

Change starts with us

Young people's
ideas on the
future of Europe



Results of a pan-European consultation by:

Acknowledgements

This report is produced based on a report written by Bram Spruyt, Lieve Bradt, Jessy Siongers, and Filip Van Droogenbroeck, and commissioned by the European Youth Forum.

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About the European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. We represent over 100 youth organisations, which bring together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe.

About The 25 Percent

The 25 Percent is a project for young people, by young people, to make sure that their ideas are listened to where decisions are made, and to give them the tools and resources they need to challenge the status quo and take action on the issues they care about.

Working in cooperation with our project partners, we're striving to collect and amplify the political ideas of young people on the road to self-representation and advocacy with useful advice, real stories and inspiration. Moreover, using our Europe-wide network of activists, we offer young people clear, actionable advice on how to make their voices heard.

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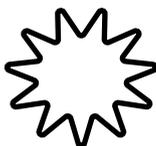
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Change starts with us

Young people's ideas on the future of Europe



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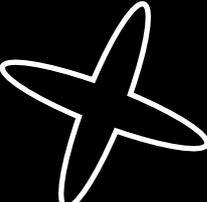
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Change starts with us!

We have gathered more than 4,000 ideas from young people in 30 European countries. This is what they want for the future of Europe:



01 A stronger European Union: deeper integration, more effective leadership, more collaboration between countries and stronger social cohesion between European citizens.

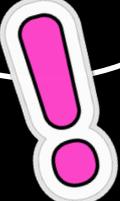


02 Bolder decisions: politicians should dream big, focus on the long term and not be afraid of radical change.

03 No more inequalities. Equality and diversity should be mainstreamed in every decision, and differences in the opportunities and treatment of citizens in different member states should be eliminated.



04 Better education, more extensive dialogue and exchange between citizens of different countries: this is the real engine for social change.



05 Stronger democracy, better mechanisms for youth participation and more accountability for political actors.



Executive summary

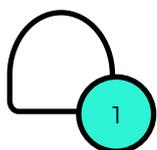
Between June and November 2021, the *25 Percent Project* gathered over 4,000 ideas on the future of Europe. We have consulted a diverse range of young people living in Europe, and we have strived to reach out to those who are usually left out from the conversation: young people from rural areas, young people who dropped out of education, young people with disabilities, young people belonging to the Roma community, young people from a religious minority, and much more. This report summarises their opinions, wishes and hopes, and it should serve as a contribution to the broad discussion on the future of Europe.

The ideas expressed by young people span many different policy areas and topics: some are relevant for local authorities, some for national governments, and some for European institutions. In this report, you can find young people's ideas on climate change and sustainability, a strong economy and jobs, the digital transformation, social justice and equality, health, education, Europe in the world, democracy, values and rights, rule of law and security, and much more.

Despite this variety, looking at all the ideas collected, young people tell a fairly clear and coherent story on what they want for the future of Europe.

- First, **Europe should become a stronger Union, able to take bolder action and act as a whole.** There is overwhelming support for deeper integration of the European Union, more effective leadership, more collaboration between countries and stronger social cohesion between European citizens.
- Second, politicians should **dream big, focus on the long term and perceive the obstacles along the way as a challenge rather than dead-end streets.** Indeed, doing politics for young people means not only tackling issues such as education, the transition to the job market, quality employment and mental health but also taking decisions while considering their long-term impact and not being afraid of radical change.
- Third, **a stronger Europe is one where inequalities are eliminated.** Equality and diversity should be mainstreamed in every decision; for instance, a policy that reinforces inequalities and does not benefit everyone equally is a policy destined to fail. Moreover, differences in the opportunities and treatment of citizens in different member states should be eliminated.
- Fourth, **more attention should be given to education since that is the real engine for social change.** Moreover, extensive dialogue and intensive exchange between citizens of different countries are also crucial.
- Fifth, **democracy is the backbone of our societies and should be strengthened.** Although in the past decade(s) more opportunities for (youth) participation have been created, more accountability is needed on the side of political actors.

The agenda that young people propose for the future of Europe is ambitious, but they are ready, willing, and able to take responsibility because *“change starts with us”*.



Introduction

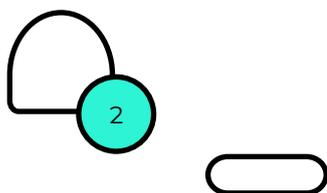
Despite making up 25% of the European population, **young people face many barriers that prevent them from having a say in their future**. Whether it's a lack of opportunities, representation or knowledge of effective advocacy, they are left without ways to share their voices and make the changes they want to see in the world. In particular, **young people with fewer opportunities, belonging to a marginalised group or a minority, face even greater challenges** regarding participation. Consequently, this can result in a society where many are not represented and where the rights of the youth are not respected.

We want to change that.

From May 2021 to May 2022, the European Union has been calling all citizens to participate in the **Conference on the Future of Europe** and form our vision for the future of our continent together. In return, this inspired us to start this project, aiming to ensure that youth voices are heard there and that young people have the power to change Europe.

Since June 2021, we have talked to young people about their vision for the future of Europe and gathered their views and ideas. Our five national partners (Spanish Youth Council, Austrian National Youth Council, National Youth Forum of Bulgaria, Cyprus Youth Council, National Youth Council of Ireland) have organised national and local events, both online and offline, to **tell young people why their voices matter and collect their wishes, hopes and ideas**. They went to schools, youth clubs, and university fairs and asked young people about their vision for the future of Europe. They often involved young people who were new to political participation and who did not have as many opportunities as others to form and express their own political opinion; for example, they talked with young people who dropped out from school or live far from big cities. Furthermore, to make sure that our consultation reflected the **diversity of European youth**, we partnered up with five international platforms representing young people from rural areas (Rural Youth Europe), young people with disabilities (the European Disability Forum), people from an ethnic and religious minority (Phiren Amenca and the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations), and internationally mobile people (the Erasmus Student Network). In this way, our consultation also included their voices, which are often left out from other exercises of citizens' participation.

By the end of November 2021, we had gathered **4,021 ideas from young people living in 30 European countries**. This report is a synthesis of all their ideas, analysed by researchers associated with the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Ghent University and members of the Flemish Youth Research Platform (JOP). In 2022, we are continuing to engage young people in a conversation on the future of Europe, and we will publish an update of this report closer to the end of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Hopefully, this report will be a source of inspiration for politicians and practitioners at the local, national and European levels within and beyond the Conference.





Methodology and data collection

The ideas in this report were collected between June and November 2021. The unique respondents were 3439 in number, and the total ideas collected were 4021. The collection happened mainly via a dedicated multilingual form on the 25 Percent project website but also during in-person events and consultations organised throughout Europe. The collection will continue until May 2022, the closing date of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The Form

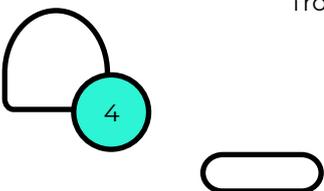
The form is available in all official EU languages, plus Turkish. The ideas were translated and then analysed in English. Once the respondents submitted the form, they were presented the option of responding to some socio-demographic questions to collect basic information such as age, gender and social background.

Respondents' sociodemographic background

The respondents' sociodemographic data enabled us to check whether the achieved sample was sufficiently heterogeneous. In annex (table 1), you can discover the geographic breakdown of the sample, and in table 2 the sociodemographic background. These numbers demonstrate that the sample includes a rather substantial variety of respondents. There is no reason to assume that the results are greatly biased towards one social group. The main limitation of the current data seems to be the rather limited regional focus with a very strong overrepresentation of the ideas expressed by Austrian youth.

Clustering of ideas

To analyse the ideas and cluster them, a two-layered codebook (Table 3 in appendix) was developed combining a deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) approach. For the first layer, we started from 10 broad themes specified by the European Commission: (1) Climate change and the environment, (2) Health, (3) A stronger economy, social justice and jobs, (4) Digital transformation, (5) Values and rights, rule of law, and security, (6) Migration, (7) Education, (8) Culture, Youth and Sport, (9) EU in the World, and (10) European Democracy. However, during the coding process, we had to introduce some adaptations to this categorization, for example, theme 3 was divided into "stronger economy-jobs" and "social justice", "culture, youth and sport" was eliminated, while "migration" was included in "EU in the world". Also, a new theme 'Other ideas' was added to include highly specific proposals mentioned by only one or very few respondents, which could not be grouped in the other themes (e.g. 'Lower the legal age for smoking'). Finally, unreadable ideas, ideas that expressed a strictly personal wish or which contained statements clearly violating basic human rights (e.g. racist elements) were grouped under the category 'Excluded from the analysis'. They represent 4.43% of all ideas.

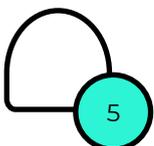
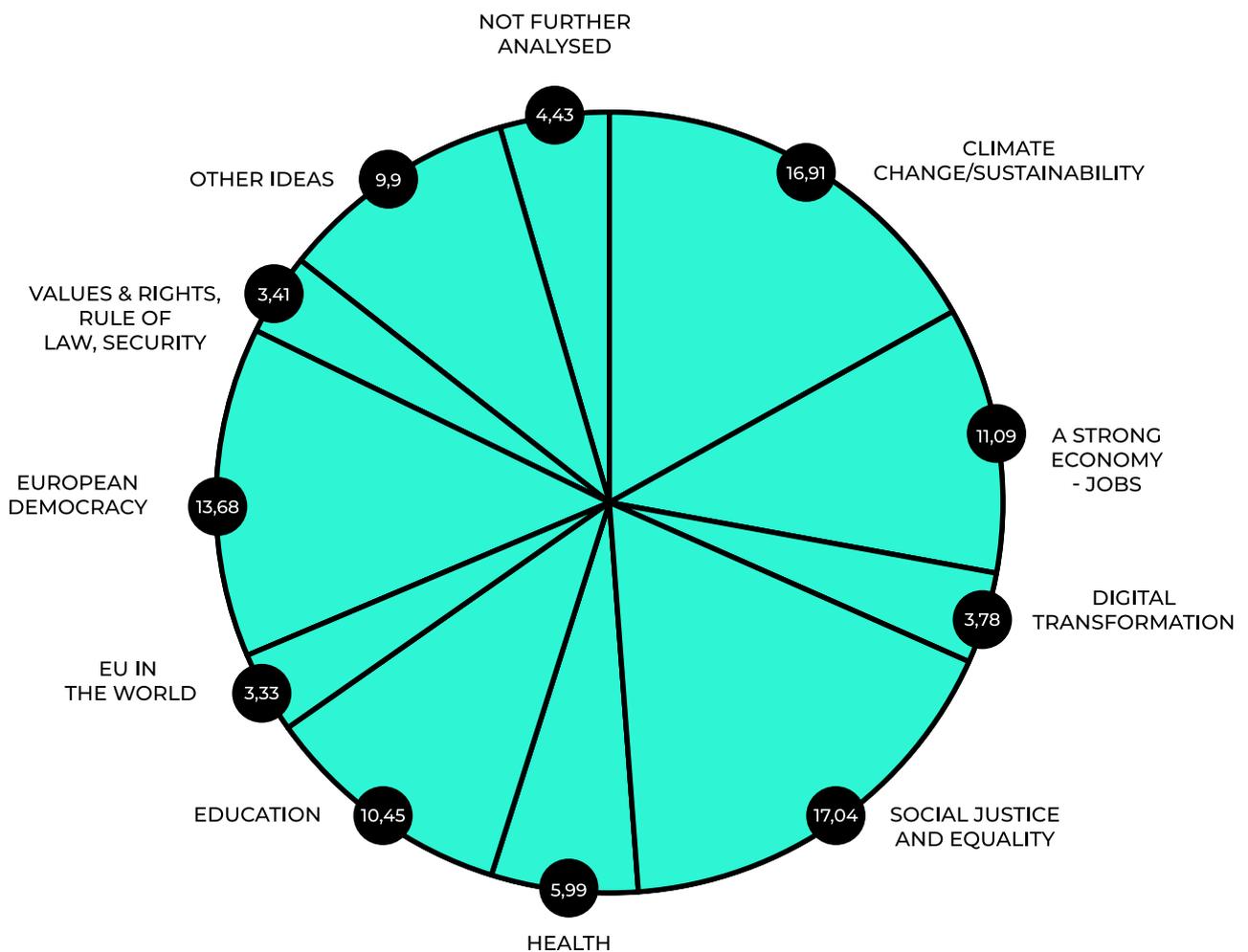


Within the themes, ideas had to be assigned to subthemes to group ideas by their specific content. In doing this, we adopted a more inductive approach and distinguished as many meaningful subthemes as possible. For each theme, the first subtheme was more general to include ideas that did not belong to one of the other subthemes belonging to that theme. Thus, the subcategories remained as homogeneous as possible content-wise.

Figure 1 below presents the different themes and their relative frequency.

In clustering, we intended to limit the hermeneutical influence of the researchers as much as possible. Therefore, every subtheme can be traced back to the actual statements written by the respondents. Therefore, the data used were solely the information provided by young people following a bottom-up approach.

Figure 1: Relative salience topics in ideas of the 25 percent (in %)



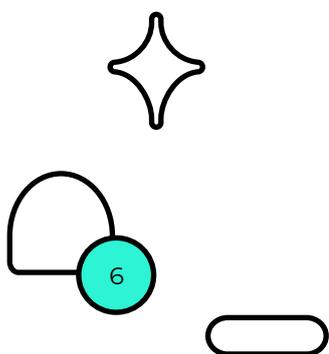
Implications of the research approach

This research strategy has three implications that the reader should take into account. First, the bottom-up research strategy implies that policy proposals (parts) may to some extent already be realised. If so, this reflects a complaint that runs throughout some ideas, namely that Europe should better explain what it does and what they have realised:

“In many discussions, Europe is often seen as a scapegoat – the bureaucrats in Brussels. They decide over us. But why is that? Ignorance and misinformation are often the root of all evil. That is precisely why it is important to educate but not to lecture” (Respondent 64).

Second, although some topics are salient among young people, they are not always easily translated into concrete policy proposals. Topics such as education, jobs, and poverty reduction were often mentioned by the respondents without being translated into concrete policy ideas. In such cases, respondents simply indicated that they want better education, more jobs for young people or less poverty without specifying how to accomplish that. Third, respondents have formulated their ideas of Europe's future without indicating which governance level (e.g. EU, member states) is responsible for specific policy areas. Their focus was primarily on real life rather than the complex political structures. Moreover, through the different ideas, it also became clear that young people are aware that the EU is a very powerful institution that has a strong *direct*, but also *indirect*, impact on country-specific policies. In that sense, it is reasonable to relate almost every challenge back to the EU.

In the following sections, we analyse the ideas clustered into ten themes.





Young people's ideas on the future of Europe

CLIMATE CHANGE SUSTAINABILITY

<p>Sustainability: general</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Climate change should not be discussed in isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Find a balance between short term benefits and long term costs · Sustainable development starts with less consumption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Educate and inform people about sustainability
<p>Sustainability as political principle</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Climate change and sustainability has not received the attention that it deserves · In each policy measure the 'sustainability' aspect should occupy a central place · Combatting climate change should be part and parcel of a politics of environmental justice so that the strongest should carry most weight
<p>Industry and 'big companies'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Halt over-production · Achieve a sustainable production chain and give consumers insight into this · The real costs for the environment should be reflected in the consumer prices · For some companies only stricter regulation and higher taxes can bring real change
<p>Waste management, recycling, banning plastics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reduce waste production · Invest in recycling processes · Reduce single-use plastics · Ban plastics for food packaging
<p>Energy and transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase the use of renewable energy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Electric cars: friend or foe? · Invest in cycling infrastructure/public transport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Higher taxes on in-country flights · Energy and transport should remain accessible for all
<p>Ecological education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Raising awareness for climate change and sustainability for all. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Cultivate ecological conscience · Look for other socialisation contexts than schools alone to accomplish this mission
<p>Green fiscality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · More funding for 'green initiatives · Higher taxes on polluting activities
<p>Food production</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · More small-scale agriculture and production for local consumption · A long-term perspective for agriculture so that this sector gets a clear and realistic perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pay attention to animal welfare and reduce meat consumption · Cheap meat does not reflect the real cost
<p>More green and better conservation of nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reforestation · Combat (air) pollution · More green areas in cities · More accessibility to nature for all

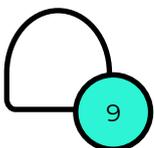
Climate change/sustainability

Climate change/sustainability is one of the most salient themes among the youth who submitted ideas about Europe's future. Its importance is further underscored by the fact that respondents explained what their future Europe would look like. It would be: "A Europe where everyone can breathe without poisoning themselves", that "develops better ways to fight global warming", where we "measure how to reduce the damage because without a planet to live on, there is nothing left to do" (Respondent 277). A clear sense of urgency pervades when young people write "Climate change now!" (Respondent 158) or "[...] either we adapt or die with this planet" (Respondent 168). Studying these ideas in-depth, nine concrete sub-themes come to the fore.

Sustainability: general

The subtheme 'sustainability' groups ideas that argue that **climate change should not be discussed in isolation** because it is strongly connected to other aspects of life. Three different types of ideas can be distinguished in this subtheme:

- Some young people specified **general principles** that Europe should follow or referred to the **ultimate goals** that should be striven for. The youth who formulated ideas at a more general level seem to be aware of the complexity of questions related to sustainability, the difficulty in **balancing between short-term benefits and long-term costs** as well as the different interests at stake. So rather than explaining what must be done, this first type of ideas articulates **a clear sense of urgency** and indicate the general direction policymakers should take.
- Other respondents explicitly referred to more **holistic principles**. They explicitly state that **topics such as climate change, pollution, etc. should not be treated in isolation**. These environmental issues are closely connected to more general aspects of sustainable work and living.
- A third subtheme refers to more **sustainable development** but also **less consumption**. These ideas hold that combating climate change not only is the responsibility of governments and formal legislation but instead starts in our own daily life. The idea is also closely related to the principle of educating and informing citizens about climate change and sustainability (see further).



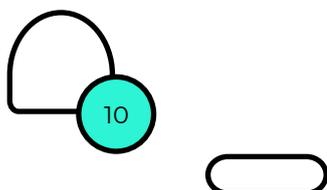
Sustainability as a political principle

A second subtheme refers to **sustainability and climate change as a political principle**. Politicians are urged to show *real commitment* to developing a more sustainable way of living. We encountered different versions of this argument.

- First, some ideas start from the perception that till now **climate change as a political issue has not received the attention it deserves**. Some politicians are accused of underestimating (or downplaying for strategic reasons) the urgency and the general impact of climate change. Respondents who believe in this element plead, for example, for a Europe-wide climate strike day.
- Second, many respondents argue that **climate change is too often treated as a 'separate topic' rather than as a transversal theme** that is closely intertwined with almost all other political topics. Taking climate change and sustainability seriously, so the reasoning goes, implies that in **every policy measure the 'sustainability aspect' should occupy a central place**.

"My idea, my demand, is therefore this: Let us examine every decision – every law, every regulation, every directive – for its sustainability. For its ecological sustainability and for its social, societal and economic sustainability. That would mean that Europe makes youth interests a priority. It would also mean reforming our pension systems, fighting social inequality and launching a democracy offensive to combat authoritarian tendencies across Europe. Imagine if every decision was preceded by these questions: What consequences will this measure have for our young people? Is it also purposeful and justifiable in the long term? Then we would live in a Europe that does not only think about today and tomorrow but also about the day after tomorrow!"
(Respondent 75).

- Third, other respondents stress that what is needed is not so much climate change as **environmental justice**. Respondents call for "a green new deal that doesn't only tackle climate change but achieves climate justice". These ideas are strongly grounded in the conviction that measures to tackle climate change will only succeed and receive political support when they are bearable for *all citizens*. Therefore, a green deal should not emphasise austerity but development and equity. Some of these respondents link this justice principle to different forms of taxation and stress that the **strongest shoulders should carry the most weight**.



Industry and 'big companies'

Although young people clearly acknowledge citizens' individual responsibility in combating climate change (see earlier), they are also very well-aware that the industry and big companies also have a crucial role to play. We found three types of ideas that express this element.

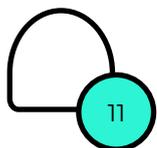
- First, some respondents argue that **over-production should be halted**. The problem is not only that people consume too much but also that intense competition also typically leads to over-production whereby some products are produced even if one knows that there is not sufficient demand for them (see also the subtheme Waste).
- A second version of this idea argues that citizens are increasingly aware of sustainability and that this awareness can be exploited to stimulate further developments to **achieve a sustainable production chain**. One concrete idea, for example, suggested printing a QR-code on all products *"to give the consumers insight in the production chain of what they purchase"* (Respondent 745). For these respondents, **the public's awareness concerning sustainability should be used as leverage to change the industry**: *"Make the CO2 balance of consumer goods transparent"* (Respondent 3198).
- A third version pleads for more direct action and argues that the only way forward is to hold 'big companies' accountable for their environmental impact. These ideas argue that **the price of consumer goods is not reflected in the real costs for the environment**. Respondents who follow this line of thought have no faith that the sector will regulate itself. For some companies, only **stricter regulation and higher taxes** can bring real change. Other respondents plead for *"a climate court"* (Respondent 2940) and expect *"new criminal offenses typified in the European Union for environmental pollution"* (Respondent 2940).

Waste management, recycling and banning plastics

Ideas in this subtheme start from the observation that **we produce too much waste** and that more effort should be invested in further developing **recycling processes**. The **reduction of single-use plastics**, especially in packaging, is perceived to be crucial.

More green and a better conservation of nature

In many of the concrete proposals that young people put forward, there is a sense of urgency. Human behaviour has caused climate change, but if we cross critical thresholds, humans may no longer be able to control this process. There are, however, also ideas arguing that fully taking advantage of all these elements over which we have direct control would produce immediate and tangible results. A clear example refers to **reforestation**:



“Get a tree for all your time in school, take care and reforest it into the forest to the end of the school program” (Respondent 184). Similarly, respondents ask for a direct ban on ‘illegal fishing’ and more protection of endangered animals. Furthermore, **more green areas in cities** (including, among other things, community gardens) should be developed or in more general terms “*more accessibility to the environment for all young people*” (Respondent 119);

Ecological education and raising awareness about sustainability

Yes, during the past few years, societal debate about climate changes has gained momentum; but no, **these discussions have not yet reached, let alone persuaded all citizens**. The young plead for **cultivating an ecological consciousness** and look not just to schools for accomplishing this: “*create climate assemblies as a measure of public awareness and co-responsibility*” (Respondent 2337). The typical ideas in this subtheme stress that *all people* should be covered resulting in a call for ecological education for all:

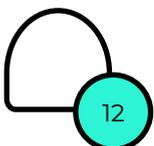
“I believe that it’s important for more people to be aware of the ecological issues such as water and air pollution, consumerism consequences, etc. An educational campaign on how we can lower our footprint is necessary among young and older people”

(Respondent 643) .

Food production

This subtheme is related to production and the big companies subtheme but differs in that it focuses on **agriculture and livestock**. We find two rather different types of ideas in this context.

- The first type pleads for more **small-scale agriculture and local production**. In some densely populated areas in Europe, so the reasoning goes, it simply makes no sense to have large-scale agricultural production. If these regions do not want to give up agriculture, farming and agriculture should be transformed and more oriented towards **production for local consumption**. Simultaneously, some ideas also articulate concern about the way agriculture is addressed in debates on climate change. Some respondents argue that we should ‘*decriminalise agriculture*’. What is needed is **a long-term plannability for agriculture** so that the people who work in this important sector also obtain **a clear and realistic perspective** and will be willing and able to invest in further transforming agriculture.
- A second type of idea refers to **animal welfare**. Some respondents simply plea for more respect for animal rights. Others strongly refer to ‘mass meat production’. They argue that **cheap meat** does not reflect the cost that ‘factory farming’ or ‘factory breeding’ inflict on the environment. In general, some young people also argue for **reducing meat consumption**.

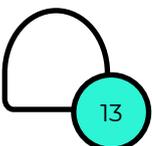


Energy and transport

Respondents argue that countries and Europe should invest more strongly in developing technologies for renewable energy and that the use of renewable energy should be strongly encouraged or even obliged. Regarding transportation, some respondents argue for a total car ban in the city, while others plead for only electric cars in the city and the last group holds that especially the **cycling infrastructure and public transport** in cities should be further developed into a real alternative for cars. Transportation is, however, more than only cars. Some young people call for **higher taxes on in-country flights**. Importantly, in line with the respondents who called for climate justice, young people also in this context clearly emphasize the importance of **accessibility for all**.

Green fiscality

Respondents seem to be aware that Europe and its countries are faced with a very huge societal transformation, which may be as profound as the industrial revolution. This transformation will take time but also requires a lot of funding. Respondents in our sample highlight two options. First, all types of **'green' initiatives** clearly need **more funding**. Others, then, argue for **higher taxes on polluting activities** such as using/producing cars, the use of fossil fuels, etc.



A STRONG ECONOMY - JOBS

Job security and workable jobs

- Improve job security
- Ban zero-hour contracts
- Provide more paid internships for young people
- Make it more clear when work will be paid or not
- Improve the combination between work and responsibilities related to childcare

Job opportunities for young people

- Combat country-level differences in job opportunities for young people
- Inform young people better about opportunities for labour market mobility
- Pay specific attention to young people who are at the very beginning of their labour market career

Transparency, fiscalisation and combatting corruption

- Increase transparency about decisions and policy measures in Europe
- Combat tax disloyalty between EU countries
- Reduce bureaucratic processes and combat corruption
- Tax policies that strive for more equality and combat tax avoidance?

Better (public) transport

- Facility transport between European countries better
- Provide more and better railways (e.g., faster, more sustainable, etc.)
- Better connection between rural and urban areas
- Public transport should be more affordable for young people

Stimulating entrepreneurship

- Support start-ups
- Support interaction between young entrepreneurs (EU entrepreneurship training)

A strong economy, labour market migration and innovation

- Better facilitate within-Europe labour migration
- The future of Europe's economy depends on creativity and technological innovation
- European economies can collaborate more stronger.
- Europe should help European economies to improve international trading

A strong economy – Jobs

The theme *A strong economy – Jobs* collects ideas that touch upon the economy. It is, however, very clear that respondents define ‘economy’ very broadly. Six subthemes could be distinguished and will be analysed in the next paragraphs.

A strong economy based on labour market migration and technological innovation

The first set of ideas focuses on how Europe’s economy can be strengthened. Respondents refer to three different types of ideas. First, some young people argue for the facilitation of **labour migration within Europe**. Immigrants should be provided the means to integrate well into society. Second, other young people believe that the future of Europe’s economy is strongly linked to creativity and **technological innovation**. Third, respondents argue that **European economies can collaborate and integrate more strongly** and that Europe should help to **improve international trade**.

Job security and workable jobs

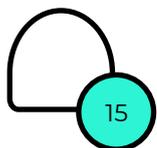
The first set of ideas refers to good jobs. First, some of the respondents are clearly worried about **job security**. They call for initiatives to provide more secure jobs and **a ban on ‘zero hour contracts’** –highly flexible jobs where the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum number of working hours to the employee – and higher salaries. Second, respondents also argued for more **paid internships for young people**. All too often, young people have to work hard and shoulder important responsibilities in their jobs but are not paid because they are considered to be ‘in training’. Third, some respondents suggest that good jobs respect and even guarantee a good work-life balance. Respondents plead in this context for more paid maternity/paternity leaves and free day-care and childcare.

Actions directed at providing job opportunities for young people

Some respondents argue that **country-level differences in job opportunities for young people** should be addressed

*“Young people need equity not equality, we need to have the same job opportunities regardless of the place we live in Europe”
(Respondent 144).*

Respondents plead for more labour market mobility in Europe for young people. To that end, young people can and should be better informed about the existing opportunities.



Respondents also underline the **difficult position of people who are at the very beginning of their professional career**: “Develop a strategy to ensure access to the labour market for youth even if they do not have experience and are freshly graduated” (Respondent 964).

Transparency, fiscalisation and combating corruption

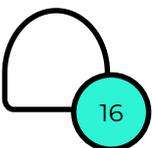
A good and strong economy, so the young people argue, is transparent and fair. Therefore, the EU should act to **increase transparency** around decisions and policy measures. Respondents often associate transparency with the **reduction of bureaucratic processes** (e.g. in the context of subsidies) and link it to the reduction of corruption. However, corruption is also mentioned as a topic linked to fiscal policy. In that context, a subset of young people clearly supports **tax policies that strive for more equality and combat tax avoidance**.

Better (public) transport

Respondents indicate ample space for improvement in the transportation network in Europe. Ideas regarding improving (public) transport are both mentioned in the context of strengthening the economy, European identity and social cohesion.

“One of the four freedoms of the EU is the freedom of movement of persons. A problem for the future of Europe is the decrease of international travel. This creates an environment for isolationism and even racism. Once the pandemic is over, we need to remind people of the world beyond national borders. The creation of a special travel-pass-week during the summer where European citizens buy a ticket pass for unlimited train rides during that week is what my idea is all about. Similar to the Erasmus+ programme, all travellers can have travel costs restored ONLY if they have visited a certain number of museums and other cultural sights during the validity of their ticket pass. This promotes travel and an educational opportunity for Europeans to learn about cultures outside of their own”
(Respondent 372).

Respondents also stressed that **not only is it important to improve transport facilities within European countries, but also special attention should be paid to transport opportunities between European countries**. In that context, young people also call for “a European public ticket” (Respondent 1366). Respondents see opportunities for providing **more and better railways** in Europe. Special attention should be paid to (1) providing **better connectivity between the more rural and urban areas** in Europe, (2) making transport **faster**, and (3) making it more **sustainable**.



*“I want to see better, cheaper public transport to rural areas across Europe to make them less isolated and more inclusive”
(Respondent 107).*

Respondents also favour the (further) development of an overnight European train system. Second, respondents argue that **public transport** should also be made **more affordable, especially for young people**.

Stimulating entrepreneurship

A final, small, but meaningful set of ideas focuses on entrepreneurship and urges more support for young entrepreneurs and start-ups. They not only plead for more (financial) aid and encouragement but also suggest that Europe should **facilitate interaction between (young) entrepreneurs** and stimulate exchange between European entrepreneurs, as well as providing **EU entrepreneurship training**.



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital infrastructure and accessibility for all

- Need for broadband expansion and free internet
- Further digitalization of governmental services
- Close the large gaps in accessibility between (1) rural vs. urban areas, and (2) age groups

Combat fake news and disinformation

- It is hard to balance free speech and ensuring true news, but it has to be done
- EU should combat the dark side of digitalization

Education for digital skills

- Living in a digitalized world requires skills to process information use digital devices, etc.
- Include these competences in education and training rather than assuming that citizens will learn them spontaneously

Data policy and cyber security

- Data is the new raw material of the 21st century thereby increasing the importance of access to data, data-technologies, data-infrastructure
 - Reduce dependence on non-EU data platforms and big tech companies

Digital transformation

Respondents argue that after the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be important to sustain the positive effects achieved via digitalisation while combating the flaws and dark side of the digital transformation of society. Concrete ideas about digital transformation can be grouped into four subthemes, which will be described in the next paragraphs.

Invest in digital infrastructure and accessibility for all

Respondents underscore the need for **broadband expansion** and **free internet**:

“Digital is more than converting a sheet of paper into a PDF. Digital is voting via app, a stable network in all public places as well as trains, night trains, etc.” (Respondents 1303)

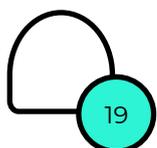
In an increasingly digitalized world, access to the internet is considered not only a basic need but first and foremost a means for social change (e.g. to strengthen democracy, to achieve awareness about climate change, to offer opportunities for participation). Young people also plead for the further **digitalization of governmental services**. In this context, some respondents draw attention to the need to reduce the **large gaps between the more urban and rural areas** and **differences between age groups**:

“There can only be a strong Europe in which equal opportunities prevail. It does not matter whether you live in the city or in the country – in the future, it must make no difference whether you work in your home office in the country or in your office in the city. In Europe, every household from Portugal to Bulgaria and from Malta to Sweden needs broadband internet access. This brings equal opportunities and strengthens rural areas, and prevents a brain drain and counteracts the rural exodus” (Respondents 84).

Combat fake news and disinformation

All too often, the internet and social media are used to spread **fake news and disinformation**, which in turn polarise society. Respondents are well-aware of some of the dangers and urge the EU to take action. The COVID-19 pandemic is perceived as an eye-opener in this context:

*“The pandemic has shown an issue that was already there. **It is hard to balance free speech and ensuring true news but it has to be done** gradually because fake news is doing more and more damage” (Respondent 538).*



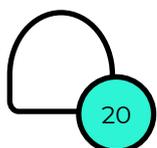
Invest in data policy and cybersecurity

Data is considered the new raw material of the 21st century, so access to **data and the necessary know-how, technologies and infrastructure to use data** are becoming increasingly important. Respondents demand *“the best possible framework conditions from the EU to be able to generate innovations and new business opportunities from data”* (Respondent 81) or that *“social media youth users and non-youth users are equally protected and informed”* (Respondent 108). Respondents in this context also warn that **we depend too much on non-EU data platforms**.

Education for digital skills

Combating fake news, increasing cyber security and further digitalising governmental services also requires **skills to process information, to use digital devices**, etc. Young people indicate that further investments should be made to **include these competencies in education**:

“Digitization changes how, when and where we learn and work; therefore, it requires new teaching structures so that digital teaching can work (e.g. asynchronous learning, shorter units – since it is very exhausting online)” (Respondent 1325).



SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Inclusion, tolerance and respect for diversity

- Europe's horizon = an inclusive space where empowered youth develop their future = a Europe where everybody matters
- More social cohesion and less polarization
 - Stimulate people to help each other

Equal opportunities for all

- Equal chances start with providing equal opportunities for personal growth for all
- Gender equality: talk about sexism, raise awareness concerning gender equality, more severe penalties for sex offenders, affirmative action
 - Ethnic inequality: integration is not a one-directional process
- More opportunities for language education (Europe-wide language platform)
- Invest in poverty reduction by lowering costs (for electricity, water, housing), support people who need it and raise minimum wages

Empowering minorities

- Fighting discrimination is not sufficient to create a level playing field.
- Check each policy proposal against an inclusion and diversity standard
- Investing in tolerance and inclusion will benefit all

Fight all forms of discrimination

- Discrimination is a threat for mental and physical violence!
- Protect all people against discrimination and pay specific attention to ethnic minorities, the Roma, LGBTQ+'s
 - Focus on all contexts and pay specific attention to discrimination on the labour market, housing market but also public administration

Social justice and equality

The theme of **social justice and equality** groups a wide range of ideas related to social (in)justice and (in)equality. Justice and equality are very general themes, and the respondents approach it also in that way. This means, for example, that a good number of young people simply mentioned the topic (e.g. *more equality!*) without specifying a very concrete idea about *how* to reach it. In the group of ideas that belong to this theme, we could distinguish four subthemes, which will be analysed in the next paragraphs.

Inclusion, tolerance and respect for diversity

A first subtheme articulates a clear view concerning what type of society Europe should strive for. **Europe's horizon should be “An inclusive space where empowered youth develop their future”** (Respondent 5). Words often used in this context are ‘mutual respect’ and ‘tolerance’. Respondents call for **more social cohesion**, longing for a place where everybody can feel at ease, in short, “A Europe where everybody matters”. This implies that Europe continues to fight discrimination and **polarization**, and promotes **helping each other**.

To fight against all forms of discrimination

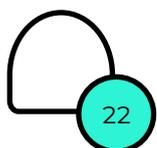
Many respondents argue that Europe should fight **all types of discrimination**. Respondents mention a range of specific groups that face discrimination in contemporary society such as ethnic minorities, the Roma, LGBTQ+ people, etc. The issues of discrimination that are mentioned relate to many spheres such as the labour market, the housing market, the opportunity to donate blood, but also public administration:

“Prepare the public sector for the integration of nonbinary and trans identities through widespread adoption of a third gender marker option in legal documents and trans specific measures for inclusion in regards to employment, education and health” (Respondent 145).

Moreover, especially in the context of LGBTQ+ and gender, issues of physical safety and violence are referred to.

Equal opportunities for all

Fighting discrimination is not sufficient. What is needed, according to young people, is a more equal society in Europe. Equality is, in this context, linked to receiving the **same opportunities for personal growth**. Besides a more general longing for more equality, specific groups are often mentioned.



- The first topic refers to **gender, gender identity and sexual orientation**. Respondents call for 'same wages' and 'equal pay'. Some others link gender inequality to differences in **education**:

"A better future Europe can't happen in my opinion without greater gender equality. This could be achieved by encouraging more women, from a young age, to pursue roles in leadership and careers in STEM. I strongly believe that this can be done by creating a more inclusive curriculum in education" (Respondent 1043).

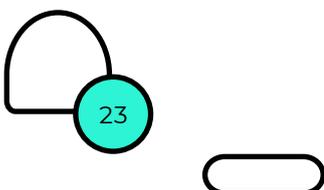
These respondents also urge Europe to **talk more often about sexism** and **raise awareness of gender equality**, which also implies raising awareness about the objectification and sexualisation of women in the media. In this context, respondents expect education to play a crucial role. Other respondents, however, are not convinced that only 'soft power' will suffice and support **more exacting penalties for sex offenders** and **affirmative action**.

- A second topic refers to **ethnic equality** and the integration of ethno-cultural minorities

"Disadvantaged and minority young people should be much more visible on every level, especially be represented in decision-making processes" (Respondent 1119)

Indeed, a subset of respondents argue that **the integration of immigrants should not be a one-directional process**: *"Migrants are invited to learn about their host societies and that is right. But in an increasingly global society, the dialogue must be two-sided and more must be done to ensure that host societies also learn about the culture of migrants"* (Respondent 523, Idea 2). Also in this context, education is considered a crucial institution to foster change. Specifically related to migrants, several respondents draw attention to the importance of **language education**. They argue that many migrants want to learn the local language but do not know how or cannot afford to take language courses. They believe that this issue can be solved relatively easily by developing a **Europe-wide language learning platform**.

- A third element refers to **poverty reduction**, including more concrete suggestions (e.g. lower electricity costs, water charge waiver, higher financial support for children, Europe-wide minimum wages, financial support for single parents, and a universal basic income).

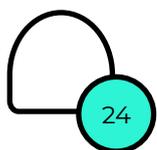


Empowering minorities

Fighting all types of discrimination is a necessary but not sufficient strategy to achieve an inclusive and fair society, our respondents argue. The latter will only be accomplished when societies really **invest in empowering minorities**.

*“Empowering the young. We are building the future that is to be ours and it follows that we ourselves know what society we want to live in and we deserve our voice to be heard. European youth structures need to be more promoted so that every young person can be an active part of society. Empowering young people leads to competencies and innovative solutions to problems that currently exist or are about to arise. Every young person has at least once felt that his rights have been violated at some stage, which reduces the motivation and active participation in taking civic ideas. Even the smallest settlements deserve access to European programs to ennoble their environment”
(Respondent 1615).*

The empowerment argument is part and parcel of a more general set of ideas referring to **investing in diversity**. First, some young people argue that tolerance and inclusion will only be achieved if we work on and invest in it. This requires a radical shift where **each policy proposal is assessed against an inclusion and diversity standard**. Some respondents hold that **investing in tolerance and inclusion will ultimately benefit all**. In such ideas, equity is clearly seen as a key to development and welfare for all members of society.



HEALTH

Improve health services for all

- Remove obstacles like expensive education, long waiting lists, etc. to improve accessibility of health services
- Combat differences in quality services between urban and rural areas in Europe
- Combat problems with accessibility of health services related to labour migration

Mental health

- Raise awareness about the importance of mental health increase the understanding of mental health among the public at large
- Mental health services should become more available, affordable and less stigmatized
- Mental health is not a stand-alone phenomenon. There is need for emotional education

Meaningful inclusion of young people with disabilities

- Provide more opportunities to participate in social life including the job market
- Continue to invest in the accessibility of infrastructure
- Adapt public information to people who suffer from a specific disability (e.g., people who are blind, deaf, etc.)

Sexual health, abortion and women's health

- Provide more and better sexual education and education about contraception
- Feminine hygiene products must be freely available (or at least cheaper)
- Guarantee access to a voluntary interruption of pregnancy in a free, safe, and private manner

Addiction

- Develop effective strategies against online gaming addiction, smoking, and drug and alcohol abuse
- Provide more accessible and affordable care for people who suffer from an addiction

Health

The next theme concerns health (services). Within this theme, five subthemes could be distinguished and are illustrated in the table below.

Improve health services for all

This subtheme groups a range of specific proposals all pointing to current issues that hinder the accessibility of health services such as expensive medication, long waiting lists and **differences in the quality of health services between urban and rural areas in Europe**. Other respondents refer to problems in **access to health care services due to labour migration** whereby some people have to wait long before they are eligible for affordable health care service in the country where they work:

“People need to be able to get health care coverage even though they are either unemployed or cannot pay for their treatment. There should be a fund that serves as a green card for people to qualify and get help when they need to, even if they cannot cover it financially” (Respondent 399). Respondents urge the EU “to prioritize EU funding, with health and critical infrastructure taking precedence over tourism and culture, for example” (Respondent 1093).

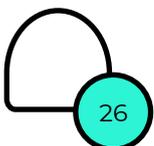
Mental health

By far, most ideas concerning health refer to the importance of mental health. In general, respondents indicated that **people should be made more aware of the importance of mental health**. People continue to see physical health as more important than mental health, and this should change according to the youth. Respondents also stress that not only is access a matter of the simple **(1) availability** and **(2) affordability** of mental health services, but also they will only be reached when **(3) the stigma on seeking mental health is removed**:

“in the near future, way more young people [should] have access, and not be shamed searching for specialists about mental health care” (Respondent 31).



The latter will only be accomplished if **the public’s understanding of mental health increases**, and schools are an important institution to enhance this understanding and awareness:



Sexual health, abortion and women's health

Respondents call for **more and better sexuality education and education about contraception** in schools. Other respondents draw attention to important elements pertaining to reproductive health, such as better access to menstrual products and contraception. Finally, respondents stress the importance of **abortion rights and the associated health care**:

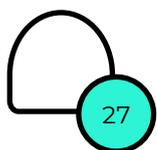
"Guarantee access to a voluntary interruption of pregnancy in a free, safe and private manner" (Respondent 2772).

Meaningful inclusion of young people with disabilities

Respondents ask for more opportunities for meaningful participation of people with disabilities in social life, including the job market. Respondents refer in this context also to the **accessibility of infrastructure** (buildings, streets, parkings, etc.) and the need to **adapt public information** to people who suffer from a specific disability (e.g. people who are blind, deaf).

Addiction

Respondents draw attention to the need to develop more **effective strategies against online gaming addiction, smoking, and drug and alcohol abuse**. Young people ask for more campaigns aimed at raising awareness about these addictions in education and plea for providing **more accessible and affordable care** for addicts. Some youth also plead for the legalisation of cannabis.



EDUCATION

Investing in education

- Towards high-quality, affordable, accessible, inclusive education for all!
- Education should be adapted for societal transformations and the changing world
 - Invest in good teachers
- Combat regional differences in the quality/affordability of education in Europe

Broadening the scope of education

- Towards topics like business education, citizenship, sex education, religious education, knowledge that one uses in daily life
- Closer connection between sports and education
- Invest in education about culture: schools are a means to broader people's horizon

Europe, Europeanization and education

- Make the educational systems in Europe more compatible to each other so that it becomes easier to follow education in different countries
- European universities, European education voucher
- Further expand Erasmus+ in terms of resources, scope, target group, and regions that participate
 - More opportunities for language learning

Transition from education to labour market

- Prepare young people better for entering the labour market
 - Invest in the cultivation of transversal skills which are necessary to be successful in professional life
 - More coaching and guidance for those who need it

Recognition for non-EU educational degrees

- Better recognition of non-EU educational credentials
 - Develop trajectories that acknowledge skills
 - Provide tailor-made trajectories that lead to the accreditation of people's knowledge and skills

Education

Education is an important topic for young people. Young people display a strong belief in education as an engine for societal transformation so that in most of the other themes education is often referred to as the way to bring actual change. Thus, education is a real transversal theme. If we distinguish education here as a separate theme, we do so in light of the proposals that directly refer to the more general organisation of education. Five subthemes could be distinguished and are analysed below.

Investing in education

To begin with, some young people call for further investments in (1) **high-quality**, (2) **affordable**, and (4) **accessible education** (5) **for all**. Young people stress that education is a basic right and that some young people still do not receive the education that they deserve. Respondents also argue that education should be **adapted to societal transformations** and become more interesting and motivating for young people. Such a mission will never be accomplished if we do not continue to invest in **good teachers**. First, some respondents refer to the specific situation in their country. They complain about the poor quality of education in some schools, the financial difficulties in covering the costs of education, etc. Other respondents draw attention to **the differences between European countries** and stress that

“Education in European countries should have the same price. Students who leave their countries to study abroad should have rights to receive supplements and subsidies without the need to work night shifts for example and be scared if they are going to pass because they are overworked in order to manage living and studying abroad for a better future.” (Respondent 149)

Respondents also plead for **more inclusive education**, offering additional help for students who need it and the broader availability of tutoring.

Broadening the scope of education

In the content of education, some respondents also argue that the **scope of education should be broadened** by paying more attention to topics such as business education, citizenship, sex education, religious education and knowledge that one can use in daily life. Education should do more than simply prepare young people for entrance into the labour market. On one hand, respondents hold that in regular education, more opportunities should be included for sport and arts. Precisely because all young people follow education, schools are an excellent means to broaden young people's horizons and teach them how to live a healthy life.



On the other hand, some respondents believe that education should not be confined to schools. Investing in sports facilities, supporting young people's creativity, etc. are seen as an excellent way to offer young people, and in particular, those who struggle in school life, a broad and lifelong education.

Europe, Europeanization and education

Young people also perceive a close connection between Europe, Europeanization and education. They argue that more effort should be invested in **making the different educational systems in Europe compatible** so that it becomes easier for young people to receive education in another country. Some respondents plead for **European universities**; others call for a **European education voucher** that would enable young people to study abroad. A related element is that young people strongly favour a **further expansion of the Erasmus+ project** in terms of increasing (1) the general awareness of the existence of this program among citizens, (2) the resources that are provided to Erasmus+, (3) the target group (e.g. offer young entrepreneurs possibilities for learning exchange programs) and (4) the regions that participate in the program. People clearly associate the exchange program Erasmus+ also with community building and the reinforcement of a European identity. A third element in this context is that Europe should invest in **more opportunities for language learning**. Respondents suggest that a platform could be developed to support (young) people learning different European languages.

Recognition for non-EU educational degrees

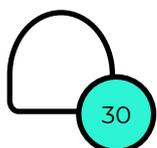
A fourth subtheme relates to the accreditation of foreign diplomas and, more specifically, a **better recognition for non-EU educational degrees**:

“Recognise university qualifications from 3rd world countries in the European qualifications framework to make it easier for asylum seekers to find employment” (Respondent 1420).

Respondents suggest in this context that more energy should be invested in **developing trajectories that acknowledge skills** and guarantee that people acquire access to **tailor-made trajectories that accredit their knowledge and skills**.

Transition from education to the labour market

On one hand, young people argue that they should be **better trained in education to function in a labour context** and that **transversal skills** should occupy a more central place in education. On the other hand, they contend that not everybody receives the same opportunities when they start working; some make wrong career choices or simply do not know exactly what they want in their professional life. **More guidance and coaching** with finding a good and full-filling job is therefore considered necessary.



EU IN THE WORLD

EU less dependent on other regions

- COVID-19 pandemic as an eye-opener
- Reduce Europe's economic dependence on other regions
- Reduce Europe dependence on non-European Big Tech companies

EU show moral leadership at the international science

- Stop use double standards towards specific countries
- React strongly against dictatorships and countries that use violence to suppress minorities
 - Recognize Europe's colonial past
 - Invest more in developmental aid

A European army

- An effective foreign policy and showing moral leadership requires an army.
- A European army would provide young people from countries that don't have an army an opportunity for military training

Europe's borders and refugees

- Europe should effectively control its borders with respect for Human Rights
- The strongest European countries should take their responsibility rather than leaving the burden of asylum seekers for the country where they arrive
 - Invest in refugees and newcomers

EU in the world

The theme 'EU in the world' comprises all ideas that relate to the EU foreign policy. It groups ideas from respondents who argue that the EU should **act with a unified voice on the international scene**: "Giving more competences to Europe to act on global problems that countries alone cannot fight (or don't want to)" (Respondent 460). Four specific subthemes, as described below, could be distinguished.

Europe should be less dependent on other regions

Respondents refer to the COVID-19 pandemic as an eye-opener:

"The safeguarding, diversification and resilience of international value chains, as learning from the COVID crisis, will be a future task for the EU. We must reduce the EU's dependence on third countries, especially but not only in the health sector"
(Respondent 80).

Europe should display moral leadership at the international scene

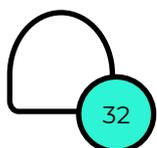
Respondents complain about the use of double standards towards specific countries, the absence of a **strong reaction** against some dictators and/or countries that use violence to oppress minorities in their country. Similarly, ideas in this subtheme argue that the EU should **recognize its colonial past**. All this should be coupled **with more developmental aid** to improve living conditions in the least well-off countries, with effective monitoring.

The borders of Europe and refugees

Respondents argue that Europe should **respect human rights while effectively controlling and protecting its borders**. They also stress that the **strongest countries in Europe should share responsibility** and not leave the burden of asylum seekers for the country where they arrive first.

A European army

Some respondents argue that **an effective foreign policy and/or moral leadership requires an army**. Moreover, some respondents claim that **young people from countries that have no army would receive an opportunity for military training** in such an EU army.



EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Strengthen the voice of youth

- Youth politics rather than politics of youth
- Youth-based check for all new EU policies
- Empowerment of youth entails more than providing opportunities to participate
 - Lowering the voting age to 16

Strengthen democracy itself

- Democracy should be innovated and strengthened on a continuous basis
 - More direct democracy
- More participatory politics and support for grassroots politics
- Specific proposals such as participatory budgeting, boycott lobbying, limit party discipline
- European platform to share ideas and proposals

Strengthen European identity

- Need to 'connectedness', feelings of belonging among European citizens
- A cohesive Europe does not grow spontaneously. It should be created and cultivated
- More contact opportunities for young people from different European countries
- Create a Europe wide holiday, European TV, ...
- A compulsory subject on Europe in education

A more integrated Europe

- More collaboration and a politically more integrated Europe
- Unanimity principle as a hurdle, need for mechanisms to hold countries accountable
 - Don't turn a blind eye to existing regional differences in Europe
- Focus more on the differences between urban vs. rural Europe

More sovereignty for European countries

- Preference for a more loose connection between member states
- Respect for sovereignty of European countries

Make realisations of EU more visible

- Many people are unaware of the realisations of the EU, this provides ample opportunities for misinformation and negative campaigning
- Fund trips to the European parliament to observe the structure of the EU, the work performed by members of the European Parliament and have a dialogue with them

European Democracy

European democracy is one of the most salient themes in the ideas of young people. This is of course not completely surprising given the context in which the ideas were gathered (i.e. the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe). Young people care about democracy and visualise many ways in which its working can be improved. The topic of European democracy entails six subthemes, as it can be seen in the table below.

Strengthen democracy itself

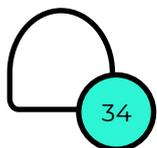
First, there is a clear wish **to strengthen the working of the democratic process itself**. Young people plead for more civic participation, for raising awareness among people that they have a voice and for providing more opportunities for them to get involved in politics and bring them closer to the (democratic) institutions. In a first more general argument, respondents focus on the goal we should strive for “... *giving the power back to the people and following democracy back to its roots by involving the citizens in every decision. Asking everybody to participate will increase the population’s engagement in politics – no one has to blindly trust politicians to make the right choice for them. This way, fast decisions could be made, that truly represent the citizens’ opinion*” (Respondent 18). Sometimes these arguments result in a plea for **more direct democracy**:

“Involve citizen groups (environmental campaigners, minority groups, etc) more directly in decision-making rather than as a mere act of tokenism to make it look like something is being done”
(Respondent 977).

In general, respondents strongly favour **more participatory politics and supporting grassroots politics. More specific ideas** are also presented concerning *how* (European) democracy can be strengthened: participatory budgeting at every administrative level, boycotting, support for grassroots organisations, support for public participation networks, limitation of party discipline in European political institutions, better information channels for citizens, limitation of political careers to 10 years, and the generalisation of a European platform on which European citizens can post their ideas. Respondents who make these concrete proposals basically argue that **democracy should be innovated and strengthened continuously**.

Strengthen the voice of youth in EU politics and the institutions

Young people express in strong terms that their voice should be heard because **“Change starts with us”** (Respondent 1102). One clear frustration that underpins many young people’s ideas in this context concerns the feeling that their voice often remains unheard.



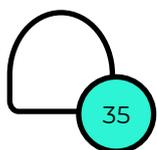
They plead for a broader involvement of youth in (European) politics. **Rather than a 'politics of youth'** (i.e. youth as a separate topic), respondents **plea for a 'youth politics'**, that is, a politics that starts from the idea that young people *are* the future of Europe and that all measures and policies implemented by European institutions will affect young people the most:

"The great challenges we face as humanity, such as the climate crisis, the unequal distribution of resources, etc. are all problems that we young people will have to deal with. Today's decisions influence our tomorrow and our future, so shouldn't we also have a say?" .

Young people do not only demand a seat at the policy table but also stress that they want to get truly involved in politics:

"The times when politicians only get in touch with young people through symbolic meetings and photos are over. We have proven that we are interested in shaping Europe together and that we want to and are able to get actively involved" (Respondent 66).

Another idea that in general terms is highly prevalent among young people, is that *"it should be publicly visible which recommendations for action have been implemented and which have not"* (Respondent 94). Young people plead for **a youth-based review for all new EU policy proposals** and want to hold politicians and policymakers (politically) accountable for what they have (not) done with their suggestions and proposals. Second, although the respondents strongly believe in young people's capacity to do politics, they also acknowledge that **the simple opportunity to participate in politics is not sufficient**. What really matters is **empowerment**. This starts with improving *"political awareness of the youth"*, promoting a *"European identity and citizenship in the school curriculum"* (Respondent 47), and providing information in an accessible way. Young people favour organising more international meetings with teenagers around the EU in the European Parliament to discuss their problems and the funding of *"a European agency for political education"* (Respondent 2621). Moreover, young people also indicate that *"structures should be made more accessible and youth-friendly, making processes more tangible [...]"* (Respondent 3244) and in the context of better tracking what has happened with their policy proposals, they suggest appointing an expert group that can assist youth representatives. Young people not only plead for soft power but also for structural reforms that *guarantee* that the voice of youth is heard. Some respondents plead in that context for specific ideas such as **lowering the voting age to 16** or a **transnational voting list for European elections**.



Making the achievements of the EU more visible to citizens

Respondents were well-aware that not all citizens in Europe support the EU. One reason for this, according to the respondents, is that **many people are unaware of the achievements of the EU**. This provides space for **misinformation** and **negative campaigning**:

“In many discussions, Europe is often seen as a scapegoat – the bureaucrats in Brussels. They decide over us. But why is that? Ignorance and misinformation are often the root of all evil. That is precisely why it is important to educate but not to lecture. Political education must be anchored earlier in the curriculum because that is the only way to ensure that misinformation is countered with knowledge” (Respondent 64).

Therefore, young people argue that **European institutions should better communicate with citizens**. Respondents plead for **funded trips to the European Parliament** to observe the structure of the EU and the work performed by members of the European Parliament and have a dialogue with them.

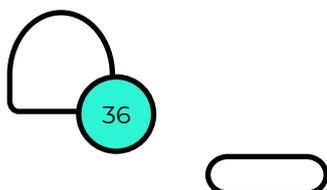
Strengthen European identity

Thinking about European democracy is thinking about Europe and Europeanisation. In that context, respondents argue that Europe should invest in what they refer to as ‘connectedness’. It groups a range of ideas that are all aimed at fostering better knowledge of people who live in different European countries, in short, **cultivating a stronger European community and feelings of belonging among European citizens**. Ideas include among other things providing **more contact opportunities for young people from different European countries**, creating more (digital) spaces for debate on European affairs, making Europe Day an actual **Europe-wide holiday**, creating a European passport, or creating a European TV with news and stories from people all around Europe. A central idea that underpins all these suggestions is that a stronger and more cohesive Europe is something that should be *created* and *maintained* rather than be seen as something that grows spontaneously. Respondents see in this context an important task for education:

“Children from a young age should study European history and culture, to allow them to discover the richness and diversity of our continent” (Respondent 538).



They plead for **a compulsory subject on the EU in education** so that people grasp the European idea from a young age.



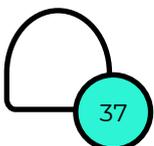
A more integrated Europe

First, some respondents clearly plead for **a more integrated EU** through which Europe receives more power. Respondents who support that idea plead for a more federal Europe even if this implies that countries lose some of their sovereignty. Especially the **unanimity principle** seems to be perceived as a hurdle that strongly limits the effectiveness of European politics. Some articulations of this idea argue that Europe should also **invest more in accountability mechanisms** for EU states and act against states that do not comply with European decisions and legislation.

There is, however, also a second variant of this idea that could best be summarized as a plea for a “*one-speed Europe*” (Respondent 1659). In this version, respondents draw attention to **existing regional differences and stress the need to overcome these**. They argue for a stronger unity of Western and Eastern Europe and Northern and Southern Europe and urge Europe to focus more on the differences between more urban versus rural Europe.

More sovereignty for the European countries

Although most ideas in this context argue for a stronger and more effective integration, some prefer **a much looser connection between the member states** and are unwilling to transmit any sovereignty of the countries to the EU.



VALUES AND RIGHTS, RULE OF LAW, SECURITY

Respect for European values

- A strong Europe should be a community based on a series of values, cultivate these values and protect them against violations (from member states)
 - Separation of church and state
 - Respect for the rule of law
 - Freedom of speech
 - Solidarity

Safety and bullying

- (Online) bullying remains all too often under the radar
- Combatting violence and bullying by both soft (e.g. awareness teams in schools) and hard (sanctioning) power

Prohibition of hate speech

- Better European hate speech legislation to combat hate speech that serves political purposes

Values and rights, rule of law, and security

Several ideas stress that Europe is more than an (economic) collaboration between a set of countries. **A strong Europe should be based on a series of values and cultivate and protect them by taking strong action when they are violated.** That is the core message of the ideas that we group under the theme 'Values and rights, rule of law, and security'. We distinguish three subthemes, illustrated below.

Respect for European values

Three sets of concrete values are regularly mentioned. The first is the **separation of church and state**. The second concerns the **rule of law**. The third, more often mentioned than the first two, concerns **freedom of speech**:

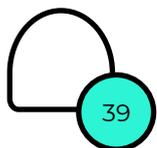
"Democracy lives through the interaction of diverse viewpoints. That's why space for the exchange of opinions and ideas is so relevant" (Respondent 61).

Respect for these values may not arise spontaneously and should therefore be cultivated and thus taught in schools. Fourth, **solidarity** was mentioned as an important but often lacking value. The respondents urged Europeans to be more generous to each other and called for a social Europe with strong connections where people help and care for each other.

In many cases, the call for more attention to European values seems to be grounded in the perception that **(some of) these values are at risk**: "These respondents urge Europe to **better defend its values not only regarding threats from outside the Union but also against violations from member states**. Respondents call for more accountability measures regarding countries and even "*Suspend countries membership if they practice policy that is against EU Values*" (Respondent 1664).

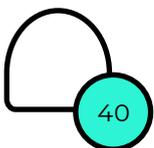
Safety and bullying

Although some respondents refer in this context to issues of physical safety (e.g. fewer guns, better protection against terrorism) and the trustworthiness of the police, most ideas focus on bullying. Especially **online bullying and hate speech are perceived as problems that often stay under the radar or whose impact remains underestimated**. Again, we see that concrete ideas cover both soft – e.g. "*supporting victims of bullying by having awareness teams in schools*" (Respondent 1233) – and hard power – "*To effectively sanction people who spread hate news*" (Respondent 824).



Prohibition of hate speech

The ideas distinguished here as a separate category share one common element: they all focus on planned and organised hate speech that serves political purposes. Respondents refer to specific conflicts in Europe (i.e. The Balkans) or groups (The Roma). To stop this hate speech, respondents call for **better European hate speech legislation**.



OTHER IDEAS

Youth spaces

- Provide places where young people can be themselves and express freely
- Youth spaces are related to safety and care
- Youth spaces are related to creativity and opportunities for social interaction among youth
- Youth spaces are related to political engagement and empowerment

Affordable housing and homelessness

- Help young people in finding a first home so that they can move out of the family home and become independent
- Tackle the problem of homelessness by building more social houses, rent caps, homeless shelters, etc.

Rest category

- highly specific proposals mentioned by only one or very few respondents, which could not be grouped in the other themes

Other ideas

The ideas grouped under this category are the following:

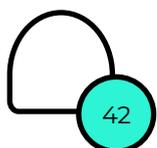
Youth spaces

Young people are well-aware that during youth they learn, experiment and develop themselves. It is a phase of life surrounded by strong emotions and uncertainty. Many young people are provided space to develop in their families and schools, but this is not always the case. Moreover, young people also want a place where they can experience some independence. Therefore, one idea that was frequently mentioned and which did not fit into the nine themes of the European Commission referred to **'youth spaces'**: *"Having opportunities for the young people to interact with each other and to be able to make direct changes to their environment in sync with their vision for a better future and more importantly a peaceful future"* (Respondent 722).

Young people called for *"a space for young people in every town"* (Respondent 39) and suggested that empty buildings can be re-used for this purpose. Different elements are important here. First, it refers to a place where the youth can meet and interact. It should be **a place where they can be themselves and express themselves freely**. Second, for some young people, this call for more youth spaces is also related to issues of **safety and care**: *"to have more youth spaces in Eastern Europe, and some of them to be open 24/7 if needed"* (Respondent 27) or *"a place where they can go when they feel discriminated"* (Respondent 1823). For others, however, youth spaces are more linked to issues of **creativity** *"a space for creating positive change through the medium of arts (dance, drama, spoken word)"* (Respondent 40). Still others link youth spaces to **political engagement and empowerment**: *"We need to raise the awareness of privilege that is and what needs to be done to improve that. I, therefore, find it important to stand up for our values. Democracy lives on the participation of diverse viewpoints. That's why space for the exchange of opinions and ideas is so relevant"* (Respondent 61).

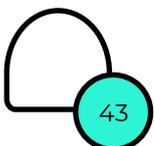
So although young people have clearly different motivations for seeking more investments in youth spaces, there is a great demand for **further investments in developing public youth spaces**. However, respondents clearly differ in their notion of youth spaces.

An idea that is directly related to the previous one refers to the need to **provide more opportunities for young people to interact and share ideas**. Some respondents do not link this to a specific 'space'. These respondents plead for *"creat[ing] a network of young people to share ideas and project"* (Respondent 903) and see this as a European endeavour. The latter also links this idea to ideas about (European) democracy and the involvement of young people in it.



Affordable housing and reduction of homelessness (1,62%)

For some young people, housing is really an issue. We find two versions of the argument. On one hand, they draw attention to the difficulties (young) people face when finding their (first) home and **having the opportunity to move out of the family home and be independent**. Therefore, they plea for "*more affordable housing space for young people*" (Respondent 496). On the other hand, youngsters are concerned about the more general **problem of homelessness**. Regarding both phenomena, they argue for concrete measures ranging such as building more social houses, rent caps and homeless shelters and making rent prices fairer.





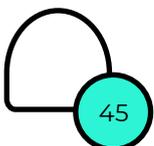
Conclusion

In this report, we presented the analysis of the ideas that were submitted between June and November 2021 by young people in the context of the *25 Percent Project*. We conclude this report by highlighting several *transversal elements*. Indeed, looking at the 4021 (3843 effectively analysed) ideas that shaped this report, young people tell a fairly clear and coherent story based on a number of elements that linger throughout ideas belonging to different themes.

- First, **Europe should become a real Union, able to take bolder action and act as a whole**. Young people have high expectations regarding Europe, and they demand European decision-makers to address a wide range of challenges. Even if the European Union cannot tackle these problems directly, it should coordinate with and support the member states and develop strategies that encourage countries to adopt specific policies. There is overwhelming support for stronger integration of the European Union, more effective leadership, more collaboration between countries and stronger social cohesion between European citizens. In this regard, barriers that hinder reaching this goal should be removed. This is especially important because action at the European level is needed to overcome the many crises that Europe is facing.

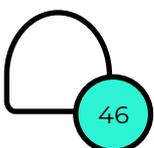
“The European Union has already faced many challenges. Let’s look at the financial crisis, the refugee crisis or the current Corona crisis. These crises were and are different, but they have taught us the same thing: a European Union must decide to solve the major challenges together and as one” (Respondent 83).

- Second, politicians should **dream big, focus on the long term and perceive the obstacles along the way as a challenge rather than dead-end streets**. Indeed, youth politics (rather than politics of youth) is closely related to taking a long(er) time horizon in politics. Young people are the future of Europe, and all measures and policies taken today will affect them the most; thus, taking political decisions while keeping young people in mind means taking more sustainable but also bolder decisions.
- Third, **a stronger Europe is one where inequalities are eliminated**. Every young person, no matter where they were born in Europe, should get the same opportunities regarding education, jobs and self-development. In particular, equality and diversity should be mainstreamed in every decision: a policy that reinforces inequalities and does not benefit everyone equally is a policy destined to fail. This is especially important in a European dimension; accordingly, differences in the opportunities and treatment of citizens in different member states should be eliminated.



- Fourth, **greater importance should be given to education since that is the real engine for social change.** In the course of our consultation, young people have identified many challenges that Europe is facing today: climate change, pollution, over-consumption, inequality, discrimination, fake news and disinformation, hate speech and bullying, and much more. In this regard, education can play a crucial role in effectively addressing all these problems. At the same time, extensive dialogue and intensive exchange between citizens of different countries are also important factors to overcome these challenges. Therefore, Europe should better connect the different educational systems, encourage people to study abroad and provide funding and information to all young people to enable them to participate in exchange programmes.
- Fifth, **democracy is the backbone of our societies and should be strengthened.** Although in the past decade(s) more opportunities for (youth) participation have been created, more feedback is needed concerning what has actually been done with the voices and ideas of citizens. Listening to young people is one step, and taking them seriously is quite another step. Therefore, when young people participate in democratic exercises such as the EU Youth Dialogue or the Conference on the Future of Europe, they expect policymakers to be accountable regarding how their ideas have been used. This doesn't mean that all their suggestions need to be adopted; however, a true dialogue should go both ways.

The agenda that young people propose for the future of Europe is ambitious, but they are ready, willing, and able to take responsibility because “*change starts with us*”.





Appendix

Table 1: Country of residence (N: 3439)

COUNTRY	N	% (OF THE VALID ANSWERS)
Albania	1	0,05%
Austria	783	36,86%
Belgium	230	10,83%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4	0,19%
Bulgaria	232	10,92%
Croatia	10	0,47%
Cyprus	58	2,73%
Czechia	8	0,38%
Denmark	1	0,05%
Estonia	1	0,05%
Finland	10	0,47%
France	35	1,65%
Germany	43	2,02%
Greece	24	1,13%
Hungary	15	0,71%
Ireland	262	12,34%
Italy	37	1,74%
Kosovo	1	0,05%
Latvia	15	0,71%
Lithuania	20	0,94%
Luxembourg	2	0,09%
Malta	4	0,19%
Montenegro	1	0,05%
Netherlands	24	1,13%
Poland	17	0,80%
Portugal	19	0,89%
Republic of North Macedonia	5	0,24%
Romania	28	1,32%
Serbia	3	0,14%
Slovakia	2	0,09%
Slovenia	3	0,14%
Spain	206	9,70%
Sweden	5	0,24%
Turkey	15	0,71%
Total valid	212	
	4	
Missing	130	
	5	
I'd prefer not to share this information	10	
Total	343	
	9	

Table 2: Sociodemographics of the respondents (N: 3439)

GENDER			AGE		
	N	%		N	%
Boy/man	416	41,2%	15 or younger	98	5,5%
Girl/Woman	575	56,9%	16-1	497	28,0%
Non binary / Other	19	1,9%	19-25	913	51,5%
Total	101				
I'd prefer not to share this information	0	100%	26 or older	264	14,9%
	52			177	100,0%
Missing	237		Total	2	
	7			166	
Total	343		Missing	7	
	9			343	
			Total	9	
			Mean age	21,7	
			Median age	22,0	

EMPLOYMENT STATUS			HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
Student	841	67,4%	Primary education	190	18,8%
Working	309	24,8%	Secondary Education	343	33,9%
Not in work or education	98	7,9%	Higher (tertiary) education	478	47,3%
Total	124	100,0%		101	100%
I'd prefer not to share this information	8		Total	1	
	103		I'd prefer not to share this information	121	
Missing	208			230	
	8		Missing	7	
Total	343			343	
	9		Total	9	

INCOME		
0: Very Difficult	23	2,5%
1	112	12,3%
2	114	12,6%
3	297	32,7%
4	216	23,8%
5: Very easy	145	16,0%
Total	907	100,0%
	253	
Missing	2	
	343	
Total	9	

Table 3: Saliency of different themes (N: 4021)

COUNTRY	% ^a	SUBTHEME	%
CLIMATE CHANGE/SUSTAINABILITY	16,91	Sustainability: general	5,22
		Sustainability as political principle	1,74
		Industry and 'big companies'	0,53
		Waste management, recycling and banning of plastics	2,06
		More green and a better conservation of nature	1,82
		Ecological education and raising awareness about sustainability	0,90
		Food production	1,74
		Energy and transport	2,41
		Green fiscality	0,45
HEALTH	5,99	Improve health services for all	1,09
		Mental health	2,84
		Sexual health, abortion and women's health	0,62
		Meaningful inclusion of young people with disabilities	0,85
		Addiction	0,60
A STRONG ECONOMY - JOBS	11,09	A strong economy based on labour market migration and technological innovation	2,81
		Job security and workable jobs	1,34
		Actions directed at providing job opportunities for young people	1,27
		Transparency, fiscalization and combatting corruption	1,89
		Better (public) transport	3,28
		Stimulating entrepreneurship	0,50
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY	17,04	Inclusion, tolerance and respect for diversity	3,21
		To fight against all forms of discrimination	2,14
		Equal opportunities for all	11,51
		Empowering minorities	0,75
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION	3,78	Invest in digital infrastructure and accessibility for all	1,99
		Combat fake news and disinformation	0,45
		Invest in data policy and cybersecurity	0,40
		Education for digital skills	0,95
VALUES AND RIGHTS, RULE OF LAW, SECURITY	3,41	Respect for European values	2,01
		Safety and bullying	0,85
		Prohibition of hate speech	0,55
EDUCATION	10,45	Investing in education	3,48
		Broadening the scope of education	2,24
		Europe, Europeanization and education	4,10
		Recognition for non-EU educational degrees	0,27
		Transition from education to the labour market	0,35
EU IN THE WORLD	3,33	Europe should be less dependent on other regions	0,42
		Europe should show moral leadership at the international scene	0,92
		The borders of Europe and refugees	1,59
		A European army	0,40
EUROPEAN) DEMOCRACY	13,68	Strengthen democracy itself	3,06
		Strengthen the voice of youth in EU politics and the institutions	4,82
		Making the realisations of the EU more visible to citizens	0,99
		Strengthen European Identity	2,35
		A more integrated Europe	2,14
		More sovereignty for European countries	0,35
OTHER IDEAS	9,90	Other: not further classified	7,44
		Youth spaces	0,85
		Affordable housing and reduction of homelessness	1,62
Not to be analysed	4,43		4,43

^a Percentages do not sum up to exactly 100% due to rounding errors.