

DEBATING EUROPE

What do young Germans want from Europe?

Main findings

YOUNG GERMANS DEMAND GREATER ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND JUSTICE FROM EUROPE

Germany holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at a critical moment for the 27-member bloc. Decisions taken now, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn, will affect the lives of millions of Europeans, not least young people – who are often among the hardest-hit in any recession. So, what do young Germans want their government to prioritise during Germany's Presidency?

In order to find an answer, the online platform Debating Europe held a series of online focus groups with 100 young Germans about the issues most important to them. We found an overwhelming desire among focus group participants for "More Europe", as well as high levels of dissatisfaction with the handling of environmental issues, policies towards refugees, and inequality in society. The findings from our focus groups were compiled into a report entitled "What do young Germans want from Europe?", which was distributed to Member of the European Parliament and members of the German Bundestag.

Their key findings of the report are as follows:

1. **Combating climate change.** Young Germans are calling on politicians to take climate change seriously and to take the measures necessary to mitigate the consequences of climate change. They welcome the approach of the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen when it comes to the fight against climate change, but nevertheless have some scepticism. They worry that measures against climate change may be weakened in the face of demands for economic recovery. Instead, they would like to see measures to combat climate change stepped up.
2. **Refugee policy based on humanity and European values.** The inability of the EU to develop a common asylum and refugee policy angers Young Germans. They expect more humanity and readiness to help in dealing with the issue, in accordance with European values.
3. **Growth, but not at all costs.** Young Germans do not want economic growth at any price. They would like to see a rethink of the way we create and assign value, and for sustainable economic activity in harmony with environmental protection.
4. **Make the EU more democratic and strengthen the role of the European Parliament.** The reputation of the EU among Young Germans suffers from the fact that they perceive its structures as too undemocratic and lacking in transparency. This can be remedied by a stronger role for the European Parliament, observance of the "Spitzenkandidaten" principle in future European elections, and better public communication by European institutions.
5. **Accepting Germany's special responsibility for Europe.** Because of its history and economic weight, the Federal Republic of Germany has a special responsibility for the success of the European project. Young Germans expect the German government to play a strong pro-European role, encouraging other EU countries to follow it on the road to deeper integration.
6. **EU as a global pioneer for fair international cooperation.** Young Germans expect the EU to play a strong role in the fight for a fair international order. The EU Commission should understand and fulfil its geopolitical ambitions in this regard.

7. **Show greater solidarity.** Too often the EU appears divided. Young Germans would like to see a united Europe, whose member states show solidarity with one another and with the needy of the world.
8. **Encourage cross-border travel.** Young Germans view the ease of travelling and settling within the European Union one of the best things about EU membership. Programmes that encourage mobility should be expanded.
9. **The EU must improve its image.** Young Germans feel that the EU does not adequately communicate the advantages of membership. The project has to be explained and defended against critics again and again.
10. **Restore credibility through honest politics.** Young Germans think politics is too slick and professional: they get the sense that politicians are disconnected from everyday concerns. This credibility gap should be urgently addressed.

Debating Europe's focus groups provide a valuable insight into how young Germans see Europe.

Debating Europe is an initiative of the think tank Friends of Europe. The German edition of the platform (www.debatingeurope.eu/de) launched in 2017, has brought together over 330,000 citizens, and over 23,000 followers on Facebook and Twitter.