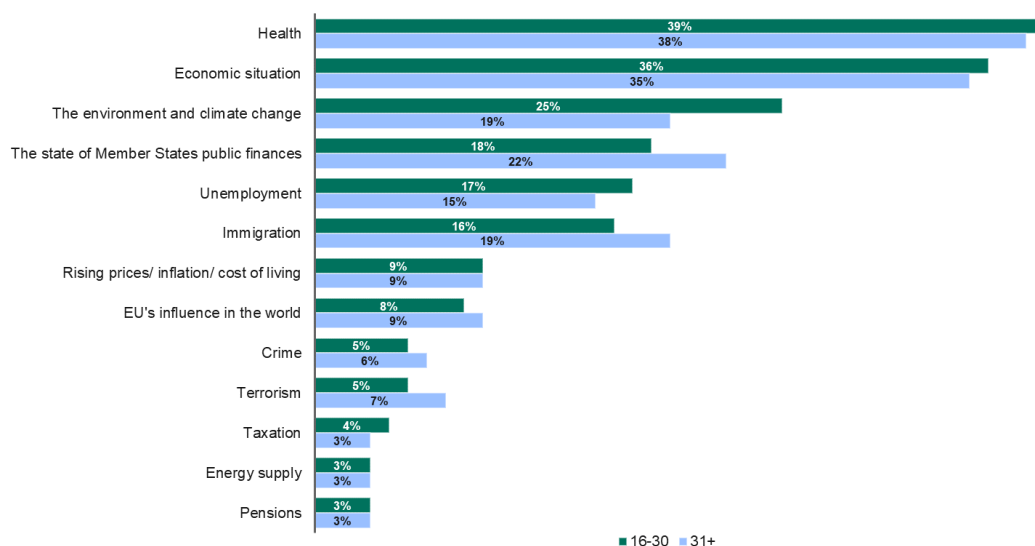


Figure 5. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

## 2.3. Topics that should be addressed in priority by the European Parliament

Aside from considering which topics are the most pressing for Member States and the European Union as a whole, young EU citizens have also voiced which they think should be **addressed in priority by the European Parliament**<sup>9</sup>. Weighing differing areas of action through this perspective is also indicative of EU youth's priorities.

### Younger citizens are more likely to prioritise the climate, gender equality, human rights, and digitalisation, compared to the older

Differences are apparent in the selection that respondents between the ages of 16 and 30 put forward when compared to the rest of the population. Although **both age groups** are most likely to state **public health** (44% for those aged 16-30), this is followed by **action against climate change** (38%) for **younger respondents**. On the other hand, public health is followed by measures to fight poverty and social exclusion (40%) for those aged 31 and over. This finding reveals that young EU citizens are strongly sensitised towards the need to push for greener societies.

Additionally, other differences arise, with younger EU citizens being more likely to name **gender equality, inclusion and diversity** (21% vs 13% of 31+), **human rights in the EU and the world** (27% vs 23%), and **the digitalisation of the European economy and society** (13% vs 9%). As was pointed out in previous sections, younger citizens in the EU place more importance on issues that regard social inclusion, the

<sup>9</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

environment, and future technologies than the rest of the population, and these preferences hold when considering what should be prioritised in the European Parliament.

Taking a country-specific view, young EU citizens' propensity to select differing topics of priority to be addressed by the European Parliament presents indicative variations, following patterns already identified in the previous paragraph. **Italy's** youth once again are most likely to feel that **public health** should be addressed in priority by the European Parliament (67%). **Measures to support the economy and create new jobs** is most selected by the young in **Greece** (61%), **Portugal** (60%), **Cyprus** (58%), **Spain** (57%), and **Italy** (55%). This pattern, which has already been discussed in the previous paragraphs, stems from the multiple and overlapping strains posed by the economic and health crisis in those countries. When it comes to stating that **action against climate change** should be addressed in priority by the European Parliament, young EU citizens in environment-conscious states like **Sweden**, **Denmark** (both 56%), **the Netherlands** (54%), and **Luxembourg** (50%) are most likely to select this.

### Women put forward specific priorities compared to men

Gender differences also exist in terms of how young EU citizens evaluate the topics that should be addressed in priority by the European Parliament. **Women** are much more likely to select **gender equality, inclusion and diversity** (29% vs 14% of men), **human rights** (32% vs 22%), and **public health** (48% vs 41%). Matters of gender equality and human rights affect women directly, as well as issues related to public health, which is likely to be the reason behind such results. On the other hand, **men** are more likely to place importance on **the digitalisation of the European economy and society** (17% vs 8% of women), **the future of Europe** (28% vs 20% of women), and **trade agreements between the EU and other countries in the world** (13% vs 6% of women).

Variation contingent on specific age groups within the young in the EU does not portray strong patterns in relation to the prioritisation of topics to be addressed by the European Parliament, yet some differences do emerge. In particular, **those aged 16-20** are more likely to select **gender equality, inclusion and diversity** (26% vs 18% of those aged 21-25), **democracy** (22% vs 17%), and slightly more likely to do so for **action against climate change** (40% vs 37%).

Some specific patterns emerge based on the respondents' educational level. **Those who have concluded their studies at the age of 20 or after** are much more likely to say that **action against climate change** (43% vs 16% of those who left school aged 15 or younger), and **human rights** (27% vs 15% of those who left school aged 15 or younger) should be addressed in priority by the European Parliament. A higher educational level is often tied to a stronger awareness about these issues. Conversely, **those who exited full-education earlier** are much more prone to say that **measures to support the economy and create new jobs** (51% vs. 38% of those who spent 20 or more years), and **a fair and sustainable agricultural policy** (20% vs. 12% of those who spent 20 or more years) should be prioritized.

## 2.4. Topics that the EU budget should be spent on

The priorities of young Europeans described in the previous sections are reflected in their choices about the EU budget<sup>10</sup>. Youth are most likely to select **employment, social affairs and public health** (22%), **climate change and environmental protection** (18%), and **education, training, culture and media** (13%). These patterns are comparable to those of the rest of the population. However, relatively to older respondents, young people are more likely to place importance on the environment, and on social issues, education and development. By contrast, EU citizens aged 31 and above place relatively higher significance on matters pertaining to social security and economic stability.

To portray this, when asked what topics they would like the EU budget to be spent on, respondents between the age of 16 and 30 were significantly more likely than older respondents to say climate change and environmental protection (18% vs 13% respectively), and education, training, culture and media (13% vs 8% respectively). Conversely, those who have 31 or more years are more prone to saying that the EU budget should be spent on employment, social affairs, and public health (27% vs 22% of younger respondents).

The country-comparison reveals patterns similar to those already observed in the previous sections. For example, young EU citizens are most likely to select **climate change and environmental protection** in Northern European countries like **Sweden** (51%), **Denmark** (33%), and **Luxembourg** (31%). On the other hand, **employment, social affairs and public health** is given higher consideration in Southern countries like **Portugal** (50%), **Spain** (39%), and **Croatia** (37%).

Gender differences, however, are not as strongly engraved. **Women** are more prone to stating that the EU budget should be spent on **employment, social affairs and public health** (24% vs 19% of men), and **defence and security** (8% vs 4% of men).

<sup>10</sup>Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020

A comparison between the distinct age groups within the younger population reveals slightly different priorities between the 16-20 and the 26-30, in line with what has been said in the previous sections. When thinking of topics that the EU budget should be spent on, **those aged 16-20** are more likely to choose **climate change and environmental protection** (22% vs 16% of those aged 26-30), and **education, training culture and media** (16% vs 11%). Conversely, **respondents aged between 26 and 30** are more likely to choose **employment, social affairs and public health** (23% vs 19% of those aged 16-20) placing more importance on indicators of social and economic stability.

### And on which of the following would you like EU budget to be spent? Firstly? And then?

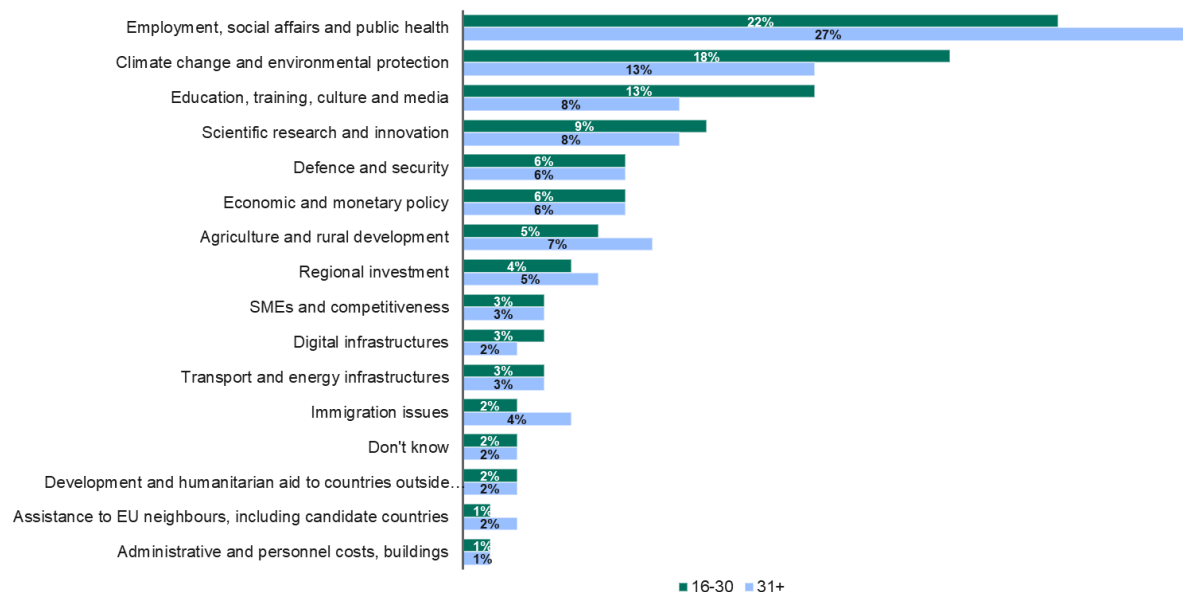


Figure 6. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020

## 2.5. Priorities to face global challenges

Taking a more global perspective, EU youth have also been asked **which areas should be prioritised in order to face major global challenges**<sup>11</sup>.

Young Europeans' global priorities with respect to the rest of the population are in line with what has been claimed in the previous sections. Young EU citizens are most likely to select **the environment and climate change** (40%), **social fairness and equality** (38%), and **health and safety** (34%). Older respondents are more willing to choose health and safety (40%) as the most crucial global challenge, followed by social fairness and equality (38%), and the environment and climate change (36%). This shows that citizens aged 31+ are more concerned by social and economic issues than their younger counterparts. This group is also slightly more likely to name free trade and the market economy (15% vs 13% of younger respondents), as well as the industrial capacity of the EU (7% vs 5% of younger respondents). On the contrary, EU youth place higher importance on **education** (28% vs. 23% of older respondents), and **cultural diversity and openness to others** (12% vs 9% of older respondents).

Looking into those who are most prone to stating that **the environment and climate change** are the most pressing global challenges, between-country differences are similar to the ones highlighted in the previous parts. **Sweden** (69%), **Denmark** (65%), and **the Netherlands** (63%) hold the highest number of EU youth choosing this response.

Some of the gender differences observed in the previous sections persist. For example, young **women** are more likely to find **health and safety** an important topic to face global challenges than men (39% vs 30% respectively). On the other hand, young **men** are more prone to stating that **progress and innovation** (19% vs 12% of women) is to be prioritised.

Differences between specific age groups within young EU citizens are less apparent, although **those between the age of 16 and 20** are most likely to find that **health and safety** (37% vs 33% of those aged 26-30) should be prioritised in order to face global challenges.

<sup>11</sup> Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020

A stronger variation is observed when comparing respondents with distinct educational levels. **Those with the highest educational level** (having ended their studies aged 20 or older) are more likely to prioritise **the environment and climate change** (44% vs. 25% of those who concluded their studies aged 15 or less), and **progress and innovation** (16% vs. 9% of those who concluded their studies aged 15 or less). Conversely, **those with the lowest educational level** are most likely to choose **health and safety** (44% vs. 30% of those who spent 20 or more years) as a priority.

## 2.6. Values that should be defended by the European Parliament

Another key aspect which is worth assessing are young EU citizens' opinions on the **values they believe the European Parliament should defend**. When asked about this<sup>12</sup>, Europeans aged 16 to 30 years-old show relatively similar patterns to the rest of the population. EU youth are most likely to select that **the protection of human rights worldwide** (55%), **equality between men and women** (48%), and **freedom of speech** (43%) as values to be defended by the European Parliament. Older respondents are more likely to mention the solidarity between EU Member States, that they place in second position, before equality between men and women.

### More concern for human rights and gender equality in Western Europe, the importance of solidarity for the Eastern countries

In terms of country-level analysis, there are significant differences in the degree to which EU youth choose specific values that should be defended by the European Parliament. When it comes to the selecting **the protection of human rights worldwide**, young European citizens in the **Netherlands** (74%) and **Germany** (71%) are most prone to doing so. **Gender equality** is chosen by a large share of youth in **France** (63%), **Luxembourg** (60%), **Sweden, the Netherlands**, and **Spain** (58%), but only by a minority of them in **Romania** (18%), **Bulgaria** and **Hungary** (22%). In the Eastern European countries young people are less concerned by gender equality, but they are more likely to stress the need for solidarity between Member States. In **Bulgaria** 58% of them choose this subject, 50% do so in **Slovenia** and 46% in **Latvia**. In richer countries like the **Netherlands** (15%), **France** (16%), and **Finland** (21%), youth are less likely to choose this value.

Additionally, young respondents in **Denmark** and **France** (both 30%), as well as **Belgium** (28%), are most likely to state that the value of **dialoguing between cultures and religions** should be defended by the European Parliament. Tensions with their religious minorities, as well as terrorist attacks in recent years might explain why the need for intercultural and religious dialogue is the most salient in those countries.

### Distinct values depending on young people's specific position in society

When analysing gender differences in responses, **women** are much more likely than men to say that **equality between men and women** as a value should be defended by the European Parliament (56% vs 39%). This result must stem from such a value being closer to young women's everyday lived experiences. Conversely, **men** are more likely than women to select **freedom of speech** (46% vs 40% of women), **solidarity between EU Member States** (34% vs 30%), and **the dialogue between cultures and religions** (24% vs 21%).

Looking at specific age groups within EU's youth, some differences surface in the selection of values that should be defended by the Parliament. The youngest, **16 to 20 years of age**, are most likely to say that **freedom of speech** (47% vs 41% of those aged 26-30), and **equality between men and women** (50% vs 45%) should be prioritised. On the other hand, the oldest, **26 to 30 years of age**, are more prone to prioritise **the solidarity between EU Member States** (35% vs 29% of those aged 16-20), and **the protection of minorities** (26% vs 23%).

Respondents with a higher education are significantly more likely to say that **equality between men and women** should be defended as a value by the European Parliament (46% of those who finished their studies at the age of 20 or later vs 29% of those who left school at the age of 15 or before). They are also more prone to selecting **the solidarity between EU Member States** (34% vs 23%). Respondents with a lower educational level (having terminated their studies aged 15 or younger) state more than the others that **the protection of minorities** should be prioritised as a value by the European Parliament (29% vs 21% of those who continued their studies until the age of 20 or after).

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To conclude, young Europeans' concerns are generally in line with those of the rest of the population. Compared to older Europeans, young EU citizens place more importance on the environment, and they are more preoccupied with issues of human rights and gender equality. Their preoccupations and priorities at the national level reflect those at the European and global level, with similar differences between countries and within specific socio-demographic groups. National and individual wealth are especially determinant in explaining variations in young people's priorities, with poorer countries and less educated individuals being less likely to prioritise the climate and more concerned by economic issues.

<sup>12</sup> Parlameter 94.2, November-December 2020



# III. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Previous sections have shown that younger Europeans were more concerned over the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change than their older counterparts. In this section, we propose a focus on the topic of **climate change**. Youth's concern for climate change will be assessed also in relation **to the European Union's role in contrasting this phenomenon**. A paragraph is dedicated to the **European Green Deal<sup>13</sup>, the EU strategy that sets out a detailed vision to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050**, and to young people's perceived priorities regarding its measures.

### 3.1. Climate change as a main concern for Europeans

Whether the pandemic has increased or not people's awareness about the climate crisis is still a matter of debate. In the years before the advent of Covid-19 a new global movement, led by the youth, contributed to shifting public attention towards climate change. Some fear that, for a moment, the pandemic could bring the urgent environmental crisis to the background. However, what the Covid-19 pandemic did was reveal our fragility in front of nature's unpredictability and the power of global collective action in the face of unprecedented natural emergencies.

**If the pandemic has driven people's attention towards health, climate change remains, especially for young Europeans, one of the main concerns that their country is facing.** When questioned about the two most important issues their country is facing, in autumn 2019 23% of the young Europeans interviewed mentioned climate change. This made the climate their top priority together with rising prices, inflation, and the cost of living. After the advent of the first pandemic wave, in summer 2020 concern for climate change at the national level was down to 19%<sup>14</sup>. In winter 2021 it stood at 17%, the fourth most important issue for their country, according to young Europeans<sup>15</sup>. Health, on the contrary, moved from being a main concern for 17% of EU youth in autumn 2019, to 40% of them in winter 2021. Although young Europeans are slightly more concerned by climate change at the national level than older Europeans (+4 pp), this issue has somewhat fallen behind more pressing problems in the context of the pandemic. The same is true for older Europeans (31+), among whom concern for the environment has decreased by 5 percentage points before and after the advent of the pandemic.

**Despite losing some ground as a national concern in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, young Europeans still consider the environment one of the three main issues facing the European Union (24%).** Concern for climate change has significantly declined between autumn 2019 and winter 2021 (-9 pp), despite remaining a top concern. An equal decline has been observed among older EU citizens (31+). However, young Europeans are still more likely to consider climate change a main issue for their EU compared to older Europeans (+6 pp), for whom climate change represents only the fifth-most pressing issue for the Union.

Unlike Europeans aged 31+, EU youth consider climate change more important than the state of Member States public finances (+6 pp) and immigration (+4 pp). They also place it above a yet pressing issue for youth like unemployment (+6 pp). However, unemployment comes before climate change among young people's most important issues at the country level (27% of young Europeans mentioned unemployment, but only 17% did mention climate change, a telling 10 percentage points difference).

#### What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?

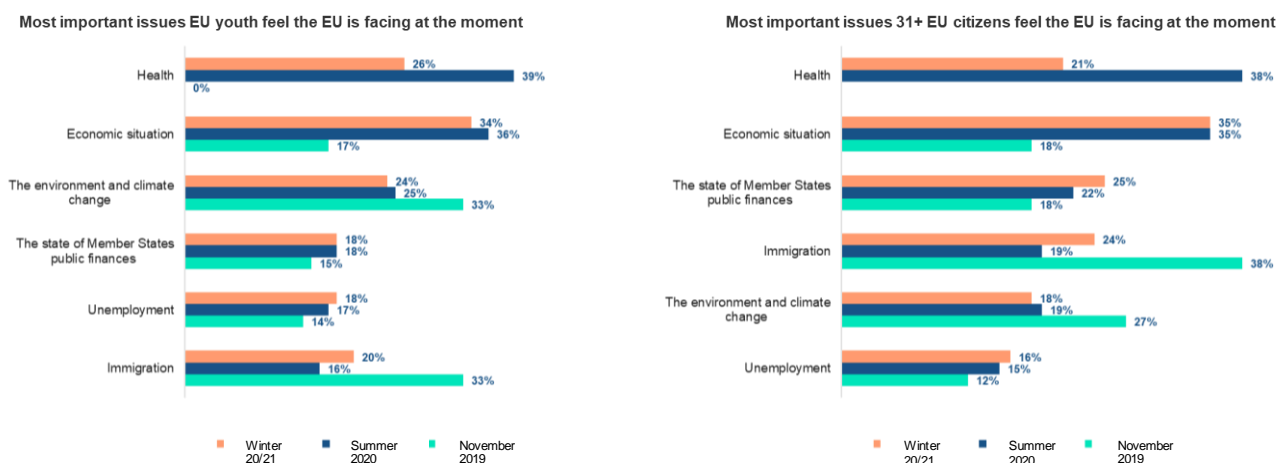


Figure 7. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 92, November 2019; Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020; Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-european-green-deal/file-european-green-deal>

<sup>14</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020

<sup>15</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

## 3.2. Priorities for the Green Deal

Being climate one of their main concerns at the EU level, young Europeans' opinion about the European Green Deal is of particular relevance. **Asked which objectives should be prioritised by the Union in the European Green Deal, an absolute majority of young people mentioned "Developing renewable energy" (55%).**<sup>16</sup> "Fighting against plastic waste and being a leader on the issue of single-use of plastic" (48%) is another topic which close to half of young Europeans believe should be immediately tackled by the Green Deal, followed by "Promote the Circular Economy – a system preserving natural resources and limiting waste" (38%). Together with "Reducing energy consumption" (27%), these issues are unanimously considered important by both younger and older respondents.

On some of the main challenges which EU citizens think should be included in the Green Deal, young and older Europeans hold slightly distinct opinions. "Supporting EU farmers for them to receive fair remuneration to provide Europeans with affordable and safe food" is mentioned as a top priority by 39% of the respondents aged 31+ (+3 pp compared to the younger). Older respondents are also more likely to prioritize the introduction of a tax on products imported from third countries that have lower climate policy standards. On the contrary, "Protecting biodiversity" (+4 pp), "Moving towards a zero-pollution ambition" (+7 pp) and "Measures to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050 by reducing greenhouse emissions" (+4 pp) are considered more important by young Europeans compared to the older.

**Depending on their country, young people may hold different opinions about the priorities of the European Green Deal.** For example, youth in Finland feel the promotion of the Circular Economy should be the top priority of the Green Deal (64%) but they do not consider the zero-pollution ambition as of much importance (22%). On the contrary, the latter should be a main priority according to 44% of the youth in Hungary. The protection of biodiversity seems particularly felt by young people in Northern and Southern Europe, but way less so by those in Eastern Europe. In Cyprus (54%), Finland (53%) and Belgium (53%), an absolute majority of youth chooses this subject, while they are only 20% or less in Romania (20%), Lithuania (18%), and Poland (17%). In the Eastern European countries instead, young people place more value on economically supporting EU farmers for them to produce affordable and safe products. This item is chosen by 46% of youth in Latvia and 45% in Czechia. This subject is prioritised also by young people in France (45%) and Belgium (44%), due perhaps to the economic importance of farming in France, and in neighbouring Belgium.

**The specific geographical features of a country may have generated distinct national discourses about environmental policy which, in turn, determined distinct degrees of awareness about the potential national strategies against climate change.** Developing renewable energies, for example, is considered a priority by an absolute majority of youth the Southern European states, which are rich of renewable resources. That is the case for Malta (67%), Portugal (65%), France (59%), Italy (58%), and Cyprus (58%). However, renewable energy development is given high consideration also in those Northern European states that have historically invested a lot on renewables like Denmark (64%), Sweden (61%), and Germany (57%), but also in Ireland (68%), Estonia (64%) and Czechia (57%).

**In your opinion, which of the following objectives should be given top priority in a European Green Deal, a set of measures to protect the environment and fight climate change?**

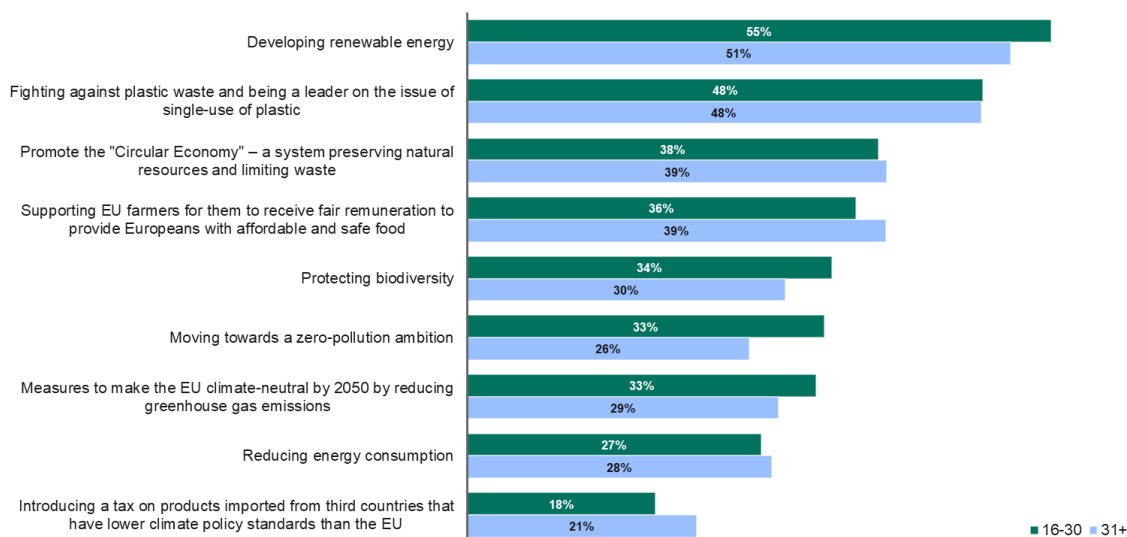


Figure 8. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>16</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

## Desk Research European Youth in 2021

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Although the pandemic has slightly moved young people's concern away from the environment, climate remains one of young Europeans' key concerns. Because they are likely to be more directly affected by climate change, youth are more likely to prioritise the climate over other key subjects.

A European Green Deal may represent an occasion for the EU to prove that young Europeans' future is a key priority of the Union. If such initiative had to come into effect, young Europeans would like to prioritise the development of renewable energies and the fight against plastic waste, including the issue of single use of plastic. The European Parliament has recently intervened on this subject by banning single-use plastic items by 2021. This decision is an example of a positive development of the EU's environmental policy which responds to young people's priorities.



# IV. THE ECONOMY AND JOBS



This section proposes an overview of young Europeans' assessment of the ongoing economic and employment situation. The first part of the chapter focuses on youth opinion about the more general economic and employment situation in their country. The second part is about their personal financial and employment situation, meaning their current employment condition and the financial situation of their household.

## 4.1 Current situation

The Millennial generation (those born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s) is the only recent cohort of Europeans having gone through two major global economic crises during their youth. As the current economic crisis is further testing the resilience of the Millennial generation in front of economic adversities, younger Millennials and youth born between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century are also growing up in a world shaped by economic instability. This experience has defined young people's opinion about the general economic and employment situation, especially in those Member States that had not completely recovered from the previous economic crisis.

**Two thirds of young Europeans judge the current situation of the national economy as bad.** For 46% the situation is rather bad, while one in five judge it as 'very bad'.<sup>17</sup> Young Europeans, however, have a better judgement of the national economic situation than Europeans aged 31+, although by a little margin (+4 pp).

**Similarly, two thirds of young Europeans also judge the current employment situation of their country as bad.** For 46% the situation is 'rather bad', while one in five judge it as "very bad"<sup>18</sup>. As for the situation of the national economy, young Europeans have a better judgement of the employment situation than older Europeans, although by a little margin (+5 pp).

### How would you judge the current situation in each of the following: The situation of the (NATIONALITY) economy

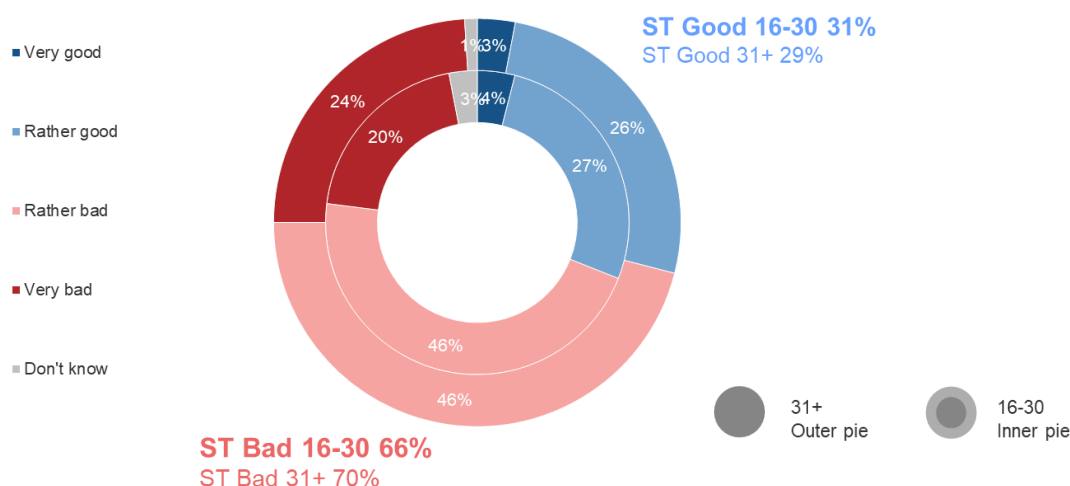


Figure 9. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

### In the Southern economies, young citizens hold a more negative judgment of the economic and employment situation

**Youth in the weaker economies of Southern Europe are the ones who judge the most the situation of the national economy as bad.** Greece (94%), Italy, Spain (both 91%), Portugal (88%) and Croatia (84%) are the countries where young people express the worst judgement about the national economy. Luxembourg (14%), Sweden (17%), Malta (32%), the Netherlands (33%), Denmark (34%), Estonia (44%) and Germany (47%) are the only Member States where minorities of young people consider the situation of their national economy as bad.

**Youth in the Southern European countries are also more likely to judge the employment situation of their countries as bad.** Spain (96%), Greece (91%), Italy (89%) and Portugal (86%) are the countries where young people express the most negative judgement about the employment situation in their country. These countries share a relatively high unemployment rate among youth. Czechia, Denmark (both

<sup>17</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>18</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

35%), the Netherlands (38%), Malta (39%), Sweden (40%), Germany (44%) and Luxembourg (47%) are the only Member States where a minority of young people judges the employment situation of their country as bad.

#### **Young respondents' individual situation affects their judgment of the national economy**

**The negative judgement of the national economy is stronger among the ones who stopped education at the age of 15 or before:** 82% consider the situation of their national economy as bad, while 65% of those who finished education aged 20 or more do so. These young people might be more likely to be employed in low-skilled jobs within sectors which have been heavily impacted by the pandemic, like hospitality and catering.

**Questioned about the employment situation, eight young Europeans with the lowest educational level out of ten judge the employment situation of their country as bad,** and a third consider it as 'very bad'. On the contrary, those who finished education aged 20 or more (60%) or are still studying (67%) have a less negative judgement of the employment situation in their country. These people might be working in more stable positions.

**More than eight young Europeans in ten (81%) who declare having difficulties paying bills most of the time judge the employment situation of their country as bad.** More than two thirds (78%) of those who have difficulties paying bills from time to time share a similar negative judgement, while six in ten of those who almost never or never face difficulties paying bills judge the employment situation in their country as bad.

**70% of young women consider the employment situation in their country as rather or very bad, they are significantly more likely to hold this opinion than men (+8 pp).** The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the female-dominated sectors has been two-fold and largely negative. On one side, the female dominated professions of the care sector have suffered the direct health consequences of the pandemic, with hospital workers bearing the effects of the larger influx of patients. On the other side, many female-dominated jobs in the hospitality sector have been lost. These two converging factors might explain the higher share of young women judging the employment situation in their country as bad.

## 4.2 Personal situation

Youth are one of the categories which is suffering the most the consequences of the economic crisis generated by the coronavirus pandemic. Many jobs where young people are highly represented, like temporary jobs in the hospitality sector, have been lost due to the closures implemented to curb the pandemic. This is especially true for those countries that highly rely on this sector, like the Mediterranean ones.

In every state, as labour demands have fallen drastically during the first year of the pandemic, many new graduates have been struggling to find a stable job. The extraordinary social security measures implemented by the various governments to sustain the sectors most impacted by the pandemic and avoid uncontrolled unemployment included freezes on layoffs and ad-hoc benefits. However, as these exceptional measures are progressively coming to an end, the real consequences of the economic crisis, especially on the younger, might further surface.

**Only close to six in ten (57%) of young Europeans judge their personal job situation as good.** For 42% the situation is 'rather good', while 15% judge it as "very good"<sup>19</sup>. Young Europeans share a similar judgement of their personal economic situation than older Europeans (57% for the 16-30 judge it as good compared with 58% of the 31+).

**The picture seems slightly more positive regarding the household's financial situation. Seven in ten of young Europeans judge the financial situation of their household as good.** For 57% the situation is 'rather good', while 13% judge it as "very good"<sup>20</sup>. Young Europeans share a similar judgement of the national economic situation as the oldest Europeans (70% for the 16-30 judge it as good compared with 68% of the 31+).

**However, the overall picture hides some significant between-country differences.** In Bulgaria, (53%), Italy (54%), Hungary (56%), Austria (58%), Spain and Greece (both 59%) less than six in ten young Europeans judge the financial situation of their household as good. Despite this, **more than 70% of young respondents consider the financial situation of their household as good in 17 Member States** including the Netherlands (88%), Denmark (87%) and Czechia (84%).

Young Europeans' judgment about their personal and household's economic situation follows similar patterns to those observed regarding their judgment about the national economic situation.

<sup>19</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>20</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021



### A worse opinion of their personal job and financial situation in countries and territories with a lower GDP-per capita

**Youth in the Southern and Eastern European countries tend to be the ones who judge the less their personal job situation as good.** Italy (26%), Spain (41%), Bulgaria (42%), Hungary (45%) and Greece (47%) are the countries where a minority of young people express a positive judgement on their personal job situation. Czechia (79%) and Estonia (74%) are exceptions in the geographic pattern mentioned above with levels as high as Luxembourg (82%), Malta (79%), the Netherlands (78%), Sweden (77%) and Finland (76%) when it comes to the positive judgement towards their personal job situation.

**Youth living in large towns are more likely to have a positive judgement about the financial situation of their household.** 73% of youth living in large towns judge the financial situation of their household as good, including 15% who judge it as 'very good', while less than seven in ten of those living in rural area or villages (67%) and in small or middle-sized towns (68%) do, including only close to one in ten who judge the situation as 'very good' (both 11%). This might be indicative of the unequal distribution of wealth between large-urban areas and the countryside.

### Distinct judgments of their personal job and financial situation depending on young people's educational level

**More than seven out of ten young Europeans who finished education aged 20 or more (72%) judge their personal job situation as good,** and close to a quarter (23%) judge it as very good. 55% of those who finished education before 15 and 53% of those who finished between 16 and 19 share the same view. It is worth mentioning that a quarter of those who are still studying mention that they 'don't know'.

**Close to eight in ten (78%) young Europeans who finished education aged 20 or more judge the financial situation of their household as good.** Six in ten of those who finished education aged between 16 and 19 do so. A minority of young Europeans who finished education before 15 judge the situation of their household as good (48%).

**More than two thirds (66%) of young Europeans who declare that they almost never or never have difficulties paying bills judge their personal job situation as good.** Less than three in ten (27%) do so while they declare having difficulties paying bills most of the time while 44% of those mentioning that they have difficulties from time to time judge their personal job situation as good.

### How would you judge the current situation in each of the following: Your personal job situation

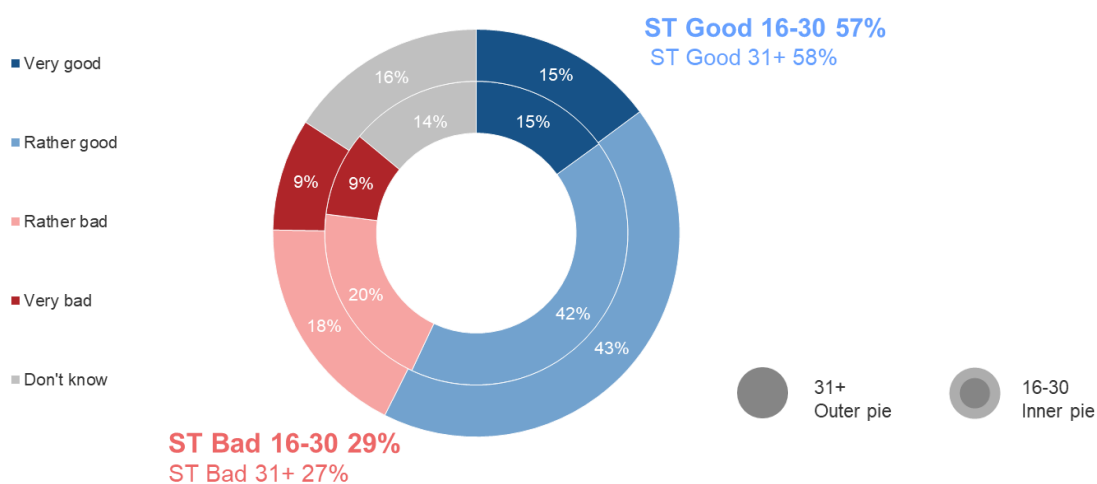


Figure 10. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

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Overall, young people negatively evaluate their national economic and employment situation. Although their opinion is slightly more positive than that of older Europeans, two thirds of EU youth consider the state of their national economy as bad, and an equally high share of them judge the employment situation negatively.

This judgment also reflects the state of young people's financial and employment situation. Only close to six in ten young people in Europe consider their own employment situation as good, and three out of ten declare that their household's financial situation is bad. Economic problems are more pronounced in the Southern European countries. Highly relying on tourism, these countries' economies have suffered a bigger blow during the pandemic, which has impacted especially their youngest population. The least educated youth, together with women, are those who are paying the biggest price in this crisis. This might be related to the fact that they are more often employed in the sectors directly affected by the pandemic, like hospitality.



## V. YOUNG EUROPEANS AND THE MEDIA



This section is dedicated to **an analysis of media usage by young Europeans**. In the first part of the section, **survey data about media usage** for different types of sources (TV, radio, written press, internet) are assessed and compared between distinct groups of consumers (16-30 years old and 31+). The following analysis dwells also on specific country and socio-economic differences that might explain distinct trends in media usage. The second paragraph looks specifically at **social networks' diffusion**, once again assessing both age and country differences in the employment of distinct social network platforms. Finally, the section ends by looking **at the pandemic's consequences on social media usage and screen time**

## 5.1. Most used media

The digital revolution is radically reshaping media consumption. Online social media are progressing constantly, while traditional media like the radio or written press are losing ground. When young people consume TV or radio content, and they do so to a significantly smaller extent than older generations, this type of content is often mediated by the internet. The digital press is substituting the written one, which has become marginal among youth.

### The internet, and online social media, may be slowly replacing traditional media

**93% of young Europeans use the internet every day or almost every day.**<sup>21</sup> Considering that 82% of them use online social networks daily, and 9% do so two or three times a week, **online social networks may be considered one of the main drivers of internet consumption among young people**. European youth use the internet significantly more than older people. Almost every young European (98%) use internet at least once a week, while only 83% of those aged 31+ do so.

**The internet may be slowly pushing the younger generations away from traditional media, like the radio and TV, but also the written press.** 31% of them never read the written press (this number is 22% among the 31+), and only 13% of young Europeans read it on a daily basis (-15 pp relatively to older Europeans). The written press seems very poorly ingrained among the younger generations even when compared to the radio. Even though 30% of Europeans aged 16 to 30 declare that they listen to the radio everyday (20 pp less than Europeans older than 31), only 18% affirm that they never listen to it. That is just 6 percentage points more than older individuals. This indicates that the radio, despite becoming a more marginal medium, is far from being alien to young Europeans.

### TV consumption is influenced both by age and the educational level

**Speaking of the radio and the written press, it is important to notice how usage of these media is determined by the educational level, also among the younger.** Among those who ended their studies at the age of 20 or after, 37% declare that they listen to the radio every day. A 19-point gap separates them from the 18% of daily radio users observed among young people who finished their studies at the age of 15 or earlier. An absolute majority among the latter (51%) declares also that they never read the written press, a number which is equal to 28% among those who finished their studies after the age of 20. **Young EU citizens with the shortest education are instead significantly more likely to watch TV on a daily basis, either on a TV set or via the internet** (+23 pp compared to those with a high educational level).

TV consumption among young Europeans deserves specific attention. Although the percentage of individuals who never watch television remains low among the younger generations (4%, just slightly more than the 31+), **the frequency at which young people watch TV is significantly lower than among older ones**. 64% declare that they watch it every day (22 pp less than older Europeans), while 18% watch it two or three times a week. Daily TV consumption is thus declining among youth and this is even more manifest when looking at TV consumption narrowly speaking. Overall, when 54% of Europeans aged 16-30 watch TV on a tv set on a daily basis, this is the case for 84% of those aged 31 and older. **Young Europeans are indeed much more likely to watch TV via the internet** on a daily basis (26%), compared to older Europeans (14%).

### Media usage is not the same between Member States

**The digital revolution has impacted on media usage in every European Member State. However, country differences in the access to the internet still exist and they are reflected on internet usage among youth.** Romania (82%), Croatia (84%), Lithuania (86%) and Poland (88%) are the only states where less than 90% of young people use internet on an everyday basis. This might be due to some of those countries' relatively large socio-economic inequalities, limiting access to the internet for those parts of their populations who cannot afford to buy an internet connection<sup>22</sup>. However, **differences in culture and habits might be equally likely to explain the smaller frequency of internet use**. In three out of the four countries listed above (Romania being the exception), youth are more willing to read the written press and listen to the radio compared to yet more affluent countries in Western or Southern Europe. While in France 45% of respondents aged 16 to 30 never

<sup>21</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>22</sup> Respondents in Romania, Croatia, Lithuania, and Poland did not report a lack of availability or access to internet infrastructure.

read the written press, these are only 14% in Lithuania, 25% in Croatia and 28% in Poland. If 33% of youth in Spain declare that they never listen to the radio, only 7% in Croatia, 10% in Poland and 12% in Lithuania say the same.

### Young Europeans are more likely to get most of their news about European politics from the internet compared to older Europeans

**Younger generations are increasingly relying on the internet to be up to date about European political events. Over half of young Europeans get their news about European politics online (54%).**<sup>23</sup> This is way more than among Europeans older than 31 (22%, -32pp). 39% of them get this kind of news from news websites, but social networks also represent a relatively popular source of information about European politics (15%), especially among the youngest segment of the population (20% use this type of source among the 16-20). On the opposite, older Europeans are more likely to get their news about European politics from television (58% among the 31+, as opposed to 30% among the younger group). Moreover, older EU citizens get their news from the written press more often compared to younger ones (10% versus 6%).

**In most countries, websites are young people's main source of information about the EU, but in some others, they have already been overtaken by social networks.** This is the case for Malta (40% vs 29%) and Slovakia (34% vs 29%). On the contrary, young people in some Eastern or Southern Member States still tend to get a larger part of information about the EU from TV compared to news websites. In Austria, Belgium, and France, TV advances websites by small margins, but the sum of those who rely on websites and social networks for European news is higher than those who rely on TV. This is true also for Italy and Bulgaria, even though around 40% of youth in these countries still get most of their news from TV. **In Portugal and Romania, where TV is also widespread, this remains in absolute the main source of information about the EU.**

**Young Europeans with a lower educational level (school dropouts at 15yo or younger), are more likely to follow European news matters on TV (41%),** although a majority of them relies on online sources. **They are also the young group which relies on social networks the most (23% of them use this medium),** followed by young people with an intermediate level of education (16% versus 30% who use websites). **Students and highly educated youth, namely those who ended their studies after the age of 20, are the most likely to get their news from websites (44%).**

### Could you tell to what extent you...?



Figure 11. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94 Winter 2020/2021

<sup>23</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

## 5.2 Most used online social networks

Online social networks' consumption is most probably one of the main drivers of internet consumption among young Europeans. Generalist social networks are the most diffused among Europeans, despite significant differences depending on the age of the respondents. **Image-based media like YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are significantly more diffused among youth. They also use more messaging apps than the older respondents, but with lower differences.**

74% of young Europeans declare that they have used YouTube at least once in the last week<sup>24</sup>. That places **YouTube** in the first place among the most used social media platforms among young Europeans, followed by **Facebook** (70%), **WhatsApp** (67%) and **Instagram** (65%). The Facebook-embedded messaging app, Messenger, is also widely used among youth (47%), overtaking yet popular messaging apps among the younger like Snapchat (29% of the 16-30 use it versus 4% of the 31+). **Platforms like Snapchat, but also YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are indeed significantly more rooted among youth, compared to the older.** While Instagram is the fourth most popular app among Europeans aged 16 to 30, it is in fifth place among those older than 31+, after Messenger. Similarly, while 29% of young Europeans use TikTok, only 5% of those aged 31 and older do so.

### The place of emerging or niche online social media

**Emerging online social networks like Discord (12%) and Twitch (9%) are attracting an increasing share of young social media users, but they are still extremely marginal among older Europeans (only 1% of the 31+ use them).** This kind of platforms are especially appealing to online-based communities, like gamers, who are generally less represented among older generations. The same might be true for Reddit (used by 7% of the younger respondents), while a professional-based social network like LinkedIn seems able to attract younger and older users almost alike (13% among the 16-30 and 9% among the 31+).

**Within the younger generation, these new social media platforms are more used by the youngest Europeans (16-20), compared to those in aged 21-25 or 26-30.** 13% of the 16-20 use Twitch, versus 8% and 7% among the 21-25 and 26-30, respectively. 18% use Discord among the 16-20, versus 12% among the 21-25 and 7% among the 26-30. **Image-based apps, like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok also tend to be more popular among the youngest segment of the 16-30 population.** Snapchat and TikTok are used respectively by 43% and 41% of the 16-20, while only 30% of the 21-25 uses these platforms. The share of Snapchat and TikTok users is below 20% among the 26-30.

### Which online social network(s) have you used in the last 7 days for any purpose?

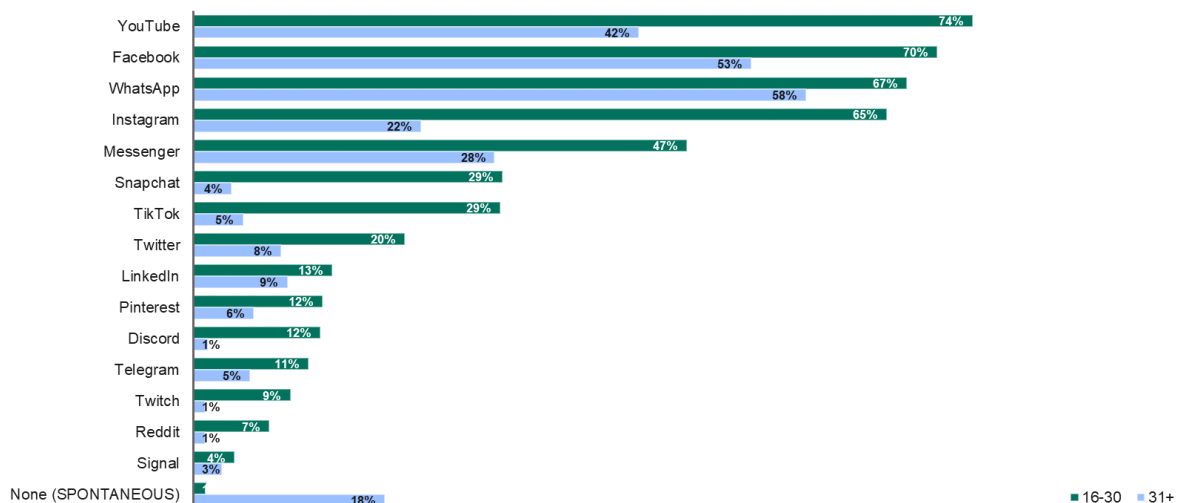


Figure 12. Source: Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

<sup>24</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021



### National variations in social media use

**Social networks are not homogeneously diffused among the EU countries.** Notwithstanding important national variations, YouTube seems the most homogeneously distributed social network. Despite being used by a majority of young Europeans in almost every country, a usage pattern along geographical and cultural lines for Facebook and Instagram is noted. **Facebook is significantly more utilized in Eastern Europe**, including the Baltic countries and the Eastern-Mediterranean states of Cyprus, Malta, and Greece. The other main Facebook-owned platform, **Instagram, is more popular in the West** (Ireland, Belgium, The Netherlands), **but also in the South of Europe** (Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Italy). Sweden also has a very high rate of Instagram users.

Messaging apps are even more differently rooted in the various EU countries. **In the Northern and Western countries, Snapchat is used by an absolute majority of youth.** On the contrary, in most Eastern and Southern European countries this messaging app is employed by only a minority of young people, if not a very marginal number of them. Snapchat usage varies from 71% of young people in Sweden to 5% in Spain. **WhatsApp is the preferred messaging app by a very large majority of young people in most Western, Central and Southern European states** (France being the most notable exception), but it is only chosen by a minority of them in most Eastern European and Northern European countries (except for Finland). In these states, **Messenger** is usually more widely used than WhatsApp, when the two are not almost equally diffused.

### Which online social network(s) have you used in the last 7 days for any purpose?

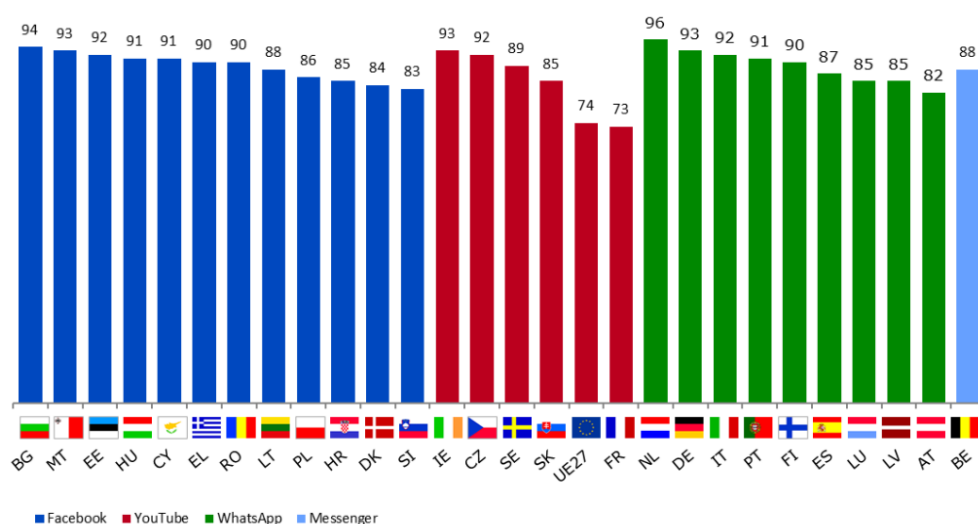


Figure 13. Source: Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021. Results for young aged 16-30

## 5.3 The impact of the pandemic on media use

The pandemic, and the successive lockdowns implemented to fight the virus, have impacted on media consumption and screen time. Because young people spend more time on the internet, but also consume other types of media (TV, videogames, etc.), youth tend to use multiple screens. Therefore, it does not surprise to find that screen time has increased to a greater extent among young than older Europeans.

**In four out of five countries analysed (France, Germany, Poland, and Spain), more than half of respondents aged 18 to 34 have declared that their screen time has increased during the lockdowns<sup>25</sup>.** In the Netherlands, screen time increased for almost half of them (49%). The increase has been the highest in Spain (73%), perhaps because this country has experienced one of the strictest lockdowns in Europe. Spain is also the only Member State, among the five analysed, where over half of older respondents (35+) reported an increase in screen time (57% of them). **In general, unlike younger people, screen time has increased for only a minority of older respondents**, although in four of the five states analysed, the percentage of older Europeans who reported a decrease in screen time is lower than among younger Europeans. In any case, this category represents only a marginal percentage of the total respondents (8% of young people in the Netherlands and Poland, 4% in the other countries).

<sup>25</sup> Kantar International Survey

Desk Research  
European Youth in 2021

Young people spend a large amount of their screentime on social media. Therefore, **social media usage during the lockdowns significantly increased in all the countries analysed**. Once again, Spain is the country where this increased the most (69%), followed by Germany (55%), France (50%), Poland (48%), and the Netherlands (46%). **The time spent on social media has increased significantly more among young people than older ones**. This difference is especially striking for France, Germany and the Netherlands where it increased two-times more among young people aged 18 to 34, compared to those older than 35. Unlike the younger, in any state social media usage increased for a minority of the older.

**Governments in some countries implemented lockdowns to try to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. If you experienced a lockdown, to what extent did it have an impact on your behaviours and activities from the following: Screen time**

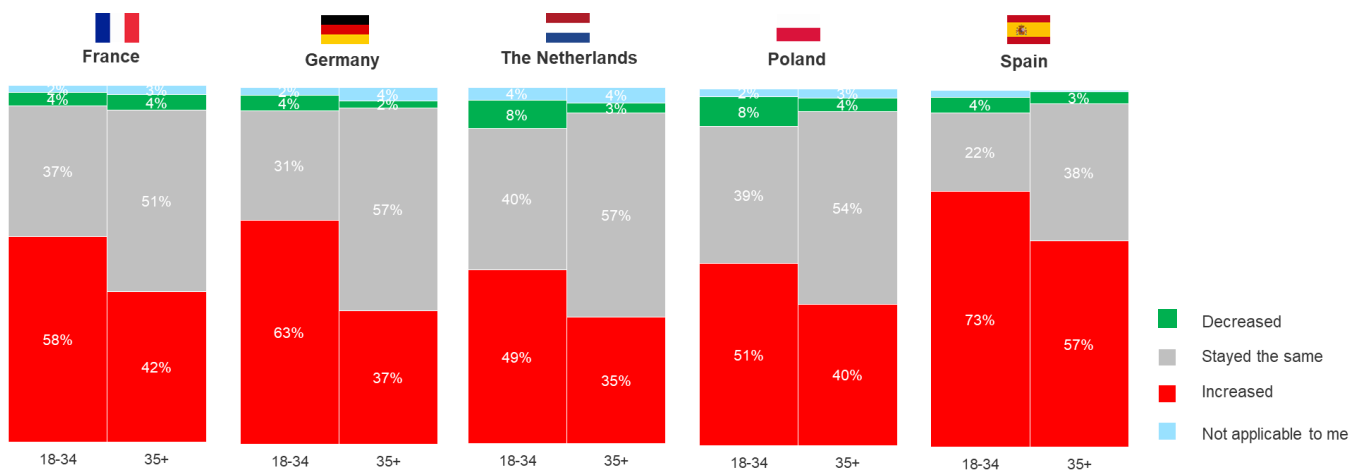


Figure 14. Source: Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

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One of the things on which young and older Europeans seem to differ the most, is their use of media and technology. Although the digital revolution has changed the habits of almost everyone in Western societies, the fact that the younger generations have lived this revolution from a very young age, makes them much more exposed to internet-based technology compared to older people. When it comes to social networks, for example, young Europeans try out and use multiple platforms, allowing themselves more choice in the selection of their preferred platforms. Among these, image-based apps, like Instagram and TikTok, remain specifically popular among the younger. The large use of internet-based media by young people is reflected also in their habits during the confinements. For the younger, screen time and social media use have increased to a greater extent than for the older.

## VI. THE EU AND THE WORLD



The following section presents data about young Europeans' consideration of the place of the European Union in the global context. In particular, it assesses EU youth' beliefs about globalisation and the values which the European Union projects at the global level, also relatively to other countries in the world. Finally, it illustrates the main global challenges that the Union will face according to young European citizens.

## 6.1. The EU, a place of stability in the world?

Despite living in a period of generalised political instability, also within the EU, young EU citizens are aware of the privileged position of the European Union within a world still ravaged by wars, poverty, and deep inequalities.

**A large majority of young Europeans (66%) consider the European Union a place of stability in a troubled world.**<sup>26</sup> This reflects a general belief among European citizens, including older individuals (64% of Europeans aged 31 and older agree with such statement).

**Young people with more years of education are more likely to consider the EU a place of stability.** Compared to somebody who left education at the age of 15 or earlier, a young person currently in education or who completed their studies at the age of 20 or after, is +25 percentage points more likely to agree with the statement "The European Union is a place of stability in a troubled world".

A comparison between the distinct European states reveals that whether the EU is perceived or not as a place of stability depends also on the specific country. Although a majority of young people in each of the countries' analysed agrees with such a view, **young people in France (55%) and Spain (58%) are less likely to consider the EU a place of stability in a troubled world.** Portugal and Spain display radically different results in this sense. While only 58% of young people in Spain believe the EU is a place of stability, 87% of young people in Portugal do so.

In Estonia and Finland, young people are significantly more likely to consider the EU a place of stability compared to older people (+14pp in Estonia and +9pp in Finland). However, that is not the case for every European country. In Ireland, older respondents are much more likely (+13pp) to consider the EU a place of stability in a troubled world, compared to younger respondents.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: The European Union is a place of stability in a troubled world**

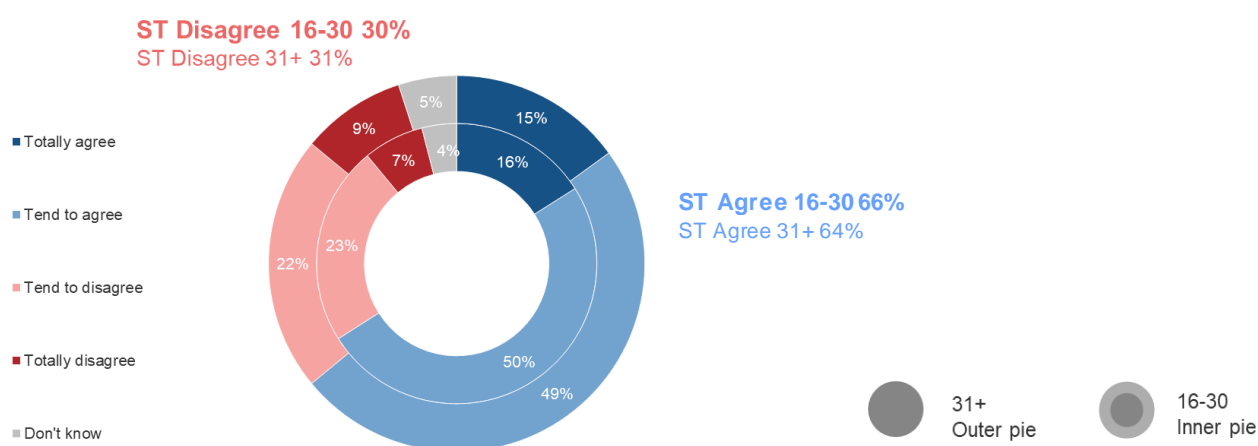


Figure 15. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94 Winter 2020/2021

<sup>26</sup> Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020



## 6.2. Globalisation

Young generations of Europeans grew up in a largely globalised world and this shaped their opinions about this phenomenon. Young Europeans are aware of the benefits deriving from globalisation, especially in terms of economic growth. Although **globalisation may be differently perceived by young Europeans depending on their country of origins and their socio-economic condition, most of them embrace this idea.**

**Age and education strongly define Europeans' opinion about globalisation. Young EU citizens are more likely to see globalisation under a positive light compared to older EU citizens<sup>27</sup>.** 72% of them associate globalisation to something positive (+13 pp compared to Europeans aged 31+). Unlike people aged 31 or older, an absolute majority of young Europeans (52%) rejects the idea that globalisation represents a threat to their country's identity.<sup>28</sup> **An even larger share of young Europeans (77%) consider globalisation an opportunity for economic growth.** They are significantly more than among Europeans older than 31 (+11 pp). Young European people who finished their studies at the age of 20 or after, are 23 percentage points more likely to link globalisation to something positive compared to somebody who ended school at the age of 15 or before. Similarly, a young student is much more likely to consider globalisation a positive thing compared to somebody who terminated his or her studies at the age of 19 or earlier (+11 pp). Students are the least likely to agree with the statement that globalisation threatens their country's identity. Only 38% of them share this opinion, 10 percentage points less than those who left education aged 15 or younger.

**The respondents' country may also explain their distinct perception of globalisation.** In most Member States, a majority of young people associate globalisation to something positive. Portugal and Denmark are the countries where this sentiment is the most diffused among young people (95% and 90% of them think globalisation is positive). In general, in Nordic countries like Sweden and Finland, in the Baltic countries (Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia), but also in the Netherlands, this feeling is stronger. In Malta, Czechia, Slovenia, and Ireland young people also tend to embrace globalisation more than in the rest of the EU. On the contrary, France (59%) and Greece (62%) are the countries where youth have the most negative views of globalisation, followed by Romania (64%), Italy (66%), Bulgaria (68%) and Austria (68%). Still, in all those countries an absolute majority of them has a positive opinion of globalisation.

In Cyprus and Greece over 60% of young people perceive globalisation as a threat to their country's identity. In multiple European countries, including Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy, Latvia, Austria, and Ireland an absolute majority of people aged 16-30 holds such view. Despite this, **in almost every Member State young people are less likely to perceive globalisation as a threat compared to their older counterparts.** Ireland, Spain, and Malta are the only exceptions to this rule. Estimates for Malta are particularly striking, young people in this country are much more likely to consider globalisation as a threat compared to older respondents (+14 pp). Portugal (97%), Malta (93%) and Finland (92%) are the Member States where youth are more willing to think of globalisation as an opportunity of economic growth, while in Romania (60%), Greece (63%), France (63%) and Cyprus (68%) this view is less shared by young respondents, although a large majority of them still agrees with it.

**Could you please tell for each of the following, whether the term brings to mind something very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative: Globalisation**

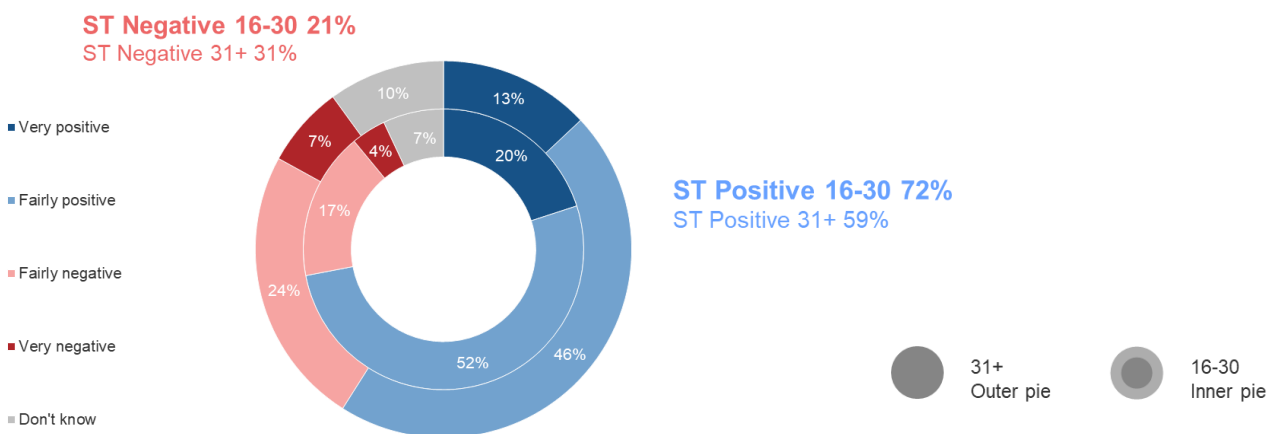


Figure 16. Source: Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>27</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>28</sup> Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020

## 6.3. The EU and the world

Young European citizens generally consider the EU an institution which embodies values to a greater extent than other countries of the world. This reaffirms young Europeans' awareness of the benefits of living in the EU compared to the rest of the world.

**When asked to rank which values are best embodied by the European Union alone compared to other countries in the world, young Europeans ranked Peace (52%) and Freedom of opinion (51%) first, followed by Tolerance and openness to others (44%) and Respect for nature and the environment (41%).<sup>29</sup>** The value that they associate the least to the EU is Progress and innovation (27% vs 23% other countries in the world, and 47% "both"). Young people seem more sceptical than older people regarding the EU's ability to create progress and innovation, and are more likely than their older counterparts to consider that this value is best embodied by other countries in the world (23%, vs 19% for the 31+).

**However, in most cases young and older respondents are equally or almost as likely to associate certain values to the EU.**

**Young respondents living in the Nordic and Baltic countries, as well as those in Austria and Slovenia, are generally the most likely to consider that the EU best embodies determinate values.** Although less than half of young Europeans consider that the EU best embodies the Respect for nature and the environment, 78% of young respondents in Finland agree with that statement. That is a 50-percentage points difference compared to young Bulgarians. **In countries hosting major European institutions, like Belgium and France, young people are more willing to consider that the European Union best embodies values such as Social justice and equality and Freedom of opinion.**

**In general, young Europeans with a low educational background are much more likely to say they "don't know" to this question.** There is a direct correlation between the young respondents' educational levels and their likelihood to ascribe certain values to the EU. The more educated tend to pay greater consideration to the EU's role, while the less educated tend to ascribe those values to other countries in the world. The value of **progress and innovation is an exception: the longer educated are less prone to consider that this value is best embodied by the EU, compared to those with shorter education.**

## 6.4. Most important global challenges for the EU

Young people are especially concerned by the impact of climate change on their lives as discussed above. That is why they are particularly aware of the role of the Union when it comes to contrasting the climate crisis.

**Climate change is the first global challenge of our era, according to youth**

**When thinking about the main global challenge facing the EU, close to half of young Europeans consider climate change the main global issue (49%)<sup>30</sup>. They consider it a bigger challenge than risks related to health (37%) and terrorism (34%). Moreover, young respondents are more concerned by climate change than the older ones (+4 pp) (on this topic, see part III for more details).**

**The young and the older generations of Europeans seem to hold quite similar opinion about the future challenges faced by the Union.** However, the older place a greater importance on public order issues compared to the younger. On average, young people display greater concern for "new risks" like those arising from new technologies (+3 percentage points) or cyber wars (+3 pp). Older respondents instead are more preoccupied by terrorism (+5 pp) and organised crime (+3 pp). Older respondents are also more likely than younger respondents to consider forced migration and displacement a main future challenge for the EU (+3 pp), perhaps because they see it as a threat to public order.

Among the younger generations, those who place climate change among the EU's top future challenges are sensibly more numerous in the 16-25 age range (+5 pp compared to those aged 26 to 30), a signal of **the growing environmental consciousness among the youngest respondents**. However, those aged 16 to 20 seem more concerned by terrorism than young adults (21-30): 36% of them considers it a major challenge, for 33% of those aged 21-30.

**Young people with shorter educational paths appear to be more concerned by organised crime compared to their better educated peers. However, they are significantly less concerned by terrorism.** Those who ended their studies between 16 and 19 are much more likely (+16 percentage points) to consider terrorism a major future challenge for the EU than those who dropped school at 15 or younger. Those currently in education or who concluded their studies after the age of 20 are also more concerned by terrorism than the less educated (+9 percentage points).

<sup>29</sup> Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020

<sup>30</sup> Special Eurobarometer Future of Europe, October-November 2020

## Different countries, different histories, different challenges

**Individual perceptions of the risks and challenges faced by the Union vary also depending on the collective concerns of each Member State. In countries that have experienced multiple terroristic attacks, particularly if targeting places frequented by young people, preoccupations about terrorism are higher.** Young respondents in France are over three times more likely to consider terrorism a major challenge than those living in Portugal. Notably, 60% of youth in France rank terrorism among the top future challenges for the European Union.

**In some countries bordering with Russia, and which have historically experienced tense diplomatic relationship with that country, concerns about cyber wars and new forms of conflicts are higher.** Young people in Finland (29%), Lithuania (30%) and Latvia (29%) are more likely to consider cyber wars a major challenge for the future of the EU compared to their peers living in other European countries.

**The specific impact and the timing of the Covid-19 pandemic in each state may have produced different concerns about health risks among young Europeans.** In heavily hit Southern European countries like Portugal, Spain and Greece, an absolute majority of young respondents considers health risks a main challenge for the EU. Also in France, Italy, Belgium, and some Central and Eastern European countries, young people are more concerned by health risks than in the Northern European states, perhaps due to the more dramatic impact of the pandemic on those populations and to the stricter sanitary measures implemented by their respective governments.

**Young people in Northern and Western Europe are significantly more likely to consider the environment a major challenge for the future of the EU compared to those living in the Mediterranean or Eastern European countries.** A young person in Sweden is over three times more likely to consider climate change a major challenge for the EU than a young person in Bulgaria. However, awareness about the challenge posed by the climate crisis is very high also in states like France, Austria, and Malta

## Which of the following do you think are the main global challenges for the future of the EU?

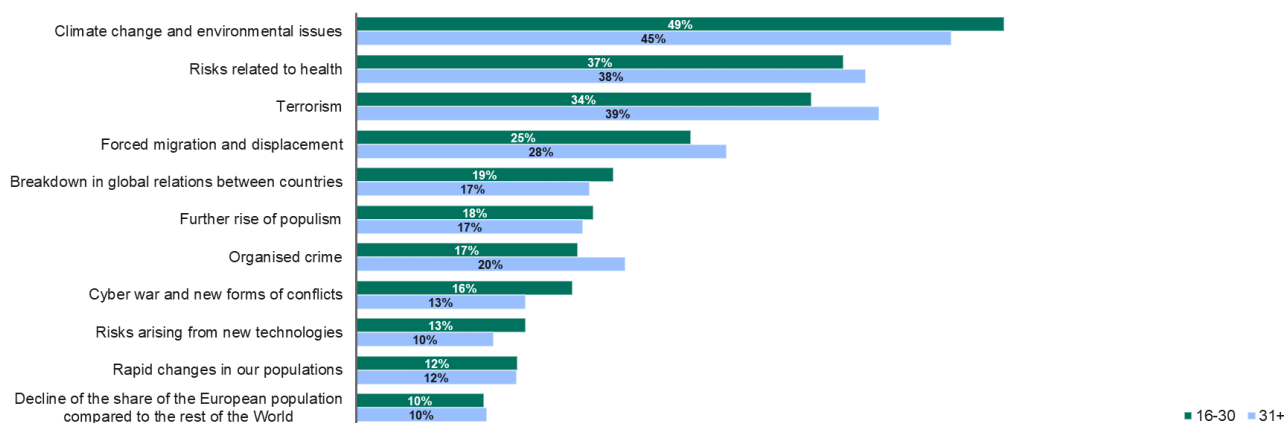


Figure 17. Source: Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

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The young Europeans of 2021 grew up in a largely globalised world. For most of them, globalisation represents a positive tendency, perhaps because, relatively to older citizens, they are more able to take advantage of the positive externalities of this phenomenon, for example in terms of economic growth. However, EU youth are also very conscious of some of the challenges posed by uncontrolled economic growth, and of the role of the EU in facing these global issues. Most of them indeed consider climate change the biggest global challenge for the European Union.

Most young people are aware of the privileged position of the EU within an interconnected and yet largely unstable world. They see the EU as a place of peace, stability, and freedom of opinion. However, the instability which has plagued some EU countries over the last decade, and which has been felt by younger citizens in those countries, should remind us of the importance for the EU to remain a guarantor of those values.



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