

# COUNTRY FOCUSES



## IMPRESSUM

### AUTHORS

Centre Kantar sur le future de l'Europe

### LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

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### ABOUT THE EDITOR

This study was commissioned by the Youth Outreach Unit and by the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit within the Directorate General for Communication (DG COMM) of the European Parliament.

To contact the Youth Outreach Unit please write to:

[eye@ep.europa.eu](mailto:eye@ep.europa.eu)

To contact the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit please write to:

[DGCOMM-POM@ep.europa.eu](mailto:DGCOMM-POM@ep.europa.eu)

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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 Country Focus report employs data collected through different opinion surveys conducted **between July 2020 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. This part in the specific, presents a short profile of a few Member State countries, namely **Germany, France, Poland, Spain and the Netherlands**.

### 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.

<i>Survey name</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Type</i>
<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="#">Standard Eurobarometer 93</a>	July-August 2020	Face to face, online

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>

<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.

## A. Germany

Young people in Germany are generally attached to the European Union. 61% of them express a sense of attachment to the EU, in line with the EU average (62%).<sup>2</sup>

Like other young Europeans, also in Germany young people link the EU primarily to inter-European mobility (for 60% of them the Union means Freedom to study and work anywhere in the EU), and also to the single currency (for 47% of them the EU goes together with the Euro).<sup>3</sup> **Compared to the EU average, for youths in Germany the EU is more likely to be a synonym of peace** (52% versus 34% EU average), **democracy** (37% vs 26%), **and cultural diversity** (38% vs 31%). The reminders of German reunification might have affected this view, even among a generation who was born after the fall of the Berlin Wall. **However, in some ways youths in Germany seem to display a relatively more negative opinion of the EU compared to other young Europeans.** Notably, they are more likely than other young EU citizens to link the European Union to bureaucracy (23%, +9 pp), waste of money (17%, +5 pp), and not enough control at the external borders (18%, +4 pp).

The environment and climate change represents the main priority of young people in Germany. 38% of them consider climate the main issue which the EU is facing at the moment, and 33% of them also consider it the main issue faced by their country.<sup>4</sup> **Concern about the environment is particularly high in Germany compared to the other European countries.** Here, young people are +16 pp more likely to mention the environment as a national priority and +13 pp more likely to mention it as an EU priority. **It seems that the concern for climate change in Germany has partly overtaken economic concerns.** Young people in Germany are much less likely to mention the economic situation as a main issue at the national level (22% of them do so, 10 percentage points less than the EU average). Still, 33% of them consider the economic situation a main concern at the EU level. A hypothetical cause might be that they perceive their country's economic situation as relatively good compared to that of other countries in the EU.

This does not imply that young people in Germany are not concerned by their national economic situation. Almost half of them (47%) indeed describe it as bad.<sup>5</sup> However, this estimate is almost 20 percentage points below the EU average (66%). They are also way less likely to describe their country's employment situation as bad (44% do so versus an EU average of 66%). **This relatively more positive picture compared to the EU average should not hide the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic on young people's finances in Germany.** 46% of them indeed declare that the pandemic has had or will eventually have an impact on their personal income.<sup>6</sup> Although this estimate is below the EU average (61%, -15 pp), it is still indicative of the negative economic effects of the pandemic on young people.

Besides the economic impact, the confinement measures implemented during the pandemic have equally affected young people's mental health in Germany. Over half of them (53%) describe themselves as frustrated, significantly more than the EU average (41%, +12 pp)<sup>7</sup>. **On a positive note, youths in Germany are more hopeful than other young Europeans** (41% describe their current emotional status as hopeful versus 35% at the EU average). Over half of them (52%) are satisfied by their government's action against the pandemic, although they are more unsatisfied compared to other young Europeans regarding the EU's action with respect to the pandemic (only 37% of them are satisfied with it, -13 pp than the EU average)<sup>8</sup>.

Overall, the youth in Germany seem relatively more **confident in their national government's capacity of handling the economic situation and the pandemic.** This might explain why they are more hopeful than other young Europeans, despite feeling very frustrated by the current situation. Young people in Germany share a generally positive view of the EU, which is seen as a guarantor of democracy and peace. However, when it comes to other pressing topics, like the health and climate crises, they might trust the EU less compared to their national government. Climate in particular, is considered an absolute priority by young people in Germany. These are indeed significantly more concerned by environmental issues than other young Europeans.

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<sup>2</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>3</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020

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

<sup>5</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>6</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

<sup>7</sup> Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

<sup>8</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

Desk Research  
European Youth in 2021

What does the EU mean to you personally? First and second most mentioned responses.

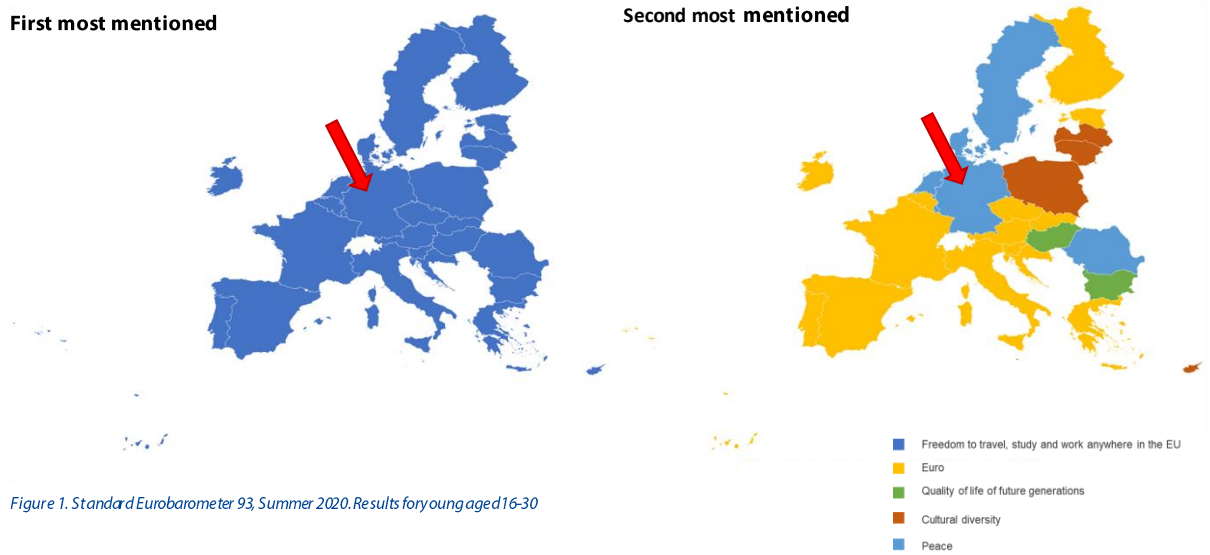


Figure 1. Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020. Results for young aged 16-30

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

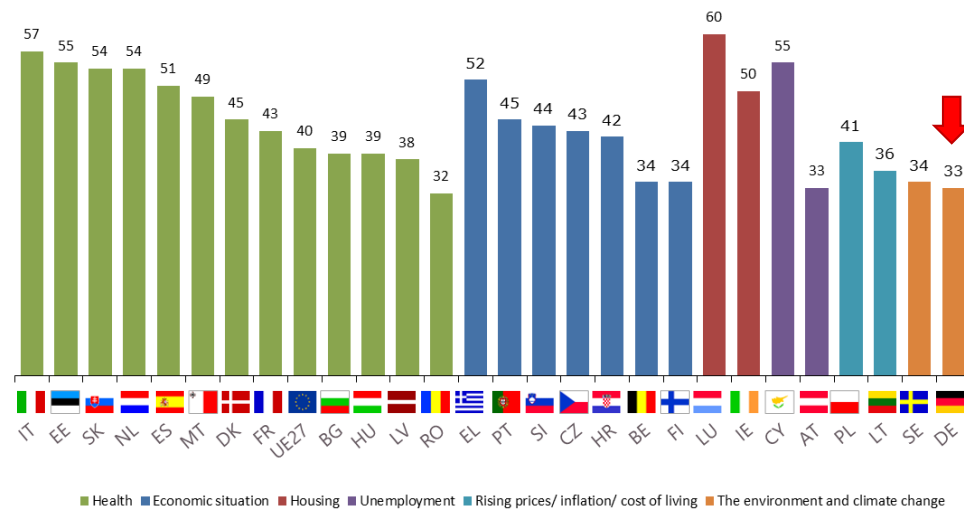


Figure 2. Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30

## B. France

A majority of young people in France feel attached to the European Union. A large share of 62% express this feeling, which is in line with the EU average (equally 62%).<sup>9</sup>

As for other young Europeans, young people in France associate the Union especially with the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU (59%), and to the single currency (47%).<sup>10</sup> Compared to the EU average, youths in France are more likely to link the Union to cultural diversity (39% vs 31%), but less likely to associate it to democracy (17% vs 26% EU average), economic prosperity (14% vs 21%) and quality of life for future generations (17% vs 23%).

This opinion highlights some of the main concerns of young people in France. **When it comes to assessing the key issues faced by the EU, 35% of youths in France indeed cite the economic situation most; together with health.**<sup>11</sup> This concern is reflected in their preoccupations at the national level, where unemployment (32%) is their second most mentioned issue after health (43%). This is not surprising considering that 72% of youths in France judge their country's employment situation as bad. Moreover, 7 young people in France out of 10 also consider the national economic situation as bad. It is important to note that these estimates are respectively 6 and 4 percentage points above the EU average.

**Preoccupations for the economic and job situation might also be a consequence of the pandemic's impact on young people.** An absolute majority of youth in France (52%) affirms that the pandemic has had or will have an impact on their income.<sup>12</sup> The negative effects of the strict confinement measures implemented in France have been extensive, negatively affecting also young people's mental health. 37% of them judge the confinement measures an experience which was difficult to cope with.<sup>13</sup> In this country, unlike in most of the Members States here analysed, the proportion of young people who increased their tobacco consumption (+5 pp), and their gambling practice (+3 pp) was bigger than the proportion of those who dedicated less time to those bad habits during the lockdowns.<sup>14</sup> Young people in France are also among the least likely to approve their government's actions against the pandemic (barely 30% of them approves them, 10 pp below the EU average). Their approval of the EU actions is higher (37%), but still below the EU's average (50%).<sup>15</sup>

**Among young people in France, the only preoccupation which is comparable to that for the economy and the health situations is represented by the issue of climate change.** 30% of them believe that this is one of the two key issues currently faced by the Union, 5 percentage points more than the European Union's average.<sup>16</sup> Preoccupation for the environment is sensibly higher among the younger generations in France. Only 22% of citizens aged 31+ mention it as one of the two main issues faced by the EU (- 8 pp, compared to the 16-30). Youths are quicker to mention the environment when it comes to the EU's key issues compared to their country's ones (30% vs. 21%). This indicates that they might have strong expectations for the Union to implement effective policies against climate change.

Overall, youth in France show a relatively strong attachment to the EU. In particular, they seem to expect the EU to take a leading role to tackle the issue of climate change in an effective manner. However, if it wants to maintain the trust of young people in France, the Union should intervene also on other issues, promoting policies aimed at improving the economic and employment situation. These two issues represent the main concerns of youths in France, especially after the coronavirus pandemic.

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<sup>9</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

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

<sup>11</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>12</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

<sup>13</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>14</sup> Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

<sup>15</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

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

Desk Research  
European Youth in 2021

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

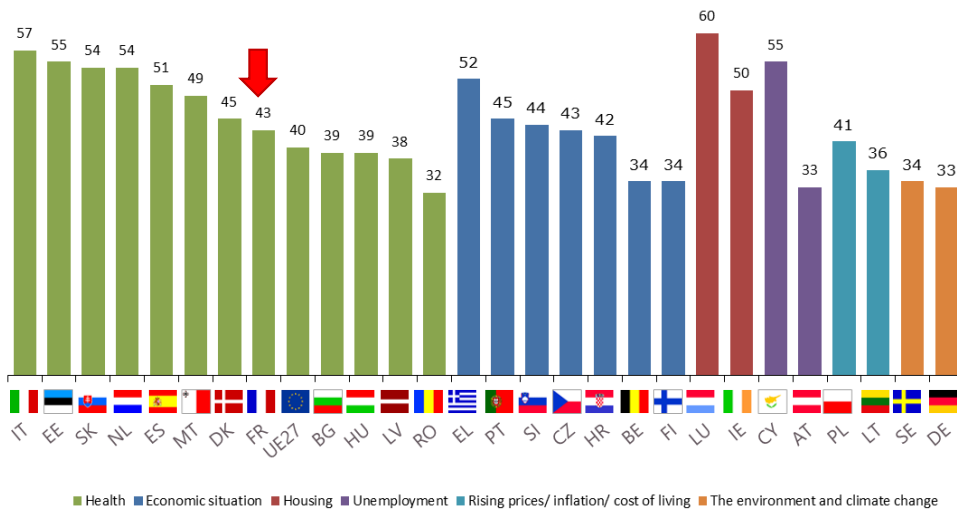


Figure 3. Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30

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: Gambling

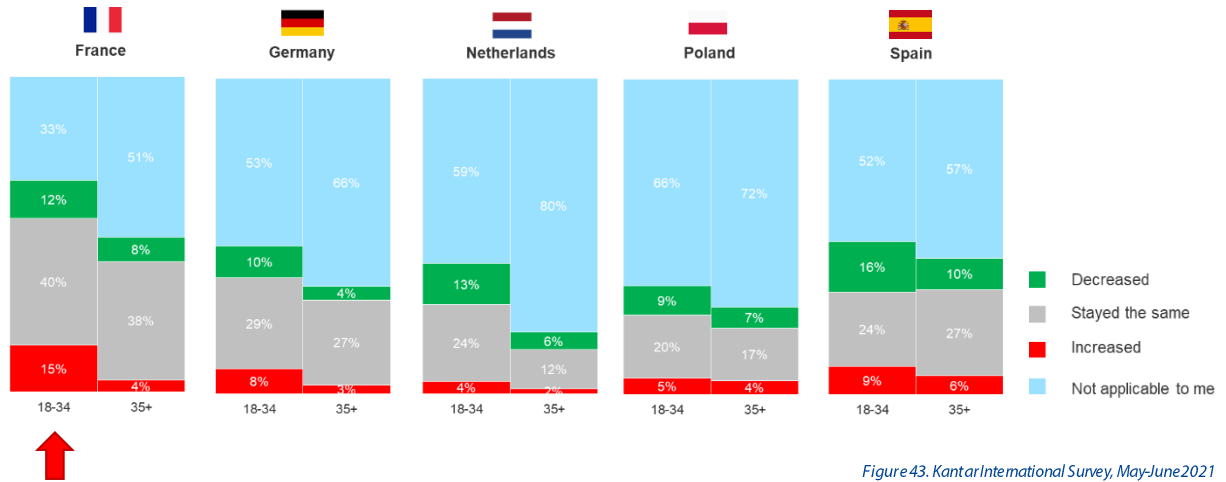


Figure 43. Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

Thinking about the measures taken to fight the Coronavirus pandemic, in particular the confinement measures, would you say that it is an experience easy or difficult to cope with? An experience... (%)

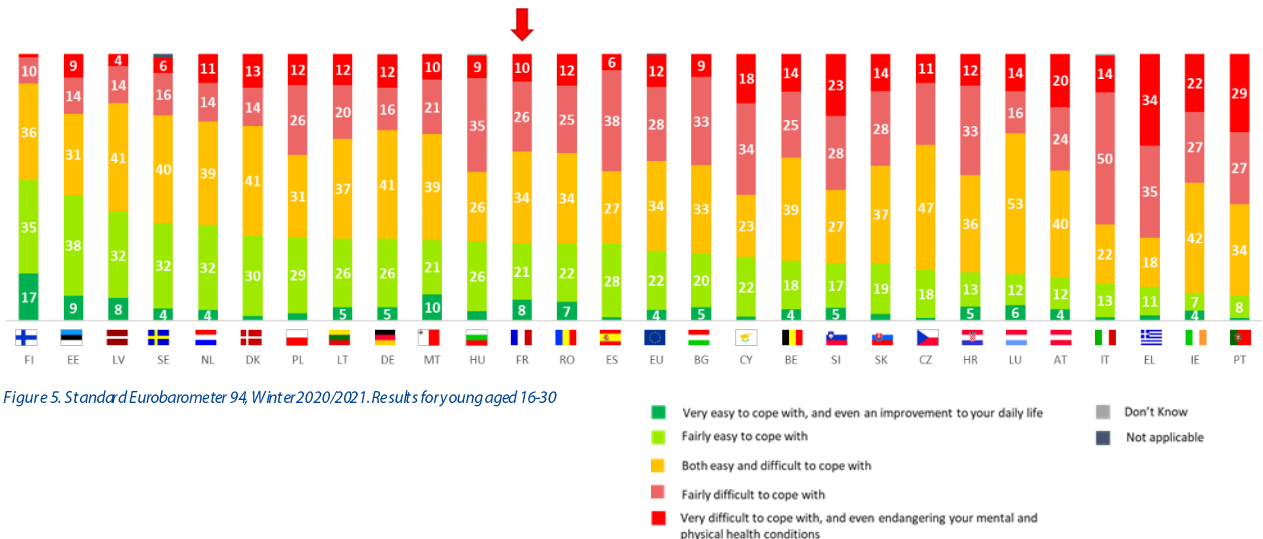


Figure 5. Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30

## C. Poland

Youth in Poland are extremely attached to the European Union. 82% of them declare a sense of attachment to it, compared to 62% at the EU average.<sup>17</sup> For them the EU means especially freedom to travel, study and work anywhere within the Union (55% define the EU primarily in these terms). Young people in Poland are also more likely to link the EU to quality of life for future generations (27% versus 23% at the EU average).<sup>18</sup>

**Their country's economic situation, and especially its living conditions, are a source of concern for young people in Poland.** 41% of them consider rising prices and the cost of living as the main issue which their country is currently facing. This is significantly more than the EU average (16%, +25 pp).<sup>19</sup> 65% judge the economic situation of their country as bad<sup>20</sup>, and youth in Poland are also relatively more concerned by their government's debt (16% versus 9% at the EU average). These concerns are slightly more marked among younger than older people in Poland, which is in contrast with the EU trend.

**This might be explained by the fact that in Poland young people have suffered the economic consequences of the pandemic to a much greater extent than youth in the other countries analysed, and also slightly more than older people in the same country.** 72% of them declare that the pandemic has had an impact on their personal income, or they expect it to have an impact in the future (versus 71% of older respondents).<sup>21</sup> This is a much higher estimate compared to the other EU countries (11 pp above the EU average). Possibly, the very negative economic impact of the pandemic in Poland has influenced young people's bad habits in this country. For example, Poland is the only country among the ones analysed in this focus, where the proportion of youths who reported consuming more alcohol during the confinement than the proportion of those who drunk less (+6 pp).<sup>22</sup> Up to 38% of young people in Poland reported that the confinement was a difficult experience.<sup>23</sup> One year after the onset of the pandemic, 25% of them described their emotional status as angry, the highest proportion of respondents choosing this item among the Member States analysed in this focus.<sup>24</sup>

**On top of that, youths in Poland are unsatisfied with their national government's response to the pandemic.** Only 31% approve their government's actions in this respect, one of the lowest estimates among the five countries analysed in this focus.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, a large majority of them (59%) is satisfied with the EU's actions against the pandemic, 9 percentage points more than the EU average.

In general, young people in Poland seem to be highly attached to the EU and they hold a relatively more positive judgement of the Union and of its ability handle the pandemic compared to other young European citizens. However, youths in Poland are preoccupied by the economic stability of their country, especially after the pandemic severely tested/impacted their personal financial situation, and that of their national accounts. That is why young people in Poland might have greater expectations on the Union to financially support their country in this phase.

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

<sup>18</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020

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

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

<sup>21</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

<sup>22</sup> Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

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

<sup>24</sup> Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

<sup>25</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021



## Desk Research European Youth in 2021

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

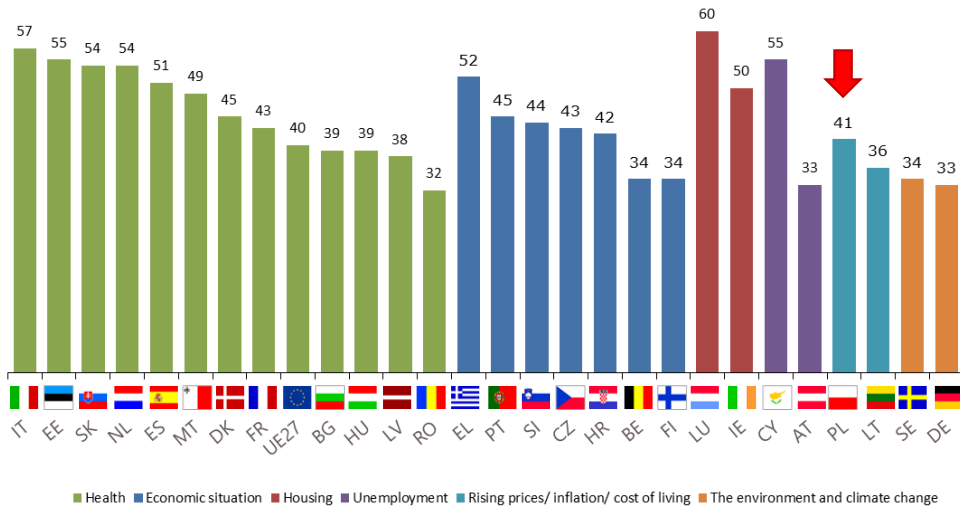


Figure 7. Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30

**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: Drinking alcohol**

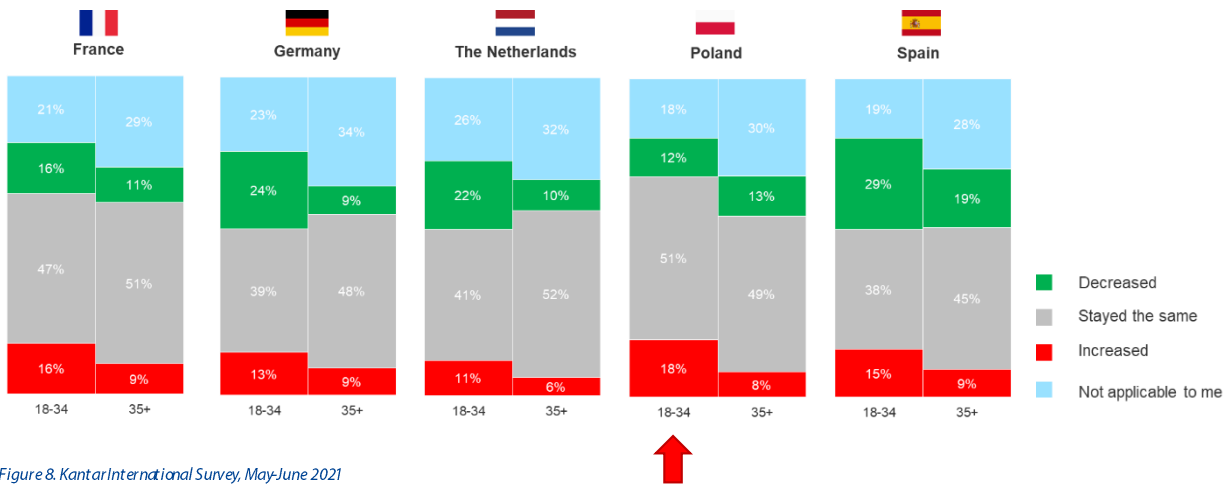


Figure 8. Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

## D. Spain

Young people in Spain express one of the highest degrees of attachment to the EU among the countries analysed. 70% of them express a sense of attachment to the Union, 8 percentage points above the EU average.<sup>26</sup> For most of them (57%) the EU means freedom to travel, study and work anywhere within the Union.<sup>27</sup> If these values are much in line with the EU average, when it comes to peace, young people in Spain are instead much less likely to associate it to the EU. For only 14% of them the Union is synonym with peace. The country's tense internal relations with Catalonia might explain this result.

**Economic preoccupations dominate young people's concerns in Spain.** 40% of them think the economic situation is the main issue currently facing their country and the EU (41% hold this opinion at the country-level).<sup>28</sup> For almost half of them (49%), unemployment is the main issue faced by their country and one of the most pressing ones at the EU level (36%). Young people's great concern for the economy and unemployment in Spain is explained by their very negative judgment of the economic and job situation. 91% of them think the situation of their national economy is bad, and 96% also consider the employment situation in their country as bad<sup>29</sup>. The judgement about the employment situation is 3 percentage points more negative among younger than older respondents, highlighting the pressing problem of youth unemployment in Spain.

**These extremely negative opinions have probably been determined also by the strong impact of the coronavirus pandemic in this country.** For 69% of youth in Spain the pandemic has had impact on their income, or they expect it to have an impact in the future<sup>30</sup>. This is 8 percentage points above the EU average (61%). Many young people in Spain have struggled to cope with the confinement measures (44%, +4 pp than the EU average)<sup>31</sup>. They are now 10 percentage points more likely to describe themselves as helpless compared to the EU average (40% vs 30%)<sup>32</sup>. Their distrust towards the national government's actions against the pandemic is even less reassuring: only 23% approve their government's initiatives against the pandemic<sup>33</sup>. This is the lowest estimate among the countries analysed in this focus. Still, young people in Spain hold a much better opinion of the EU's actions against the pandemic. 51% of them approve it, more than two times the share of those who are satisfied by the government's actions.

As they are facing a very difficult economic situation at the national level, young people in Spain might turn to the Union to demand effective initiatives against the health and economic crisis. Their strong attachment to the EU cannot be jeopardized, therefore it is key that the EU lives up to the expectation of young citizens in Spain during this critical phase.

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<sup>26</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>27</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020

<sup>28</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>29</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>30</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

<sup>31</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>32</sup> Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

<sup>33</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

## Desk Research European Youth in 2021

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

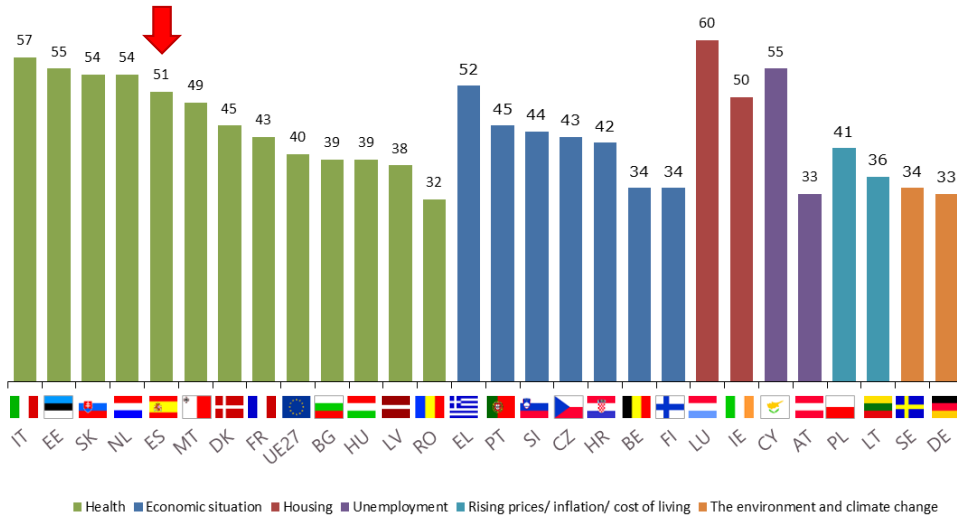


Figure 9. Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30

**Thinking about the measures taken to fight the Coronavirus pandemic, in particular the confinement measures, would you say that it is an experience easy or difficult to cope with? An experience... (%)**

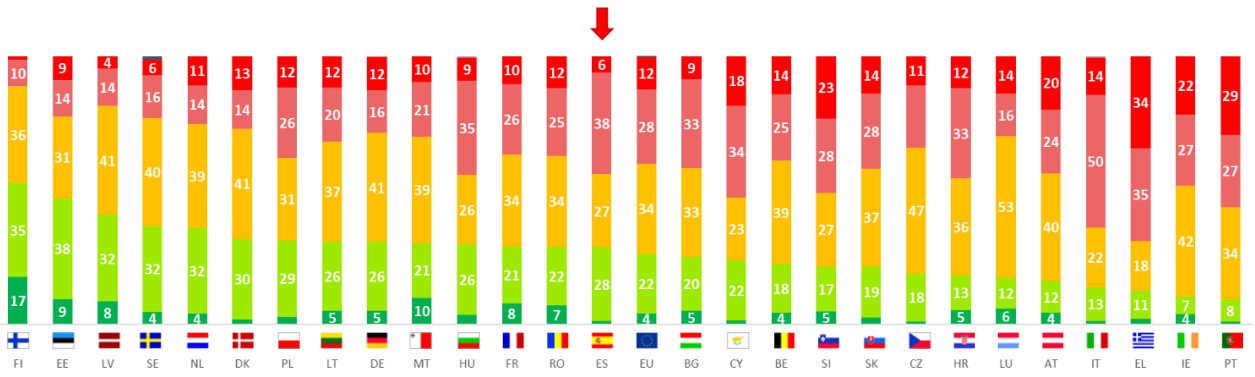


Figure 10. Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30

- Very easy to cope with, and even an improvement to your daily life
- Fairly easy to cope with
- Both easy and difficult to cope with
- Fairly difficult to cope with
- Very difficult to cope with, and even endangering your mental and physical health conditions
- Don't Know
- Not applicable

## E. The Netherlands

Young people in the Netherlands describe themselves as relatively little attached to the European Union. Although only 33% of them is attached to the EU (versus an EU average of 62%), youths in this country do not hold a negative opinion of the EU and of its actions<sup>34</sup>.

Among the five countries analysed in this focus, and compared to the EU average, the Netherlands is the country where young people are most likely to associate the Union to positive values like peace (52%, 18 pp more than the EU average), a stronger say in the world (40%, +16 pp), democracy (36%, +10pp), quality of life for future generations (30%, +7 pp), and social protection (25%, +9 pp)<sup>35</sup>. Despite this, youth in the Netherlands are relatively more likely than the EU average to associate the loss of cultural identity to the European Union (11%, +4pp). This might also explain why they consider immigration one of the biggest issues facing the EU: 25% of them prioritise this subject, significantly more than the EU average (+9 pp), and only slightly less than older respondents in the same country (-2 pp).<sup>36</sup>

**When it comes to the issues faced by the EU, young people in the Netherlands appear to be very concerned by the economic situation** (49%, +13 pp compared to the EU average). This reflects preoccupations which are present also at the national level. 38% of them indeed consider the economic situation the main issue which their country is facing (+6 pp compared to the EU average).<sup>37</sup> These relatively high estimates are somewhat surprising given that young people in the Netherlands are generally less likely to report a negative economic and employment situation compared to other EU youths. Only 33% describe the situation of their national economy as bad, half compared to the EU average, although they are slightly more likely to consider the employment situation of their country as bad (38%, still -28 pp than the EU average).<sup>38</sup>

**The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on young people's finances and psychological wellbeing in the Netherlands seems relatively less concerning than in the other European countries.** 33% of them think the pandemic has had an impact on their income, a high estimate but significantly lower than the EU average (-27 pp).<sup>39</sup> They are also less likely to find confinement difficult to cope with compared to the other European youths (25% vs 40%).<sup>40</sup> Their approval of the national government's action against the pandemic is the highest among the countries analysed in this Focus (56%), while their approval of the EU actions against the virus is very high (75%), and much above the EU average (+26 pp).<sup>41</sup> This more reassuring picture of the pandemic's impact on young people in the Netherlands is reflected also in their reported feelings. Youths in this country are more hopeful (50%, +15 pp), calm (38%, +19 pp), and confident (42%, +28 pp) than the rest of the EU. Despite this, also in the Netherlands young people are more uncertain (52%, +5 pp) and frustrated (48%, +7 pp), than what youth reported feeling in other EU countries. On top of that, they are more likely than the EU average to describe themselves as lonely (27%, +8%), and they have been more likely to smoke more during confinement (+10%) than other young Europeans.<sup>42</sup>

**Like Germany, youths in the Netherlands stand out from the other EU youths included in this focus for displaying a very high environmental consciousness.** 40% of them feel the environment is one of the two most important issues faced by the EU, 15 percentage points more than the EU average, and 3 percentage points more than older respondents.<sup>43</sup> 34% also thinks this is one of the two most important issues faced by their country (+17 pp compared to the EU average). Given this high concern for the environment, an effective European action against climate change could potentially foster young people's relatively low sense of attachment to the EU in the Netherlands.

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<sup>34</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>35</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 93, Summer 2020

<sup>36</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>37</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>38</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>39</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

<sup>40</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

<sup>41</sup> Special Eurobarometer for the European Parliament, Spring 2021

<sup>42</sup> Kantar International Survey, May-June 2021

<sup>43</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 94, Winter 2020/2021

Desk Research  
European Youth in 2021

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

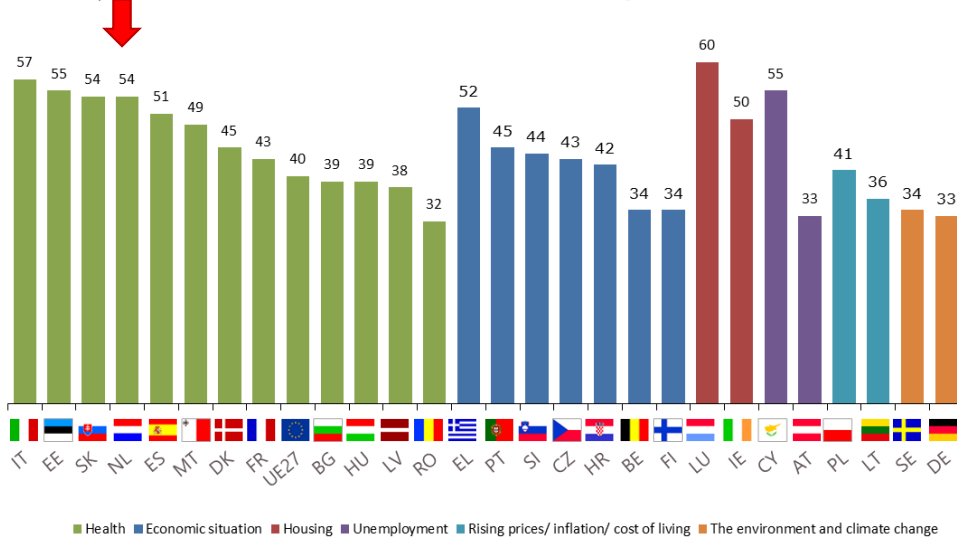


Figure 11. StandardEurobarometer 94, Winter2020/2021. Results for young aged 16-30

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: Smoking tobacco

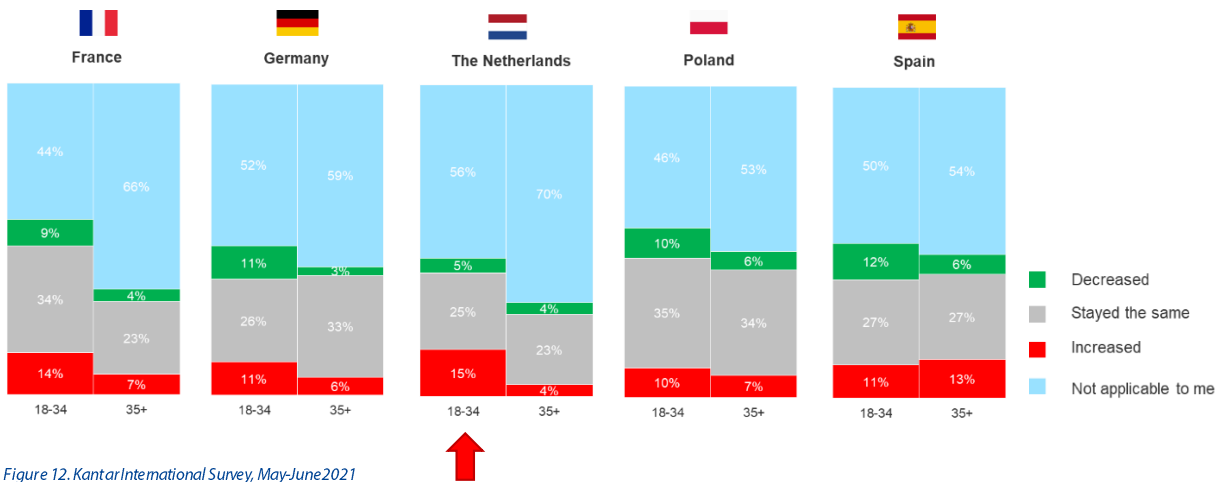


Figure 12. KantarInternational Survey, May-June2021