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W

TASK FORCE

The Donald C. Hellmann Task Force Program

Making European Citizens: Challenges to
Solidarity Among EU Member States

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MAKING EUROPEAN CITIZENS: CHALLENGES TO SOLIDARITY AMONG EU MEMBER STATES

Evaluator

Conny Reuter

Director of the Progressive Alliance & Former Secretary-General of the EU NGO network SOLIDAR

Faculty Advisor

Sabine Lang

Director of Center for West European Studies Program

Coordinators

Addie Perkins

Lexi Kinzer

Editors

Lexi Kinzer

Addie Perkins

Report Cover

Erik Levi Stone

Authors

Madison Rose Keiran

Lexi Kinzer

Esmé Lafi

Mahilet Mesfin

Olivia Nicolas

Juliet Rose Romano-Olsen

Addie Perkins

Evple Peng

Tommy Shi

Erik Levi Stone

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CEEC** — Central-Eastern European Countries
- EESC** — European Economic and Social Community
- ECB** — European Central Bank
- ECDC** — European Center for Disease Prevention and Control
- ECI** — Europeans Citizen Initiative
- EDPB** — European Data Protection Board
- ex-ENF** — Identity and Democracy
- ERASMUS** — European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
- EP** — European Parliament
- ERDF**—European Regional and Development Fund
- ESF**— European Social Fund Plus
- EU** — European Union/Brussels
- GDP** — Gross Domestic Product
- GDPR** — General Data Protection Regulation
- HEIs**—Higher Education Institutions
- ICT** — Information and Communication Technology
- ISM**— International Student Mobility
- NPI** — Non-pharmaceutical intervention
- PPE**— Personal Protective Equipment
- SME** — Small and Medium Enterprises
- TFEU** — Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
- UBI** — Unconditional Basic Income
- WHO** — World Health Organization
- HEI** — Higher Education Institutions
- MEP** — Member of European Parliament

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INTRODUCTION

Solidarity and the EU

Solidarity has been central to European integration since the signing of the Rome Treaty following World War II. Robert Schuman, a former French prime minister and one of the architects of the European Union (EU), stated in 1950 that Europe would be “built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity.”¹ With the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, it formally became a fundamental value of the EU as the twelve signatory states agreed “to deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their tradition.”² Fifteen years later, in 2007, the Treaty of Lisbon again stated the importance of solidarity in its General Provisions, emphasizing that the European Union “shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States.”³ The EU continues to pursue solidarity, pertaining to areas such as social protections and security, employment and industrial relations, as well as civil and political rights. In the EU framework, solidarity is recognized as a principal between Member States based on “sharing both the advantages, i.e., prosperity, and the burdens equally and justly.”⁴

As EU citizens have come to increasingly value European integration and cross-border solidarity, Eurobarometer surveys reveal that optimism about the future of Europe has risen (Figure 1).⁵ The overall increase in optimism about Europe’s future reflects some of

¹ European Union. n.d. “The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950 | European Union.” Accessed March 3, 2021.

https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en.

² Council of the European Communities, and Commission of the European Communities, eds. 1992. Treaty on European Union. Luxembourg : Lanham, MD: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities ; UNIPUB [distributor].

³ TREATY OF LISBON AMENDING THE TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION AND THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN. 2007. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3AC2007%2F306%2F01&qid=1613092995103>.

⁴ “Solidarity Principle.” n.d. Eurofound. Accessed January 31, 2021.

<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/solidarity-principle>.

⁵ “Future of Europe-Special Barometer 479 - European Commission.” n.d. Public Opinion. Accessed February 11, 2021.

<https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/search/479/surveyKy/2217>.

EU’s commendable achievements in relation to solidarity in enduring and overcoming various crises.

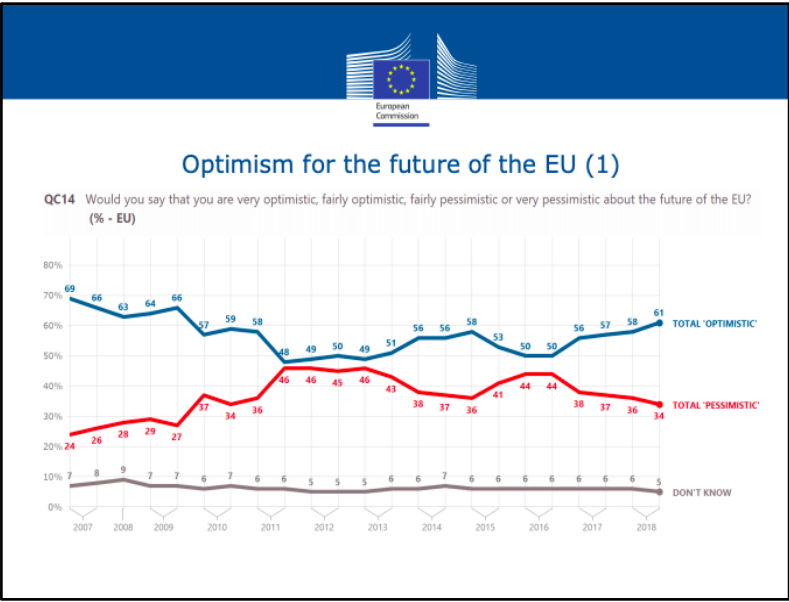


Figure 1: Future of Europe (including “Climate change”).
Source: EU Commission: Special Eurobarometer 479, 2020.

From enabling the free movement of all EU citizens to funding projects to improve infrastructure, to creating new jobs and allowing equal access to employment, and other social and tax advantages across all Member States, the EU has been instrumental in improving the lives of its citizens.⁶ In a global commendation in 2012, the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize for stabilizing the continent of Europe and advancing the ideals of human rights and democracy.⁷ Additionally, the EU’s efforts to increase awareness of positive actions have been met with access to the EU Parliament sponsored webpage, “What Europe does for me.”⁸ EU citizens, through this website, have the ability to explore how EU policies have answered calls for funding and support by way of region, social groups, and more. More recently, the EU has exhibited solidarity in its reaction to the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in 2019. Through its 750 billion euro recovery fund,

⁶ “The EU in Brief,” Text, European Union, June 16, 2016. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en.
⁷ “European Union Receives Nobel Peace Prize 2012.” 2016. Text. European Union. July 5, 2016. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/2010-2019/2012/eu-nobel_en.
⁸ “What Europe Does for Me - #EUandME.” n.d. Accessed February 24, 2021. <https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/en/home>.

the acquisition of vaccines for the EU population and a subsequent planned rollout, and the sharing of medical supplies such as masks and artificial respiratory equipment, the EU signals its encouragement of solidarity among Member States and citizens.⁹

The notion of solidarity extends beyond policy as well. The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights stresses the EU's founding on its "spiritual and moral heritage."¹⁰ The Charter evokes a common understanding that the EU is not just a collection of Member States, but a collective state of mind that speaks on the commonalities and the unique and diverse individualities of its Member States, regions, and citizens.¹¹ Through a summation of solidarity that extends from spiritual unity to concrete policy, the EU has been able to instill a "Europe of Values," and such values have become intrinsic to EU citizens' identities.¹² While EU institutions have attempted to instill solidarity between citizens, Member States, and EU political and legislative bodies, a number of internal and external tensions and crises continue to threaten a consolidated European identity.

The EU has faced three major and many minor crises in the past two decades that have exposed the fragility of European solidarity: The 2008 economic and financial crisis, the 2015 refugee crisis, and Brexit have all raised fundamental questions about the future of the EU. Both the 2008 and 2015 crises showcase the failure of adequate and timely economic and social responses by the EU and resulted in both Member States and EU citizens questioning EU governance mechanisms and the future of integration. As late as 2013, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) admitted in a resolution that the "EU has not yet developed a clear strategy for its relations with the rest of the world and its activities are more reactive than proactive."¹³ Such critique of the EU's approach to citizen

⁹ "European Solidarity in Action." n.d. Council of the European Union. Accessed January 31, 2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/european-solidarity-in-action/>.

¹⁰ European Convention. 2000. "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union." Official Journal of the European Communities. 2012/C 326/02. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>.

¹¹ Pimor, Alexandra. 2017. "Solidarity Was a Founding Principle of European Unity – It Must Remain So." The Conversation. March 24, 2017. <http://theconversation.com/solidarity-was-a-founding-principle-of-european-unity-it-must-remain-so-74580>.

¹² Chopin, Thierry. n.d. "Europe and the Identity Challenge: Who Are 'We'?" Robert Schuman Foundation. Accessed February 24, 2021. <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0466-europe-and-the-identity-challenge-who-are-we>.

¹³ "EU foreign policy must be proactive and set priorities, MEPs say." 2013. October 24, 2013. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/sv/press-room/20131018IPR22646/eu-foreign-policy-must-be-proactive-and-set-priorities-meps-say>.

and global concerns is not limited to foreign policy. A recent study from the European Politics Journal concluded that despite the perception of the EU as a “rescuer of nation states,” attempts by the EU to create policies in response to issues such as migration are received negatively and incite division among states and citizens.¹⁴

While Eurobarometer 479 reports that optimism and faith in the EU has been increasing, numerous crises have fractured the EU’s notion of solidarity and amongst many things, led to the rise of Euroscepticism and the official exit of the United Kingdom from the EU in 2021. While solidarity is central to the architecture of the EU, evident in its recurrent use in treaties and its public narrative, it is difficult to operationalize when Europe is built on the legacy of war, colonialism, and conflict. International bodies like the United Nations insist that solidarity “does not seek to homogenize but rather, to be the bridge across those differences and opposites, connecting to each other diverse peoples and countries with their heterogeneous interests, in mutually respectful, beneficial and reciprocal relations.”¹⁵ Therefore, solidarity within the EU can only persist if it repairs the cleavages of the past. In addressing the critiques that emerge from approaches to policy, the response to the financial and refugee crises, and other issues that citizens deem relevant, the ability of the EU to repair past challenges and to allow for a veritable Union rests on its commitment to combat Euroscepticism, pursue further citizen involvement in policy and legislative decision, and craft a comprehensive European identity that reflects the cultures, histories, and views of all citizens.

¹⁴ Conti, Nicolo, Di Mauro, Danilo, and Memoli, Vincenzo. 2019. “EU Citizens Who Express Fear about Immigration Are Keener to Delegate the Issue to the EU’s Institutions.” EUROPP (blog). May 3, 2019. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2019/05/03/eu-citizens-who-express-fear-about-immigration-are-keener-to-delegate-the-issue-to-the-eus-institutions/>.

¹⁵OHCHR | About International Solidarity and Human Rights.” n.d. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Accessed January 31, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Solidarity/Pages/InternationalSolidarity.aspx>.

The Rise of Euroscepticism in Member States

Since 2014, Euroscepticism has gained significant traction in Member State national political parties and has established a significant presence across the EU (Figure 2).¹⁶

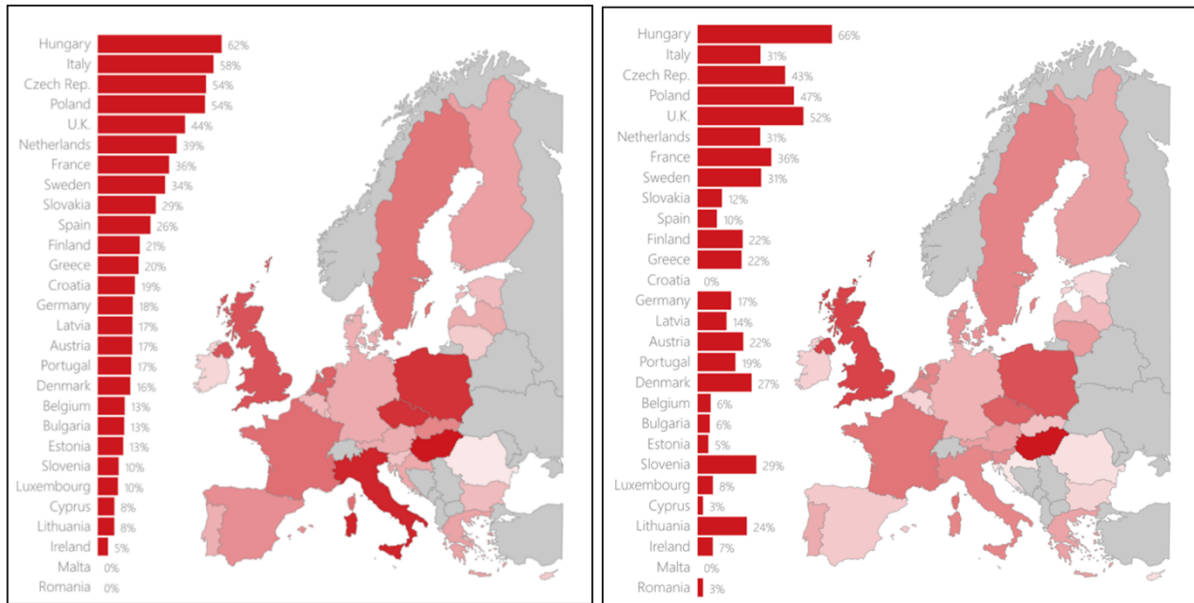


Figure 2: Eurosceptic party performance in EU Member States - 2014 on the left and 2019 on the right.
Source: POLITICO— Polling from across Europe. Updated Daily.

The strongest gains by Eurosceptic parties have been in Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, and Slovakia, showing increases between 16 and 27% from 2014 to 2019, while gains for Eurosceptic parties in Hungary, Poland, France, and the Czech Republic have remained steadily high over the years. In some cases, such as in Italy and Hungary’s recent 2018 elections, Eurosceptic parties received more than 50% of the vote, accounting for the majority of the seats in their parliaments.¹⁷ These Eurosceptic entities have strong anti-elitist and anti-establishment tendencies that disapprove of the EU’s approach to integration and the misalignment between Member State priorities and those

¹⁶ Pawelec, Hanna and Piccinelli, Francesco. 2019. “In Graphics: How Europe Voted.” POLITICO. May 27, 2019.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/how-europe-voted-election-2019-parliament-results/>.

¹⁷ “POLITICO Poll of Polls — Polling from across Europe. Updated Daily.” POLITICO, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/>.

of the EU.¹⁸ Their strategy to voicing disapproval and disdain is often through nationalist rhetoric under the pretext of a protector of identity and cultural values – claiming to safeguard their Member States’ identity from being lost in the tide of globalization and the EU. Due to this rise of Eurosceptic parties across Member States, the notion of a joint European identity and of standing for each other in solidarity during crises has become increasingly questioned.

Crises Testing the EU’s Solidarity

The Aftermath of the 2015 Migration Crisis

A main concern of Eurosceptic parties is the EU’s approach to handling massive legal and illegal migration. In 2015, the EU’s five Southern states, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta, faced an influx of migrants due to their proximity to civil war-ridden countries such as Sudan, Libya and Syria. Despite the terms of the EU’s emergency relocation scheme enacted in 2016 under Article 78 (3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), three Eastern Member States, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, disregarded this initiative and refused to accept their designated quota of 160,000 asylum seekers who had arrived in Greece and Italy.¹⁹ In hopes to resolve this discontent and foster stronger solidarity among Member States and with refugees, in September 2020, the EU put forth a new migration and asylum pact that aims to enhance fair sharing between Member States, establish stronger border regulations, and improve the reception of migrations across Member States by allocating more resources and field support.²⁰

¹⁸ Ultan, Mehlika Ozlem, and Serdar Ornek. 2015. “EUROSCEPTICISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION.” *International Journal of Social Sciences* 4 (2): 49–57.

¹⁹ Matina Stevis-Gridneff and Monika Pronczuk, “E.U. Court Rules 3 Countries Violated Deal on Refugee Quotas,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/europe/european-court-refugees-hungary-poland-czech-republic.html>.

²⁰ “New Pact on Migration and Asylum,” Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed February 24, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1706.

However, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic expressed opposition and denied the obligation to take in people coming from the Middle East or Africa. Similarly, other Member States such as Estonia have stated that they do not support the conditions of migrant relocation.²¹ Since the integration of eight post-Soviet nations, coming to a mutual agreement on migrant and asylum regulation has been difficult across the EU, as these nations tend to be less likely to welcome immigrants.²² This has created division between some Member States and the EU. Furthermore, as the concept of burden-sharing is ignored by some Members States without consequences from EU level institutions, harmful notions besetting intra-EU incompatibilities continue to emerge. On the other hand, the aforementioned states advance the argument of protecting their own culture and economy and moreover, see the EU's forcible approach towards refugees and migration policy as a source of fuel for Eurosceptic parties.

Impacts of the 2008 Financial Crisis

Eurosceptic views and the fragility of solidarity can also be linked to the severe economic hindrances that some EU Member States continue to face as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, which is also thought to have triggered the eurozone sovereign debt crisis. Shortly after the 2008 financial crisis, the EU enacted the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Financial Stabilization Mechanism (EFSM) to help maintain financial stability and provide emergency funds to worst affected Member States.²³ However, the bail-out plans and fiscal policies included the conditions of strict austerity measures which led to negative repercussions. In particular, Greece, Italy and Portugal suffered the worst; they plummeted into debt and as of 2020, are yet to eliminate their

²¹ "EU Member States Show Mixed Reactions to New Migration Pact," SchengenVisaInfo.com, September 30, 2020, <https://www.schengenvisa.info/news/eu-member-states-show-mixed-reactions-to-new-migration-pact/>.

²² "In EU, There's an East-West Divide over Religious Minorities, Gay Marriage, National Identity," *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/29/east-west-divide-within-the-eu-on-issues-including-minorities-gay-marriage-and-national-identity/>.

²³ "Before the ESM | European Stability Mechanism," accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.esm.europa.eu/efsf-overview>

high debt and increase their GDP growth whereas other Member States face little difficulties (Figure 3).²⁴

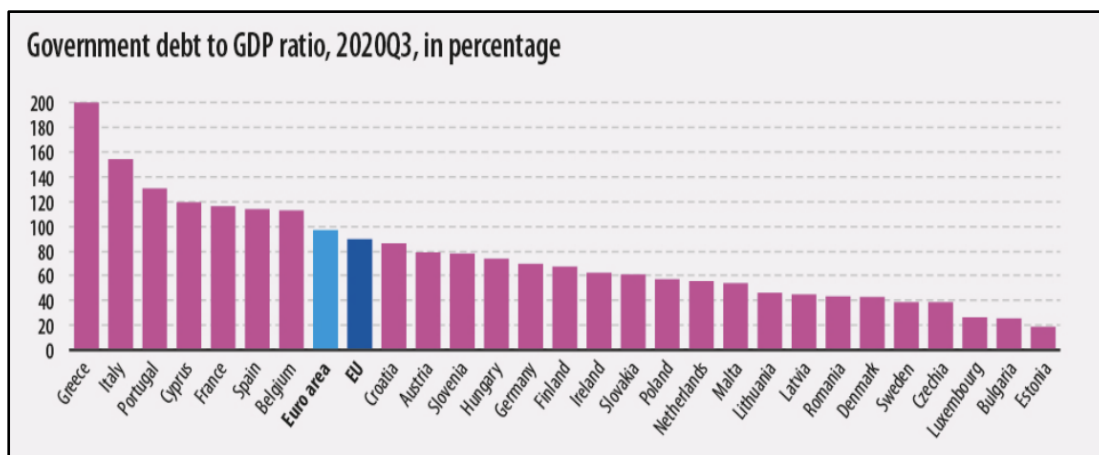


Figure 3: Comparison of Member States’ debt in the third quarter of 2020.
Source: Eurostat, 2020.

Furthermore, during Europe’s sovereign debt crisis which entailed the collapse of financial institutions, high government debt, and rising bond yield spreads in government securities, five Member States were hit the worst: Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain. These nations faced high unemployment, and high debt levels in the area along with weak banking sectors.²⁵ These countries expected, amongst other things, EU level solidarity by way of collectivizing debt in order to make them less susceptible to international speculation. However, the EU’s enforcement of strict austerity measures in response to this debt crisis, in turn, raised a question for the EU: Did they take a sustainable route by trying to rescue Member States’ economies with massive austerity measures? As of 2019, Ireland’s GDP per capita has been growing at twice the rate of the EU GDP average, while Greece’s growth rate continues to fall below 40% of the EU’s average.²⁶ Comparing the gross rates and debt ratios of Member States illustrates a

²⁴ “Government Finance Statistics - Statistics Explained,” accessed February 24, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_finance_statistics.

²⁵ Will Kenton, “Learn About the European Sovereign Debt Crisis,” Investopedia, accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/european-sovereign-debt-crisis.asp>.

²⁶ “GDP per Capita, Consumption per Capita and Price Level Indices - Statistics Explained,” accessed February 17, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/GDP_per_capita_consumption_per_capita_and_price_level_indices#Relative_volumes_of_GDP_per_capita.

spectrum of economic situations ranging from debt-troubled economies like Greece to meteoric growth rates in Ireland. As Member States choose to prioritize their own national policy over stronger EU economic and social solidarity, such reluctance presents another hurdle to achieving EU solidarity and combatting Euroscepticism.

Brexit

Brexit presented a significant blow to the European conception of solidarity and strengthened Eurosceptics in regional, national, and EU legislatures.²⁷ Arguably one of the strongest arguments for leaving the EU was expressed in the 2013 speech given by UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, promising an “in or out” referendum. Cameron addressed his main concerns with the EU starting with the eurozone: “The problems in the eurozone are driving fundamental change in Europe... people are increasingly frustrated that decisions are taken further away from them and that their living standards are slashed through enforced austerity or their taxes are used to bail out governments on the other side of the continent.”²⁸ Additionally, he pointed out that there is “a gap between the EU and its citizens which has grown dramatically in recent years” and stressed the lack of accountability from the EU. On top of these concerns, are issues with large-scale migration that UK’s current prime minister, Boris Johnson, deems as the result of “no control” from the EU in addition to EU decisions not being “democratically accountable.”²⁹

Many citizens of the UK shared these sentiments. In 2016, a survey involving 12,369 UK citizens who had just voted in the EU referendum revealed that about half of the voters wanted to leave the EU because they felt that “decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK,” whereas one third shared they wanted to exit the EU because they believed it

²⁷ “Euroskeptics’ Are a Bigger Presence in the European Parliament than in Past,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed February 23, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/22/euroskeptics-are-a-bigger-presence-in-the-european-parliament-than-in-past/>.

²⁸ Guardian Staff, “David Cameron’s EU Speech - Full Text,” *the Guardian*, January 23, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jan/23/david-cameron-eu-speech-referendum>.

²⁹ Pauline Bock, “EU Citizens Criticise Boris Johnson’s ‘xenophobic’ Migration Comment,” *euronews*, December 9, 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/12/09/eu-citizens-criticise-boris-johnson-s-xenophobic-migration-comment>.

was “the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders.”³⁰ The UK’s decision to leave the EU and their reasons behind reveal the EU’s shortcomings in multiple aspects, amongst which are the democratic deficit in EU level institutions, the added bureaucratic complexities from multiple governments, uncompensated shared use of the bloc’s resources like fishing sanctions on British waters, and the lack of swift responses upon expression of these issues, which all made it a seemingly bad deal for the net positive contributor and challenged the UK’s ability to uphold solidarity.

Since Brexit, there has been a subsequent increase in support for Eurosceptic parties within the EU Parliament. In the most recent election in 2019, the two long-established pro-European parties, the center-right European People’s Party (EPP) and the center-left Socialists & Democrats (S&D), faced losses (34 seats) while the Eurosceptic party, Identity and Democracy (ex-ENF), made leeway (37 seats) (Figure 4).³¹

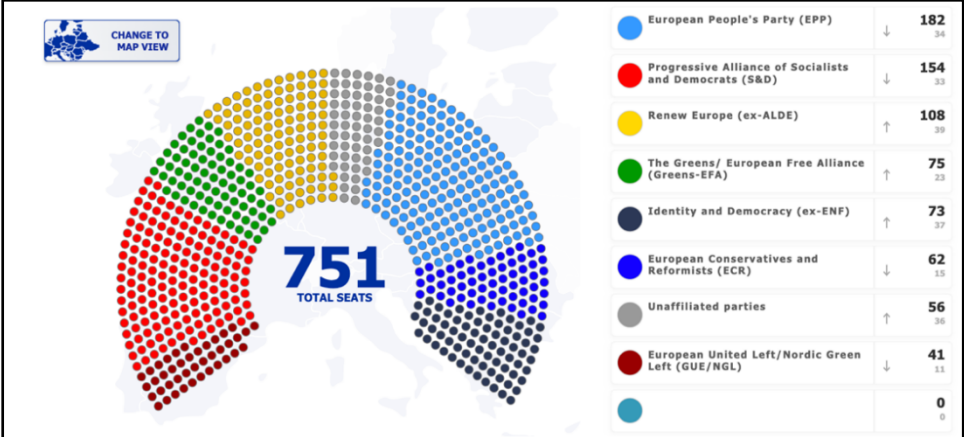


Figure 4: 2019 EU Parliamentary election results.
Source: POLITICO.

While ex-ENF did not acquire enough votes to seize control of the EU Parliament, the issues behind Eurosceptic sentiments remain a threatening presence. This is something that the EU cannot ignore, as they will require collective support from all Member States in order to increase solidarity and prosper in the coming years. It is crucial that the EU

³⁰ “How the UK Voted on Brexit, and Why - a Refresher - Lord Ashcroft Polls,” accessed February 17, 2021, <https://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2019/02/how-the-uk-voted-on-brexit-and-why-a-refresher/>.

³¹ “In Graphics.”

establishes a unified approach to handle future crises, especially when looking back at the EU response to the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 migration crisis. The Eurosceptic views that have emerged as repercussions to these crises should motivate the EU to create open conversation to boost its solidarity not only to maintain order, democracy, and success in its political and economic agenda as it grows, but to ensure a sense of inclusion and fair treatment amongst its individual Member States.

The Conference on the Future of Europe

In November of 2019, the president of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, kickstarted an initiative originally proposed by the French President Emmanuel Macron to tackle European solidarity challenges: The Conference on the Future of Europe. In a letter written to the citizens of Europe in early March of 2019, Macron called for a “European Renaissance,” advocating for new EU institutions, the reform of current policies, and a Conference to initiate the revamping of Europe’s political structures.³² Moreover, he expressed his concern about the recent loss of a Member State and the threat that nationalist parties pose to the future of Europe. Nevertheless, he stood strong in his belief that the EU is the only solution to protect Europe against foreign threats and economic crises. On June 24th, 2020, the Council of the European Union published the official document outlining the scope of this Conference, bringing Macron’s ideas to life. The Conference calls for the equal participation of all Member State governments, national parliaments, EU institutions, civil societies, academia, other stakeholders and most importantly, European citizens. The aim of this Conference embodies Macron’s original idea to put EU citizens at the center of the discussion — engaging them in open conversation and debates about the challenges Europe is facing and how the EU can create a better future for Europe.³³

³² Momtaz, Rym. 2019. “Macron Calls for Big EU Changes in ‘European Renaissance.’” POLITICO. March 4, 2019. <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-european-parliament-election-calls-for-big-eu-changes-in-european-renaissance/>.

³³ “Conference on the Future of Europe - Council Agrees Its Position,” accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/06/24/Conference-on-the-future-of-europe-council-agrees-its-position/>.

The Conference is tasked to address the following major challenges:

1. A green Europe and transition to climate neutrality by 2050; the EU must urgently make environmental protection and climate action its top priorities.
2. Societal challenges including: Public health, inequalities, inclusive labor markets, and a comprehensive approach to migration challenges.
3. Innovation, competitiveness and digital transformation related to the future of work; research and development.
4. Democracy: fundamental values, rights and freedoms; the rule of law; countering disinformation and strengthening trust in public institutions.
5. The international role of the EU; addressing geopolitical challenges in the post COVID-19 global environment; strategic autonomy; multilateralism and cooperation; security and defense; trade and value chains.

By giving EU citizens a prominent voice in the Conference, the EU has a better chance to build and reflect on existing policies that are the most relevant to citizens. At the same time, the forum will be a step forward in combating Euroscepticism as it allows for more transparency and accountability directly between individuals and the EU. In creating such an initiative that speaks to both policy makers and civically engaged citizens, the Conference on the Future of Europe will be a forum in which the EU can strengthen solidarity between the EU institutions, Member States, and citizens.

On February 3rd, 2021, the EU Council announced that the Conference on the Future of Europe will be held over one year, starting on May 9th, 2021 with a concluding date in May 2022.³⁴ However, the EU Council has made two significant changes to the document released on June 24th, 2020. Instead of an equal distribution of power amongst all Conference attendees, some of the participants, such as the national parliament members, are now to be “observers,” while the Conference is to be led by the three presidents of EU institutions: The European Parliament, the Council and the

³⁴ “[Opinion] Why a Shortened ‘Future Europe’ Conference Suits France,” EUobserver, accessed February 17, 2021, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/150856>.

Commission.³⁵ The *Euobserver* reports that the redelegations were made to avoid any conflicts and to ensure “smooth steering,” whereas the decision to compact the Conference into one year is due to Emmanuel Macron’s desire to have full participation while in presidential power.³⁶ The EU’s acceptance of this hurried approach does not reflect the primary goals of addressing Europe’s challenges through in-depth analysis and conversation at this Conference; it might also challenge the EU in its ability to put citizens first. Moreover, by taking power away from the voices of national parliaments and in effect reducing citizen participation, the EU Council is seemingly prioritizing Member State politics over facilitating better cohesion amongst the EU as whole.

This Task Force has been convened to advise EU institutions, and, more specifically, the Conference on the Future of Europe on how to address current challenges to solidarity. Our report focuses on eight key areas that we consider integral to boosting solidarity among Member States and citizens, and therefore, should be debated at the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Outline of our Task Force

By concentrating on the active engagement of citizens with EU policy making, increasing cooperation and cohesion between Member States in specific policy areas, and addressing dis- and misinformation, the eight chapters of this report provide actionable policy recommendations that address various issues of solidarity locally, nationally and at the EU level. Our beginning chapter focuses on the importance of education within the EU and explores how to increase awareness of the ERASMUS program and boost accessibility across all Member States. Next, we investigate Europarties and the possibility that they can be used to create more political cohesion among Member States. We call attention to the European Citizens Initiative forum and its ability to create citizen-sparked change. Furthermore, we discuss how the EU can work with European citizens

³⁵ “[Opinion] Why a Shortened ‘Future Europe’ Conference Suits France.”

³⁶ “[Opinion] Why a Shortened ‘Future Europe’ Conference Suits France.”

and Member States to combat disinformation and misinformation and in return, gain more trust from citizens and better promote a factual view of Europe. We also look at the EU's current migration and asylum policies in hopes to incentivize a congruent set of regulations and security across all Member States. In a final section on economic challenges, we examine the EU's recent economic recovery fund and its potential to strengthen economic integration. In the same light, we suggest the EU take a closer look at Universal Basic Income and what this could mean for fighting income inequality and unemployment while facilitating of economic and social stability within the EU. In our last chapter, we address the EU's recent response to COVID-19 and suggest ways in which the EU can foster more solidarity through reforming current EU health policies and better prepare for future health crises.

While this report covers a range of challenges to European identity as well as its social and economic welfare, this report cannot address all issue areas identified by the Conference on the Future of Europe. Among the most prominent issues that we do not cover are climate change and the urgent call for an EU-focus on environmental protections. We were also not able to cover major challenges in the areas of innovation, competitiveness and digital transformation related to the future of work; research and development, the third of five major challenges that the EU plans to discuss at the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Acknowledging that we cannot engage with all EU challenges comprehensively, we submit that this report addresses key concerns over identity and welfare within the EU by way of specific recommendations that we believe will increase solidarity. The Conference on the Future of Europe provides a strong public platform to articulate, debate, and navigate a successful future for Europe and strengthen the ties between citizens and transnational governance bodies. Seizing the possibilities that the Conference offers for strengthening communication, building trust, and crafting future-oriented policies is thus paramount for the EU's own significance and resilience.

CHAPTER ONE: EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS AND ERASMUS+

1.1 Introduction

In 2019 Mariya Gabriel, the EU Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth received in her Mission Letter from EU president-elect Ursula von der Leyen details on the changes Europe was undergoing. Von der Leyen noted that climate change, the emergence of new technologies, and geopolitics have had a profound effect on Europeans' lives. COVID-19 has only added a new layer to these challenges, both socially and economically. In the wake of these newfound challenges, she emphasized education's role moving forward, arguing "the best investment in our future is in our young people, our innovators, and our researchers. Education, research, and innovation will be key to our competitiveness and ability to lead." Most importantly, she says we must do this together: We must cooperate across "languages, borders and disciplines," and we must "collectively address the societal changes and skills shortages that currently exist." Solidarity in the EU begins with education.³⁷

As COVID-19 and Brexit have put Europeans in a position of uncertainty, where many people are left with unanswered questions about the future of Europe, it is vital that the EU strengthens its institutions to allow for success. As the EU battles the concerns and uncertainty that have been brought about by COVID-19, EU educational institutions must be prepared to continually fight the waves of Euroscepticism. For the EU to enact long-term sustainable changes, educating youth should be highly prioritized. Focusing on the shaping of European identity on an individual level by way of education will be an effective route towards the cultivation of *long-lasting* EU solidarity.

³⁷ Leyen, Ursula, Mariya von der. 2019. "Commissioner-Designate for Innovation and Youth." European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/mission-letter-mariya-gabriel-2019_en.pdf.

An integrated EU identity is reliant on a citizen-level understanding of the importance of the multitude of demographics that comprise the EU, in cultures, histories, and traditions.³⁸ Therefore, to engage youth to produce a more unified European Union, education that values intercultural exchange should be prioritized. Significant progress has been made in this area: Current EU policies in place to achieve intercultural exchange include the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus+). Since 1987, the Erasmus program has enabled over three million students from over 4,000 higher education institutions across Europe to spend three to 12 months pursuing education abroad. Such time abroad has allowed these students to immerse themselves in other European cultures and languages. By involving themselves in cross-cultural institutions and activities, these students have created and identified themselves within the broader make-up of the EU, further strengthening their European identity. Resulting from these programs is a reported correlation with participation and the ‘Europeanization’ of students: students who participated in Erasmus were more likely to self-identify as European.³⁹ Other outcomes reported include cultural enhancement and foreign language development, both of which also work towards fostering a collective European identity.

Erasmus’s emphasis on a collective European identity positions itself perfectly to serve as the framework for improving solidarity in education. Commissioner Mariya Gabriel confirmed the influence that Erasmus can have, describing it as a tool for “strengthening cooperation between institutions across Europe,” providing Europe the instruments to recover from crises resiliently and cohesively.⁴⁰ Additionally, the EU itself identifies

³⁸ Krzaklewska, Ewa, and Seweryn Krupnik. “The Role of the Erasmus Programme in Enhancing Intercultural Dialogue. Presentation of the Results from the Erasmus Student Network Survey 2007.” Pàgina inicial de UPCommons. Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), July 2, 2008. <https://upcommons.upc.edu/handle/2099/5767>.

³⁹ Jacobone, Vittoria, and Giuseppe Moro. 2015. “Evaluating the Impact of the Erasmus Programme: Skills and European Identity.” *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 40 (2): 309–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2014.909005>.

⁴⁰ Education, Directorate-General for. “Erasmus+ Annual Report 2019.” Publications Office of the European Union. Publications Office of the European Union, December 14, 2020. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30af2b54-3f4d-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

Erasmus as the “best known and largest exchange program in the world,” offering the potential for large-scale impact in strengthening EU solidarity.⁴¹

1.2 Participation in Erasmus

Based on commentary from EU actors about the positive role and influence of Erasmus, increasing its participation is a trustworthy route towards improving EU solidarity. When students do not have the opportunity to study other cultures, they are less likely to look for similarities across Member States and instead focus on differences.⁴² Although participation in Erasmus has increased over the years, the growth is steadily slowing. Figure 5 demonstrates that between 2012/13-2013/14, the growth of the program did not increase to the same caliber as previous years.⁴³

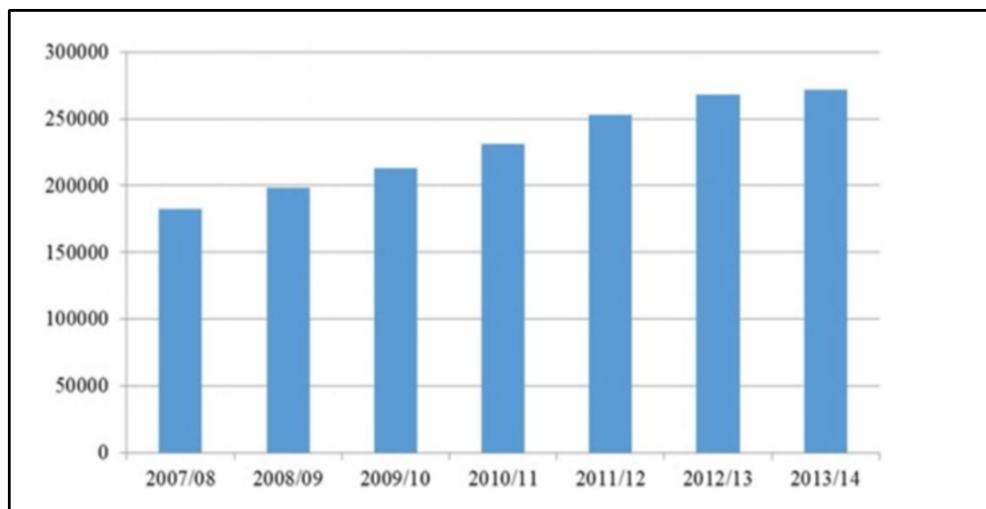


Figure 5: Total number of Erasmus exchanges 2007-2014.
Source: European Commission: Erasmus + annual report, 2019.

Moreover, the Eurobarometer Report on European Youth in 2016 reported that 61% of its respondents were not interested in intra-EU mobility for training, education, or

⁴¹ Feyen, Benjamin, and Ewa Krzaklewska. 2013. "The Erasmus programme and the 'generation Erasmus'—a short overview." *The ERASMUS phenomenon—symbol of a new European generation*: 9-20.

⁴² Black, H. Tyrone, and David L. Duhon. 2010. "Assessing the Impact of Business Study Abroad Programs on Cultural Awareness and Personal Development." *Journal of Education for Business* 81 (3): 140–44. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOEB.81.3.140-144>.

⁴³ Education, Directorate-General for. "Erasmus+ Annual Report 2019."

professional purposes.⁴⁴ Evidently, public perception of the value of Erasmus has declined significantly. This is concerning, as Erasmus, and student mobility more broadly, have a demonstrated importance in young peoples' perception of their own European identity.⁴⁵ Hence, if students are not recognizing the significance of Erasmus, they are not understanding the importance of an integrated European identity and are thus, unable to adequately contribute to such integration of identity and strengthening of EU solidarity.

In utilizing Erasmus as a piece of the framework in fashioning a European identity, we first must identify why participatory growth has faltered. Problems exist in the following areas: Erasmus's lack of accessibility to certain socioeconomic groups, the absence of prospective student knowledge about the benefits of the program, and the shortage of communication channels for students to give feedback. The combination of these shortcomings has contributed to the decline in Erasmus participation. To account for such a decrease, this chapter aims to provide policy recommendations for the improvement of participation in the Erasmus program as a solidarity-forming mechanism.

Lack of Accessibility to Erasmus

One of Erasmus's primary limitations is that participation in the program is highly inaccessible to students from specific socioeconomic backgrounds. While the cost of studying abroad through Erasmus varies considerably by country, all students interested in participating must factor in living costs, transportation, food, and university related expenses into their budgets.⁴⁶ In Dublin, Ireland, the estimated average weekly costs for an Erasmus student totaled €240.5.⁴⁷ Costs like these can become limiting, especially when students must extend their study abroad periods for unforeseen reasons. By

⁴⁴ "ESN Reacts to Eurobarometer 2016." Erasmus Student Network, May 23, 2016. <https://esn.org/news/esn-reacts-eurobarometer-2016>.

⁴⁵ Mitchell, Kristine. 2012. "Student Mobility and European Identity: Erasmus Study as a Civic Experience?" *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 8 (4). <https://www.jcer.net/index.php/jcer/article/view/473>.

⁴⁶ "Costs of Living in NL." Erasmus University Rotterdam. Accessed February 26, 2021. <https://www.eur.nl/en/education/practical-matters/financial-matters/costs-living-nl>.

⁴⁷ "Living Costs for Erasmus Students." Estimated Living Costs for Erasmus Students - Education in Ireland, n.d. <https://www.educationinireland.com/en/what-can-i-study-/erasmus/living-costs-for-erasmus-students.html>.

highlighting these disparities, Erasmus becomes a symbol of difference rather than unity. These socioeconomic barriers are reflected in participatory patterns across Member States. Participation in Erasmus and International Student Mobility (ISM) follow patterns of movement from economically prosperous nations to economically peripheral countries. In Portugal, an EU Member State considered to have a low GDP, there is an imbalance between the large number of incoming students and the smaller number of Portuguese students participating in Erasmus. Figure 6 exhibits these differences between outgoing Portuguese students and incoming Erasmus students, illustrating that Erasmus’s participation is determined by pre-existing socioeconomic disparities in Europe.⁴⁸

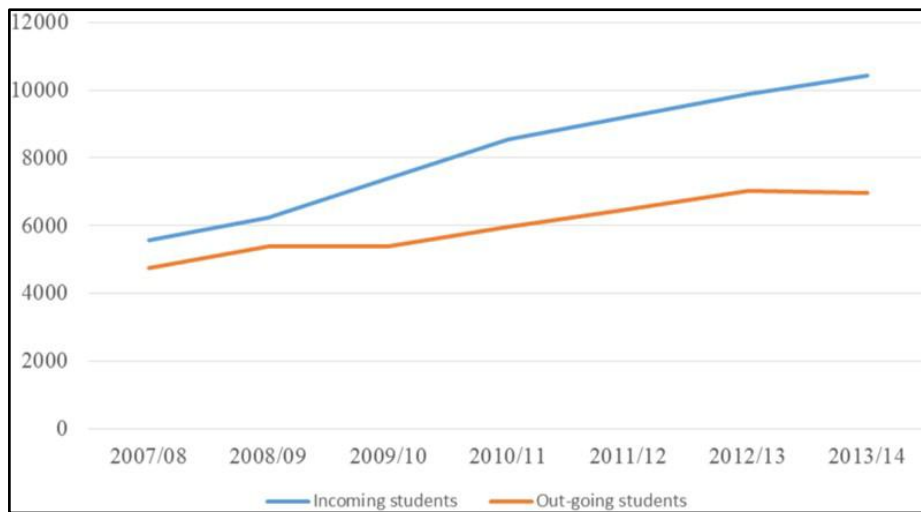


Figure 6: Incoming and outgoing Erasmus movement to and from Portugal.
Source: European Commission.

Insufficient social and economic capital inhibits students from lower GDP Member States from fully participating in Erasmus in the same way that students from high GDP states like France and Germany can. While Erasmus research showcases that the program is attempting to attract participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and lower GDP Member States, it appears to be “catering more for students from well-off backgrounds.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cairns, David. 2017. “The Erasmus Undergraduate Exchange Programme: A Highly Qualified Success Story?: Children’s Geographies: Vol 15, No 6.” *Children’s Geographies* 15 (6): 728–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1328485>.

⁴⁹ Otero, Manuel Souto. 2008. “The Socio-Economic Background of Erasmus Students: A Trend towards Wider Inclusion?” *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l’Education* 54 (2): 135–54.

While some of the most popular destination countries do include France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, these four Member States also account for the highest amounts of outgoing students. The countries with the smallest number of outgoing students are consequently represented by lower GDP Member States. Figure 7 shows Erasmus’s participation by country in 2018 by measuring the number of outgoing students.⁵⁰ While population difference does partially factor into these numbers, there is still a visible divide in participants’ socioeconomic background and their respective Member State GDP. Students from high GDP countries are choosing almost exclusively other high GDP countries or specific low GDP countries, while students from low GDP countries are not participating on an equal level. Educational structures like Erasmus that reproduce existing social hierarchies ultimately harm the goal of solidarity because they serve to differentiate students from each other rather than unite them.⁵¹

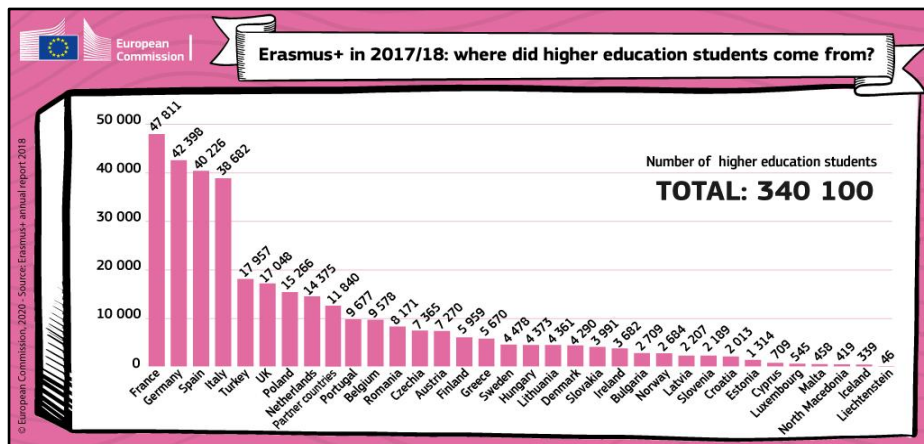


Figure 7: Erasmus+ in 2017/18: where did higher education students come from. Source: ICEF Monitor: Erasmus Destinations, 2018.

Improving Accessibility

Connected to the obstacles caused by differences in socioeconomic background and Member State GDP is the credit conversion system and its impediment towards financial

⁵⁰ “Erasmus-Destinations.” ICEF Monitor - Market intelligence for international student recruitment. Accessed February 26, 2021. <https://monitor.icef.com/2020/02/erasmus-funded-a-record-number-of-international-placements-in-2018/erasmus-destinations/>.

⁵¹ Ballatore, Magali, and Martha K. Ferede. “The Erasmus Programme in France, Italy and the United Kingdom: Student Mobility as a Signal of Distinction and Privilege.” *European Educational Research Journal* 12, no. 4 (December 2013): 525–33. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2013.12.4.525>.

accessibility: lack of credit recognition may require students to extend their period of study abroad, incurring further and unexpected costs.⁵² When examining the specifics of credit-conversion as an obstruction to Erasmus participation, one-third of Erasmus students studying at Polish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) reported that they struggled to get their study abroad credits accepted by their home countries.⁵³ The current system of credit recognition, known as the Bologna Process, lacks consistency across the EU and does not guarantee students credit for their participation upon returning to their country. This lack of transparency about course equivalents and credit conversions reduces these students' mobility and, in the future, will discourage participation in international education exchange programs altogether.⁵⁴ A route towards addressing these inconsistencies is stimulating participation in dual and joint degree programs that span across Member States, which could be achieved through expanding the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree program, the current joint degree program, to cover bachelor's degree programs as well.⁵⁵ The Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree program and other dual and joint degree programs already have consistent credit conversion systems, which eliminates the need for extensive reform.¹⁴ The more students that are able to partake in these degree programs without concern about credit conversions, the more they can benefit from the increased cultural enhancement and strengthened European identity an international education provides.

1.3 Erasmus's Image

Adjacent to improving the accessibility of Erasmus is the development and management of a uniform 'image' for Erasmus across Europe. By 'image,' we refer to an improvement in the perception of Erasmus in terms of economic, cultural, and social return-value.

⁵² Vossensteyn, Johan J., M. Beerkens-Soo, Maarja Beerkens, Leon Cremonini, Barbara Besançon, Noor Focken, Bart Leurs, et al. 2010. "Improving the Participation in the Erasmus Programme." European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 148.

⁵³ Oborune, Karina. 2013. "Becoming More European after ERASMUS? The Impact of the ERASMUS Programme on Political and Cultural Identity." *Epiphany* 6 (1). <https://doi.org/10.21533/epiphany.v6i1.60>.

⁵⁴ Gordon, Jean, and Jean-Pierre Jallade. 1996. "'Spontaneous' Student Mobility in the European Union: A Statistical Survey." *European Journal of Education* 31 (2): 133–51.

⁵⁵ "Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees." n.d. Text. Erasmus+. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/individuals/students/erasmus-mundus-joint-master-degrees_en.

Previously discussed disparities reflect the existence of “country-specific differences in the way Erasmus is regarded.”¹⁸ For example, the European Parliament’s Report on Improving Participation in the Erasmus Program reported that in some countries, Erasmus was not seen as a “rational investment in a future career but rather a luxury best avoided by students with limited resources.”⁵⁶ As such, this section aims to provide recommendations on how to minimize the country-specific differences in the expected return value of Erasmus participation. Increasing diverse participation in Erasmus will allow the program to better function as a solidarity mechanism through extending the intercultural skills it provides to a larger demographic of EU citizens and students.

Improving Erasmus’s Image

Misinformation or lack of consistent information lies at the core of the disparity between the desired intent and perceived intent of an Erasmus education. Within HEIs, research has shown that a lack of information leads to students not being fully aware of options to participate in mobility programs like Erasmus.⁵⁷ Furthermore, “uncertainty about the benefits of the Erasmus period abroad” was identified as a top reason that students did not participate in Erasmus.⁵⁸ With a shortage of participation that emerges to misconceptions of Erasmus, students miss out on the enhanced EU identity that the program provides through its cross-cultural and trans-EU education and exposure.

To combat this, we recommend that an EU-spanning online information portal available in all 24 official EU languages be created to improve and clarify the image of Erasmus and extend accessibility to students facing financial barriers. Such a portal could easily be integrated into the already-existing Erasmus Student Network website as an additional

⁵⁶ Vossensteyn, H., M. Beerkens, L. Cremonini, Jeroen Huisman, Manuel Souto-Otero, B. Bresancon, N. Focken, et al. 2010. “Improving Participation in the Erasmus Programme. Final Report to the European Parliament,” July. <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/improving-participation-in-the-erasmus-programme-final-report-to->

⁵⁷ Deakin, Hannah. 2012. “How and Why We Should Encourage Undergraduate Geography Students to Participate in the Erasmus Programme: Journal of Geography in Higher Education: Vol 37, No 3.” *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 37 (3): 466–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2012.731043>.

⁵⁸ Beerkens, Maarja, Manuel Souto-Otero, Hans de Wit, and Jeroen Huisman. “Similar Students and Different Countries? An Analysis of the Barriers and Drivers for Erasmus Participation in Seven Countries.” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 20, no. 2 (May 2016): 184–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315315595703>.

project. Though EU citizens have many forms of communication available to them, it has been found that the use of online videos of past participants was particularly effective in diminishing students' perceived barriers to studying abroad, making an online format the most effective option.¹⁷ Past participants also noted that there was a lack of information surrounding co-funding opportunities within countries and institutions.¹⁸ The lack of transparency and awareness of these funding opportunities serves as a misconceived financial barrier towards participation in Erasmus. Therefore, the addition of an online information portal that explicitly lays out the funding opportunities for the Erasmus program and the relevant experiences of past Erasmus students to improve the transparency of Erasmus would be beneficial. The demonstrated relevance of parental educational background as a determinant to mobility demonstrates that students need effective support from others within their home countries. Hence, using past students' experiences to inform prospective students could positively impact participation in Erasmus.¹⁸ As more and more students are inclined to participate, the benefits of Erasmus's ability to cultivate European identity have the potential to be extended to more people.

Additionally, further emphasis and promotion of the placements program should be incorporated and communicated to prospective participants through the Erasmus website to increase the awareness of the benefits of Erasmus. The placements program, also referred to as a "traineeship," refers to the system wherein Erasmus students are placed in internships or work placements as a part of their study abroad program. According to Erasmus, this program allows students to improve communication, language, and intercultural skills while also building highly valued "soft skills" for employment beyond the duration of their program. Past participants regarded the placements program as a positive and highly successful aspect of Erasmus. In bolstering this aspect of Erasmus, the EU can expect overall increased participation and contribution to bridging the gap between the costs and benefits of Erasmus by providing students with tangible resume-

building experiences and skills.⁵⁹ The traineeship program should be made more prominent on the Erasmus website so that interested students are able to access information about it easier. By explicitly listing traineeships under the ‘Opportunities’ tab and adding shortcuts to the traineeship page, the promotion of this aspect of Erasmus has the potential to attract more students and clarify any misconceptions students have about the benefits of the program. By expanding the marketing of this unique aspect of Erasmus, more students could gain international work experience and the resulting European cultural enhancement the program entails.

1.4 Student’s Voices

To sustain the steady improvement and evolution of the Erasmus program, systems of feedback must be put in place to provide policymakers with the necessary context on current issues within the Erasmus program. Thus, increasing the mediums through which students in Erasmus can communicate their needs and concerns is key to sustaining long-term effective change. If increased participation in Erasmus builds solidarity, then the constant maintenance of that increased participation is needed to be considered. Furthermore, the most direct source of feedback on these topics can only come from the students themselves, so providing a mechanism where students can easily express their comments and concerns for Erasmus is essential.

While the steady flow of student input informs small changes to the Erasmus program, as of 2021, no formalized system of feedback exists to ensure the value of student’s suggestions other than an online survey administered by the Erasmus Student Network.⁶⁰ To address the issue of consistent EU response to this feedback, we recommend the creation of an annual Conference of past Erasmus participants to foster these communication channels more directly. Past participants would be invited to the

⁵⁹ EAC. n.d. “Traineeship (Student).” Text. Erasmus+. Accessed March 4, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/traineeships-students_en.

⁶⁰ “ESNs survey.” Erasmus Student Network, February 18, 2021. <https://esn.org/ESNs survey>.

Conference immediately after their time abroad to share their feedback on how Erasmus has impacted their European identity directly with the Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency, the group overseeing Erasmus at the EU level.⁶¹ Using the students' feedback, this agency can implement a policy that is increasingly reflective of their experiences. In doing so, Erasmus's ability to form solidarity across the EU will persist into the future as it continually adapts to student concerns and opinions. In addition, the 2021 Conference on the Future of Europe offers an opportunity for student's voices to be heard. In providing answers to questions about the Conference, the EU Commission stated that understanding how programs like Erasmus could be used to promote citizens' participation in the Conference will be focused upon.⁶² To account for this, the Conference should convene a committee comprised of past and current Erasmus students to speak about their experiences with the program at the Conference. This would allow for open discussion on the future of Erasmus and its role in cultivating citizen participation in EU affairs. Further solutions towards improving EU solidarity through Erasmus could arise through such a discussion in a forum setting.

1.5 Conclusion

Erasmus's unique framework and past success as a solidarity-forming program makes it the ideal route for improving EU solidarity in education. However, certain barriers bar Erasmus from achieving its full potential. Given the importance of educating today's youth, it is incredibly important to address these shortcomings. Accessibility remains a large hurdle for many students wishing to participate in Erasmus. Second is the lack of awareness about the program, and third is the lack of formalized systems of student feedback on their experiences. Within the Conference on the Future of Europe and

⁶¹ "Erasmus+." The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Accessed February 26, 2021. https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2014-2020/erasmus_en.

⁶² "Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe." 2020. Text. European Commission. January 22, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_89.

beyond, the EU needs to take the steps to improve these areas as such effort and reforms will allow Erasmus to function as the solidarity mechanism it has the potential to be.

1.6 Policy Recommendations

- Extend the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree program to bachelor students to limit the number of students held back by inconsistent credit conversions, and hence increase the accessibility of Erasmus across the EU.
- Create an online information portal as an extension of the Erasmus Student Network website that lays out funding opportunities for Erasmus and the relevant experiences of past Erasmus students to improve the accessibility of Erasmus equally across Member States.
- Further promote the traineeship program on the Erasmus website to diversify participant outcome goals and bridge financial barriers that create a gap between low and high GDP Member States.
- Hold a Conference comprised of past participants on the improvement of the Erasmus program as a solidarity mechanism moving forward and incorporate student views into the Conference of the Future of Europe.

CHAPTER TWO: EUROPARTIES

2.1 Introduction

First mentioned in the Treaty of Rome in Article 138a, transnational political parties are additionally a key aspect of the Treaty of Maastricht, which stipulates that they “are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens.”⁶³ These transnational political parties, known as Europarties, can be understood as transnational, extra-parliamentary federations of national political parties from several EU Member States, united by political affinity.⁶⁴ Traditionally, Europarties are composed of national member parties, European Parliament groups or individual MEPs, secretariats, associations and political foundations, and some form of individual membership. When looking at the current distribution of Europarties in Parliament, the European People’s Party (EPP), a center-right party, holds the majority with one hundred and eighty-seven seats (Figure 8).⁶⁵ Despite the majority being held by EPP, it is important to note that the ID, ECR, and GUE/NGL, which are the fourth, sixth, and seventh most populous parties, are all Eurosceptics, varying from hard to soft Euroscepticism. The combined seats held by these Eurosceptic parties make up one-fourth, or 25%, of the total seats in Parliament, showcasing the prevalence of Euroscepticism in EU level governance. With such a widespread presence amidst the EP and subsequently across other EU and Member State institutions, the EU needs to urgently impede the growth of Euroscepticism.

⁶³Treaty on European Union [Maastricht Treaty], signed 7 February 1992, Official Journal of the European Communities, No. C191/1, 29 July 1992, <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1540802419323&uri=CELEX:11992M/TXT>>, accessed 1 February, 2021.

⁶⁴“Glossary of Summaries.” n.d. EUR-Lex. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/eu_parties_status.html.

⁶⁵Zalan, Eszter, and Elena Sánchez Nicolás. 2020. “Boost for Right in Post-Brexit EU Parliament.” EUobserver. January 15, 2020. <https://euobserver.com/brexit/147149>.

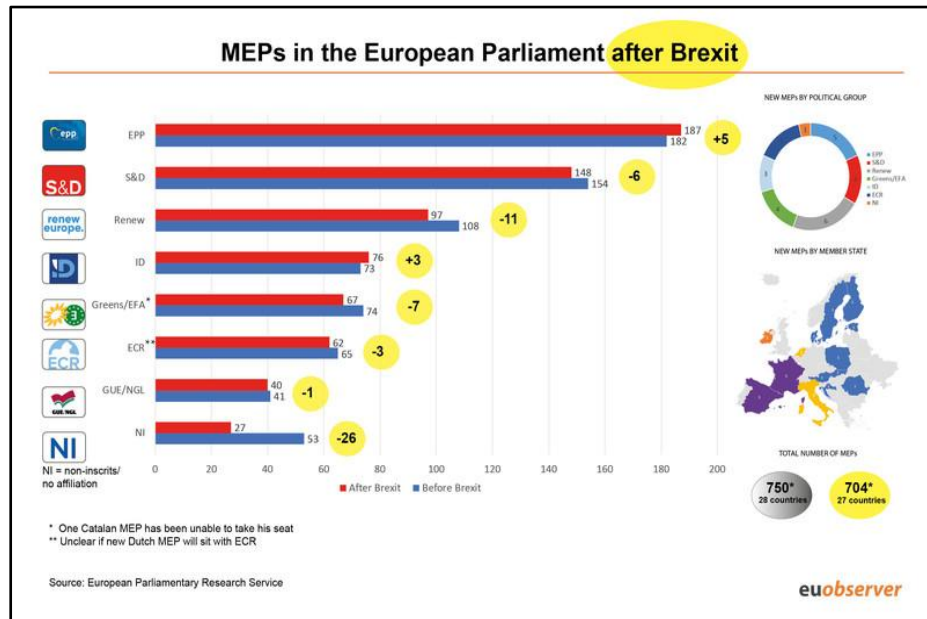


Figure 8: MEPs in the European Parliament after Brexit.
Source: euobserver, 15 Jan. 2020.

Additionally, although Europarties were intended to be a continuation of European integration in their creation of a transnational political forum, they have performed weakly and have remained largely invisible due to low public awareness. European elections are run by Europarties, as they run for and hold seats in the European Parliament. However, the visibility of national parties as the main power in campaigns leads to citizens incorrectly assuming that the EU is directed by national parties, not the Europarties. Such a lack in knowledge of Europarties is further sustained with descriptions of Europarties as being ‘parties of parties,’ suggesting domination by their respective member parties.⁶⁶ With such widespread disinformation about their actual role within EU politics, specifically the extent of their capacity for inciting change, Europarties face several challenges that inhibit their success, such as low visibility and lack of a unified electoral system for European elections.

In this chapter, we will provide policy recommendations to combat these challenges and in turn, promote solidarity in the EU by strengthening Europarties as an institution.

⁶⁶ Hertner, Isabelle. 2018. “United in Diversity? Europarties and Their Individual Members’ Rights.” *Journal of European Integration* 41 (4): 487–505.

Although Europarties are currently simple expressions of national political preference at the European level, if utilized to their full potential, they can be:

An integral part of the emerging EU-wide political sphere. In this sense, they do not simply represent an additional level of decision-making next to the national level. Instead, European policymaking is poised to become the key political locus, relegating national politics to a secondary place. This argument is then linked to the broader discussions about the European public sphere and the possibility of establishing one European demos (i.e. politically conceived “people”).⁶⁷

By utilizing these parties to their fullest potential, they will be integral in promoting solidarity. Europarties are the most democratic and accepted aggregates of citizen interests, as they lend a voice to the diversity of EU populations and, most importantly, they can potentially transcend nationalism and create an EU identity across citizens in all Member States. Furthermore, by creating more direct dialogue and connections with citizens, Europarties can combat the apathy felt by voters towards the EU because they don't feel heard or represented.⁶⁸ Should the complete authority of Europarties be realized through implementing the recommendations provided in this chapter, EU level politics and relevant European topics will become increasingly central to the political and public discourse across EU Member States. As evident in the construction of Europarties as an integral part of the EU system, they can contribute to linking Member States and their citizens together and diminishing the “us versus them” mentality that currently exists due to heightened public awareness of national politics.

2.2 Increasing Visibility of Europarties

One of the largest issues currently faced by Europarties is low visibility among voters. For many years, it has been clear that insufficient public awareness of Europarties as a leader in European politics is closely linked to the lack of a European party system, which is

⁶⁷ Blockmans, Steven, and Sophia Russack, eds. 2020. *Deliberative Democracy in the EU*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd. <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/deliberative-democracy-in-the-eu/>.

⁶⁸ Standard Eurobarometer 91, Spring 2019, page 13.

further emphasized by the strength of national political parties. Insufficient recognition of European topics in national policymaking additionally reinforces the invisibility of the Europarties among EU citizens. As a result, citizens often confuse Europarties with national political groups and are rarely aware of their existence. Low public awareness can be contributed to the fact that:

Europarties never appear on ballots, and they rarely appear in campaign materials. Their Spitzenkandidaten are mostly unknown: for instance a poll taken a month before the European elections in 2019 found that only 26% of Germans knew who Manfred Weber, the lead candidate for a conservative alliance, was even though he himself was a German and came from the most highly institutionalized Europarty – the EPP.⁶⁹

The visibility of Europarties is undermined by many national member parties being unwilling to use the Europarty logo and slogan on their campaign materials and ballots. Moreover, Eurosceptic parties at the national level view Europarties as symbols of the destruction of national democracy, which has allowed space for resentment towards the EU.⁷⁰

In response to the low visibility of Europarties and the unwillingness of national member parties to help aid in their publicity, we recommend boosting Europarties national awareness. There is a correlation between the public attention of Europarties as a result of the emphasis that national political elites place on the European agenda and media focus on the EU.⁷¹ Media coverage of European issues is, therefore, essential for the promotion of Europarties. In boosting national awareness of Europarties, there should be mandatory requirements for the use of the Europarty logo on campaign materials. While Europarties are the ones running for elections and sitting in the European Parliament, campaigns and programs are mostly handled by national parties; they decide on the lists of candidates, choose their electoral program, and run under their name and logo.⁷² With

⁶⁹ Kelemen, Daniel. "The Spitzenkandidaten Process: Requiem for a Misguided Eurodream?" Brexit Institute, June 19, 2019. <http://dcubrexitinstitute.eu/2019/06/the-spitzenkandidaten-process-requiem-for-a-misguided-eurodream/>.

⁷⁰ Deliberative Democracy in the EU: Countering Populism with Participation and Debate. Page 115.

⁷¹ Deliberative Democracy in the EU: Countering Populism with Participation and Debate. Page 119.

⁷² Drounau, Louis. "A New Voting System." EuropeanConstitution.eu, 2019, europeanconstitution.eu/a-new-voting-system.

insufficient publicity and clarification behind the roles of Europarties, the conflation between Europarties and national parties will continue. Consequently, until national parties begin to mention their Europarty affiliation, visibility and recognition of these parties by citizens will continue to remain low. Even if national parties prefer to keep Europarties at a distance with limited roles, a system of incentives to use Europarty logos, symbols and/or common manifestos could be established via EU party regulations.

One way for EU party regulations to increase the use of Europarty logos is through the role of the MEP to campaign and convince national parties to do so. Such an action would be received positively, as would it be attractive to MEPs to be seen beyond a position of just being local councilors, but as local councilors who have ties to the EU level. Additionally, it would bring increased distinction to local politics, and in turn, force local politics to address what the EU does for them. To improve their accessibility, Europarties should also consider running their websites in multiple languages, as the majority of Europarty websites are in English, French, and/or German. In providing only the most widely used European languages on their website, Europarties allow space for the alienization of European citizens that either have a different first language or don't speak the above languages entirely. In amending the limits of language, the EU will begin to eliminate one of the divides between citizens and the Europarties, as well as general division across the EU. By using Europarties, a major transnational medium, as a format to incite increased employment of all EU languages focusing on language as a means to bring EU citizens, the EU can work to bolster solidarity and inclusion.

Another action to aid in the visibility of Europarties is the broadening of individual membership and expanding participation of individuals in internal Europarty activities. Currently, membership is restricted to national parties and a few affiliated associations and organizations for some Europarties, providing members of the public little direct opportunity to join Europarties.⁷³ For example, the European People's Party (EPP)

⁷³ Shemer, Yoav. 2017. "Parties' Transnational Coordination in the EU after Lisbon: The Greens and Beyond." Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. <https://research.vu.nl/en/activities/parties-transnational-coordination-in-the-eu-after-lisbon-the-gre>.

restricts membership to MEPs, while the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) offers membership to all citizens. In Europarties like the Party of the European Left (EL), membership seems to only exist on paper,⁷⁴ while ALDE individual members take part in their meetings, voice their opinion, and vote on delegations.⁷⁵ It is important to recognize that some Europarties now offer individual membership, as it presents the potential to create strengthened links between citizens and the EU. However, though most Europarties now have a form of individual membership, such membership is currently limited as far as who can become a member and what their role is, as previously mentioned. Despite such limitations, party members have proven their resourcefulness in national political parties, and such value can be extended to Europarties, given they extend their participation and membership guidelines.⁷⁶ Most crucially, members do most of the on-the-groundwork during election campaigns: They distribute leaflets, put up posters, work campaign stalls, go door-to-door, make telephone calls, and promote the party on social media. Additionally, individual members can be charged an annual membership fee in order to help Europarties fund the expenses not covered by the EU (up to 90%).⁷⁷

As previously discussed, many Europarties have individual members, but their roles are so limited that many feel they are not making a difference.⁷⁸ To attract more individual members, Europarties need to expand their visibility and make sure that individual citizens have more say in policy and decision-making. One way that Europarties can promote individual membership is by including these members in the process of writing the Europarty manifesto, their most comprehensive policy documents. By formally including individual members into the manifesto-writing process in all Europarties, national party members of these Europarties would yield some of their policy-making

⁷⁴ Statute of the EL, article 6, alinea 7.

⁷⁵ "Parties' Transnational Coordination in the EU after Lisbon: The Greens and Beyond."

⁷⁶ Hecke, Steven van, Alex Andrione-Moylan, Nathalie Brack, Isabelle de Coninck, Stephen Day, Wojciech Gagattek, Emilie van Haute, et al. 2018. "Reconnecting European Political Parties with European Union Citizens." International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2018.71>.

⁷⁷ "European Political Parties" Funding European political parties. Accessed February 25, 2021.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/contracts-and-grants/en/political-parties-and-foundations/european-political-parties>.

⁷⁸ Deliberative Democracy in the EU: Countering Populism with Participation and Debate.

power to the grassroots.⁷⁹ Such change would help make citizens feel increasingly heard, thereby promoting solidarity within the EU by giving them direct influence in the policy-making process. This increased participation would also provide a better understanding of Europarties and the EU itself, which would make the political process more transparent and more trustworthy to the average citizen. Based on the data from Figure 9, it is apparent that current EU elections are focused nationally instead of transnationally.⁸⁰

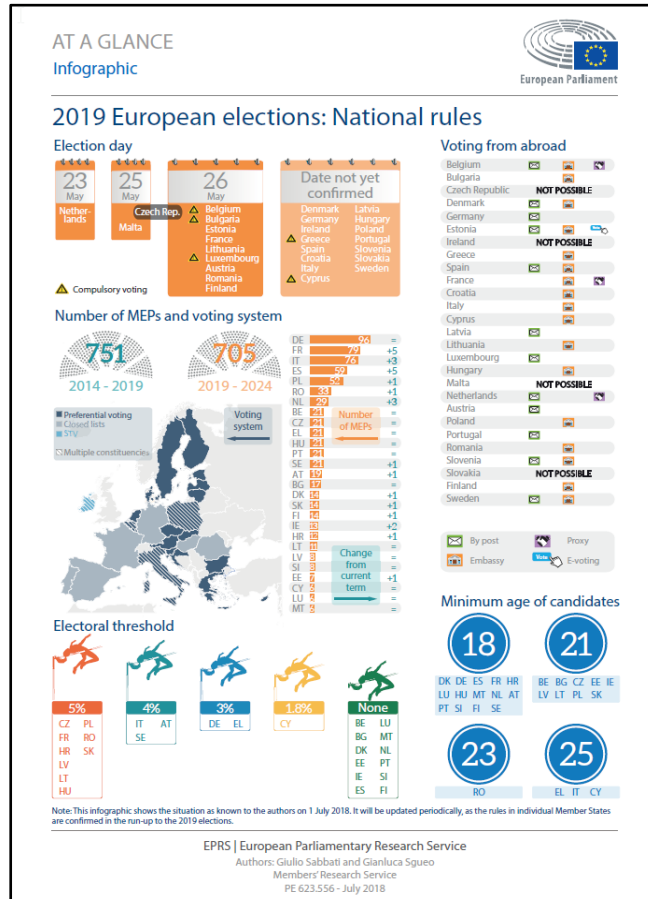


Figure 9: 2019 National rules for European Elections.
Source: European Constitution (non-profit organization that proposes a new EU voting system).

By concentrating so heavily on national politics instead of EU-wide politics, elections to the European Parliament forfeit their chance to create a transnational identity among voters and to promote EU-wide issues. By creating a more transnationally oriented

⁷⁹ "United in Diversity? Europarties and Their Individual Members' Rights."

⁸⁰ Drounau, Louis. "A New Voting System." EuropeanConstitution.eu, 2019, europeanconstitution.eu/a-new-voting-system.

system, voters would be more inclined to think about issues faced by the entire EU instead of just within their respective Member States. To address such issues, we suggest a combination of a transnational ballot list (for Europarties) and a national ballot list (for national political parties), meaning that each voter would have two votes for two different constituencies.

By creating a more transnationally oriented system, voters would be more inclined to think about issues faced by the entire EU instead of just within their respective Member States. To address such issues, we suggest a combination of a transnational ballot list (for Europarties) and a national ballot list (for national political parties), meaning that each voter would have two votes for two different constituencies. Such an electoral system would be similar to the voting system for the German Bundestag. One vote would be for a locally elected official in each district (three hundred and fifty districts total) to ensure there is a connection between the MEPs and citizens, and the other vote would be for a European party list, with those seats being allocated to maintain proportionality. There would be approximately three hundred and fifty Parliament seats for each, as shown in Figure 10.⁸¹

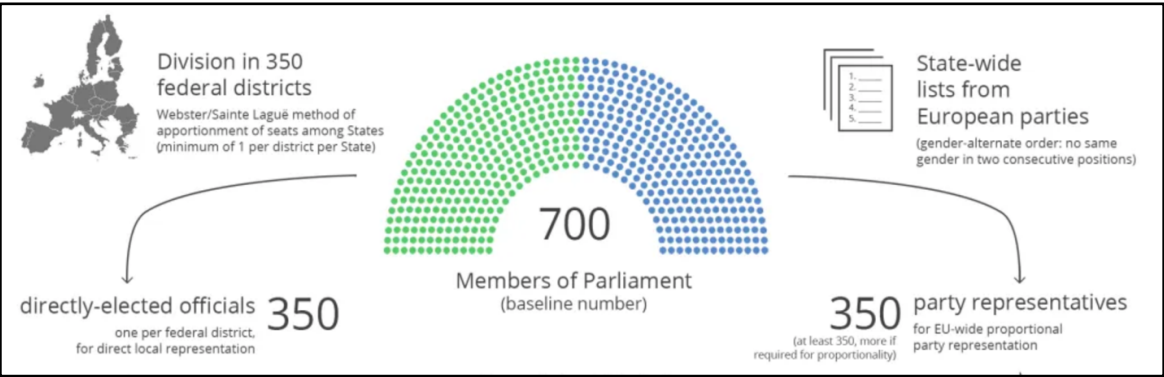


Figure 10: Proposed voting system.
Source: European Constitution (non-profit organization that proposes a new EU voting system).

By allowing citizens to vote through pan-European lists next to their national ballot, Europarties and common EU-wide candidates would be able to Europeanize the

⁸¹ "A New Voting System."

elections. In turn, the centralized campaign strategy, conduct of campaigns, and candidate selection and manifestos would give the national media incentives to cover Europarties more intensively. This would, in turn, lead to a greater focus on EU themes, and provide room for direct competition with other Europarties. While national parties would continue to run their own campaigns for national seats, they would be pressured to further emphasize their transnational affiliations. The benefit of this approach would be twofold; it would take the national system for European elections and subsequently create an EU-wide voting system, both of which would help unify the electoral systems as well as provide more visibility for Europarties, as they are now directly on the ballot.

By reforming issues of visibility, Europarties can address the issue of EU voters, many of which are apathetic towards the European Parliament and feel as if their interests are not being heard. For example, in Greece, 68% of citizens feel as if their voice does not count in the EU as of 2019.⁸² In revising the mode of election for the European Parliament, the EU will make the average citizen feel increasingly connected to Brussels and the EU, counter Euroscepticism, and thus, promote solidarity. In addition to providing a larger focus on EU themes, a vote with one single constituency rather than twenty-seven national constituencies ensures that every EU citizen's vote would count the same as any other, meaning equal enfranchisement. In doing so, this would provide meaningful representation to each voter, eliminating the disconnect between Brussels and EU citizens. Currently, the Conference on the Future of Europe is planning on addressing transnational lists for EP elections, and we strongly encourage their address of the voting system we have proposed.⁸³ The transnational list, in combination with direct representation, would ensure that voters feel represented while also promoting discourse around transnational issues that would bolster solidarity. The Conference on the Future

⁸² Standard Eurobarometer 91, Spring 2019, page 13.

⁸³ "Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe – Questions and Answers." European Commission - European Commission, January 22, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_88.

of Europe would be an ideal format for discussing these issues as this suggested voting system can drastically impact the future of European politics and solidarity.

2.3 Unifying the Electoral System

A second issue that Europarties face is the lack of a unified electoral system for European elections. The direct elections to the European Parliament are still conducted by way of separate national electoral systems, which is one of the fundamental obstacles to the full establishment of Europarties at a transnational level. When elections are so nationally focused, they encourage citizens to think only of politics within their Member State and not at a broader European level. Without the existence of a unified electoral system, Europarties will remain secondary political actors of European integration. While a change of the electoral system has been previously discussed, none of the European Parliament's previous proposals leading in the direction of a unified system have been agreed upon by EU institutions.⁸⁴ What is at stake is not only the question of equality of votes and size of constituencies (the number of voters per each MEP), but also the question of a uniform minimum age, transnational ballot list, and standardized election day, all of which are fundamental to a unified voting system. The supra-nationalization of the electoral model is thus a prerequisite not only for enhancing the role of the Europarties, but also for the adherence to the principle of an equal vote. This fundamental democratic principle is violated by the existing imbalance and diverging national regulations. Should the following suggestions be implemented, the election system of Europe would be more focused on trans-EU issues versus the current national focus. Moreover, voter turnout would increase with a larger pool of young voters, and votes would be increasingly proportionate. Such changes and consecutive results would help fight Euroscepticism by creating an EU-wide dialogue and increasing open communication between citizens and politicians. In having each vote count proportionately, citizens would feel assured that their vote counted and that their voice

⁸⁴ "A New Voting System."

was being heard, creating more trust in EU systems, combating Euroscepticism, and increasing solidarity.

Our first recommendation in addressing such inequality is for the EU to establish a more unified voting system. We propose making the official voting age across the EU sixteen. Additionally, all EU citizens sixteen or above should be able to vote for the MEP in their country of citizenship regardless of their current country of residence, given they are still registered to vote in their country of citizenship. These citizens should also have the right to choose to vote in their country of residence instead of their country of citizenship, given they have lived there for more than two years, have a registered residence, and local bank account. We believe that the selected age of sixteen should be the transnational voting age because, in the EU, the younger generation has a higher rate of voting and are the least likely group to vote for right-wing, Eurosceptic parties in most countries.⁸⁵ On the other hand, with older generations making up a larger percentage of the voting pool, expanding the voting age will add more young voters to balance out the higher Eurosceptic votes. Most importantly, young voters are crucial to rebuilding trust in the EU and promoting an EU identity. They tend to be much more pro-European and are less likely to think of the EU system as broken when compared with older voters.⁸⁶ These are the voters that pro-European parties should focus on to secure their vote and instituting a transnational voting age of sixteen will allow Europarties and the EU to boost solidarity and pro-European sentiments.

As discussed in the section on improving the visibility of Europarties, the creation of a transnational ballot list alongside a national ballot list would also help unify election rules. This new method of MEP elections would create proportional representation in Parliament by having one vote for a local representative and a second vote for a party. Half of MEP seats would be filled by local representatives elected in three hundred and fifty regional districts, and the other half would be filled by the Europarty votes, allocated to maintain

⁸⁵ Zerka, Pawel. "Europe's Underestimated Young Voters." ECFR. European Council on Foreign Affairs, May 2, 2019. https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_europes_underestimated_young_voters_elections/.

⁸⁶ "Europe's Underestimated Young Voters."

proportionality. However, some suggest an alternative to the dual ballot system: That the EU utilizes transnational lists by bypassing national elections altogether and having every EU citizen vote directly for who they want in Parliament.⁸⁷ European parties would submit lists of candidates, citizens vote for a list, and each list receives a percentage of the vote. This method would make it easier for the EU to unify election laws, as national elections would no longer be taking place. In addition to this method, the political opinion of citizens is properly represented, as each party gets a share of seats that matches its share of the popular opinion.

While this approach sounds plausible, the issues with it are immediately apparent. Should this method be used, citizens would have to vote for hundreds of candidates for each party. It would be difficult, if not impossible for citizens to dedicate enough time to learn about each candidate and decide who to vote for, so they would simply vote for their chosen party. This suggestion of evading national ballots and focusing on direct elections to Parliament would mean a complete disconnect between candidates and citizens. Therefore, we suggest having both a transnational and national list. It would keep the existing national apportionment (the distribution of MEPs per country), for candidates elected at the national level, and add a transnational constituency for which all European citizens could vote together. Europarties would then have a significant role in representing the interests of citizens and would be tasked to make sure citizens felt as if their vote is represented in the European Parliament. The creation of a transnational list is vital to the success of Europarties as it would create a visible, unified, and more importantly, European political platform that would draw attention to transnational issues and contribute to a collective European identity among voters.

⁸⁷ "Drounau, Louis. "Not transnational lists, transnational parties." EuropeanConstitution.eu, 2019, europeanconstitution.eu/a-new-voting-system.

2.4 Conclusion

Fostering European solidarity is one of the most pressing issues in the EU today. As demonstrated in this chapter, Europarties and the assurance of their success are vital to this task and will actively fight against Euroscepticism and distrust. Creating a system in which Europarties can be utilized to their full potential is essential to their prosperity and to the creation of the European-wide political dialogue that has been sought after. In our research, we have found that the two most pressing issues that have hindered the growth of Europarties are their lack of visibility and the EU's lack of a unified voting system. If a more unified voting system is created in addition to our other recommendations, public awareness of the Europarties will increase with it. One cannot exist without the other. Visibility will not increase as much as it could without a unified voting system, and a unified voting system such as the one we suggested would automatically increase visibility. Creating a system in which citizens feel heard by their politicians and believe their vote is represented in the European Parliament is vital to combatting mistrust in the EU, thereby proving the importance of Europarties. Maintaining proportionality in Parliament and creating a transnational political dialogue among Member States will further promote a European identity and ensure that all citizens feel a part of the EU.

2.5 Policy Recommendations

- Make the use of Europarty logos on national campaign material mandatory to increase awareness.
- Introduce more EU languages apart from French, German, and English on the Europarty website to increase user accessibility.
- Expand individual membership to include the average citizen and expand their roles so they can participate in decision and policymaking.
- Adopt the German “Bundestag” system of voting, with each citizen casting two votes: One for a locally elected official and one for a Europarty. Address this

system at the Conference on the Future of Europe alongside the discussion of transnational lists.

- Unify the electoral system by establishing sixteen as the universal voting age, allowing all EU citizens over sixteen to vote in their country of citizenship (possibly residency), and the creation of a transnational ballot list.

CHAPTER THREE: THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE (ECI)

3.1 Introduction

Increasing direct citizen involvement in the European Union's various institutions contributes significantly to creating solidarity within the EU and nurturing the identities of European citizens. In its history, the EU has established various avenues for citizen involvement, such as public consultations or the European Citizen's Consultations whereby EU representatives meet with citizens and hold debates regarding new and revised initiatives, and citizens can take further action by requesting EU documents and bringing legal challenges to pre-existing policies.⁸⁸ However, the most prominent mechanism for the involvement of EU citizens remains the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).

The European Union has worked to decrease its perceived democratic deficit and has focused its efforts on incorporating elements of representative democracy to combat such misconceptions. While this principle of citizen representation is achieved by the European Parliament at the EU level, the Lisbon Treaty takes these democratic principles a step further in its introduction of the ECI in 2007, which was subsequently launched in 2012.⁸⁹ In the establishment of the ECI, the EU solidified participatory democracy as a source of democratic legitimacy alongside its representative democratic principles.⁹⁰ As the ECI acts as the EU's citizen-led agenda-setting mechanism, it functions as a way for citizens to set forth initiatives to the EU, thus bringing citizens' voices into the EU's decisions and priorities. Beyond this functionality, the ECI has the potential to bring issues to a

⁸⁸ Alemanno, Albert. 2018. "Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics." Carnegie Europe. December 5, 2018. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/12/05/beyond-consultations-reimagining-eu-participatory-politics-pub-77873>.

⁸⁹ "About Parliament." n.d. About Parliament. Accessed February 23, 2021. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en>.

⁹⁰ Athanasiadou, Natassa. 2019. "The European Citizens' Initiative: Lost in Admissibility?" *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law* 26 (2): 251–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1023263X18824772>.

European-wide level of public discourse, which would allow for more democratic participation across Member States and the fostering of what it means to be European.

However, the concern that follows the ECI is how the EU can effectively encourage citizen investment into this mechanism and how can more people be incorporated into its participatory framework. There is, additionally, a disconnect between the ECI's effectiveness and what it is trying to achieve. The main challenges for the current state of the ECI in addressing the EU's democratic deficit are arguably people's lack of knowledge and access to the ECI, the inability of each initiative to meet the signature threshold, and how ECIs are received and addressed by the EU institutions and how they can better cultivate an EU-wide public sphere of discourse.

The EU must improve both the initial and follow-up procedures of ECI's to, amongst many things, increase peoples' faith in the EU. In such an approach, the EU will increase conscious solidarity between citizens with similar trans-EU concerns and assure them that their voices are being heard by the EU and its institutions. By amending specific components of ECI, this initiative has the potential to combat pressing European issues and Eurosceptic political parties that threaten EU solidarity and integration. The ECI is one of the EU's most promising options for uplifting the identity and agency of its citizens; it allows Europeans to stand side-by-side in solidarity on matters that are most important to them and participate in meaningful conversations about the future of Europe. Within the creation of such dialogue, the ECI and participating EU citizens will help diminish Eurosceptic voices that are often fueled by the inability to participate and communicate openly with the EU.

3.2 The Origin and Structure of ECIs

The European Citizens' Initiative is the main instrument for participatory politics at the EU level. It was designed with agenda-setting in mind, thereby affording the European citizenry the same right as the European Parliament and European Council in the

legislative process.⁹¹ To successfully register an ECI, organizers must go through a submission process whereby an initiative is either accepted or denied by the European Commission. During these proceedings, ECI's are evaluated on their feasibility regarding the legal scope of the European Commission: whether they abide by EU treaties and if initiatives are "manifestly abusive, frivolous, or vexatious."⁹² However, even with the capacity to do so, only a few proposals have succeeded when it comes to challenging a rejection from the Commission.⁹³ When successfully registered, organizers have a 12-month window to collect one million signatures from citizens representing at least a fourth of all Member States, with relatively low minimum thresholds for each country.⁹⁴ If an initiative manages to collect enough signatures, organizers meet with the European Commission and a public hearing is held by the EP. However, the Commission is under no legal obligation to make a policy proposal relating to a successful initiative.⁹⁵ The European Commission's role in this process is extensive, as they are not only responsible for registering initiatives, but are also the main addressee of successful initiatives.⁹⁶ Through this process of organizing and providing a path for citizens to influence decisions at the EU level, the ECI at its best would facilitate transnational conversations and solidarity by entailing support for issues that matter to European citizens. However, the ECI faces several challenges that prevent it from reaching its full potential.

ECI's are integral to increasing the EU's democratic processes by enhancing citizen participation in EU level conversation and debates. However, despite the ECI mechanism being intended for universal use, it has been easier to utilize by social movements and organized groups such as trade unions, 'pro-life' organizations, animal rights groups, and

⁹¹ Boucher, Stephen. n.d. "How Citizens Can Hack EU Democracy." Carnegie Europe. Accessed January 25, 2021.

<https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/05/02/how-citizens-can-hack-eu-democracy-pub-76168>

⁹² Longo, Erik. 2019. "The European Citizens' Initiative: Too Much Democracy for EU Polity?" *German Law Journal* 20 (2): 181–200. <https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2019.12>.

⁹³ Greenwood, Justin. 2018. "The European Citizens' Initiative: Bringing the EU Closer to Its Citizens?" *Comparative European Politics* 17 (6): 940–56. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-018-0138-x>.

⁹⁴ Weisskircher, Manès. 2020. "The European Citizens' Initiative: Mobilization Strategies and Consequences." *Political Studies* 68 (3): 797–815. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719859792>.

⁹⁵ "The European Citizens' Initiative: Lost in Admissibility?"

⁹⁶ "The European Citizens' Initiative: Mobilization Strategies and Consequences."

environmentalists.⁹⁷ While these organizations are thought to be more capable of carrying out ECI campaigns and as such, strive to make large-scale social change, it leaves the question of democratic participation: How closely do these organizations represent EU citizenry? In “Formal Agenda-Setting (European Level),” authors Gloria Rose and Georg Aichholzer, explore the participatory process in ECI’s, social movements, and organized groups while also identifying the shortcomings of these initiatives. Specifically, they describe how public opinion is moderated through these intermediaries and discuss how the representative nature of these organizations “has not only weakened over time, but also become contested.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, a 2018 report shows that from 2017 to 2018, the percentage of people who trust NGOs dropped in 14 out of the 28 countries surveyed, with nine of them being EU Member States (Figure 11).⁹⁹

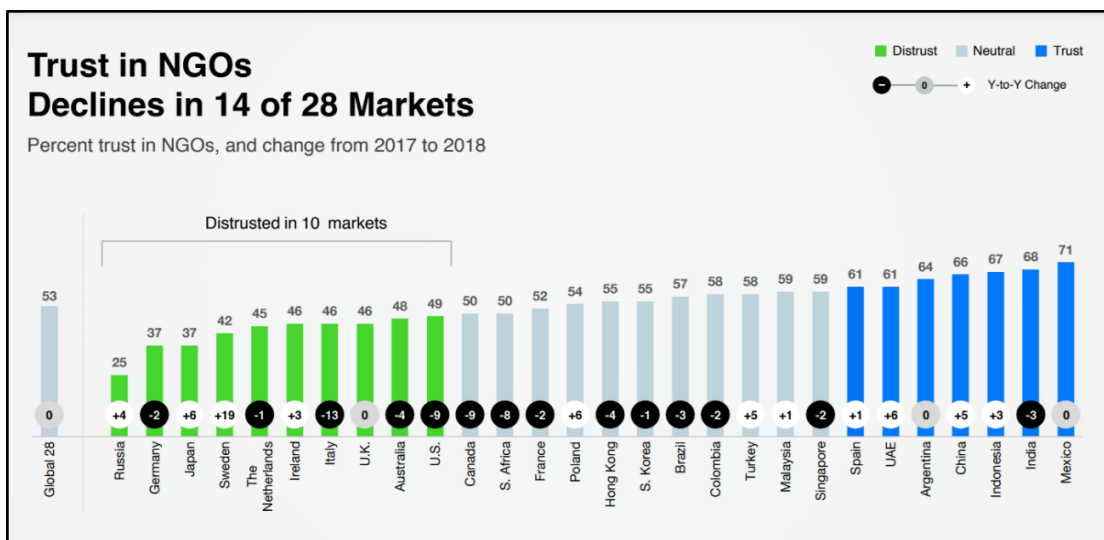


Figure 11: 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer-comparing 28 countries trust in NGOs.

Source: Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics.

This Trust Barometer indicates that NGOs may not be adequate substitutes when it comes to representing entire populations, as they do not account for individuals outside

⁹⁷ “The European Citizens’ Initiative: Mobilization Strategies and Consequences.”

⁹⁸ Rose, Gloria, Ira van Keulen, and Georg Aichholzer. 2020. “Formal Agenda-Setting (European Level).” In *European E-Democracy in Practice*, edited by Leonhard Hennen, Ira van Keulen, Iris Korthagen, Georg Aichholzer, Ralf Lindner, and Rasmus Øjvind Nielsen, 209–36. Studies in Digital Politics and Governance. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27184-8_9.

⁹⁹ “2018 Edelman TRUST BAROMETER.” 2018. Edelman. January 21, 2018. <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2018-trust-barometer>.

of these organizations. However, due to the large networks of organizations and the easy assembly of people during social movements, NGOs often succeed other ECIs who are only successful based on their collection of one million signatures, which is notably hard to achieve, especially when considering the necessity to mobilize transnationally. Nevertheless, the prominent role of social movements underutilizes the value of individuals who do not participate and thus, could diminish the ECI's potential as a representative tool.

The ECI as a mechanism faces its own set of challenges, and there are several areas that need improvement. As of May 2019, only nine million signatures have been collected altogether out of 448.6 million EU citizens.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, since its inception, there have been 99 registration requests, 76 of which have been registered as initiatives, and only six initiatives that have been successful in reaching one million signatures.¹⁰¹ The fact that only six initiatives have met the requirements to be considered "successful" illustrates the lack of visibility and awareness of the ECI as a participatory mechanism, and how difficult it has been to mobilize Europeans across Member States. Furthermore, the fact that the "success" of an ECI does not refer to the actual implementation of an initiative and is solely based on whether it has collected enough signatures, presents an obstacle in the ECIs path to fostering solidarity and implementing citizen-sparked change at the EU level.

It is evident that the ECI has room for improvement when it comes to strengthening its legitimacy and the extent to which it can truly foster a Europe-wide public sphere that is invested in a shared European Project. Without clear and consistent responses to citizens' initiatives, the function of the ECI as a democratic instrument subsides and solidarity becomes harder to achieve locally, nationally, and at the EU level. The combination of low awareness of the ECI and its scarce influence over EU policymaking

¹⁰⁰ "Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics."

¹⁰¹ "Home | European Citizens' Initiative - Portal." n.d. Accessed February 18, 2021. https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/_en.

has resulted in an overall disenchantment with the ECI and, by extension, fed into growing Eurosceptic narratives in the EU.

3.3 Knowledge and Awareness of the European Citizens' Initiative

The European Citizens' Initiative plays a central role in how people can relate directly to the European Union. According to the ECI website, it functions as a way for citizens to have "a greater say in the policies that affect [their] lives."¹⁰² However, the ECI as a mechanism for direct citizen participation can only foster a sense of agency for citizens and transnational comradery if people have knowledge about it and access to it. This is a considerably weak feature of the ECI because, without general awareness of it, there is a missed opportunity for increasing citizens' roles in EU politics. To boost citizens' knowledge and awareness of ECI, the EU must take actionable steps toward promoting ECIs and engaging with Europeans about this instrument. Beyond this, the European Union must transform how the ECI is conceptualized to capture its potential as a direct democracy tool. At the general level, "public knowledge about the ECI has remained very limited."¹⁰³ Additionally, there is growing concern about the extent to which the public engages with the ECI as a participatory mechanism. In a 2020 Eurobarometer survey, individuals of Member States were asked if they were aware of their rights as EU citizens (Figure 12).¹⁰⁴ While 75% of participants were aware of their right to participate in an ECI, such understanding of this right was the lowest percentage of all rights listed in the survey. When looking at the original goals of the ECI, one of the key points stated is that it acts as a democratic participatory mechanism. Participatory democracy not only entails this direct link for citizens in decision-making processes, but also that it enables "channels of communication with often misrepresented categories of the population."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² "Home | European Citizens' Initiative - Portal."

¹⁰³ "The European Citizens' Initiative: Lost in Admissibility?"

¹⁰⁴ "The European Citizens' Initiative: Lost in Admissibility?"

¹⁰⁵ "The European Citizens' Initiative: Lost in Admissibility?"

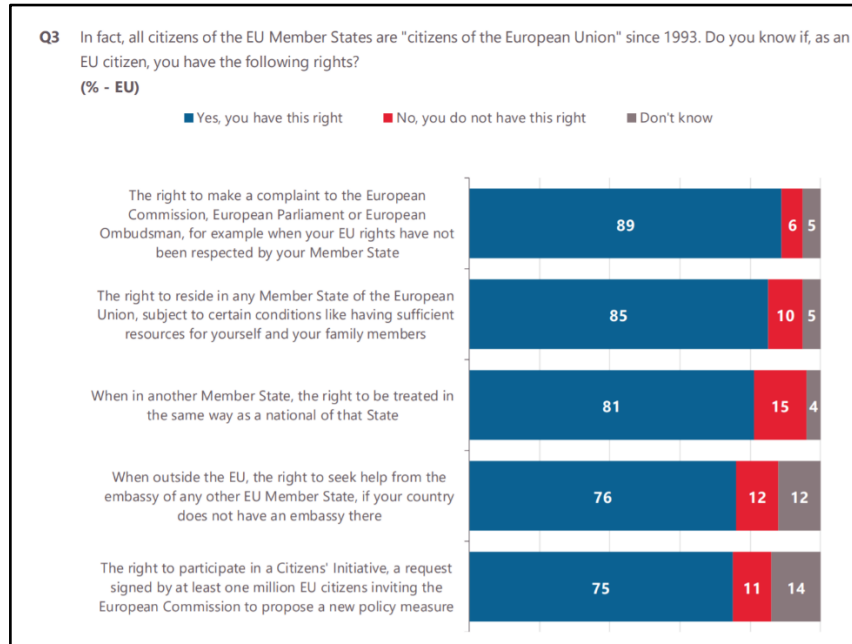


Figure 12: Survey -Do citizens of EU Member States know their rights as an EU citizen.
Source: European Commission: Eurobarometer 485- EU Citizenship and Democracy, 2020.

However, despite such desire for widespread citizen engagement and representation, it is believed that only well-educated citizens with high interest in EU affairs are the ones that actively participate through the ECI.¹⁰⁶ If only a portion of society are able to utilize this instrument, it works against fostering a sense of belongingness to the European community and threatens citizens' ability to identify with European institutions. A void in direct citizen input makes the EU vulnerable to actors that would claim to speak on the behalf of citizens, thus feeding into populist, Eurosceptic rhetoric.¹⁰⁷ Without effective, active, and well-represented participation through the ECI, there is a risk of increased disillusionment with the representative nature and democratic quality of EU participatory mechanisms. On the other hand, it is insufficient for the European Citizens' Initiative to exist solely as a participatory mechanism, as its efficacy hinges on its implementation and ability to create wide-spread change. To facilitate active participation and debate amongst citizens, the EU must increase public salience of the ECI. Avenues like the ECI are meant

¹⁰⁶ "Formal Agenda-Setting (European Level)."

¹⁰⁷ "Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics."

to influence the EU from the bottom-up and speak against the rhetoric of populist and Eurosceptic parties by providing citizens a way to influence EU decision-making.

To increase awareness of the European Citizens' Initiative and build its capacity as a participatory mechanism, the EU should implement more social media shareability into the ECI website. The ECI is itself is a form of e-democracy, where information and communication technology (ICT) has been used to enhance democratic structures and processes.¹⁰⁸ The EU has worked to improve the ECI technology, ranging from making an online platform for collecting signatures, to an ECI forum.¹⁰⁹ However, increasing social media accessibility on the website is a step towards boosting ECIs' visibility. Social media and ICTs reduce barriers that people may have in supporting campaigns, and instead, create opportunities for activism. Digital media lowers the cost of communication, association, and participation for individuals by providing a single space for such activity, thereby giving an increased range of people access to issues brought up by ongoing ECIs.¹¹⁰ Social media shareability also offers an opportunity for new actors and grassroots organizations tools to mobilize people online. With more e-democracy platforms emerging, benefits come: "When e-participation platforms are used to complement, rather than replace, existing democratic processes and when decisionmakers follow up on the outcomes, digital tools can be highly successful and strengthen democratic participation."¹¹¹ Despite the ECI already being considered an online tool that is designed to be used for democratic participation, expanding the shareability of ECIs would enhance the democratic quality of this forum by reaching more citizens across the EU and better provide organizers with tools to craft transnational campaigns. Increasing social media accessibility and highlighting it as an aid for

¹⁰⁸ Kneuer, Marianne, and Mario Datts. 2020. "E-Democracy and the Matter of Scale. Revisiting the Democratic Promises of the Internet in Terms of the Spatial Dimension." *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 61 (2): 285–308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-020-00250-6>.

¹⁰⁹ "Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics."

¹¹⁰ "E-Democracy and the Matter of Scale. Revisiting the Democratic Promises of the Internet in Terms of the Spatial Dimension."

¹¹¹ Lironi, Elisa. 2018. "Harnessing Digital Tools to Revitalize European Democracy." Carnegie Europe. December 28, 2018. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/11/28/harnessing-digital-tools-to-revitalize-european-democracy-pub-77806>.

organizers would open the door to increased involvement of the European public and most importantly, prioritize the issues that Europeans care about the most.

Additionally, the EU could strengthen awareness about the ECI and ongoing ECIs by discussing them at the Conference on the Future of Europe. Within the structure of the Conference, the EU could incorporate the pre-existing ECI Days as run by the European Economic and Social Community (EESC). This is an event where ECI organizers, civil society organizations, citizens, policymakers, and researchers all meet to discuss the ECI and its future.¹¹² As part of the Conference, ECI organizers could interact with other interested groups, share their experiences, and develop transnational strategies for mobilization. Moreover, the EU could host live events consisting of Q&As, panels, or forums where organizers along with interest groups looking to start the process an ECI could talk to legal advisors about how to commence an initiative. One of the main goals of this Conference is to involve EU citizens and give them a greater say in what the EU should improve and take action on.¹¹³ The incorporation of ECI Day and the EESC at the Conference on the Future of Europe would be invaluable in introducing the ECI to the public and showcasing its potential to better call upon citizen's voices when addressing Europe's most pressing challenges.

3.4 ECI Mobilization and Fostering a European Public Sphere

Beyond issues of awareness, ECIs face difficulties in efficiently mobilizing citizens. This is due to the high costs of running a successful campaign and the minimal impact that initiatives have at the level of EU politics. Both aspects work to create a narrative that ECIs are not cost-effective, thus making it less appealing as a direct democracy instrument and could play a role in the negative perception of the EU among citizens.

¹¹² Groot, Maarten de, and Christian Huesmann. 2020. "ECI Day 2020 – What Will the Future Hold for the European Citizens' Initiative?" Text. European Union | European Citizen's Initiative Forum. March 18, 2020. https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/blog/eci-day-2020-what-will-future-hold-european-citizens-initiative_en.

¹¹³ "Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe." 2020. Text. European Commission. January 22, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_89.

Organizers need significant resources, networks, citizen alliances, as well as coalitions with civil society, media, and NGOs to garner success.¹¹⁴ In particular, a large team of individuals, such as legally qualified personnel, data protection specialists, fundraising directors, and marketing specialists are necessary to help ECIs meet the threshold of one million signatures. Even before the signature minimum, proposals for initiatives must be registered by the European Commission. About 30% of ECIs fail to be registered on the grounds that an initiative must fall within the competencies of the European Commission and EU treaties.¹¹⁵ Even for initiatives that are able to be registered, one million signatures is a large threshold to reach, and consequently, there is a very low success rate: six out of 76 initiatives (or 7% of all initiatives) have met the requirements.¹¹⁶ A Commission official argued that not reaching one million signatures was not completely without effect: “The fact that the ECI existed and the fact that there was debate going around it and the fact that people were campaigning for the ECI also made national politicians realize there was a problem. And they actually debated it in national government.”¹¹⁷ The official was trying to frame the ECI as being a positive mechanism despite the slim margin of success for initiatives, however, his words ultimately highlight the negative impact that such a success rate has on EU solidarity. This quote raises concern when considering that the ECI seems to challenge the idea of facilitating a European-wide public sphere. Without participatory efficacy at the EU level, people are pushed toward mobilizing nationally, thereby decreasing their sense of a shared EU solidarity. This is concerning, as this statement is from a Commission official, who seems to highlight the impact of the ECI and the lack of EU follow-through as a positive for creating nationally-based debate and Member State-centered public discourse. Therefore, the success rate of these initiatives must be bolstered to increase democratic legitimacy and decrease the negative narratives of anti-EU populist movements.

¹¹⁴ “Formal Agenda-Setting (European Level).”

¹¹⁵ Hierlemann, Dominik, and Christian Huesmann. 2018. “The Reform of the European Citizens’ Initiative: Not for the Youth?” Bertelsmann Stiftung. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/181012_D_BST-Einwurf-5-2018-ENGLISCH.pdf.

¹¹⁶ “Home | European Citizens’ Initiative - Portal.” n.d. Accessed February 18, 2021. https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/_en.

¹¹⁷ “Formal Agenda-Setting (European Level).”

Another pitfall in the design of the ECI is the disconnect between mobilization strategies and the goals of the ECI in fostering participatory democracy. The requirement of one million signatures emphasizes mobilization as a key aspect to the success or failure of an initiative. As it stands, successful mobilization within the framework of the ECI means focusing campaign efforts in just one or two populous countries. Figure 13 illustrates the nationalities of signatories for one of the successful initiatives, “Stop Vivisection.”¹¹⁸ While the organizers of the campaign were from diverse backgrounds, most signatures were collected in Italy.

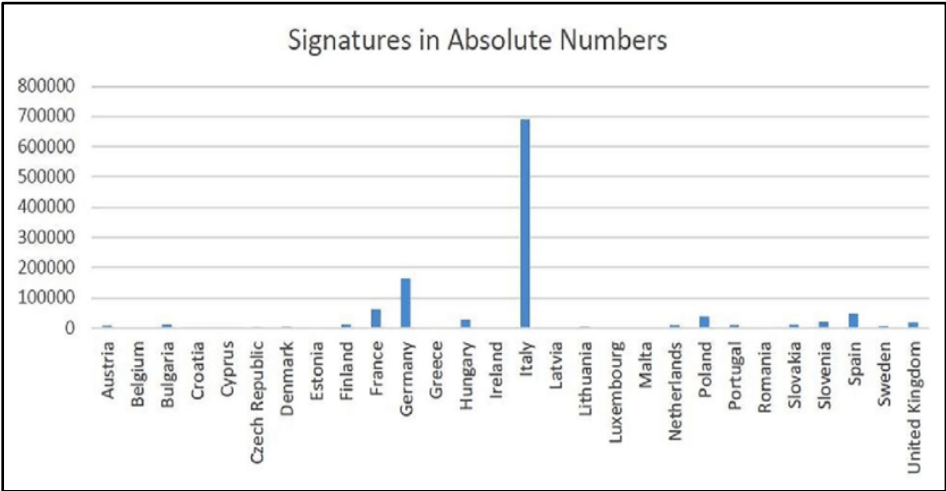


Figure 13: Comparing signatures gained for ECI’s across EU Member States.
Source: Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics.

This shows that the ECI does not necessarily facilitate increasingly diverse trans-European support or discourse on given issues. When looking over initiatives, the majority have obtained a significant number of signatures in only one or two countries. This presents a problem for the ECI when it comes to creating a European Public Sphere, as initiatives can be designed to target a few Member States instead of addressing all EU members as a whole. Without rigorous, pluralistic, public discourse at the EU level, the

¹¹⁸. “The European Citizens’ Initiative: Mobilization Strategies and Consequences.”

Union is left vulnerable to movements that latch onto Eurosceptic rhetoric and decrease faith in the European Project.¹¹⁹

To bolster the effectiveness of ECI mobilization efforts, the EU needs to provide tools that limit the burdens on those who want to start an ECI and those who are currently running ECI campaigns. This would be in the form of legal, advocacy, and skill-sharing programs that aim to decrease the costs of both registering ECIs as well as mobilizing people transnationally. More specifically, these tools could take the form of citizen lobbying aid, which would assist current and potential advocates and be modeled after systems of legal aid. The EU could also create skill-sharing platforms for advocates, which could bring together legal and advocacy support for citizens, prominent organizations, as well as NGOs.¹²⁰ This structure for ECI support would work to bring interest groups together and limit the high requirements for engaging with such a vast citizenry, thus embedding solidarity amongst all ECI participants.

Additionally, the ECI must set a precedent for its participatory framework within the EU and be effective at stirring up conversation, debate, and public opinion at a transnational level. Rather than involving the EU at only the registration phase and requiring the garnering of one million signatures before moving forward in the process, the EU should play a role in fostering interest earlier on for promising campaigns. For example, if an ECI reaches 200,000 signatures within the first six months, an initial public hearing in the EU Parliament should be held.¹²¹ This would “give running ECIs a political platform and facilitate public debate on the issue” and in turn, make issues more salient to the public. This also has the benefit of keeping ECI committees motivated throughout the campaign process and gives EU institutions a chance to see where citizens’ opinions lie; incorporating issues that have not reached one million signatures. Moreover, an initial hearing could “ensure that the efforts of those that do not reach the million mark can still

¹¹⁹ “Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics.”

¹²⁰ “Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics.”

¹²¹ “European Citizens’ Initiative.” 2015. Democracy International e.V. February 4, 2015. <https://www.democracy-international.org/european-citizens-initiative-reform>.

be heard in one way or another.”¹²² This hearing would capitalize on the ECIs potential to be a beacon of public debate by highlighting persistent issues and ongoing initiatives along with encouraging citizen engagement at the EU level. Increased public salience of issues and debates would also strengthen incentives for EU institutions and European representatives to respond thoughtfully to public input.¹²³ Ultimately, an initial public hearing means reaching more people and actively working to create interest in EU politics. Drawing a line between this public sphere and solidarity:

An equal right to liberty and self-development can only be achieved in a participatory society, a society which fosters a sense of political efficacy nurtures a concern for collective problems and contributes to the formation of a knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking a sustained interest in the governing processes.¹²⁴

This would be a step toward creating a more democratic environment and a new public sphere that can bridge the gap between national and European identities. Solidarity and the principles of relying on one another and social belonging exist at these different levels and are often centered more around one’s own country.¹²⁵ If the EU is to strengthen solidarity, it must consider how it can balance these levels of solidarity, thereby increasing a Europe-wide sphere of discourse for people to be invested in tackling the issues that Europe faces.

3.5 EU Reception and Follow-Up Procedures

The European Citizens’ Initiative is central to the pressing concern of bolstering EU solidarity, as it provides a unique avenue for giving citizens a voice in EU affairs. As opposed to top-down implementation of solidarity measures, the ECI “represents an unprecedented means of transnational democracy” as a mechanism that brings citizens

¹²² “Opening Speech by the EESC President at European Citizens’ Initiative Day.” 2016. European Economic and Social Committee. January 29, 2016. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/presentations/opening-speech-eesc-president-european-citizens-initiative-day>.

¹²³ “Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics.”

¹²⁴ “The European Citizens’ Initiative: Too Much Democracy for EU Polity?”

¹²⁵ Lahusen, Christian. 2020. “European Solidarity: An Introduction to a Multifaceted Phenomenon.” Citizens’ Solidarity in Europe, March. <https://www.elgaronline.com/view/edcoll/9781789909494/9781789909494.00006.xml>.

more belonging and say in the EU.¹²⁶ However, there remains a severe lack of responsiveness to even successful initiatives. Out of the six successful ECIs, none have been met with concrete legislative follow-through. “Stop Vivisection,” “Right2Water,” “One of Us,” and “Ban Glyphosate” were all declined initial legislative actions. However, while “Right2Water” and its call for the human right to water and sanitation was mentioned in an EU directive on water quality, this happened more than seven years after the ECI was initially submitted.¹²⁷ This lag in follow-up and failure to take action on all successful ECIs reveals how the current ECI process is inadequate for pressuring EU lawmakers to enact legislation.¹²⁸

The very structure of the ECI, the few incentives that the European Commission has in implementing policy-related responses, and the overall lack of transparency and accountability throughout the process all point to how the ECI can be perceived as symbolic rather than having democratic legitimacy. Not only does such a lack of action in response to ECIs create disappointment and frustration, but it also dissuades people from taking part in ECIs to begin with and has negative effects on the institution’s legitimacy in the public eye. In this sense, deficiency in awareness and faith of ECI effectiveness are two sides of the same coin and could potentially have the opposite of their intended effect. The EU is not taking actionable measures to afford the accomplishment of a successful ECI any satisfaction in terms of policy change, and such an insufficient response could cause citizens to feel little to no attachment towards either the successes or failures of the EU as a whole. The European Commission is perceived by many authors to be “the player that makes or breaks the instrument,” as the Commission can block any initiative’s proposal from going to the European Parliament or European Council.¹²⁹ Additionally, the lack of formal commitment to acting on successful ECIs has disillusioned many activists. For instance, organizers for the “Stop Vivisection” Initiative shared that hearings with the

¹²⁶ “The European Citizens’ Initiative: Too Much Democracy for EU Polity?”

¹²⁷ Berg, Carsten. 2021. “Time for the European Commission to Shine.” *Www.Euractiv.Com* (blog). January 8, 2021. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/opinion/time-for-the-european-commission-to-shine/>.

¹²⁸ “How Citizens Can Hack EU Democracy.”

¹²⁹ “The European Citizens’ Initiative: Mobilization Strategies and Consequences.”

Commission were brief and did not allow enough time for true and meaningful debate.¹³⁰ This shows how the Commission can act against solidarity in their inadequacy in dedicating time and engaging in active, in-depth conversations with citizens. Instead, quick responses, as exhibited in “Stop Vivisection,” create barriers that disincentivize citizens from utilizing modes of participatory democracy.

Furthermore, there is perceived dissonance between day-to-day EU policymaking and ECI proposals. This is another reason why there is limited follow-up when it comes to how successful initiatives are ultimately handled. The “Stop Glyphosate” ECI, which demanded the end of the herbicide’s usage, was successful in reaching the required one million signatures, but it could not be factored into ongoing EU decision making.¹³¹ Demand garnered from the ECI did not have a place in what the EU was prioritizing at that moment. This disconnect creates an inherent barrier between any ECI that manages to get enough signatures and what the EU is prioritizing in that session. Moreover, the EU’s response to the initiative seemed to deflect responsibility onto Member States: “Member States are responsible for the authorization, use and/or ban of glyphosate-based products on their territories.”¹³² The failure of the “Stop Glyphosate” initiative highlights how the ECI might be perceived as a way for the EU to simply legitimize itself as a democratic body, without putting the effort into fully realizing the instrument’s democratic potential. Disillusionment with the entire process of ECIs can feed Euroscepticism and turns away potential campaigners from the ECI. It creates a reputation for the EU’s most prominent instrument of participatory democracy into one that is ineffective at influencing EU politics, mitigating the ECIs democratic incentives.¹³³

To improve the democratic quality of the ECI, there needs to be additional mechanisms in place for initiatives to be considered successful and implemented. First, there needs to

¹³⁰ “The European Citizens’ Initiative: Mobilization Strategies and Consequences.”

¹³¹ “Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics.”

¹³² “Glyphosate: Commission Responds to European Citizens’ Initiative and Announces More Transparency in Scientific Assessments.” 2017. Text. European Commission. December 12, 2017.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_5191.

¹³³ “Time for the European Commission to Shine – EURACTIV.Com.”

be more established points of contact for EU citizens throughout the process of the ECI and built-in transparency. Having citizen input and EU transparency at each step of the process would create a feedback loop “to guarantee that input from citizens and grassroots organizations be considered in tangible ways within EU decision making.”¹³⁴ As it currently stands, the ECI and its implementation process are mostly one-sided: The Commission meets and publishes a press release in response to an ECI. EU citizens need a way to express their level of agreement for how ECIs get implemented, thereby incentivizing the EU to responsively act on initiatives. Additionally, there must be clear and transparent links between initiatives and any resulting policy-change. The recommendation mentioned previously: The introduction of a public hearing if an ECI reaches 200,000 signatures in the first six months, is one such step toward making this possible. With this, citizens’ opinions on matters are apparent from the beginning and can request that a follow-up from that point on be included in the process.

Finally, the incorporation and ties to other institutions within the EU have the potential to make lawmakers accountable, completing this feedback loop. The EU should institute mechanisms for the ECI to not be barred from the European Parliament and the European Council. Currently, ECIs are discussed in plenary sessions, but this should go a step further by requiring that plenary sessions be followed by a plenary resolution on the ECI.¹³⁵ Additionally, the European Commission should “voluntarily abstain from using its veto power provided by its monopoly on legislative initiative.”¹³⁶ This would give citizens a chance to see where their representatives stand on issues that are brought up by ECIs, as well as inform them of the Commission’s decision on the ECI.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ “Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU Participatory Politics.”

¹³⁵ Groot, Maarten de. 2019. “Revitalizing the ECI – Improving the Follow-up on Successful Initiatives.” Text. November 29, 2019. https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/blog/revitalizing-eci-improving-follow-successful-initiatives_en.

¹³⁶ “We Need Even More Reform of the ECI: A Short-Term and a Long-Term Proposal.” 2020. European Union | European Citizen’s Initiative Forum. October 28, 2020. https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/blog/we-need-even-more-reform-eci-short-term-and-long-term-proposal_fr.

¹³⁷ “Revitalizing the ECI – Improving the Follow-up on Successful Initiatives.”

3.6 Conclusion

The European Citizen's Initiative is unique in its role as a democratic instrument. It has the potential to foster direct democracy in the EU, bridge the EU's democratic deficit, and overall increase the role that citizens play in EU level politics. Concerning solidarity, the possibility of increased democratic legitimacy of the EU has the ability to contradict anti-EU movements and allow individuals to identify more closely with the idea of being an EU citizen. However, to fully embody this role, the ECI must be improved in several ways, including citizen awareness of the ECI, how effectively ECIs can foster a European Public Sphere, and how ECIs are addressed by the EU. When considering the future of the EU at the Conference for the Future of Europe, citizens' voices and their influence at the EU level should be uplifted and extended beyond the scope of the Conference by being solidified in the efficacy of the ECI.

3.7 Policy Recommendations

- Implement social media shareability on ECI websites for individual initiatives to mobilize supporters.
- Include ECI Day in the Conference on the Future of Europe, where ECI organizers, activists, citizens, and EU members could be hosted to discuss the future of ECIs as well as hold Q&As.
- Incorporate skill-sharing platforms and citizen lobbying aid to the ECI registration process to ease the complexity of registration and give organizers the tools they need for producing successful initiatives.
- An initial public hearing in EU Parliament should be held if an ECI reaches 200,000 signatures within the first six months.
- Establish mechanisms that enable ECIs to reach the EU Parliament and Council for consideration

CHAPTER 4: COMBATTING DISINFORMATION IN THE EU

4.1 Introduction

Since the advent of the internet and social media, connectivity between Europeans and the world has never been easier. EU citizens can now instantly connect with others with the click of a ‘follow,’ ‘like,’ or ‘new message’ icon, and while this has improved information sharing, business, entertainment, and more, it has also opened new avenues for deception and exploitation. Today, online media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have replaced traditional TV and radio stations as the primary sources of news for many people. A study conducted in 2018 revealed that more than 50 percent of adults in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Portugal, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, and as many as 70 percent of adults in Greece, get their news from social media.¹³⁸ One of the reasons these platforms are so successful at catching users’ attention is due to their use of built-in algorithms to collect personal data and feed users specific content based on past interactions. Most of the disinformation is spread online via social media platforms, and such frequent social media usage exposes people to heightened levels of disinformation and misinformation, which can increase Euroscepticism and undermine solidarity at the local, national, and EU level.¹³⁹

Moreover, social media platforms notably lack regulation, and this loosely controlled online environment has allowed unreliable news, disinformation, and conspiracy theories to spread widely on a global scale. Election interference, subversion of democracy, and conspiracy theories have been attributed in large part to the quick and extensive spread

¹³⁸ “Statista. “Usage of Social Media as a News Source Worldwide 2020,” n.d. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/718019/social-media-news-source/>.

¹³⁹ “Transparency, Communications, and Trust: The Role of Public Communication in Responding to the Wave of Disinformation about the New Coronavirus.” Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), July 3, 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/transparency-communication-and-trust-bef7ad6e/#section-d1e37>.

of disinformation across social media. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the prevalence of conspiracy theories such as QAnon on the internet, contributing to what WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus often described as an “infodemic” in addition to the pandemic.¹⁴⁰ While the European Union has recognized the issues that come with online media by pushing for and establishing stronger data privacy regulations, disinformation and misinformation have continued to spread throughout the EU.¹⁴¹

This chapter focuses on what the EU can do to curtail misinformation and disinformation within its borders. Disinformation is often the umbrella term used to denote any type of false information, but the difference between disinformation and misinformation is significant. Misinformation refers to false or misleading information that is spread without the intention of causing harm. Disinformation refers to false or misleading information that is created and disseminated with the intention to disrupt society in a way that causes confusion, distrust, or harm. Providing a space to introduce and debate a wide range of opinions is necessary for a pluralistic and democratic society. Pluralism also depends on the media being responsible for presenting accurate and unbiased content that will help voters develop an informed opinion. However, what happens when “opinions” are actually falsehoods? Combatting the spread of so-called “fake news” and conspiracy thinking on a global scale is uncharted waters for any institution.¹⁴²

According to a 2018 Eurobarometer survey, 85% of respondents considered “fake news” a problem in their country.¹⁴³ EU citizens are well aware of the dangers of disinformation, and the EU can take steps to further combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation over social media platforms. In doing so, they will help increase solidarity between EU citizens and increase trust in national and EU institutions, as well as

¹⁴⁰ Ghebreyesus, Tedros. “Munich Security Conference.” February 15, 2020. <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/munich-security-Conference>.

¹⁴¹ European Commission. “Fighting Disinformation,” 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation_en.

¹⁴² Nenadić, Iva. “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.” *Internet Policy Review* 8, no. 4 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1436>.

¹⁴³ “The General Data Protection Regulation.” Special Eurobarometer 487a. European Commission, June 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/86886>.

contribute to the promotion of democratic values. Disinformation is harmful and divisive, shaping negative views about migration and taxes, views often based on misleading stereotypes or false claims, which contributes to Euroscepticism. If the public trusts the EU to present accurate information, protect their rights, and maintain transparency about their policies and programs, solidarity between the EU and citizens will improve.

4.2 The EU's Data Policies

The global nature of cyberspace makes disinformation an issue that affects people in the EU and across the world. To acknowledge the danger of disinformation and uncontrolled business access to user data, the EU passed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), globally the first data protection policy of its kind. The GDPR is a wide-ranging law that gives people more power over their data and expands enforcement powers to data protection authorities in an effort to better protect data privacy.¹⁴⁴ By requiring companies doing business in the EU to follow the GDPR rules, the policy benefits not just EU citizens, but the privacy of people worldwide. The EU demonstrated its leadership and commitment to protecting personal data when it passed the GDPR, which other governments can use as a model and guide. The European Commission has determined that since its passage, it has succeeded in strengthening data protection and is on the path to creating the single EU digital space.¹⁴⁵

Along with the GDPR, the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) was established as an EU level board made up of the heads of all the national data protection authorities to ensure data protection throughout the EU.¹⁴⁶ This body provides “general guidance” on GDPR policies, interprets data protection policy for stakeholders, and advises the European Commission on the best data policy practices.¹⁴⁷ While the GDPR has only

¹⁴⁴ Campbell, Alex. “How Data Privacy Laws Can Fight Fake News.” Just Security, August 15, 2019. <https://www.justsecurity.org/65795/how-data-privacy-laws-can-fight-fake-news/>.

¹⁴⁵ “Digital Transition - Two Years of Application of the General Data Protection Regulation.” Euro-pean Commission, June 24, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/1_en_act_part1_v6_1.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.”

¹⁴⁷ European Data Protection Board. “General Guidance,” n.d. https://edpb.europa.eu/our-work-tools/general-guidance_en.

been in effect since 2018, it is still too early to see some of the true impacts of the policy, as the prevalence of disinformation in 2020 signals that more policy is necessary to improve privacy standards and data protection.¹⁴⁸

The EU has launched several other initiatives aimed at combatting disinformation: the StratCom Task Forces, Code of Practice on Online Disinformation, European External Action Service, European Democracy Action Plan, Digital Services Act, and Rapid Alert System.¹⁴⁹ The European External Action Service (EEAS) is the diplomacy, foreign service, and defense ministry of the EU; it is in charge of defense missions, which now includes cybersecurity.¹⁵⁰ In 2015, the StratCom Task Force established EUvsDisinfo.eu, a website with the goal of identifying and exposing disinformation created and disseminated in connection to the Russian government against the EU and its Member States.¹⁵¹ The EU has recognized the role that social media platforms and online media sources have played in the spread of disinformation and has shown initiative in creating guidelines for digital platforms and private online media websites, most notably through the Code of Practice on Online Disinformation in 2018, the EU's "self-regulatory standards to fight disinformation."¹⁵² The Democracy Action Plan, released in December 2020, outlines goals for the European Union's "digital agenda." These priorities include protecting elections, preserving fair forums for debate, strengthening media, combatting disinformation, and "involving and empowering the public."¹⁵³ Fighting disinformation is a top priority in the Democracy Action Plan, which aims to go further than existing programs by imposing punishments on disinformation actors, targeting money-making benefits of disinformation, and enforcing existing regulations.¹⁵⁴ Also submitted in December 2020

¹⁴⁸ "Digital Transition - Two Years of Application of the General Data Protection Regulation."

¹⁴⁹ Polyakova, Alina, and Daniel Fried. 2020. "Democratic Offense Against Disinformation | CEPA." Think Tank. Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA). December 2, 2020. <https://cepa.org/democratic-offense-against-disinformation/>.

¹⁵⁰ European Union. "European External Action Service (EEAS)," October 7, 2020. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/eeas_en.

¹⁵¹ EU vs Disinfo. "About," n.d. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>.

¹⁵² European Commission. "Code of Practice on Disinformation," February 23, 2021. <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/code-practice-disinformation>.

¹⁵³ European Commission. "European Democracy Action Plan," 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan_en.

¹⁵⁴ Jourová, Vera. "European Democracy Action Plan: Remarks by Vice-President Vera Jourová." December 3, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_2308.

to the European Parliament and European Commission was The Digital Services Act (DSA) proposal, which will create an updated legal framework for the EU that focuses on illegal content, disinformation, advertising, and online violence.¹⁵⁵ Apart from institutional programs, the EU Disinfo Lab is an independent, non-profit group whose goal is to combat disinformation in the EU; they are a self-declared “home for disinformation activists and experts.”¹⁵⁶

The EU’s endeavors in recent data privacy initiatives have been able to reduce the ability of microtargeting and increase transparency about the source and money spent on political advertising on digital platforms.¹⁵⁷ However, their efforts have not been entirely successful, and there are important steps the EU can take to reach these objectives. Continuing to find new methods to address disinformation and mitigate its spread is essential to combating Euroscepticism, protecting data privacy, and fostering solidarity across the EU, its Member States, and citizens.

4.3 Issues and Recommendations

To combat disinformation, we propose a two-pronged plan. First, the EU should establish common standards for digital platforms and develop a framework for future data policy to reduce the spread of disinformation via digital platforms. Second, the EU should expand its media sphere and work to deepen ties with local communities and individuals in the EU via the improvement of the EUvsDisinfo website and local news collaborations. Combatting disinformation in the EU will help boost solidarity by targeting false claims spread to undermine trust in EU institutions or exacerbate political and social tensions. There is a multitude of issues accompanying the “infodemic” and disinformation, but the recommendations outlined below are meant to employ the EU’s capabilities to both

¹⁵⁵ European Commission. “The Digital Services Act: Ensuring a Safe and Accountable Online Environment,” n.d. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act-ensuring-safe-and-accountable-online-environment_en.

¹⁵⁶ EU Disinfo Lab. “Home Page,” n.d. <https://www.disinfo.eu/>.

¹⁵⁷ “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.”

reduce disinformation from the source and help give citizens tools to stop the spread of disinformation and misinformation while making informed opinions.

The EU is in a position to dedicate resources and policy to fight disinformation in Europe and globally. By focusing on data privacy and setting standards for social platforms as well as increasing efforts to engage with citizens, the EU can fight disinformation that often seeks to undermine it. Through combatting disinformation, the EU can promote social solidarity between citizens with a collective understanding of the importance of free expression, honesty, and transparency. With concrete actions in the data privacy realm and cooperation between Brussels and digital platforms, a more trustworthy media system can be created.

Data Protection and Privacy

The existing Code of Practice on Disinformation was signed by companies including Google, Twitter, Mozilla, and Facebook, but it was non-binding and self-enforced.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, without accountability, it is uncertain how the Code of Practice is combatting disinformation in the EU. Effectively countering disinformation requires an approach that includes all stakeholders and works with the same definitions for words like “misinformation,” “disinformation,” and “foreign interference.” The nebulous and malleable nature of these terms can hinder understanding between different stakeholders and weaken efforts to reduce disinformation or protect data. Despite new regulations to the Code of Practice, there have been few instances of data protection authorities investigating political parties, national governments, or international institutions for GDPR violations.¹⁵⁹

While most EU residents get their news from public television, private, online news outlets are gaining more popularity as sources for news and can be made increasingly politicized

¹⁵⁸ “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.”

¹⁵⁹ “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.”.

and personal.¹⁶⁰ The spread of disinformation on online and social platforms is often aided by microtargeting, a practice that singles out users based on their demographic characteristics and/or social media habits discerned through personal data collection, and directs a post or an advertisement specifically towards a small group of similar users.¹⁶¹ This is the process by which online “echo chambers” and identity clusters develop. It is increasingly easier to determine demographic characteristics and opinions from activity on social media alone, such as likes on Facebook.¹⁶² To better understand how disinformation spreads and its effects on society and public health, research is necessary. Disinformation research requires access to data, which is often protected under digital platforms’ terms of service and, it can be argued, by the GDPR.¹⁶³ Much of disinformation research uses Twitter data simply because it is more accessible than data from alternative platforms like Facebook or Reddit.¹⁶⁴ While researching disinformation from Twitter is beneficial, it does not provide a comprehensive picture of online disinformation because each platform is different. For example, studies find that disinformation spreads more organically, that is, between individual users, on Twitter and spreads faster via advertising on Facebook.¹⁶⁵

As a complement to the Code of Practice on Disinformation, the EU should establish a commission that works with researchers and digital platforms to identify pressing issues, create Common Standards for social platforms and online news outlets, make data available for researchers, and introduce consequences for breaking regulations. Through this close collaboration, the EU and digital platform companies would be able to frequently reassess the efficacy of their Terms of Service and identify and fix vulnerabilities that

¹⁶⁰ “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.”

¹⁶¹ “How Data Privacy Laws Can Fight Fake News.”

¹⁶² Kosinski, Michal, David Stilwell, and Thore Graepel. 2013. “Private Traits and Attributes Are Predictable from Digital Records of Human Behavior | PNAS.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 110 (15): 5802–5.

¹⁶³ Pamment, James. “The EU’s Role in the Fight Against Disinformation: Developing Policy Interventions for the 2020s.” Carnegie Endowment, September 30, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/09/30/eu-s-role-in-fight-against-disinformation-developing-policy-interventions-for-2020s-pub-82821m>.

¹⁶⁴ Ahmed, Wasim. “Using Twitter as a Data Source: An Overview of Social Media Research Tools (2019).” *LSE Impact Blog* (blog), June 18, 2019. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2019/06/18/using-twitter-as-a-data-source-an-overview-of-social-media-research-tools-2019/>.

¹⁶⁵ “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.”

make the dissemination of false information easier. Defining commonly used terms will also reduce confusion or misunderstandings during cross-sector discussions. The Common Standards would establish guidelines for determining whether a piece of content exploits or infringes on citizens' rights to free expression, privacy, and political participation. Each digital platform is different, so creating flexible guidelines that companies can adapt to fit their particular model, content, and needs would be prudent. Coming to a consensus about what information can be accessed by researchers will additionally improve studies on disinformation that can inform future policy. As disinformation gets more difficult to discern from fact, and as conspiracy thinking infiltrates mainstream thought, it will be imperative to cut off disinformation before it reaches its target audience. Microtargeting often aids in the development of online echo chambers and exacerbates polarization. Therefore, EU policy needs to determine the degree to which microtargeting and algorithms that use personal data infringe on privacy rights. Under these circumstances, policymakers can reduce the amount of personal data collected and the ability to micro-target users. The Common Standards should also institute guidelines for making social media data available for academic and operational research, which will help identify future vulnerabilities and enable the EU to respond more quickly to issues of data privacy.

Close collaboration between digital platform companies, researchers, civic organizations, and Member State governments is necessary for the creation of Common Standards that take into account the varying security and rights concerns different stakeholders have. The upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe is where these conversations can begin, with representatives from various groups as well as citizens being part of the policy-making process. Large companies like Facebook, Google, and YouTube are where a lot of the changes need to happen, so their representatives should be at the Conference to help create and subsequently sign onto the Common Standards. A transparent debate will be imperative to the creation of standards that hold companies accountable for their part in creating an environment for the spread of disinformation.

Fact-Checking on EUvsDisinfo

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed that the EU's existing measures did not adequately prevent the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories over social media and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp. From the beginning of COVID-19, disinformation related to the virus has spread widely over social media. For example, rumors about the origins of the virus and anti-Asian racism have been particularly common topics since the pandemic worsened in early spring of 2020. The spread of disinformation over the internet has three main effects: It increases polarization, depletes trust in institutions and mainstream media (public television and radio channels), and threatens the integrity of democratic processes, a concern for the EU and its election integrity.¹⁶⁶

Conspiracy theories are a dangerous form of disinformation that stem from a combination of confusion and fear. Conspiracy thinking exacerbates distrust in public institutions and media coverage, creating a more unstable social environment that aids in the spread of further disinformation and conspiracies. They also easily spread and mutate, as exhibited by the corona-5G conspiracy, which claimed that 5G technology suppresses the immune system and increases vulnerability to COVID-19, and that the virus was somehow conceived by Bill Gates.¹⁶⁷ Even if conspiracy theories experience a short period of popularity, their dissemination decreases public trust, especially in times of confusion, such as a pandemic, where conspiracies can be highly dangerous.¹⁶⁸ A recent study in Germany, France, Italy, and the UK found that levels of conspiracy belief are very high due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 14).¹⁶⁹ Around 40 percent of respondents in each country expressed the belief that they thought governments were using the pandemic as an excuse to increase surveillance and control over citizens, a conspiracy theory

¹⁶⁶ VÉRITER, Sophie L., Corneliu Bjola, and Joachim A. Koops. 2020. "Tackling COVID-19 Disinformation: Internal and External Challenges for the European Union." *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 15 (4): 569–82. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-BJA10046>.

¹⁶⁷ "Tackling COVID-19 Disinformation: Internal and External Challenges for the European Union."

¹⁶⁸ "Tackling COVID-19 Disinformation: Internal and External Challenges for the European Union."

¹⁶⁹ Henley, Jon. "Pandemic Leaves Europeans More Likely to Believe Conspiracy Theories – Study." *The Guardian*, February 22, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/22/covid-pandemic-leaves-europeans-more-likely-to-believe-conspiracy-theories-study>.

stemming from a fear of movement restrictions implemented to curtail the spread of the virus.¹⁷⁰

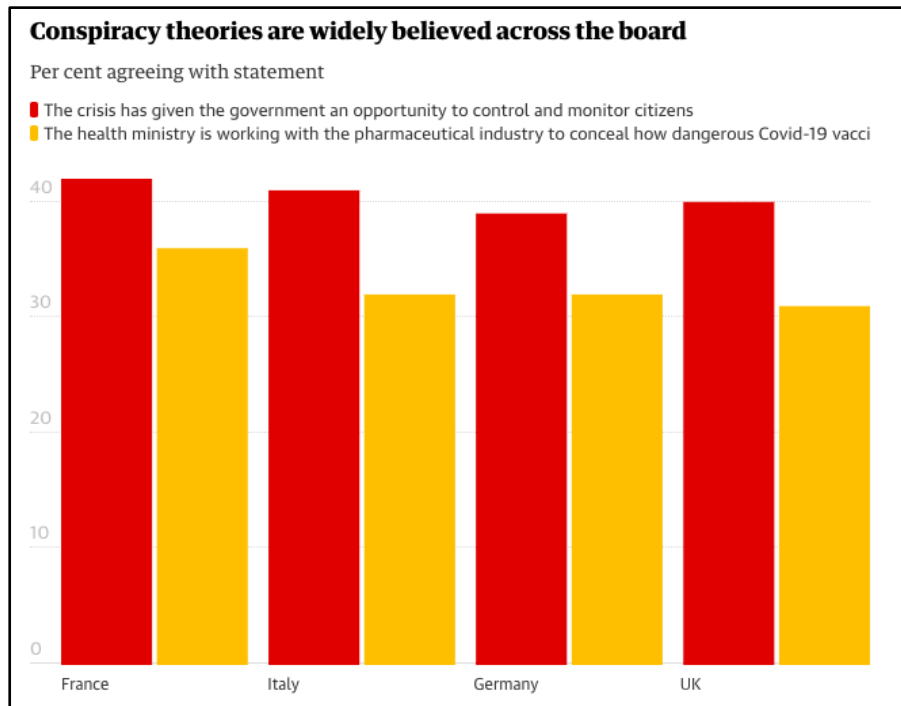


Figure 14: COVID-19 Conspiracy Theory Belief in the EU.
Source: The Guardian, 2021.

A more serious conspiracy is QAnon, which originated in the United States during the Trump presidency and is gaining traction among right-wing groups all over Europe, specifically in Germany, and merging with existing right-wing groups online.¹⁷¹ The QAnon conspiracy believes that Trump was elected to expose and root out a large circle of Satanist, pedophile elites in the US government, but its anti-Semitic undertones appeal to far-right groups in Europe as well. The rapid spread of this debunked conspiracy theory can be attributed in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, as followers of the QAnon conspiracy also believe that the coronavirus was released to curtail civil liberties. People skeptical of vaccines and who oppose lockdown measures have also been drawn into the QAnon community. These combined sentiments undermine the liberal democratic values central

¹⁷⁰ "Pandemic Leaves Europeans More Likely to Believe Conspiracy Theories – Study."

¹⁷¹ Bennhold, Katrin. "QAnon Is Thriving in Germany. The Extreme Right Is Delighted." *New York Times*, November 3, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/11/world/europe/qanon-is-thriving-in-germany-the-extreme-right-is-delighted.html>.

to the EU project by encouraging mistrust in the government and playing on bigoted stereotypes. Furthermore, increased screen time due to lockdowns and curfews amidst the pandemic has also contributed to the spread of the theory.¹⁷²

While disinformation on social media spreads through posts, shares, and likes, it can also spread over messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. Though messaging platforms are more intimate because they require mutual consent for correspondence, claims can spread through “forwarding” between contacts. Rumors about lockdowns and false coronavirus cures spread quickly over WhatsApp in the early months of the pandemic, and with over two billion users all over the world, and especially in Europe, political and health leaders, as well as the app representatives, had difficulty mitigating the dangers.¹⁷³

The EUvsDisinfo website is a great resource for citizens to stay updated with disinformation. However, the EU could make several improvements to the site to expand its scope and increase its effectiveness. The current EUvsDisinfo site is focused on Russian disinformation campaigns, but it would be beneficial for the EU to include as many disinformation campaigns/examples as possible and prioritize the rumors that are particularly popular or widespread at a given time. It would prove helpful during a crisis, such as COVID-19, to include common questions being asked and official EU answers— and if the answer is unknown, the site can clarify that they are researching it, so people don’t believe false information from other sources. The EUvsDisinfo site could also expand its citizen participation features to allow people to challenge a headline or claim identified as “false.” Doing so would help hold fact-checkers accountable. One important concern that the website’s administrators would have to take care of is keeping a balance between refuting false claims and respecting free speech rights. The aforementioned Common Digital Platform Standards would help in this regard, after deciding the criteria for whether disinformation respects rights or exploits them. Having all 24 official EU

¹⁷² “QAnon Is Thriving in Germany. The Extreme Right Is Delighted.”

¹⁷³ Davies, Guy. “Coronavirus Misinformation on WhatsApp Is Going Viral, despite Steps to Combat Its Spread.” *ABC News*, March 24, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/coronavirus-misinformation-whatsapp-viral-steps-combat-spread/story?id=69688321>.

languages would also make the site more accessible and advertising it on social media platforms and online news outlets would help direct more traffic to the site. As disinformation becomes more difficult to identify, the EU can reduce disinformation's spread by identifying and exposing it quickly to a large audience. The expansion of the EUvsDisinfo website would improve an existing resource from the EU and give citizens the agency and means to form their own opinions from a wide range of news media. On the other hand, there is a fine line between free speech and exploiting the right to free speech, and discussions must be held to determine where that line is are transparent and include input from Member State governments, citizens, and civic and rights organizations. The digital age has brought technological innovations but also has bombarded people with constant information. People are concerned about disinformation, though, and tend to reconsider whether to share a headline if they see it might be false.¹⁷⁴ While the EU cannot put flags on every claim on the internet, they can give citizens access to an easy tool so they can confirm the accuracy of a claim before sharing it with others. Resilience in response to misinformation and disinformation on the internet is important for solidarity among citizens, and the EU can provide a tool people can use to exercise their right to form their own opinions.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is an upcoming opportunity that the EU needs to take advantage of to combat mis- and disinformation. The Conference should convene a committee of citizens, researchers, and disinformation experts to understand their needs for the disinformation website that works well for all parties. A preliminary draft of the website could be released towards the beginning of the Conference, and attendees could participate in a survey by visiting it and offering feedback about its layout, accessibility, and content. At the end of the Conference, the website could be launched in earnest for the public.

¹⁷⁴ Pennycook, Gordon, Adam Bear, Evan Collins, and David G. Rand. "The Implied Truth Effect: Attaching Warnings to a Subset of Fake News Headlines Increases Perceived Accuracy of Headlines Without Warnings." SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, August 7, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3035384>.

Media and Communication

A majority of disinformation prompts or aggravates distrust in governments and institutions.¹⁷⁵ This fact has been made explicit in the popular confusion leading up to the Brexit vote. There is consensus among researchers and politicians alike that ahead of the Brexit vote in 2016, people were not given adequate information to make an informed decision. Cambridge Analytica, the firm that worked closely with the pro-Brexit campaign, used data gathered from Facebook profiles to create and target political advertisements without the knowledge nor consent of the people whose data it was.¹⁷⁶ One very prominent claim made by the Leave campaign, that the National Health Service would be receiving 350 million GBP per week as a result of the money saved by leaving the EU, was misleading and unsubstantiated, but about half of UK citizens believed it.¹⁷⁷ The Leave campaign also used imagery to stoke fear of migrants and pan to racist stereotypes. Their billboard that read, “Breaking point: the EU has failed us all,” depicted migrants crossing a border in Slovenia, but was meant to increase fear that brown-skinned migrants would soon be entering Britain.¹⁷⁸ Although it was a billboard, this is another example of manipulated information that played a part in the UK’s move to leave the EU, which shook the legitimacy of the European project.

A general lack of communication between the EU and citizens is another factor that contributed to the Brexit vote.¹⁷⁹ Although the GDPR was adopted in 2016 and came into effect in 2018, in 2019, only 65% of EU citizens knew about it, and just over a third of them understood its purpose (Figure 15).¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ “Transparency, Communications, and Trust: The Role of Public Communication in Responding to the Wave of Disinformation about the New Coronavirus.”

¹⁷⁶ “Unpacking the ‘European Approach’ to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation.”

¹⁷⁷ “Final Say: The Misinformation That Was Told about Brexit during and after the Referendum.” *Independent*, July 28, 2018.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/final-say-brexit-referendum-lies-boris-johnson-leave-campaign-remain-a8466751.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Drainville, Ray. “The Visual Propaganda of the Brexit Leave Campaign.” *Hyperallergic*, July 12, 2016.

<https://hyperallergic.com/310631/the-visual-propaganda-of-the-brexit-leave-campaign/>.

¹⁷⁹ “Poor EU Communications a Major Factor in Brexit Decision.” *University of Portsmouth News*, October 24, 2019.

<https://www.port.ac.uk/news-events-and-blogs/news/poor-eu-communications-a-major-factor-in-brexit-decision>.

¹⁸⁰ “The General Data Protection Regulation.” Special Eurobarometer 487a. European Commission, June 2019.

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/86886>.

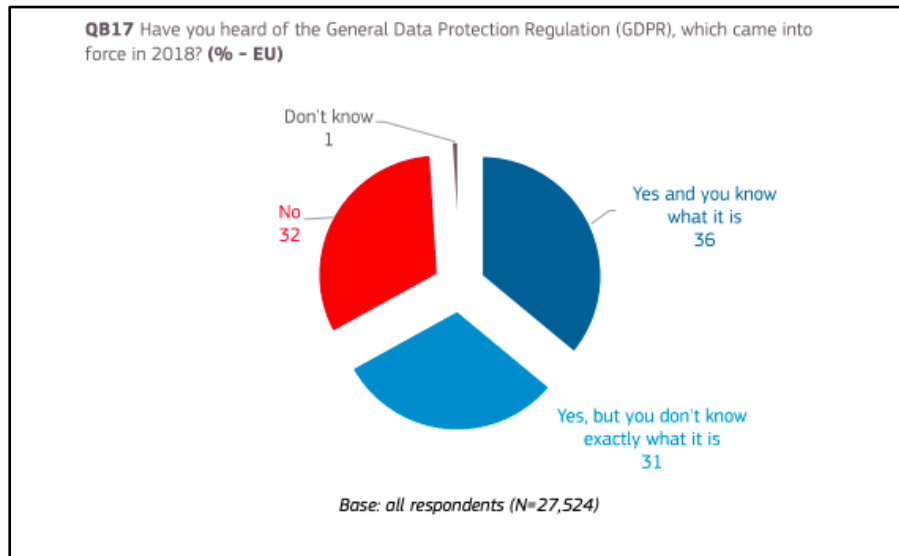


Figure 15: Awareness of the GDPR.

Source: European Commission: Special Eurobarometer 487a, 2019.

This demonstrates that there is a disconnect between EU activity and citizen knowledge about the EU. Part of this can be attributed to the EU’s general lack of pointed communication to accompany its actions; that is, the EU is clear on what it does, but does not effectively communicate the purpose of its actions.¹⁸¹ Often, private contractors are used for EU institutions’ communications, rather than one in-house team.¹⁸² The European Commission’s Directorate-General of Communication is the department responsible for communicating EU activities to journalists, businesses, and ordinary citizens. It is also responsible for the Eurobarometer surveys, which measure public opinion on a wide range of EU-related topics.¹⁸³ The EU’s communications strategy has been shifting towards a more citizen-centered approach, particularly through social media, but remains a largely top-down approach.¹⁸⁴ Even within social media, one study found that only about two percent of EU citizens follow EU social media pages.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Butsch, Ingo. “EU Communication: What Are the Biggest Challenges and What Can the Institutions Do to Address Them?” *Friends of Europe*, August 27, 2020. <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/eu-communication-what-are-the-biggest-challenges-and-what-can-the-institutions-do-to-address-them/>.

¹⁸² “The EU’s Role in the Fight Against Disinformation: Developing Policy Interventions for the 2020s.”

¹⁸³ European Commission. “Communication,” n.d. https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/communication_en.

¹⁸⁴ Soldevila Brea, Maria Isabel. “The European Commission’s Strategic Shifts in Communication in Times of Contestation. The Case of the #EUandME Campaign.” Final Dissertation, Université Libre de Bruxelles Institut d’Études Européennes, 2019. <https://www.iee-ulb.eu/content/uploads/2019/10/SOLDEVILA-Maria-Isabel-MEUS-thesis-2019-final-version-with-annexes.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ “EU Communication: What Are the Biggest Challenges and What Can the Institutions Do to Address Them?”

One way the EU can increase its media presence without increasing the amount of information people are consuming is to develop relationships with local radio and TV channels. An EU communications team created for this purpose should partner with national, regional, and/or city stations across Member States to deliver EU-related news on a schedule that works for the station's existing programming, around 60-120 minutes per week. This is the length of an average weekly program, and stations could broadcast a dedicated hour to EU news or spread it out throughout other broadcasts as smaller clips. The EU news would consist of current debates, recently adopted programs and policies, background information on how the EU works, and anything else the communications team deems noteworthy. The key aspect is transparency about how the EU works and what is going on in Brussels, and clear, jargon-free programming that people unfamiliar with the EU can understand. The Directorate-General of Communication would be in charge of expanding on existing programming to create the communications team and oversee the collaboration program with local news.

To successfully implement the above programs and policy recommendations, the EU must ensure that communication with citizens is transparent, accessible, and invites citizen participation. A media collaboration between the EU and local news stations would benefit both citizens and the EU, as well as counter distrust in government fostered by disinformation. The local channel would serve as the bridge between Brussels and the viewer's own community, in their own language. Viewers will be able to see or hear on their local station about how the EU works, who is involved, and how their country's representatives advocate for the needs of citizens. Readily available and regular news would help diminish the believability of disinformation meant to decrease trust in EU institutions, and by result, bolster solidarity. Connecting the gaps between the EU and citizens via trusted, local news stations would help combat Euroscepticism by demonstrating the impacts that the EU has on citizens' lives and showing how their country's contribution benefits them personally.

Media personnel from different Member State media and the EU communications team should begin the process of organizing EU-focused media times that work for each station during the Conference on the Future of Europe. Its nature and agenda make it a convenient place and time to survey Conference attendees and conduct a Eurobarometer survey to gauge what citizens do and don't know about the EU, and how accessible the EU makes its information. It is imperative that EU teams working with local channels also help create dialogue between each other. From direct communication, the EU would also learn firsthand the issues that matter to citizens and better serve them in Brussels, as well as show that the EU is invested in individual communities, rather than barging in with new, undesired policy. The EU-local media news collaboration would strengthen solidarity by bringing the workings of the EU closer to its citizens and the citizens' concerns closer to Brussels.

4.4 Conclusion

The EU has made unprecedented strides in working to combat the spread of disinformation, but there are still additional ways in which the EU can improve solidarity between EU citizens and between EU institutions and citizens. Opening new avenues of communication and creating accessible tools for people to combat disinformation themselves protects the democratic values of debate and discussion. Moreover, the EU can work with social media and web companies to reduce the amount of disinformation spreading online, as well as protect citizens' data privacy. The Conference on the Future of Europe is the best place to gather multiple stakeholders and citizens to come to a consensus and begin work on new policies and programs through open discussion.

4.5 Policy Recommendations

- Establish an EU Common Digital Platform Standard and Agenda for Future Data Policy to streamline communication between the EU, Member State institutions,

and digital platforms; create a protocol for disinformation and misinformation research; and serve as an outline for future policy regarding personal data and privacy.

- Update the EUvsDisinfo site through expanding the scope beyond Russian disinformation campaigns, prioritizing the visibility of current popular false claims, and increasing accessibility to all languages spoken in the EU.
- Convene two committees during the Conference on the Future of Europe to debate and plan the above two recommendations. Representatives from multiple stakeholders and citizens should be part of conversations about the new guidelines, and citizens, researchers, and disinformation experts should make up the committee to plan the expansion of EUvsDisinfo.
- Collaborate with Member States' TV and radio stations to improve understanding of the EU's role in citizens' daily lives through an information source they already trust and bring the concerns of citizens closer to EU officials.

CHAPTER FIVE: MIGRATION IN THE EU

5.1 Introduction

Since the 2015 migration crisis, Europe has initiated several policies that address migration. Priority appears to be placed on effective border control and curbing the flow of migrants. In October 2015, the Luxembourg presidency activated and coordinated an integrated political crisis response (IPCR) in reaction to the influx of migrants beginning in that year and regular roundtables were held to facilitate the development of Europe's response to the crisis.¹⁸⁶ Alongside these IPCR actions, the EU has a common European asylum system (CEAS), which “sets minimum standards for the treatment of all asylum seekers and asylum applications across the EU.”¹⁸⁷ However, the IPCR's approach to migration is less effective in the long-term as it was specifically designed to be just a response to a crisis – instead, a more sustainable, long-term CEAS is in order. On the other hand, the UN refugee agency has called for more than merely an “ad hoc” approach to migration in Europe.¹⁸⁸

While there is a need for migration policy reform, the EU has helped Member States manage some migration challenges. For example, the EU-sponsored resettlement programs have placed over 70,000 migrants under international protection and have helped them find shelter in the EU.¹⁸⁹ Europe has also developed a Directive for family reunification for migrants legally residing in the EU. Another decree – the blue card directive – was reformed in 2016 to make it easier for migrants to find employment in the EU through faster application procedures, easier mobility between countries, and lower

¹⁸⁶ “EU Migration Policy.” Consilium. Council of the European Union, January 6, 2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/>.

¹⁸⁷ “EU Migration Policy.”

¹⁸⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UNHCR and IOM Call for a Truly Common and Principled Approach to European Migration and Asylum Policies,” UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency, September 22, 2020), <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/9/5f69deff4/unhcr-iom-call-truly-common-principled-approach-european-migration-asylum.html>.

¹⁸⁹ “How the EU Manages Migration Flows,” European Council, January 6, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/managing-migration-flows/>.

salary thresholds for admission.¹⁹⁰ This Directive still has its limits, however, as it has not succeeded in fully making European labor markets available to lower-skilled workers from outside the EU.¹⁹¹

Additionally, in 2016, the Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees was created under the Urban Agenda for the EU. This partnership aimed for joint problem-solving that included local leaders as well as the voices of migrants and former refugees, rather than a top-down approach.¹⁹² As of September 2020, the European Commission developed a new pact on migration and asylum, which outlines actions to increase solidarity among Member States and with migrants residing in Europe.¹⁹³ The EU also hopes to bolster solidarity with migrants through protection efforts for those arriving from the sea, such as the three Frontex operations employed in the Mediterranean, which has saved over half a million migrants from being lost at sea since 2016.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, from 2016 – 2020, the EU operation – Operation Sophia –rescued over 50,000 migrants within its naval scope.¹⁹⁵ However, Operation Sophia was replaced in March of 2020 by Operation Irini, which was created in order to combat migrant trafficking as well as “migrant smuggling,” which refers to attempts to illegally enter the EU. It is evident that Operation Irini is more focused on border control rather than solidarity with migrants themselves. It was created to enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya, which further shows it places security over protecting migrant lives.¹⁹⁶ In fact, the Human Rights Watch goes as far as to refer to Operation Irini as the EU “turning its back” on migrants in need.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁰ “How the EU Manages Migration Flows.”

¹⁹¹ Ruhs, Martin. “Expanding Legal Labour Migration Pathways to the EU: Will This Time Be Different?,” *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, December 2020, <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/expanding-legal-labour-migration-pathways-eu-will-time-be-different>.

¹⁹² Heimann, Christiane and Janina Stürner. “Evaluation Report: Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.” European Commission, February 4, 2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/evaluation_report_urban_partnership_on_the_inclusion_of_migrants_and_refugees.pdf.

¹⁹³ New Pact on Migration and Asylum.” European Commission, November 4, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

¹⁹⁴ “Saving Lives at Sea and Targeting Criminal Networks,” European Council, February 17, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/sea-criminal-networks/>.

¹⁹⁵ Sunderland, Judith. “EU Turns Its Back on Migrants in Distress,” Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/18/eu-turns-its-back-migrants-distress>.

¹⁹⁶ Lenzu, Maria Daniela. “EU Launches Operation IRINI to Enforce Libya Arms Embargo,” European Council, March 31, 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/31/eu-launches-operation-irini-to-enforce-libya-arms-embargo/>.

¹⁹⁷ Judith Sunderland. “EU Turns Its Back on Migrants in Distress,” Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/18/eu-turns-its-back-migrants-distress>.

5.2 Migration and EU Solidarity

The issue of migration in Europe is heavily linked with the issue of inner-European solidarity, as the European migration crisis has caused divides among EU Member States. As illustrated in Figure 16, this Eurobarometer survey from autumn 2019 reveals how EU citizens believed immigration was a considerable issue facing the EU.¹⁹⁸

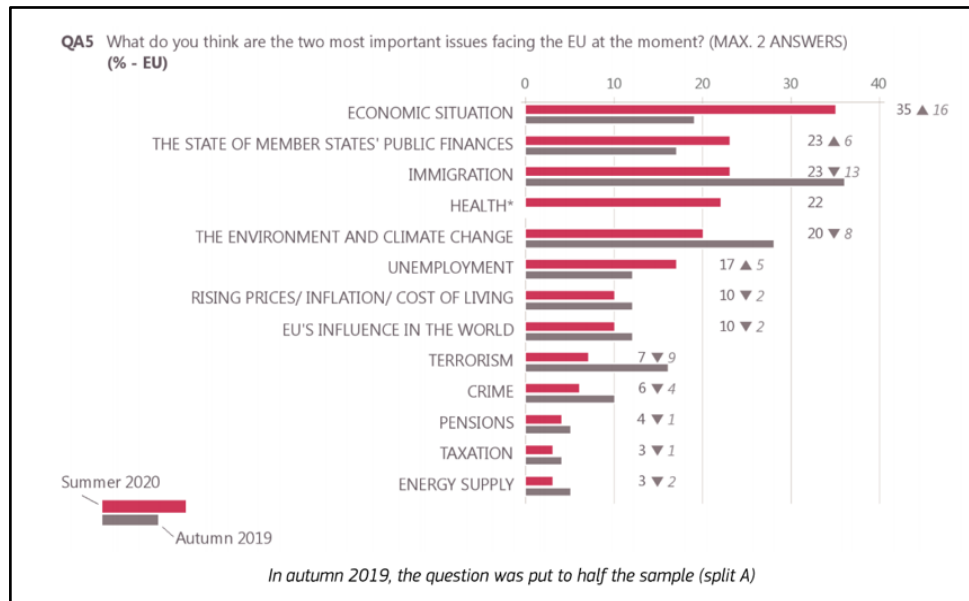


Figure 16: Public opinion in the European Union.
Source: European Commission: Standard Eurobarometer, 2019.

Despite the progress made with migration and asylum policies, more needs to be done to increase solidarity and to create an even more effective approach towards migration in Europe. Ensuring that each EU Member State has the proper resources necessary to support an influx of migrants has the potential to increase European solidarity as a whole by lessening tensions between Member States and the EU. By establishing a congruent set of regulations across all Member States for refugees and asylum seekers, the EU would be able to strengthen Member States and citizens' faith in the EU as an institution.

¹⁹⁸ Public Opinion in the European Union - Standard Eurobarometer 2019: Summer 2020. 2020. European Commission. <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2262>.

Conflicts and division amongst Member States have emerged and deepened within the EU due to the 2015 migration crisis. Southern Member States such as Greece and Italy have had to unequally take on the brunt of new arrivals to Europe whereas other states who are not in close proximity to nations that people are fleeing from, such as Libya and Syria, are less willing to share the burden. Member States geographical vicinity to the crisis has ultimately allows for the division between the Southern and Eastern frontline states of Europe along with the central and Northern nations of Europe.¹⁹⁹ This mounting division among Member States and resentment towards the EU asylum system poses a significant threat to European solidarity.

To support solidarity among EU Member States regarding the issue of migration, it is necessary to determine ways in which the EU and Member States can fairly distribute the burden of taking on migrants. The EU has stressed the importance of burden-sharing repeatedly in various treaties, including the Treaty on the Functioning of Europe. In article 80, it states that the EU and its policies must be implemented and “governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility...between the Member States.”²⁰⁰ Regardless of past stress on burden-sharing, the EU needs to enforce this while still ensuring that each Member State has adequate resources to support the influx of migrants. Solidifying the aspects of a common European asylum system will also facilitate increased solidarity by allowing more cohesion among EU Member States, thus leading to a more collective approach towards migration in Europe.

5.3 Dublin Regulation and Safe Third Countries

The migration crisis in Europe presents several challenges to European solidarity. The first of these challenges is the Dublin regulation, which was created to outline the

¹⁹⁹ Kyriakopoulos, Irene. “Institute for National Strategic Studies,” *Institute for National Strategic Studies* (National Defense University, April 25, 2019), <https://inss.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/1824758/europes-responses-to-the-migration-crisis-implications-for-european-integration/>.

²⁰⁰ “Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.” 2012. Official Journal of the European Union. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2012.326.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2012%3A326%3ATOC#C_2012326EN.01004701.

responsibilities of each EU Member State regarding asylum applications.²⁰¹ However, within the regulation, there is the assumption that all Member States are safe for third-country nationals despite structural and economic disparities between them. The European Commission states that the responsibility for asylum claims belongs “with the Member State which played the greatest part in the applicant’s entry to the EU,” which almost always means the country of first entry.²⁰² This rule is one aspect of the Dublin system that requires reform, as some EU states – such as Hungary and Bulgaria as determined by the Italian Council of State – are not, in fact, a safe third-country destination for migrants due to reasons ranging from economic troubles, political instability, and even human rights abuses.²⁰³ Less-than-ideal treatment of migrants has continuously been occurring throughout the crisis: In December 2020, Hungary was found guilty by the EU Court of Justice of breaking EU asylum law for protecting migrants in need by denying asylum application and forcibly deporting migrants to the Serbian border.²⁰⁴

Additionally, this aspect of the Dublin regulation rule has caused some EU states to become overwhelmed by migrants. In an evaluation of the Dublin system, the European Commission states that a majority of asylum claims being placed in only a few Member States would “stretch the capacity of any Member State,” and asserts that the current Dublin system is “unsustainable if current migration patterns continue.”²⁰⁵ EU states bordering the Mediterranean as well as countries like Hungary who border the east, have been disproportionately forced to shoulder the flow of migrants entering Europe.²⁰⁶ The influx of migrant arrivals has been especially difficult for the Mediterranean states of Italy and Greece, as these were hit the hardest by the 2008 economic crisis before the 2015

²⁰¹ “The Dublin System,” European Commission, April 6, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160406/factsheet_-_the_dublin_system_en.pdf.

²⁰² “The Dublin System.”

²⁰³ Morgades-Gil, Sílvia. “The ‘Internal’ Dimension of the Safe Country Concept: the Interpretation of the Safe Third Country Concept in the Dublin System by International and Internal Courts.” *European Journal of Migration and Law* 22, no. 1 (2020): 82 – 113.

²⁰⁴ Emmott, Robin and Martin Dunai, “Top EU Court Finds Hungary Guilty of Breaking Asylum Rules,” *Reuters*, December 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-immigration-court-hungary/top-eu-court-finds-hungary-guilty-of-breaking-asylum-rules-idUSKBN28R1AN>.

²⁰⁵ “The Dublin System.”

²⁰⁶ Park, Jeanne. “Europe’s Migration Crisis,” Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, September 23, 2015), <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/europes-migration-crisis>.

migration crisis. The economic impacts of some Member States having to take on such a large responsibility have resulted in dissatisfaction with the European asylum system and the status quo as a whole, which is evident in the recent rise in nationalist, anti-immigrant, right-wing parties in Europe.²⁰⁷ Because of these issues, efforts to better determine the extent to which Member States can serve as safe destinations for migrants are necessary to better foster European solidarity. Safe third-country Member States may be determined by their ability to take in migrants, as well as by their political status. The EU government could form a coalition tasked with evaluating which EU Member States can take in and foster migrants which could then produce a biannual migration safety index across EU Member States to ensure they are a safe destination for migrants and that they have the resources necessary to host these migrants.

Although the Dublin system's assumption that all Member States can act as safe third countries is currently ineffective, efforts to increase all EU Member States' ability to manage and provide safety for migrants would help alleviate the burden resulting from the 2015 migration crisis. Doing so would encourage a system of shared responsibility for the migration crisis in Europe, thus facilitating European solidarity. The European Commission proposes, in their recently published New Pact on Migration and Asylum, several responses to the issue of migration in Europe that also promote solidarity. Their suggestions focus on ways in which the EU can support Member States and how Member States can reach a unified approach in managing migration flows. To ensure the care of recently arrived and vulnerable migrants, the European Commission suggests an early identification of possible needs for new migration populations presented in a yearly foresight report to identify issues that need to be prioritized in advance.²⁰⁸ They also propose a "solidarity pool" to support Member States that may not have the necessary resources to manage an influx of migrants, which would be voluntarily funded by national contributions. The Commission plans to provide support in the case that a Member State's

²⁰⁷ "Institute for National Strategic Studies."

²⁰⁸ "New Pact on Migration and Asylum."

migration management system experiences too much pressure. Contributions for this support would be “based on Member States’ fair share” and the European Commission calls for the relocation of migrants to extend to recognized refugees and to “those in immediate need of protection.”²⁰⁹

5.4 Faith in the EU, Burden Sharing, and Enforcement

The lack of thorough reform of the Dublin system illustrates another challenge facing European solidarity in terms of the migration crisis: the lack of faith by some Member States in the EU as a governing institution and tensions among Member States. An example of these overarching concerns is what some perceive as a political weakness in the supranational institution of the EU. An article evaluating the principle of EU solidarity in relation to migration in the *European Journal of Migration and Law* states: “The weakness of the European asylum system can be seen as the mirror of the weakness of the entire European integration process.”²¹⁰ This apparent “weakness” is evident in the issues surrounding the implementation of EU migration laws. EU Member States are placed in charge of enforcing EU law, however, a lackadaisical approach to enforcement at times results in some Member States forgoing EU law, which is a challenge to the existence of a common European asylum system and European solidarity as a whole. The aforementioned article regards the EU Member States’ responsibility to enforce EU law as the “most crucial challenge underpinning the effort to achieve forms of solidarity among Member States.”²¹¹

The absence of a concrete structural support for a common European asylum policy has resulted in a trend of European Member States disregarding EU migration laws and policy. Such action has subsequently resulted in the weakening of European integration and solidarity, which has been a consistent issue facing a common EU migration policy.

²⁰⁹ “New Pact on Migration and Asylum.”

²¹⁰ Marin, Luisa, Simone Penasa, and Graziella Romeo, “Migration Crises and the Principle of Solidarity in Times of Sovereignism: Challenges for EU Law and Polity,” *European Journal of Migration and Law* 22, no. 1 (February 26, 2020): pp. 1-10, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340066>.

²¹¹ “Migration Crises and the Principle of Solidarity in Times of Sovereignism: Challenges for EU Law and Polity.”

Only last spring, the EU court ruled that Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were guilty of forgoing EU migration law by refusing to accept migrants from Southern EU States.²¹² If they had followed EU policy, these Member States would have helped ease the burden that the major migrant-receiving countries like Greece and Italy have been facing since the crisis began in 2015. Additionally, in a piece on the implementation of EU migration law, Iris Goldner Lang – a professor of EU law at the University of Zagreb – states that Member States’ refusal to follow EU migration law is part of a larger process of political withdrawal from a common asylum policy and the institution of the EU as a whole. Lang stresses that the implementation of EU law is an important factor in the strengthening of European solidarity.”²¹³

A fundamental absence of faith in the EU migration and asylum system is present in EU Member States and a challenge to European solidarity. This lack of trust has caused Member States to refuse to follow EU migration policy and has ultimately worsened the migration crisis in Europe. The state of solidarity in Europe regarding migration policy has been described as being “in a deep crisis,” and states that attempts at improving European solidarity within the issue of migration have led to tensions both among EU Member States and between EU Member States and the EU.²¹⁴ In addition, academics have gone on to cite the separation of mass migration management and the development of a common transnational migration policy as a factor in the worsening of the European migration crisis.²¹⁵

Another primary reason for the divisions arising in the EU in response to the migration crisis is some Member States’ unwillingness to take in and care for migrants, instead opting to prioritize sovereignty and national interests over upholding common EU migration policy. The rise in xenophobia among EU citizens and politicians in response

²¹² Baczynska, Gabriela. “Top EU Court Says Eastern States Broke Law by Refusing to Host Refugees,” *Reuters*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-east-ruling-idUSKBN21K0YA>.

²¹³ Lang, Iris Goldner. “Human Rights and Legitimacy in the Implementation of EU Asylum and Migration Law.” *Human Rights, Democracy, and Legitimacy in a World of Disorder*, ed. S. Vöneky and G. L. Neuman eds. Cambridge University Press, 2018. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3108379>.

²¹⁴ “Migration Crises and the Principle of Solidarity in Times of Sovereignism: Challenges for EU Law and Polity.”

²¹⁵ “Migration Crises and the Principle of Solidarity in Times of Sovereignism: Challenges for EU Law and Polity.”

to the European migration crisis has contributed to some EU Member States' movement away from solidarity. The majority of right-wing Eurosceptic parties are against migration and in favor of renationalizing their own governments' control over who is allowed to enter their borders. These right-wing parties are also opposed to a common European asylum system as a whole, which poses a challenge to developing such a system and to fostering European solidarity.²¹⁶

In their article in *European Journal of Migration and Law*, Marin et al. describes: "Sovereignty-based arguments, translated into sovereignism, effectively act as a bulwark against implementation of the solidarity mechanism," and that these sovereignty-based arguments arose due to the EU's "weaknesses in terms of migration strategy."²¹⁷ Member States' unwillingness to follow EU migration policy and overall distrust in the EU system poses a threat to European solidarity as a whole, despite being rooted primarily in the recent European migration crisis. Marin et al. goes as far as to state that it is impossible for countries to effectively manage a large influx of migrants at the domestic level when sovereignty-based rhetoric is a dominant factor.²¹⁸

To foster solidarity in the EU, the strengthening of a common European asylum policy would help reduce the tensions present due to Member States resisting EU migration policy, bolstering unanimity. This can be done by strengthening Member States' confidence in the EU and its policies on migration. Solidarity is a founding principle and a primary value of the EU.²¹⁹ If the principle of solidarity were to take on a more central role in Member States' policymaking, EU Member States, and the EU as an institution would be working towards the same goal, thus making the implementation of a common European asylum system easier to achieve. Efforts to manage the migration crisis in Europe should be coordinated across the EU; as Marin et al. states: "By merging the

²¹⁶ Brack, Nathalie. "Towards a Unified Anti-Europe Narrative on the Right and Left? The Challenge of Euroscepticism in the 2019 European Elections," *Research & Politics* 7, no. 2 (October 23, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168020952236>.

²¹⁷ "Migration Crises and the Principle of Solidarity in Times of Sovereignism: Challenges for EU Law and Polity."

²¹⁸ "Migration Crises and the Principle of Solidarity in Times of Sovereignism: Challenges for EU Law and Polity."

²¹⁹ Witte, F. de, (2015) *Justice in the EU: the Emergence of Transnational Solidarity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Sangiovanni A. (2013) Solidarity in the European Union, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, pp. 1–29.

European with the comparative constitutional perspective, we intend to link the problem of mass migration with the broader issue of the building of an authentic transnational polity, which should be able to speak with a single voice in immigration matters.”²²⁰ Another way in which the European asylum policy can be strengthened is through clearly outlining Member States’ responsibilities, which has been proposed in the European Commission’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum from autumn of 2020. The European Commission outlines several new “clearer, more efficient procedures [to] ensure clearer responsibilities” through methods such as an integrated border management system – measures that the Commission hopes will help “restore trust between Member States while bringing clarity to applicants.”²²¹

Finally, an important way in which European solidarity may be encouraged with regards to the issue of migration is by maintaining open lanes of communication involving the voices of EU leaders, local leaders, EU citizens, and migrants. This would facilitate solidarity more than a top-down approach, as the EU exercising supranational power in enforcing its migration policy may spark some resistance from both Member State leaders and EU citizens, as they may feel they do not have enough agency. A joint problem-solving effort rather than a top-down approach would better foster solidarity across Europe by making a larger array of people feel heard and supported by the institution of the EU and by their fellow Member States. Additionally, this would increase confidence in the EU’s migration policy, and in the EU as an institution overall. This effort already exists within the Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees which was created under the Urban Agenda for the EU in 2016 in response to the growing migration crisis in Europe. In an evaluation of the Urban Partnership, Heimann and Stürner discuss its successes, describing it as an institution that “provided a true multi-level work environment, bringing together not only cities, Member States and EU institutions but also migrants and refugees, think tanks and civil society actors.”²²² The evaluation report on

²²⁰ “Migration Crises and the Principle of Solidarity in Times of Sovereignism: Challenges for EU Law and Polity.”

²²¹ “New Pact on Migration and Asylum.”

²²² Heimann, Christiane and Janina Stürner. “Evaluation Report: Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.” European Commission, February 4, 2020.

the Urban Partnership highlights a need for a “more structured networking effort” in order to better its influence on EU policymaking as well as its overall outreach.²²³ Efforts to further include the Urban Partnership could be improved by fostering better communication between the Urban Partnership and the European Commission, European Parliament, and European Council.

The Urban Partnership is particularly valuable due to its involvement with the European Migrant Advisory Board. Consulting migrants in discussing migration policy ensures that their opinions on policies that greatly affect them are taken into account. As an evaluation report on the Urban Partnership describes, the Partnership provides “a unique opportunity to learn from the expertise and experience of target groups of integration policies.”²²⁴ Discussions of implementing the European Migrant Advisory Board as a source of insight to EU level actors are already underway.²²⁵ The implementation would allow European solidarity to extend to migrants in Europe, as it would provide a space for their opinions to be heard and valued.

Additionally, the Urban Partnership is beneficial to EU solidarity in that it fosters a “positive narration on migration,”²²⁶ which is a vital aspect of combating the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, false information on migration, and xenophobia seen in Europe in response to the 2015 migration crisis. As the Urban Partnership allows migrants and leaders to communicate openly, it can serve as an opportunity for European leaders to better understand migrants through a lens unclouded by disinformation and xenophobic opinions. Not only does this improve solidarity with migrants in Europe by protecting them from a harshly xenophobic climate, but it also fosters solidarity among Member States and local leaders by combating the demonization of migrants, and in turn, encourages leaders to be more willing to enact policies to better the migration crisis. Furthermore,

https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/evaluation_report_urban_partnership_on_the_inclusion_of_migrants_and_refugee_s.pdf.

²²³ “Evaluation Report: Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.”

²²⁴ “Evaluation Report: Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.”

²²⁵ “Evaluation Report: Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.”

²²⁶ “Evaluation Report: Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.”

increasing the understanding and compassion for migrants helps facilitate European solidarity by causing EU leaders to better trust Europe's migration policy and to turn away from Euroscepticism and instead embrace a common European migration effort.

The Conference on the Future of Europe may also play an important role in fostering European solidarity with regard to the issue of migration. Similar to the European Migrant Advisory Board and their work with the Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, the Conference in May 2021, could organize another Conference involving refugees who arrived in Europe during the 2015 migration crisis. This would give migrants the opportunity to influence the creation of policies that affect them most of all. On top of this, it would encourage solidarity with migrants in Europe as well as solidarity between EU Member States and the EU, as providing a platform like this for migrants would aid in combatting misinformation that vilifies migration and may encourage more trust in developing a mutually beneficial common European asylum system.

5.5 Conclusion

The issue of migration is intertwined with Europe's future, and thus it is a vital topic of discussion for the Conference on the Future of Europe. The migration crisis is ongoing, and it has evolved into such a central issue that proper support for a common European migration system is necessary for overall long-term European success. To aid with the policy recommendations outlined above, the Conference must carry out a number of actions. Although reformation of the Dublin system must be carried out by Member States and the European Council, the Conference may discuss ways in which to publicize the issues in the Dublin system needs to change. We advise the Conference to draft a resolution with minimum standard to make every EU Member State a safe destination for asylum seekers. This may be accomplished through creating a European Citizens Initiative to prioritize the safety of migrants. Moreover, the Conference can aid in maintaining open lanes of communication through arguing in support of the Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees. Finally, we do acknowledge the

multitude of issues concerning the European migration crisis that we were unable to include in this chapter. Integration of migrants through education and welfare programs as well as job opportunities are also vital aspects of improving solidarity with migrants in Europe.

5.6 Policy Recommendations

- Encourage a system of shared responsibility in response to the migrant crisis specifically through the use of a coalition to evaluate Member States to ensure they are actually safe destinations for migrants, and to determine whether they have adequate resources to host these migrants; coalition will create a biannual migration safety index for the EU that illustrates their findings.
- Establish a system of shared responsibility by increasing *all* EU Member States' ability to manage and provide safety for migrants; implemented through the measures the European Commission outlines in their New Pact on Migration and Asylum.
- Provide funding to the Urban Partnership to enable multi-stakeholder communication including EU officials, local leaders, EU citizens, and migrants.
- Foster stronger communication with the Urban Partnership to incorporate the Urban Partnership's suggestions for EU migration policy.
- The Conference on the Future of Europe should organize a Conference involving post-2015 refugees to better incorporate their voices into EU migration policymaking.

CHAPTER SIX: THE RECOVERY PLAN FOR EUROPE AND ECONOMIC SOLIDARITY

6.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of the EU's Single Market, caused unprecedented shocks on trade and service industries, and has disrupted economic solidarity across Member States. On top of this, the debt ratio in public and private sectors across the EU is alarming, as Europe has not fully recovered from the burdens of the 2008 financial crisis. At the end of 2019, the unemployment rate in Europe was almost brought down to 6%, however, it rose dramatically amidst the pandemic (Figure 17).²²⁷

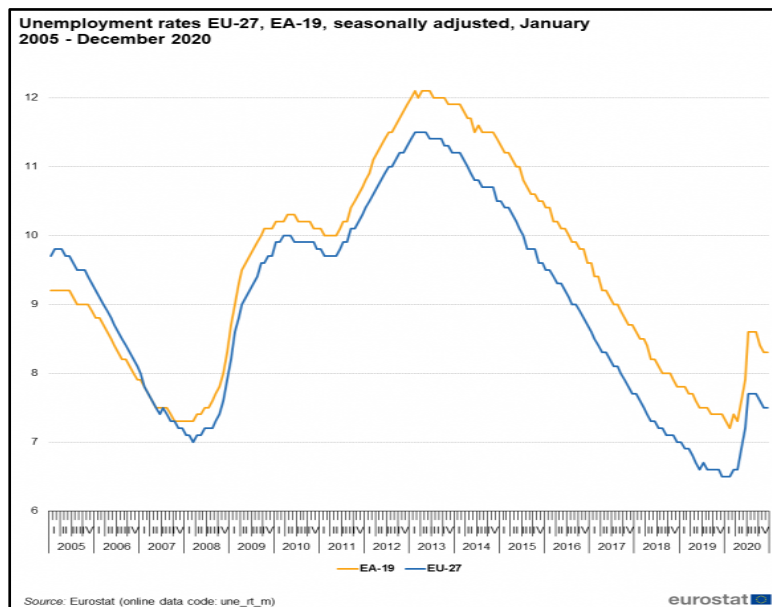


Figure 17: The unemployment rate in the EU-27 from 2005 to 2020.
Source: Eurostat, 2020.

While the pandemic has brought economic shocks all over Europe, Southern Member States took the worst hit. In particular, Spain is forecasted to suffer the most in 2021, with

²²⁷ "Unemployment Statistics - Statistics Explained," accessed February 17, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Unemployment_in_the_EU_and_the_euro_area.

a national unemployment rate of 17.9%, while the country's youth employment was already suffering at an unemployment rate of 31.13% in 2020.²²⁸ On the other hand, Italy's current debt is over 2.4 trillion euros, which is several times more than that of Greece which also struggles with high debt rates.²²⁹ These Southern countries face severe economic hindrances for several reasons: First, Spain and Italy both had major outbreaks of COVID-19 as early as February, and they were the first two EU Member States to impose strict lockdown measures, which had drastic impacts on their economies;²³⁰ Second, these countries rely heavily on tourism, meaning that a higher percentage of people will become unemployed and a higher percentage of Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) will go bankrupt; third, Spain and Italy's financial resilience is poorer compared to other Member States due to their piling debt, therefore, they have less fiscal capacity to mitigate current grievances and revive their economies after the pandemic. Monetary tools such as adjusting interest rates and issuing currency are in the European Central Bank's (ECB) hands, thus Member State governments rely heavily on the ECB's capital injection to protect their banks and sovereign credit ratings. However, the 1.35 trillion Euros that ECB promised to provide to Member States is limited, as economic recovery for Italy and Spain could take up to six years and debts are soaring due to the pandemic not only in these Member States, but in others such as Germany and France (Figure 18).²³¹ Furthermore, in the midst of the 2011 European sovereign debt crisis, Southern EU Member States proposed debt mutualization among all Member States so that the EU could have more resilience when it comes to future economic crises.

²²⁸ Romero, Teresa. 2021. "Topic: Unemployment in Spain." Statista. March 4, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/topics/6475/unemployment-in-spain/>.

²²⁹ "Italy's Debt Clock: Realtime Demo Showing The Size Of Italy's Public Debt", Commodity.com, February 16, 2021, <https://commodity.com/data/italy/debt-clock/>.

²³⁰ "Coronavirus: What Are the Lockdown Measures across Europe? | DW | 14.04.2020." 2020. DW.COM. April 14, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-what-are-the-lockdown-measures-across-europe/a-52905137>.

²³¹ Staff, Reuters. 2020. "ECB Expands Pandemic Support to over \$1.5 Trillion." Reuters, June 4, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ecb-policy-markets-instantview-idUSKBN23B1XG>.

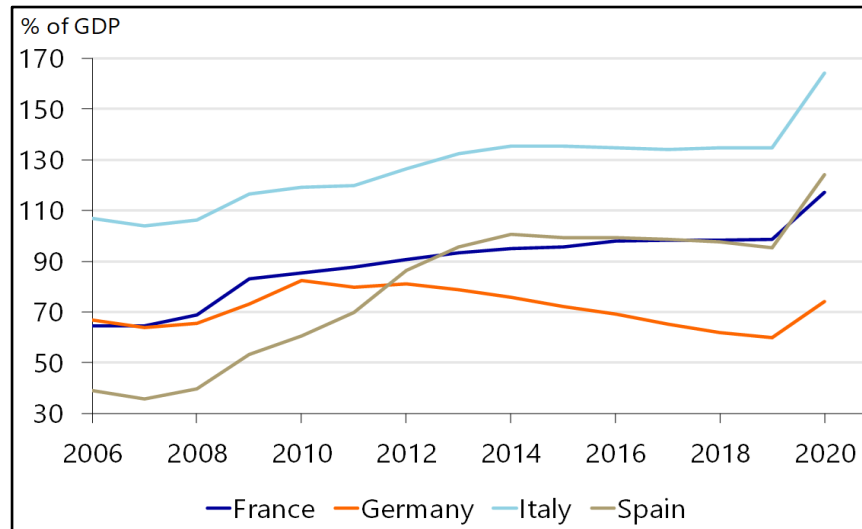


Figure 18: Public debt to GDP ratio in four EU Member States from 2006 to 2020.
Source: RaboResearch.

Specifically, the Greek Economist and former finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, put forth an idea to increase debt sharing by issuing Eurobonds. Such bonds, however, were rejected by Germany.²³² This rejection is recognizable as a major fracture in economic solidarity to a country like Italy, who 10 years following the euro crisis, is still facing significant financial hardships due to such strict austerity measures, and their national budget is not sufficient enough to sustain government activities. In addition to this, the substantial economic impact brought by the pandemic affects their nation even more, both economically and socially.²³³ In contrast, other Member States such as Germany and the Netherlands have enjoyed massive trade surpluses, and as a result, they have substantially is much more room to absorb the economic shock from COVID-19. Therefore, as Yanis claims, “without a Eurobond, or an instrument that allows Europe as a whole to share the burdens of increasing public spending, countries like Italy could be permanently condemned to economic depression.”²³⁴ Economic politics that lack the framework and tools to incentivize Member States to assist each other in difficult times,

²³² Varoufakis, Yanis. 2020. “Why Are They Saying No to the Eurobond? The Case for Constructive Disobedience in the EU Council.” Thoughts for the Post-2008 World (blog). March 30, 2020. <https://www.yanisvaroufakis.eu/2020/03/30/why-are-they-saying-no-to-the-eurobond-the-case-for-constructive-disobedience-in-the-eu-council/>.

²³³ “Why are they saying no to the eurobond? The case for constructive disobedience in the EU Council.”

²³⁴ “Why are they saying no to the eurobond? The case for constructive disobedience in the EU Council.”

ultimately prevent the European Union from facilitating collective economic cohesion and solidarity. Moreover, as Member States are increasingly discontent with current economic situations, this further nourishes nationalist and Eurosceptic forces that seek to undermine the EU's policies and goals to strengthen European integration. Therefore, this chapter is aimed at examining the recent economic measures the EU has put in place, while also providing applicable economic policy recommendations for the EU to better engage the economy of all its Member States and enable a supportive economic framework across the EU that works to boost economic and social solidarity.

6.2 Background

Due to the increasing economic divide amongst Member States that has emerged amidst COVID-19, France and Germany proposed an EU recovery fund that offers 500 billion euros²³⁵ in grants to help other Member States that have been suffering from financial deficits due to the pandemic.²³⁶ The fund would be financed through joint long-term debt issued by the European Commission on behalf of the EU and repaid from the EU's future budgets. Additionally, the Commission would need Member States' yearly approval to raise funds. The European Commission also proposed a new agenda that would help mitigate the immediate health and socio-economic impact from the COVID-19 pandemic and restore growth while supporting the green and digital transitions in the Single Market.²³⁷

At the core of this new agenda is the Next Generation EU, which entails the EU raising a total of 750 billion euros on top of their existing budget, known as the Multiannual Financial Framework. The center piece of Next Generation EU is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, with 672.6 billion euros in grants and loans to support reforms and

²³⁵ Katsomitros, Alex. 2020. "The Significant Impacts an EU Recovery Fund Would Have." World Finance. September 3, 2020. <https://www.worldfinance.com/special-reports/the-proposal-of-an-eu-recovery-fund-paves-the-way-for-significant-future-fiscal-transfers>.

²³⁶ European Commission, "Recovery plan for Europe", https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en

²³⁷ Recovery Plan for Europe, European Commission, May 27, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en.

investments undertaken by Member States.²³⁸ The European Commission adopted the regulation for establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility on February 11, 2021,²³⁹ and Member States have until April 30th to prepare and submit their national recovery and resilience plans.²⁴⁰ Additionally, to access the money, Member States need to allocate at least 37% of the funds to the transition to a greener economy and at least 20% to initiatives to digitalize the country's economy.²⁴¹

The Recovery Fund and Next Generation EU are the products of unprecedented collective actions taken by EU leaders to borrow the money needed to overcome the economic shock that accompanied the pandemic. This groundbreaking joint debt issuance is a crucial step towards a fiscal union, and the funds would be raised through EU-issued bonds and financed through a series of new taxes on greenhouse gases, plastics, large corporations, and tech-giants.²⁴² Furthermore, this proposal will help diminish heated debates over how to respond to the economic trauma, and such action marks a crucial step to preserve the Single Market in the long run, sending a strong signal of solidarity.

However, though the Recovery Fund and Next Generation EU have a great prospect for the emergence of a fiscal union, there are underlying issues. The first issue is that actual debt sharing across the Eurozone, the action required to create a Eurobond, might not occur through the Recovery Fund and Next Generation EU. The second issue is that since the European Commission must receive consent from all Member States in order to borrow on the market, without unanimity, the Recovery Fund would be delayed and thus, poses significant challenges to the EU's economic recovery. For instance, in

²³⁸ "Recovery plan for Europe."

²³⁹ "EU Recovery Package: Council Adopts Recovery and Resilience Facility." 2021. Council of the European Union. February 11, 2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/02/11/eu-recovery-package-council-adopts-recovery-and-resilience-facility/>.

²⁴⁰ "Covid-19 Recovery: How the Main EU Instrument Will Work | News | European Parliament." 2021. European Parliament News. February 4, 2021. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20210128STO96608/covid-19-recovery-how-the-main-eu-instrument-will-work>.

²⁴¹ Lloyd, Naomi, and Guillaume Desjardins. 2021. "EU's Multi-Billion Pandemic Recovery Fund Gets Go-Ahead from European Parliament." Euronews. February 10, 2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/10/eu-multi-billion-pandemic-recovery-fund-gets-go-ahead-from-european-parliament>.

²⁴² Boonstra, Wim. 2020. "EU Recovery Fund: What Will Be the Impact?" RaboResearch - Economic Research. June 3, 2020. <https://economics.rabobank.com/publications/2020/june/eu-recovery-fund-what-will-be-the-impact/>.

November 2020, both Poland and Hungary vetoed the budget plan as well as the 750 billion Recovery Fund because they refused to accept the new “rule of law” conditions. The third problem is that a majority of European citizens lack the understanding of the importance to have a Eurobond. The predicaments identified above are major obstacles that hinder the EU from making quick, important decisions to bolster its economy and the economy of its Member States. If these issues are not addressed properly, the economic foundation of the EU will be devastated by the current COVID-19 crisis, leading to its inevitable disintegration. As Varoufakis says, “if [the EU’s] economic foundation buckles, powerful centrifugal forces already in play are ready to tear the union apart.”²⁴³ This chapter expands on these complications and provides policy recommendations that we believe will help cultivate socio-economic solidarity between the EU and its Member States.

6.3 The Recovery Fund ≠ Eurobond

With a Eurobond issued on behalf of the European Central Bank, Member States’ debts can be restructured so that debt isn’t entirely shouldered by the respective Member State but is spread across the EU.²⁴⁴ In having the Eurobonds carried across Member States, the total net present value of the debts shrink over time, and therefore, become far more manageable. However, despite popular belief, the Recovery Fund and Next Generation EU are not full Eurobonds. Although the Franco-German part of the Fund is projected to be grants, the money will be repaid from the EU’s future budget, and the largest source income of the budget comes from Member States’ contribution based on their gross national income.²⁴⁵ In Next Generation EU, conversely, more than half of the package is in the form of loans.²⁴⁶ Therefore, the liabilities that accompanied the Recovery Fund will

²⁴³ Varoufakis, Yanis. 2020. “[Opinion] The EU’s Economic Response to Coronavirus Helps Only Europe’s Enemies.” *The Guardian*. April 11, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/apr/11/eu-coronavirus-relief-deal-enemies-debt-eurozone>.

²⁴⁴ DiEM25 Communications. 2020. “Disintegration of the Eurozone Has Begun. Austerity Will Be Worse than in 2011.” *DiEM25* (blog). April 17, 2020. <https://diem25.org/disintegration-of-the-eurozone-has-begun-austerity-will-be-worse-than-in-2011/>.

²⁴⁵ “Gross National Income-Based Own Resource.” n.d. Text. European Commission - European Commission. Accessed March 4, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2014-2020/revenue/own-resources/national-contributions_en.

²⁴⁶ “Recovery Plan for Europe.”

fall on the shoulders of national governments, adding to the heaps of debt they already have. The 2011 European sovereign debt crisis has already tested the limits of government debt, and without a solid debt mutualization across all Member States, the COVID-19 crisis will push more governments into more austerity programs, if not defaults.

The current fiscal capacities of indebted countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy prevent them from taking additional loans, but the need for an increase of public spending to support high unemployment leaves them no choice. In September 2020, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa, stated: “The option we have is to make full use of grants and not use the part related to loans until the country’s financial situation allows it.”²⁴⁷ When comparing Portugal’s national debt rate from 2015 to a projected rate in 2025, Costa’s concern of debt is reaffirmed and concurrently, ties in with Member State leaders’ worry about when the EU will reinstate its budgetary rules, including a limit for indebtedness of 60 percent of GDP (Figure 19).²⁴⁸ The budget rules only add another obstacle for indebted countries to take loans, regardless of how cheap they are, and a shrinking budget alludes to an austerity program, which is what was implemented in Greece and Portugal during the 2011 European sovereign debt crisis.

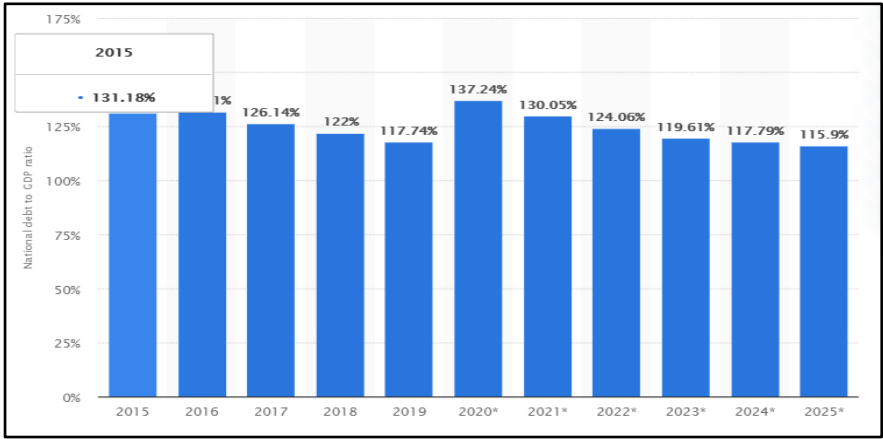


Figure 19: Portugal’s national debt rate from 2015 to 2025 in relation to gross domestic product (GDP).
Source: Statista, 2020.

²⁴⁷ Smith-Meyer, Bjarke, and Paola Tamma. 2020. “EU Recovery Fund Deal May Get Money Flowing in Summer.” Politico. December 18, 2020. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-coronavirus-recovery-fund-deal-money-flowing-summer/>.

²⁴⁸ “Portugal - National Debt in Relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2025.” 2020. Statista. October 2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270414/national-debt-of-portugal-in-relation-to-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>.

Most importantly, Europeans will have their own views on whether the Recovery Fund or Next Generation EU have helped them or their family. If the Recovery Fund saves Europeans for now, but adds a long-term financial struggle as reflected in Greece and Portugal, it will backfire and ultimately damage solidarity between the EU and its Member States. In order to eliminate these long-term financial repercussions, the EU should re-evaluate the long-term impact of the Recovery Fund in two ways:

1. Task the EU Parliament with establishing an expert commission to assess the Recovery Fund's long-term economic repercussions.
2. Evaluate the lasting effects of the Recovery Fund on EU citizens: Will they see the Recovery Fund as a support mechanism from the EU in the future (e.g., five or ten years from now)?

The Conference on the Future of Europe should discuss and devise solutions on how to remedy Member States debt, especially the Southern Member States. If high debt levels among Member States are not resolved quickly, Southern countries in particular, will keep struggling in economic stagnation, despite the Recovery Fund helping prevent bankruptcies during COVID-19. Stagnant economies will keep shrinking Member State governments' budgets, and the newly built green and digital industries would not be able to sustain themselves without public funding supports. The EU should communicate closely with Member States' financial ministers about whether the Recovery Fund will put Member States in a more difficult position before the fund is being disbursed. If an evaluation determines that the Recovery Fund will squeeze Member States' budget capacities to a smaller level, the EU should consider letting the European Central Bank issue Eurobonds on behalf of the entire Eurozone. By having the ECB issue a Eurobond, the debt burdens will be shared among all Europeans instead of individual governments and businesses. Furthermore, without a comprehensive survey on what European people think of the Recovery Fund, even if the EU's plans are executed perfectly, future austerity programs on deficit countries will foster resentment towards the Recovery Fund. Therefore, the EU must democratize the decision-making process and conduct public

opinion surveys in order to have the support of the people and their Member States, and such an action will hopefully lead towards a positive EU future.

6.4 Political Barriers

Political barriers have not only stalled conversation around the Eurobond but are also impeding the Recovery Fund. The European Commission wants to establish the new “rule of law” mechanism in Poland and Hungary.²⁴⁹ The primary objective of this condition is to ensure that the EU funding will be protected against generalized deficiencies in the area of the rule of law. The basic mechanism is that if Member State’s government fails to spend the money according to plan, they would trigger a financial sanction by the EU. By linking the loan-part of the Recovery Fund to the rule of law, the EU might face a situation where national governments do not meet the requirements, as demonstrated in Poland and Hungary. The EU would then have to suspend the fund and still require the respective national government to execute the Multiannual Financial Framework; the Member State government would have no choice but to raise its citizens taxes. This situation will impact the most vulnerable groups such as minorities and people who lost their jobs during the pandemic and could possibly, turn those who are supposed to be the ultimate beneficiaries of EU funding, into the victims.

Furthermore, Hungary and Poland’s veto halted the Recovery Fund in November, and the EU is now trying to find solutions that circumvent the objections so that the funds can be disbursed as soon as national recovery and resilience plans are approved.²⁵⁰ Poland and Hungary see the conditions as a new measure taken by EU to undermine national sovereignty, while the frugal four (Austria, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands), insist on making the changes.²⁵¹ Since thousands of small business owners around Europe desperately need the fund to save them from bankruptcy, the EU had to put forth a

²⁴⁹ “October Infringements Package: Key Decisions.” 2020. Text. European Commission. October 30, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/inf_20_1687.

²⁵⁰ “EU agrees budget deal, ending threat of Hungary and Poland veto.” 2020. Emerging Europe. December 10, 2020. <https://emerging-europe.com/news/hungary-poland-remove-eu-budget-veto/>.

²⁵¹ Frugal Four: four like-minded fiscal conservative countries: Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Austria.

compromise: That sanctions cannot be triggered until the European Court of Justice has ruled on the legality of the mechanism, which will take more than a year to complete. Although the approval of the Recovery Fund ultimately took place in November 2020, the political disputes pose a significant challenge for the EU to take collective action in the long-term. The current narrative that affluent Northern Member States will always bail out the poorer Southern states has been creating a vacuum that Eurosceptics and nationalists have been filling, subsequently weakening solidarity between the EU and its Member States. However, the Netherlands, as well as Germany and Austria, have valid reasons for not wanting to either receive funds from EU institutions as well as share debts, but it is important to note that their prosperity and wealthy economies will not last if the Single Market perishes. While the Netherlands and Germany have been the biggest beneficiaries, they would no longer have these advantages if Italy and Spain were to leave the EU. In order to alleviate this unfair economic situation, the EU should initiate a public campaign on changing the current narrative of North vs. South which will enhance economic solidarity through means of sharing both the profits and the burdens.

Specifically, the European Commission can take advantage of the European Youth Portal and expand on current solidarity projects.²⁵² Within the European Youth Portal, the Commission can provide financial support to individuals and organizations that are willing to engage in conversation and solutions to bridge the gap between Northern and Southern Member States. The European Commission should also work with Member States' governments on advertising the solidarity projects in Member States' local communities. By creating a new North-South narrative through solidarity projects, Europe's youth will be more united when they take offices in the future.

²⁵² "European Youth Portal | European Youth Portal," accessed March 3, 2021, https://europa.eu/youth/home_en.

6.5 Understanding Eurobonds and What they Mean for the Future of Europe

As previously mentioned, a prominent issue that blocks the EU from gaining collective public support on their economic policies is EU citizens lack of knowledge when it comes to how they work and the benefits of Eurobonds and their positive on the EU's future economy. A Eurobarometer survey conducted in September of 2011, during the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, puts this matter into perspective: Only 15% of Europeans know and understand the functions of a Eurobond (Figure 20).²⁵³ Continued economic stagnation could entice young Europeans to move out of the EU in seek of better opportunities in countries with more promising economic growth, and that contradicts the EU's vision of persistent solidarity. Therefore, it is crucial that Europeans understand that another eurozone crisis could damage the entire European economy.

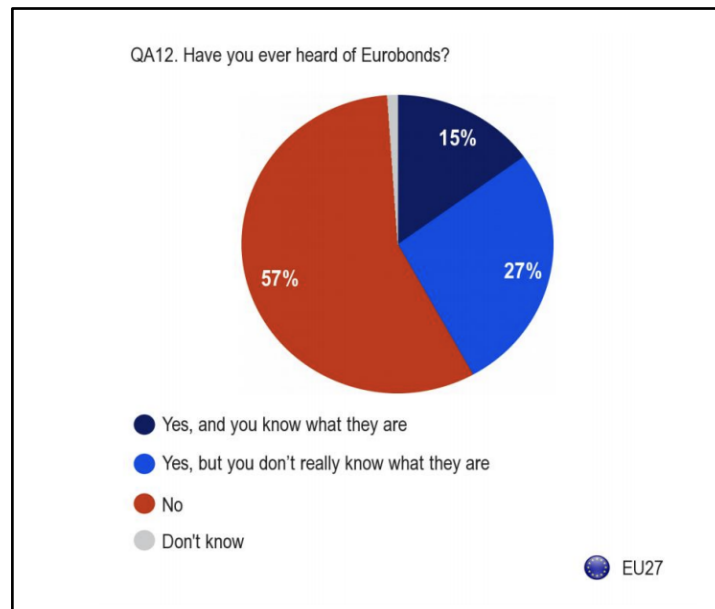


Figure 20: Eurobarometer 76.1: “Have you ever heard of Eurobonds?”
Source: European Commission: Standard Eurobarometer, 2011.

²⁵³ “European Commission. n.d. “Standard Eurobarometer Archives - European Commission.” EUROPA - Public Opinion Analysis -. Accessed February 28, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm.

The EU should strive to make sure that solidarity is not just a rhetorical catchword, but that it is one that citizens that if burdens can be shared across all Member States, each country's burden will be significantly less. If not, bankruptcies in Greece or Italy could result in years of recession, while other Member States face little to no problems. For the European people to unite under a common economic interest, assuring the Single Market's prosperity with a Eurobond is the most sensible solution. Therefore, European citizens need to have the opportunity to obtain education about the Eurobond in order to articulate shared interests, which will ultimately help foster economic and social solidarity. The EU can achieve this in two ways:

1. Conduct a thorough evaluation and debate surrounding Eurobonds at the Conference on the Future of Europe.
2. Sponsor public campaigns through respective national central banks to produce model programs on how to educate citizens on the Eurobond.

Eurobonds are a crucial step for the EU to increase investment in green and digital industries without slamming austerity on Member States. Beyond expanding solidarity projects to change the North-South narrative, the EU should also expand solidarity projects on Eurobonds. The EU and the ECB should initiate a Universal Basic Dividend initiative to promote the Eurobond and allow Europeans to gain better knowledge on the economic policies at stake. Furthermore, by having a Universal Basic Dividend among all Europeans, citizens can benefit directly from the prosperity of the Single Market.

The EU has taken unprecedented collective action towards a fiscal Union, but without thorough restructuring of debt rates, the Recovery Fund could result in more austerity programs and ultimately lead to a long economic recession. Therefore, a Eurobond must be introduced to restructure the debts and create more resilience in the EU's economy. Political leaders should overcome their differences and change the divisive narrative to one that represents the interests of Europe as a whole. The EU also needs to initiate public campaigns on Eurobonds so that the citizens will understand their common interests and provide public support for the Single Market and European solidarity.

6.6 Policy Recommendations

- Task the EU Parliament with establishing an expert commission to assess whether the Recovery Fund will exacerbate debt situations and potentially cause a longer economic recession than 2011 Sovereign Debt Crisis.
- Evaluate the lasting effects of the Recovery Fund on EU citizens: Will they perceive the Recovery Fund as having had a positive impact on their economic and social welfare five or ten years from now?
- Initiate stronger public debate in Parliament and in the Conference on the Future of Europe with the goal of establishing Eurobonds and a Universal Basic Dividend.
- Sponsor public campaigns through respective national central banks to produce model programs on how to educate EU citizens on Eurobonds.

CHAPTER SEVEN: UNCONDITIONAL BASIC INCOME (UBI) IN THE EU

7.1 Introduction

Unemployment, job insecurity, and income inequality are all problems within the EU. As of December 2020, the unemployment rate across the EU is at 7.5%, compared to the slightly lower 6.5% from the same period last year.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, the EU's average income quintile share ratio, a measure of inequality of income distribution,²⁵⁵ has not changed much in the past three years: Estimated at 5.03 in 2017, 5.05 in 2018, and 4.99 in 2019²⁵⁶ indicates that there have not been significant improvements in managing income inequality overall within the EU. Inequality between Member States is also a problem, as some countries like Finland (3.5) and Belgium (3.8) have lower inequality ratios, while other Member States have almost double the inequality ratio, such as Lithuania with a ratio of 7.3, and Bulgaria, with a ratio of 8.2 in 2017.²⁵⁷ The quintile share ratios amongst Member States highlight the economic disparity within the EU and call attention to the wealth and income inequality between the EU Member States and citizens. These inequalities prevent the EU from being able to work as efficiently and pursue solidarity, as socioeconomic differences have created conflict in the interests between the rich and poor. Unless these issues are minimized or fixed, these differences will continue to increase tension between Member States and thus, prevent the EU from effectively bolstering solidarity.

²⁵⁴“Unemployment Statistics - Statistics Explained,” accessed February 17, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Unemployment_in_the_EU_and_the_euro_area. “Unemployment Statistics - Statistics Explained,” accessed February 17, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Unemployment_in_the_EU_and_the_euro_area.

²⁵⁵ “Glossary: Income Quintile Share Ratio - Statistics Explained,” accessed February 17, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Income_quintile_share_ratio.

²⁵⁶ “Eurostat - Data Explorer,” accessed February 17, 2021, https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_di11&lang=en.

²⁵⁷ “Income Inequality in EU Member States,” accessed February 17, 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190718-1>.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated income and wealth inequalities within the EU. Not only is job security increasingly questioned, but the ability to maintain individual needs has become uncertain as many low education sector jobs have been impacted, especially within the dining, travel, and entertainment sectors. Countries in the EU with lower GDP per capita, such as Slovakia and Bulgaria, have reported a 20.5% and an 18.2% decrease in employment in low education sector jobs, meanwhile EU countries with higher GDP, like Denmark and Luxemburg, reported only a 2.5% and 4.7% decrease in jobs in low education sectors (Figure 21).²⁵⁸ What can clearly be seen is a disparity in unemployment between rich and poor Member States.

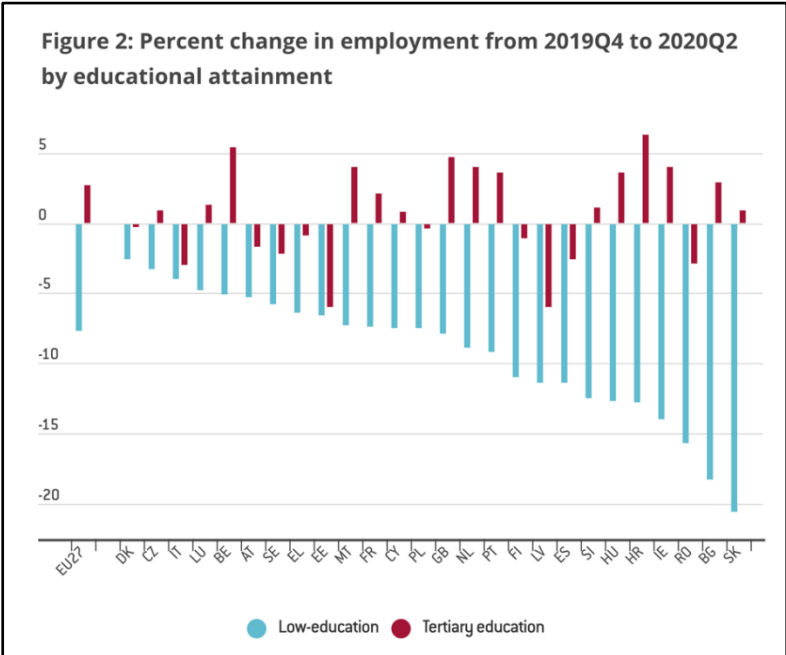


Figure 21: Percent change in unemployment in EU Member States from 2019Q4 to 2020Q2. **Source:** Darvas, Zsolt, 3 Dec. 2020.

A potential solution to the rising inequality and unemployment in the EU is to implement universal basic income (UBI). UBI is a guaranteed source of income that also has the capacity to offer emotional support and reassurance for recipients to feel more secure

²⁵⁸ Darvas, Zsolt. "COVID-19 Has Widened the Income Gap in Europe | Bruegel," December 3, 2020. <https://www.bruegel.org/2020/12/covid-19-has-widened-the-income-gap-in-europe/>.

regardless of their current lifestyle or economic situation. This is especially true for those who earn less; an article published in Psychology Today asserts:

If someone comes up a bit short for rent, and you give them five-hundred dollars, they can now make rent. That reduces stress and has a great effect on their day-to-day well-being for at least a month. If you give the five-hundred dollars to a billionaire, it won't be worth their time to cash the check.²⁵⁹

On top of alleviating financial stress, UBI can provide citizens with increased spending power and a greater sense of autonomy. According to the Self Determination Theory (SDT), “autonomy is one of the three basic human psychological needs.”²⁶⁰ Reducing financial stress and improving a sense of autonomy will overall increase happiness and, in return, foster a positive relationship between the EU and its citizens. While UBI is a marginally unexplored method of social welfare, by demonstrating interest in implementing such radical ideas, the EU will appear to be more proactive in providing a safety net for those in poverty within the Union. Moreover, the introduction of UBI could be a catalyst for the creation of stronger social and economic solidarity between the EU, Member States, and EU citizens. Specifically, UBI would motivate people not just to promote their own health and wellbeing but break down the barriers of inequality and work to maintain cohesion in society. COVID-19 has shown that basic human needs should be met to uphold public order, and UBI could further help accomplish it as well as help cushion the economic shocks during future pandemics and other crises.

7.2 The History of UBI in the EU

UBI in the EU was first proposed in a European citizen initiative in 2013.²⁶¹ Since then, though it has failed to meet the requirements of receiving at least one million signatures and meeting the threshold for at least seven Member States for an ECI to pass, the group

²⁵⁹ Stone, Jim. “Would a Basic Income Increase National Happiness?” Psychology Today, August 24, 2015.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/clear-organized-and-motivated/201508/would-basic-income-increase-national-happiness>.

²⁶⁰ “Would a Basic Income Increase National Happiness?”

²⁶¹ UBIE - Unconditional Basic Income Europe. “WHO WE ARE.” Accessed February 13, 2021. <https://www.ubie.org/who-we-are/>.

of Europeans behind it (Unconditional Basic Income Europe), have critiqued and changed the meaning of what UBI represents in the EU and have pushed for its success. The current proposed ECI initiative states that the EU Commission should “make a proposal for unconditional basic incomes throughout the EU, which reduce regional disparities in order to strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU.”²⁶² While the proposed UBI initiative does not assert how the EU should implement the idea, it states that UBI should be universal, individual, unconditional, and high enough, meaning that everyone should be given unconditional basic income without any preconditions and the amount given would be enough for the living standard in any given area.²⁶³ This initiative is still in the process of collecting signatures and will continue to do so until December 25, 2021. As of February 2021, they have successfully collected enough signatures to meet the threshold of one out of seven countries but are yet to gather the required one million signatures.²⁶⁴

7.3 UBI Trial in Finland

While Unconditional Basic Income Europe continues to pursue the implementation of UBI across Europe through the ECI program, one Member State, Finland, has conducted a trial to test out how implementing UBI would perform and impact its citizens. Finland started its UBI experiment in January 2017 and concluded it in December 2018.²⁶⁵ During this time, 2,000 unemployed citizens, split between unemployed control and variable groups, were able to receive 560 euros unconditionally every month. The trial concluded that in terms of employment, there was no difference between the two groups. However, there was a significant disparity between how happy the groups were. The chief researcher, Olli Kangas, shared: “The basic income recipients of the test group reported

²⁶² European Citizens’ Initiative for Unconditional Basic Income 2020-21. “Start Unconditional Basic Incomes throughout the EU,” September 15, 2020. <https://eci-ubi.eu/>.

²⁶³ “Start Unconditional Basic Incomes (UBI) throughout the EU.”

²⁶⁴ “Start Unconditional Basic Incomes (UBI) throughout the EU.”

²⁶⁵ Henley, Jon. “Money for Nothing: Is Finland’s Universal Basic Income Trial Too Good to Be True?” the Guardian, January 12, 2018. <http://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/jan/12/money-for-nothing-is-finlands-universal-basic-income-trial-too-good-to-be-true>.

better well-being in every way,” and that the UBI psychologically helped those who received the income, as it provided security for people to do what they want instead of being forced to find a job.²⁶⁶ With UBI, people have more financial freedom to develop their careers in fields they are interested in; they will not be driven to find jobs solely based on salary, and by working in their preferred careers, it will help reduce the rate of burnout and increase individual happiness and autonomy. With an increase in happiness comes increased faith in the institution that provided the welfare program, fostering a sense of solidarity.

The UBI trial in Finland not only reported that there was an increase in happiness, but that there was also increased trust in social institutions: “Basic-income recipients registered elevated levels of trust in other people and institutions, such as Finland’s politicians, political parties, parliament, judiciary, and social-security system.”²⁶⁷ Thus, it’s evident that with UBI, people can see how government institutions are directly benefiting their lives with guaranteed assurance and support. The UBI trial in Finland demonstrates how assisting citizens on an individual level can, in return, increase support for government institutions such as the EU, along with deepening the trust between government representatives and citizens. If the EU incorporates a mechanism that will help citizens economically, they have a greater chance at increasing European’s trust in the EU and its functions, as well as strengthening solidarity across the EU. Overall, the EU Commission can use Finland’s UBI trial as an example to draft and create their own version of UBI trials in various Member States. Such actions will, therefore, work towards decreasing both individual and transnational inequality while also boosting economic and social solidarity across Member States.

²⁶⁶ Reuters, “Finland’s Basic Income Trial Boosts Happiness, but Not Employment,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/09/world/europe/finland-basic-income.html>.

²⁶⁷ Allas, Tera, Jukka Maksimainen, James Manyika, and Navjot Singh. “An Experiment to Inform Universal Basic Income | McKinsey.” Accessed January 18, 2021. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/an-experiment-to-inform-universal-basic-income>.

7.4 Economic Problems within the EU

While there have only been a few trials conducted to prove the impacts of UBI worldwide and one completed trial in the EU, many economists have researched how UBI can potentially affect a country. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, due to fast-paced technological growth, many researchers have been paying increased attention to the idea of UBI: “Estimates suggest that it will be technically possible to automate between a quarter and a third of all current jobs in the Western world within 20 years.”²⁶⁸ As the world becomes more technologically advanced, many jobs and industries will shift from being labor-intensive to being capital-intensive, and as such, many people in labor-intensive jobs will be left unemployed. UBI was proposed as a method to help alleviate the financial challenges and stress these people might face in such a scenario.

On top of the emerging problem of job shortage for labor-intensive jobs, another concern is the increase of inequalities between rich and poor. The rising Gini coefficients indicate that current social welfare programs are not efficient enough in helping the financially struggling citizens within the EU and between EU Member States. Over the past 30 years, many EU countries such as Denmark, Luxemburg, Germany, and Greece have had an increasing Gini coefficient, meaning that the inequality within the country has increased over time (Figure 22).²⁶⁹ In other words, the rich EU Member States are getting wealthier, while the poorer Member States are unable to catch up. Moreover, despite affluent Member States spending substantial funds on welfare assistance, like Germany or Denmark that are spending 25.9% and 28.3% of their GDP; and Luxembourg and the Netherlands that are spending 21.6% and 16.1% of their GDP as of 2019, economic inequality in these Member States persists.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Karakas, Cemal. “Basic Income: Arguments, Evidence, Prospects.” European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2016. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586679/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)586679_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586679/EPRS_BRI(2016)586679_EN.pdf).

²⁶⁹ “Basic Income: Arguments, Evidence, Prospects.”

²⁷⁰ “Social Expenditure Database (SOCX) - OECD,” accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm>.

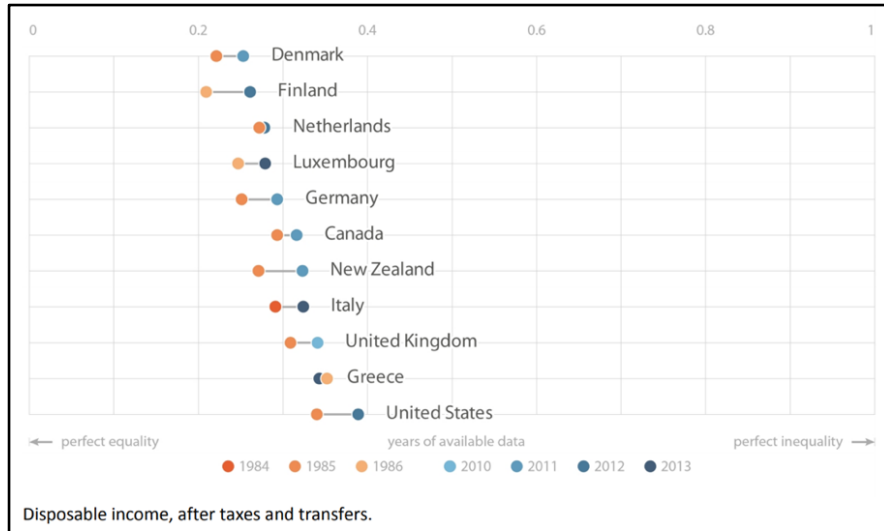


Figure 22: Gini Coefficient comparison between seven EU Member States, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.
Source: European Parliamentary Research Service, 2016.

Due to this, Europeans are becoming dissatisfied with an inadequate EU level response. According to a Eurobarometer survey published in 2018: “The vast majority also feel that income inequalities are too great and that governments should address them, while fewer than half believe that equality of opportunity and their social status has improved over time.”²⁷¹ The current welfare programs across the EU are not providing enough assistance to help reduce income inequality, and thus a new welfare program such as UBI is necessary.

Another problem that contributes to the rising inequality in the EU is brain drain, which is the “emigration of highly skilled laborers to other countries.”²⁷² Currently, “EU countries such as Romania, Poland, Italy, and Portugal are especially affected by brain drain, while other countries such as Sweden, Ireland, Estonia, and Denmark notice the opposite effect, namely brain gain.”²⁷³ Moreover, the GDP per capita difference between the two groups, i.e. brain drain and brain gain, is striking. In the brain drain group, as of 2019, the GDP per capita in Italy is 33,228.24 USD and 23,252.06 USD in Portugal, while Poland

²⁷¹ “Special Eurobarometer: How Fair Do Europeans Think Life in the EU Is?,” Text, European Commission - European Commission, April 23, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_3427.

²⁷² Shubhaangi Srivastava, “Brain Drain vs Brain Gain,” Assembly of European Regions, February 19, 2020, <https://aer.eu/brain-drain/>.

²⁷³ “Brain Drain vs Brain Gain.”

is at 15,692.51 USD. Whereas the GDP per capita in the countries that experience brain gain are Denmark at 60,170.34 USD, Ireland with 78,660.96 USD, and 51,615.02 USD in Sweden.²⁷⁴ With so many skilled workers leaving poor nations such as Poland, Italy, and Portugal, it will further increase the inequality between Member States, especially when industries are becoming more financially capital intensive. When there is a loss of highly skilled human capital, there will be a decline in innovation which limits Member States from undergoing further economic development. This disparity between more developed Member States will further worsen with brain drain and thus, prevent the EU Member States from having a more homogenized economic identity, in turn harming solidarity.

To help solve these three problems, the EU should task the European Commission with implementing more UBI trials throughout Member States, regardless if the ECI goes through in 2021. By examining the positive economic and social effects UBI can have across a wide range of identities, demographics, and socioeconomic differences, the EU can address various ways in which UBI can respectively help all Member States, especially the poorer ones. Through these trials, the EU would be able to gather additional data to help shape a more comprehensive welfare plan with UBI that can bridge the inequality gap that current welfare plans have. These trials will need to have three major focuses:

1. Assisting countries with lower GDPs to fund UBI trials. Since wealthy Member States have more resources at their disposal, they can conduct these trials on their own without assistance. Attendees of the Conference on the Future of Europe can discuss how to obtain funding to help with the running of trials in poorer Member States.
2. How much assistance should the EU provide? Will UBI be domestic welfare, EU-led welfare, or a blend of the two systems?
3. How to readjust the existing welfare programs?

²⁷⁴ "GDP per Capita (Current US\$) | Data," accessed February 25, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?view=map>.

At the Conference on the Future of Europe, EU and Member State representatives can engage in open conversation with EU citizens about the ramifications of UBI if it is implemented. In addition to the EU initiating this process, they will be standing in solidarity with Europeans and working towards a collective solution for financial struggles.

Without administering additional UBI trials, the EU will not be able to acquire effective data on how UBI could help labor-intensive workers that are laid off, improve current welfare systems, and encourage more people to stay in their country instead of moving elsewhere. The EU will ultimately be unable to gather the information that can help reduce wealth and income inequality within the EU. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the current EU national unemployment rate rose one percent between December 2019 to December 2020,²⁷⁵ and while this is partially due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, one can see that the people most affected by this rise in unemployment are those in low-educated sector jobs (Figure 23).²⁷⁶ Specifically, the top three jobs at the highest risk are wholesale and retail, manufacturing and accommodation, and food services.²⁷⁷

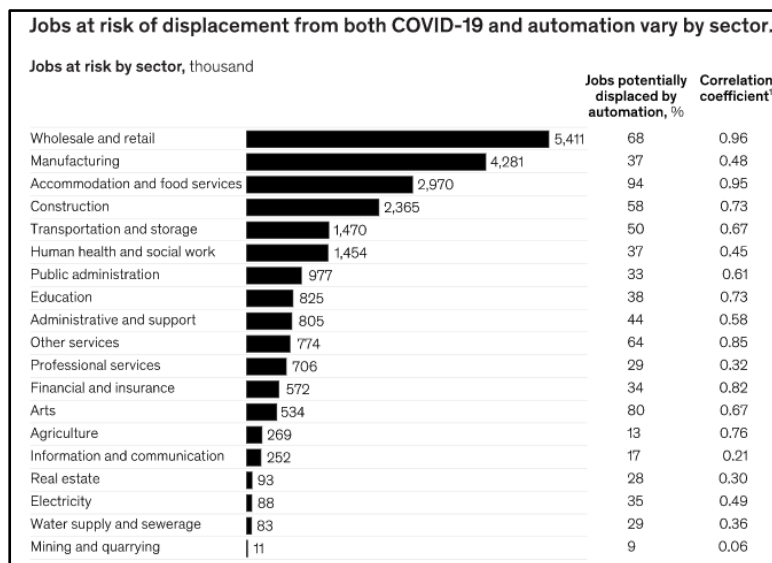


Figure 23: Jobs at risk of displacement in Europe.
Source: The Future of Work in Europe | McKinsey, 10 June 2020.

²⁷⁵ "Unemployment Statistics - Statistics Explained."

²⁷⁶ Smit, Sven, Tilman Tacke, Susan Lund, James Manyika, and Lea Thiel. "The Future of Work in Europe | McKinsey." Accessed February 25, 2021. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-in-europe>.

²⁷⁷ "The Future of Work in Europe | McKinsey."

Low-income people are disproportionately losing their jobs during stressful periods such as COVID-19 and are, as result, more susceptible to psychological stress when it comes to earning a living. Providing them with UBI can alleviate some of that stress, as the UBI can be used towards food and living expenses for these people when they are in between jobs. Thus, having UBI trials to see if it is the most effective way of assisting unemployed individuals can help reduce the inequality that these people are already facing. The UBI trials would also showcase that the EU is exploring solutions to financial problems across the EU and by seeking to alleviate financial insecurity, EU citizens may be more inclined to build a better and stronger relationship with the EU and its institutions.

As previously stated, a problem that feeds into the rising inequality within the EU is brain drain. When skilled workers leave a country's struggling economy, it often has negative repercussions, as the country is ultimately losing people to grow its workforce. This also reduces innovation in these countries, which could be "detrimental to the growth potential of the home country and the welfare of those left behind."²⁷⁸ A decreased growth potential further exacerbates the inequality problem between Member States and prevents the EU from further cultivating economic and social solidarity with EU citizens. However, UBI can change the effects of the brain drain. This is demonstrated in Scotland's UBI project that took place between 2018 and 2020, which included both permanent residents and citizens, specifically: "Those who had been living and working there for at least two years. The hope was to entice newcomers—which it did." ²⁷⁹ Scotland changed its UBI requirements by including already working citizens to help decrease the brain drain and encourage other skilled workers to seek jobs in the country, which worked. People moved to Scotland because the UBI provided an incentive within the EU that would benefit them, and more importantly, citizens of Scotland had less incentive to move away as the UBI supplemented their lifestyle. The Scotland examples show how UBI would be able to help ensure that even those living in lower GDP areas can achieve a higher standard of living.

²⁷⁸ "Brain Drain: Is It as Bad as We Think? | Daily FT," December 14, 2017, <http://www.ft.lk/opinion/Brain-drain--Is-it-as-bad-as-we-think-/14-645128>.

²⁷⁹ Basic Income Scotland. "What's Happening in Scotland?" Accessed February 13, 2021. <https://basicincome.scot/whats-happening-scotland/>.

This will help diminish brain drain from occurring as incentives enticing people to move for higher income would be lowered. Furthermore, by staying in one's home country, they are able to help stimulate the economy by having more spending power with the UBI. Such increased consumption would eventually help decrease socioeconomic disparities between Member States and help boost the shared economic identity Member States have within the EU, increasing bonds between countries and strengthening solidarity.

Moreover, current welfare programs are not enough to solve the wealth and income inequality problem. Within these programs, the income quintile ratio has been around five²⁸⁰ the past couple of years, and the Gini coefficient has been on the rise regardless of Member State.²⁸¹ This demonstrates that there are gaps within the welfare programs that are in place. The current programs are mostly handled by Member States, and each Member State varies in its conception and terms for welfare. This discrepancy creates inequality in how people in need are treated by Member States, which can get translated into stress in everyday life. Furthermore, dissatisfaction towards Member States can impact perceptions of the EU, as lacking EU action to help with welfare systems can fuel Euroscepticism. Conducting UBI trials would allow people to explore a new style of welfare system that can bridge the gap that currently exists. With UBI, people would be guaranteed income regardless of their financial situation. This overall diminishes the stress that individuals in poverty have, thereby increasing satisfaction with their welfare system, and by extent, the EU. This demonstration of support from the EU gives off psychological reassurance, that EU is a beneficial institution to its citizens. This will also help increase the trust they have within the EU as they are guaranteed help, instead of suffering in silence. Such actions will help the EU improve its solidarity as struggling citizens have increased trust and believe that the EU is beneficial to them. Thus, the trials are necessary to test out if a new welfare system in place can benefit the EU in the long term in reducing brain drain and income and wage inequalities.

²⁸⁰ "Eurostat - Data Explorer," accessed February 17, 2021, https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_di11&lang=en.

²⁸¹ "Basic Income: Arguments, Evidence, Prospects."

7.5 Raise Awareness of UBI

Currently, the ECI of the UBI only has met one country's threshold and has about 10% of the total signatures needed.²⁸² Due to COVID-19, there is increasing interest in UBI and its implementation. In an article published by the University of Oxford, they found that in a survey on whether to implement UBI, "70% of respondents backed the idea, which has often been dismissed as 'wildly unrealistic.'"²⁸³ Even though there is an increased interest in implementing UBI, the number of signatures for the ECI is still low. This can be due to the lack of knowledge of what UBI is or what it can do. Furthermore, the effects of UBI can impact Member States in different ways, and due to the lack of trials, the EU does not have concrete evidence to prove if UBI can be beneficial to every Member State. Thus, both the knowledge of both positive and negative effects of UBI needs to be shared so people can determine by themselves if UBI should or should not be implemented.

We recommend increasing the awareness of UBI and the socioeconomic benefits it can bring at the Conference of the Future of Europe. The topic of UBI should be brought up during the Conference, as this discussion will highlight how important UBI is in terms of the socioeconomic future of Europe. It will bring more awareness towards the ECI, potentially allowing more people will sign the petition and help increase the chance of its implementation, increase awareness of the need for additional trials and research needed to implement, as discussed previously. The Conference on the Future of Europe should convene a panel of experts and NGOs to debate the insecurity around implementation, the impacts of UBI, and the effects UBI has on existing welfare programs. Then, they can share the information from the debate on their website.

With only less than a year left to meet ECI requirements, it is uncertain that the UBI will pass. Therefore, it is imperative that UBI is brought up during the Conference of the Future

²⁸² "European Citizens' Initiative for Unconditional Basic Income 2020-21." n.d. European Citizens' Initiative for Unconditional Basic Income 2020-21. Accessed February 17, 2021. <https://eci-ubi.eu/>.

²⁸³ "New Study Reveals Most Europeans Support Basic Income after COVID-19 | University of Oxford," May 6, 2020, <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-05-06-new-study-reveals-most-europeans-support-basic-income-after-COVID-19>.

of Europe. The Conference can involve more people in the discussion of UBI and bring awareness on how to gain the required signatures to implement the current proposed ECI plan. Furthermore, the Conference can bring additional insight into not only the economic benefits of UBI, but to the impact it would have on creating social solidarity between the EU and its citizens. It is also a helpful tool in increasing solidarity within the EU. By raising awareness on the ECI and having it approved, it increases the chances that the EU Commission will start drafting plans to realize UBI throughout the EU. Such action will help increase solidarity, as citizens can see the impacts they have in supporting ECIs, and also the proactiveness of the EU in listening to its citizens, fostering a better connection between the two. Additionally, many people might not be aware of all the effects of UBI and only have heard of the positive ones. By raising awareness of both positive and negative effects of UBI, citizens who do sign the proposed ECI are doing it with comprehensive knowledge of what UBI can do if implemented. Thus, if UBI is implemented and negative effects in the economy do occur, it would not come as a surprise to these citizens and can lessen the negative criticisms the EU is facing, preventing the relationship between citizens and the EU from significantly deteriorating.

7.6 Financial Literacy

Apart from conducting UBI trials and raising awareness of its benefits, another way that the EU can stand in solidarity with its citizens to help relieve financial stress is by facilitating financial literacy to its citizens. Financial literacy is “the ability to understand and effectively use various financial skills, including personal financial management, budgeting, and investing.”²⁸⁴ This is an essential skill, as having financial literacy can lead to advantageous money habits and allow people to make more informed decisions when dealing with money. For example, Europeans would be better equipped to deal with economic shocks like financial crises and pandemics. It is concerning to see that a 2012

²⁸⁴ Fernando, Jason. “Financial Literacy Definition.” Investopedia. Accessed February 25, 2021. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/financial-literacy.asp>.

Eurobarometer survey showed that “many consumers do not receive advice when purchasing financial products or services and that 52% of them tend to opt for the first product they see when obtaining a current bank account or a credit card.”²⁸⁵ This demonstrates that most people in the EU have little financial literacy and put little thought into how to improve their financial habits. This can be detrimental, especially since on a macroeconomic level, financial illiteracy can lead to greater wealth inequality between individuals, which would ultimately prevent socioeconomic cohesion across the EU and harm solidarity.²⁸⁶

Regardless of the implementation of UBI, we recommend that the EU begins to implement personal financial classes for students. Two years before graduation, students should start receiving classes on learning how to manage money. Increasing financial literacy across the EU is a useful strategy to help decrease inequalities across the Union. As previously stated, financial literacy and wealth inequality are correlated. To reduce wealth inequality and decrease the Gini coefficient, implementing classes at a young age can help future generations handle money better. Furthermore, the OECD “proposes that its member countries promote financial education and argues that financial education program should be designed to meet the needs and the financial literacy level of their target audience.”²⁸⁷ Increasing knowledge on how to spend money wisely will ensure “bottom-up” success where, over time, it will reduce poverty risk within the EU. Financial education will also help inform people about what the EU is doing economically, and they will have a more comprehensive knowledge of the economy overall, strengthening economic solidarity. The future of the EU relies on its ability to provide Europeans with the tools necessary for economic success; financial literacy education is one of the most sensible ways to achieve this and paves the way to a more successful experimentation and if inclined, implementation of UBI in Europe.

²⁸⁵ VALANT Jana, “FINANCIAL LITERACY AMONG CONSUMERS,” *European Parliamentary Research Service*, May 2015, 8.

²⁸⁶ “FINANCIAL LITERACY AMONG CONSUMERS.”

²⁸⁷ “FINANCIAL LITERACY AMONG CONSUMERS.”

7.7 Conclusion

The building blocks and the foundation of solidarity are the people themselves, only through individuals willing to accept and be empathetic with other people can solidarity occur. Hence, it is crucial for individuals to have the ability to take care of themselves, to allow for an emotional connection between people to happen. UBI is one policy that has the ability to improve the quality of life for all EU citizens and help strengthen the foundation of policy from the ground up. Furthermore, by directly assisting citizens with periodic payment, there will be constant reminders of the support the EU provides its citizens, increasing its reputation and thereby strengthening solidarity between citizens and the EU. Beyond the relationship between the EU and its citizens, UBI can foster a relationship between Member States. With UBI, the wealth disparities will be decreased, as citizens have more incentive to stay in their home country and avoid brain drain; it will allow them to increase spending power which will greatly boost GDP and help bridge socioeconomic gaps within the EU, therefore bolstering solidarity across multiple EU levels.

7.8 Policy Recommendations

- Conduct more UBI trials in different EU Member States to gather information on the effects of UBI.
- Increase awareness of UBI through posting information on the Conference of Future of Europe website after a debate/discussion between experts in the field to explain how UBI can impact citizens and to encourage people to sign the ECI.
- Increase funding for financial education: teach students the basics of budgeting, saving, and investing to help promote healthy habits and help them manage UBI if implemented in the EU.

CHAPTER EIGHT: EU HEALTH POLICY AND THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

*“The world would look different if every country looked at vaccines as a healthcare and not a geopolitical issue.”*²⁸⁸

—Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić

8.1 COVID-19 in the EU Timeline

The first documented and recognized case of COVID-19 in the EU was in France, with three confirmed cases by January 24th, 2020. Six days later, on January 30, Italy confirmed two more cases, and Germany confirmed five.²⁸⁹ With the rapid increase in cases, the Prime Minister of Italy, Giuseppe Conte, declared a national emergency. Italy became the first member state in the EU to close its borders and cancel all air and water travel to and from mainland China.²⁹⁰ By March 1st, Italy had over 1,600 cases with 34 deaths, incomparable to any another EU member state, including Finland, which had only five cases in total by March. By July 2020, 1,274,312 cases and 134,153 deaths had been reported across the EU, which meant that 160 individuals per one million citizens had been infected (Figure 24).²⁹¹ The EU has faced a multitude of difficulties with the emergence of the COVID-19 virus in January 2020. The loss of jobs, quickly increasing death tolls, the closing of borders, and destabilization of local economies have significantly impacted EU Member States’ economies and citizens.

²⁸⁸ Euronews. “Serbian PM: Vaccine Success down to Prioritising Health over Politics,” February 2, 2021.

<https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/02/serbia-s-pm-says-vaccine-success-down-to-prioritising-healthcare-over-politics>.

²⁸⁹ Spiteri, Gianfranco, James Fielding, Michaela Diercke, Christine Campese, Vincent Enouf, Alexandre Gaymard, Antonino Bella, et al. 2020. “First Cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the WHO European Region, 24 January to 21 February 2020.” *Eurosurveillance* 25 (9): 2000178. <https://doi.org/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.9.2000178>.

²⁹⁰ “Latte to Go - Italy, the First Country in Europe to Enter Lockdown, Starts to Emerge.” 2020. *The Economist*. May 9, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/05/09/italy-the-first-country-in-europe-to-enter-lockdown-starts-to-emerge>.

²⁹¹ Boffey, Daniel. “US Visitors Set to Remain Banned from Entering EU.” *The Guardian*, June 29, 2020, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/29/us-visitors-set-to-remain-banned-from-entering-eu>.

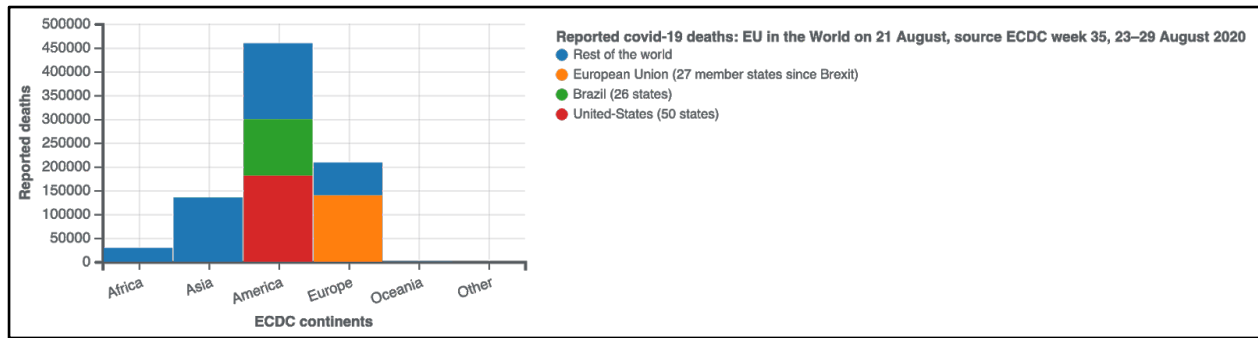


Figure 24: Reported COVID-19 deaths: EU and the world as of August 2020.
Source: The Guardian, 29 June 2020.

Secondary effects of the pandemic included rising questions regarding civil liberties, equity in health systems, and finance. Consequently, this has allowed for the rise of tension between EU Member States, some of which believe that the EU has shown signs of preferential treatment and are partial to affluent countries within the Union. This narrative became especially prevalent at the beginning of the pandemic, when personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks and medical gear, remained exclusive to some states in the EU. Poland's Prime Minister actively criticized the EU for this, as well as its lack of transparency and solidarity in response to the pandemic.²⁹² Additionally, Polish politicians as well as the Italian government have vocalized their displeasure on how the EU and other Member States failed to sufficiently help Italy by providing the nation with resources and sufficient PPE, as by March 1st, Italy had the leading cases of COVID-19 and deaths in the world following China and Iran.²⁹³

Such critiques how some Member States do not feel adequately protected in a time of crisis, and in turn, creates an air of distrust in a Union that some feel was not readily prepared to equally, and swiftly, help all of its members. This, of course, infringes on the EU's notion of solidarity. Before introducing vaccinations produced by companies like Pfizer and Moderna, the EU was already debating the long-term effects that the COVID-19 virus would have on its health programming and existing policies. Calling attention to

²⁹² Pankowska, Maria. 2020. "Szumowski Criticizes the EU: 'This European Solidarity Does Not Exist.' This Is False." OKO.Press. March 26, 2020. <https://oko.press/szumowski-krytykuje-ue-nie-ma-tej-europejskiej-solidarnosci-to-wielopietrowy-falsz/>.

²⁹³ "Szumowski Criticizes the EU: 'This European Solidarity Does Not Exist.' This Is False."

the issues that lie internally within the European Health Union inevitably means that EU and Member States must begin considering reforms.

The European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, presented plans to build a superior European Health Union and the EU's health sector, allowing for better preparedness and joint responses during future pandemics.²⁹⁴ President Leyen advocated for increased funding and more robust reforms for existing disease centers sponsored by the Union.²⁹⁵ This active push to do surpass, reform, and re-engage existing programs speaks to the Commission's under-preparedness in the current crisis. Even after COVID-19's pass, the EU must reevaluate structures founded decades ago; some predicated on the fact that a pandemic this large was merely implausible. This brings light to a pressing question: With limited authority over its Member State's health directives, to what extent can the EU cohesively contribute to better health policy outcomes and increase solidarity amongst all EU member states when it comes to battling current and future pandemics?

8.2 A Cohesive EU

More than ever, the EU must find stability through planning for recovery. With proper distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and amending outdated health policies, the EU can strengthen efficiency and social solidarity among Member States and citizens. On the path to recovery, it must confront and fight bias and boost solidarity. During a video Conference call held on March 17th, 2020, President of the European Council, Charles Michel, stated the four priorities for recovery: Limiting the spread of the virus, the provision of medical equipment (with a focus on masks and respirators), promoting research for a vaccine, and consequently, creating policies around distribution provisions, and tackling socio-economic consequences.²⁹⁶ In addition, the EU has also sought to help those in

²⁹⁴ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen." 2020. Text. European Commission - European Commission. 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655.

²⁹⁵ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen."

²⁹⁶ "Video Conference of the Members of the European Council, 17 March 2020." 2020. March 17, 2020. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2020/03/17/>.

developing worlds that have diminished access to vaccinations and medical equipment.²⁹⁷ While the Council's President's plans for recovery highlighted the main areas of EU level engagement to fight the pandemic, Member States have harbored their own challenges during this past year.

8.3 EU's Initial Response

On January 17th, 2020, the EU Health Security Committee held its first COVID-19 meeting where officers activated existing protections for civil liberties for the public and granted funds for research on the virus.²⁹⁸ From the initial meeting, the EU has begun negotiations and purchases of PPE for its Member States to better combat the virus and ensure an effective trans-European response. The joint EU purchase of protection and medical equipment for its citizens and 12 tons of deliveries made to China, all initiated under the public procurement framework in 2020, offer more balanced and constant prices and ensure the availability of equipment across the EU.²⁹⁹ Twenty EU Member States took part in the purchase, however, some did not, such as Poland, whose Prime Minister had previously criticized the EU for its lack of transparency and solidarity in response to the pandemic. Despite the satisfaction of most Member States, in response to the allegations of negligence, the EU Commission announced on March 19th, 2020, the establishment of their newly created "RescEU" stockpile to increase efficiency in distributing materials to those facing difficulty with shortages.³⁰⁰ Under this initiative, the Commission is to fund 90% of purchases for indispensable medical equipment such as ventilators; founded to be vital for increasing patients' who are in the intensive care unit chances of survival.³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ "March to August 2020," Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed March 1, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/highlights/march-august-2020_en.

²⁹⁸ "Timeline of EU Action," Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed March 1, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/timeline-eu-action_en.

²⁹⁹ European Commission. 2020. "Communication from the Commission | 2020 European Semester: Country-Specific Recommendations." European Commission. Document 52020DC0500. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0500>.

³⁰⁰ "European Coordinated Response on Coronavirus: Questions and Answers." 2020. Text. European Commission. March 13, 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/home/en>.

³⁰¹ "RescEU." Text. European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - European Commission, July 18, 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-protection/resceu_en.

8.4 Economic Impacts of COVID-19

To improve economic circumstances and mitigate the virus's impacts, the EU Commission temporarily loosened the rules on granting state aid to enterprises. New COVID-19 restrictions, however, hit the tourism and travel sectors drastically, disrupting a multitude of industries across the Union.³⁰² Not only were concerns expressed for an expected decrease in liquidity, but the Commission commented on the situation of employees working in negatively impacted industries such as tourism and small businesses.³⁰³ According to the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Member States can be compensated for detriments caused by emergencies like COVID-19, in which the Commission would assess if it qualifies under the Rescue and Restructuring Guidelines found under Act 107(2)(b) in the TEFU.³⁰⁴

8.5 RescEU

It is important to note that the EU, under its subsidiary principle, does not have the legal authority to impose health management policies, such as quarantining or closing down businesses and schools in its Member States. However, in 2019, the EU had introduced an additional amendment to its Civil Protection Mechanism called RescEU.³⁰⁵ This approach established a new reserve for materials and resources that can be sourced under dire circumstances, allowing the EU to play a more significant role in coordinating responses to emergencies, especially when they are widespread and affect all Member States. Moreover, if properly implemented and coordinated, RescEU will be swift and comprehensive, and act as an additional safety net to the EU Response Coordination Center, which currently serves as a response center for all disaster-stricken countries. RescEU initiatives are currently hosted by nine member states: Belgium, Denmark,

³⁰² "Competition - State Aid - State Aid Rules and Coronavirus - European Commission." Accessed February 26, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/what_is_new/covid_19.html.

³⁰³ "Jobs and Economy during the Coronavirus Pandemic," Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed March 3, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/jobs-and-economy-during-coronavirus-pandemic_en.

³⁰⁴ "Competition - State Aid - State Aid Rules and Coronavirus - European Commission."

³⁰⁵ "RescEU."

Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, and the Netherlands, who agreed to provide the EU with needed medical equipment when a health crisis occurs.³⁰⁶

8.6 EU4Health Program

The impact COVID-19 has had on the EU's medical and healthcare workers has prompted the EU Parliament and Council in December 2020 to create its most monetarily dense health program, EU4Health.³⁰⁷ This program provides over €5.1 billion in stimulus packages to be distributed to EU Member States, NGOs, and eligible health organizations to combat the virus. In order to be eligible, they must be screened through an application process headed by the Commission. The European Commission views EU4Health as the future for a healthier Europe, prioritizing regions and populations that have been most affected by medical crises and is based on boosting preparedness for future medical and health emergencies. Additionally, EU4Health focuses on the preparing of reserve medical supplies and healthcare experts that will be essential for understanding and responding to future crises.

Furthermore, the EU4 Health program will strengthen existing healthcare systems by kickstarting a digital transformation of its programs and disease control centers. It also plans to transform healthcare access for its most vulnerable citizens by making medicine and medical devices more affordable and available.³⁰⁸ This includes developing research for antimicrobials and making investments in other innovative practices in the health sector. The program also seeks to improve vaccination rates and health care policies that increase efficiencies in vaccine rollout; funding sources for these health care policies include the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and European Regional and Development

³⁰⁶ "RescEU."

³⁰⁷ European Commission - European Commission. "Commission Welcomes Political Agreement on EU4Health." Text. Accessed February 26, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2420.

³⁰⁸ "New EU Programme EU4Health Aims to Strengthen Europe's Health Systems to Respond Better to Future Major Cross-Border Crises, Such as the Covid-19 Pandemic." 2020. ECHAlliance (blog). December 10, 2020. <https://echalliance.com/new-eu-programme-eu4health-aims-to-strengthen-europes-health-systems-to-respond-better-to-future-major-cross-border-crises-such-as-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

Fund (ERDF).³⁰⁹ Despite the synergies that these initiatives create, the pandemic response has not been completely adequate, and therefore there is still room for improving EU solidarity in health policy.

8.7 Justifying Joint Procurement and Accelerating Vaccine Deployment

“According to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, more than 210,000 people have lost their lives to COVID-19 in the 31 countries making up the EU, EEA and the UK and a further 6.2 million have been infected, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). This makes the region the world's second most-heavily impacted after North America.”³¹⁰

—Euronews

Stagnation in vaccine rollouts across the EU currently inhibit economic and social plans for recovery in Member States. As the EU had decided to collectively procure vaccines, pharmaceutical companies failed to meet their end by not supplying the promised doses to the EU in the first quarter of 2021. In particular, this delayed the placing and receiving of orders from companies like AstraZeneca by about three months: "AstraZeneca told Brussels there would be a 60% shortfall in vaccine deliveries in the first quarter of this year. The EU's 27 member states were left with 31 million doses, instead of the planned 80 million."³¹¹ President Ursula von der Leyen publicly criticized the Anglo-Swedish company in February 2021 by releasing the EU Commission's original contract with AstraZeneca in order to show to the European public what was agreed upon.³¹² This frustration is also expressed by Inge Neven, the Belgian Federal Agency of Medicines

³⁰⁹ European Commission. "The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 Principles." Text. Accessed February 26, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

³¹⁰ Euronews. "Watch: EU Sets New Measures against 'alarming' Rise in COVID-19 Cases," October 28, 2020. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/10/28/watch-live-eu-unlocks-100-million-for-COVID-19-tests-to-fight-very-alarming-rise-in-infect>.

³¹¹ Liboreiro, Jorge. 2021. "‘Wholly Unnecessary’: Criticism Mounts on Brussels over Vaccine Furore | Euronews." Euronews. February 2, 2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/01/wholly-unnecessary-criticism-mounts-on-brussels-over-vaccine-furore>.

³¹² "‘Wholly Unnecessary’: Criticism Mounts on Brussels over Vaccine Furore | Euronews."

and Health, who shared that Belgium had to postpone opening many vaccination centers and that the quantity of vaccines is much lower than expected.³¹³ The EU Commission and Member States, such as in Belgium, emphasize how while the EU has shown and pursued solidarity in the face of this pandemic, its institutions continue to be tested. The pandemic has exposed the EU's health system's fragility and the ability and willingness to help all Member States quickly and efficiently. There is an urgent need for Europe to learn from conflicts and work towards a Europe with a new vitality; to uphold the values of solidarity between Member States and EU institutions despite the challenges COVID-19 has thrown their way.

Another issue faced by Member States is inequality. The EU Commission's decision to collectively purchase vaccines can be seen as an attempt to protect poorer Member States against the potentially more effective individual purchasing power of richer Member States. At the same time, the strong purchasing power of the EU might disadvantage its non-EU neighbors. Evidence from the EU's borders highlights this problem: Lower-income states, neighboring those who can afford to engage in bilateral deals, are experiencing extreme lags in "jab rates."³¹⁴ Edi Rama, Albania's Prime Minister, complained that Brussels had an unfair advantage in obtaining vaccines faster due to their nations' higher incomes.³¹⁵ Which leads to our first policy recommendation:

1. Allow lower GDP EU Member States to complement the vaccinations acquired by the EU with joint vaccination procurement initiatives with non-EU states. Increase EU engagement for vaccination in the EU's non-member neighborhood.

The EU's joint procurement program signed by all members in 2014 decrees that participants would join forces in acting together as a block purchaser to secure the best prices for medical equipment and vaccines in case of a medical emergency, evading

³¹³ "Wholly Unnecessary": Criticism Mounts on Brussels over Vaccine Furore | Euronews."

³¹⁴ Chadwick, Lauren. 2021. "What Are the Real Reasons behind the EU's Slow Vaccine Rollout?" Euronews. January 29, 2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/01/29/why-has-the-eu-s-coronavirus-vaccine-rollout-been-so-slow>.

³¹⁵ Euronews. "EU Vaccine Plan 'Morally and Politically Unjustified', Says Albania PM," January 15, 2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/01/15/eu-vaccine-rollout-morally-and-politically-unjustified-says-albania-pm>.

issues arising from shortages.³¹⁶ A major lesson learned so far in the COVID-19 vaccination rollout is the need for extensive supranational coordination between countries. National and local authorities need to be better prepared in order to coordinate and implement the vaccination strategy. According to their monthly COVID-19 risk assessment, European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) stated that “delays in vaccine procurement, distribution, and administration, should they occur, would also delay the option to ease non-pharmaceutical intervention (NPIs).³¹⁷ They emphasized that “rapid vaccine deployment among priority groups is needed to reduce hospitalizations, ICU admissions, and deaths due to COVID-19.”³¹⁸ Implementation capacity, however, varies between EU member states, and poorer countries find themselves in need of better infrastructure to receive as well as administer vaccinations. In some cases, transnational strategies bolster the EU initiative, such as the German states of Bavaria and Saxony supporting the Czech Republic with additional vaccines.³¹⁹ Allowing poorer EU member states to procure vaccines from other sources will not only aid in containing the pandemic but will also help stabilize the EU initiative in the long run. Purchasing and providing additional vaccines for the EU neighborhood in Southern Europe, in particular, will showcase commitment to solidarity and a health policy initiative that does not simply stop at the EU borders.

Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions

As a collective, national and regional authorities in the EU must prioritize direct assistance to vulnerable populations and medical communities during the pandemic. Although the EU's power remains limited in processing health measures to some extent, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control still strongly recommends the Commission to

³¹⁶ “Preparedness and Response Planning.” 2020. Text. Public Health - European Commission. October 12, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/health/security/preparedness_response_en.

³¹⁷ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. “Risk Assessment on COVID-19, 15 February 2021.” Accessed February 26, 2021. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/current-risk-assessment-novel-coronavirus-situation>.

³¹⁸ “Risk Assessment on COVID-19, 15 February 2021.”

³¹⁹ Zachová, Aneta. 2021. “Germany and France Will Send Vaccines to Czechia.” Euractiv (blog). March 2, 2021. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/germany-and-france-will-send-vaccines-to-czechia/.

invest in the implementation of NPIs, a public health tool used in health measures such as quarantining and limits on larger public gatherings to combat COVID-19. In following the ECDC's recommendations, the Commission must commit to enforcing a return to stay-at-home order due to the increased risk of transmission. With the arrival of a new strain, the B.1.1.7 variant, evidence suggests the variant is more aggressive and transmissible.³²⁰ Several countries in the EU have already witnessed its rapid spread and therefore experience an increase in hospitalizations and mortalities. Despite this, the majority of Europeans see little regulatory EU level enforcement to control transmissions outside of vaccine procurements. The ECDC warns against the increased easing on measures among local and regional governments. Due to signs of escalated incidence rates and the likelihood of strain mutation, the EU must encourage baseline standards to protect healthcare systems and optimize NPIs application. The EU can collectively regulate public health measures, strongly encourage its members to follow protocols, and identify cross-cutting challenges faced by majority members.³²¹ Therefore, our second policy recommendation is the following:

2. The EU must optimize public health interventions by reintroducing non-pharmaceutical interventions and establish a single unified and overarching standard for health measures in the form of NPIs.

The Conference on the Future of Europe will develop a format to debate stronger EU level NPI, such as a red-yellow-green system of EU-wide regional assessments – based on incidence rates – that trigger specific government policies and interventions. By way of establishing common standards in NPI, the EU will be able to take more a more actionable approach when it comes to healthcare and layout more personalized standards for each Member State which will in turn, better foster European solidarity by ensuring every Member State is adequately assessed for their specific healthcare needs. Targeted recommendations such as protecting vulnerable populations with “comprehensive

³²⁰ “Risk Assessment on COVID-19, 15 February 2021.”

³²¹ “Risk Assessment on COVID-19, 15 February 2021.”

testing, and intensified infection prevention and control practices in settings that host high-risk individuals, such as long-term care facilities" will add to an improved NPI system.³²² In the enforcement of Member State NPIs, citizens will feel as if their health and well-being is prioritized and will therefore be motivated to stay loyal to the structures ensuring their protection and thereby feel moved to continue to stand by its Union. To protect its higher-risk citizens and medical staff putting their lives on the defense for others, the European Union must also dedicate time to implementing intensive and unified protections against the virus. While the current EU traffic light system was created primarily for travelers, the red-yellow-green regional assessments provide a comprehensive view of the efficacies of NPIs and other preventative measures across member states.³²³ The Conference on the Future of Europe can evaluate both the traffic light system to monitor COVID-19 incident rates as well as other measure undertaken by Member States and debate whether extensive EU regulations are necessary. In allowing and promoting the expert opinions of citizens, Member States, and health experts on the success of lockdowns and other NPIs, the EU will appear amenable to these perspectives. Such receptiveness will positively impact its perception, thereby increasing citizen faith in it as an institution, and subsequently strengthening solidarity.

Balancing Inequities in Access to Healthcare Professionals

An additional issue that impacts EU solidarity within health policy is the migration of health personnel from poorer to richer EU Member States. Citing the example of Poland, estimates suggest that "between 2 million and 3 million employees have left Poland over the last decade, which is confirmed by survey data showing that on average, every tenth household has a migrant."³²⁴ In the healthcare sector, there has been a well-documented

³²² European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. "Guidance on the Provision of Support for Medically and Socially Vulnerable Populations in EU/EEA Countries and the United Kingdom during the COVID-19 Pandemic," July 3, 2020. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/guidance-medically-and-socially-vulnerable-populations-COVID-19>.

³²³ Riegert, Bernd. 2020. "Coronavirus: What the EU's New Traffic Light System Means." DW.COM. October 14, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-what-the-eus-new-traffic-light-system-means/a-55265476>.

³²⁴ Piotr Żuk, Paweł Żuk, and Justyna Lisiewicz-Jakubaszko. 2019. "Labour Migration of Doctors and Nurses and the Impact on the Quality of Health Care in Eastern European Countries: The Case of Poland." *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 30 (2): 307–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304619847335>.

outflow of professionals particularly from Eastern to Western Europe, weakening existing healthcare systems in Central-Eastern European Countries-Central Europe (CEEC's).³²⁵ Healthcare workers tend to leave their home countries if they are not provided adequate working conditions and instead are left with sparsely resourced care systems, career prospects, and pay. These “pull factors,” among other things, incentivize healthcare workers to continue their permanent stay in more affluent Western European states.³²⁶ Doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals are additionally drawn to better opportunities, such as expanding their careers and education, and as such, these “pull factors” lead to massive imbalances in care. Moreover, excellent training facilities the CEECs are exploited to produce the next generation of doctors and nurses for Western European health systems, leaving CEECs. massively under-staffed. In 2018, Germany had 1.288 nurses per 100.000 inhabitants, while Poland had 510 and Slovakia 570 nurses per 100.000 citizens.³²⁷ We recommend that the EU address these imbalances in access to health care professionals. As a first step, the Conference on the Future of Europe must convene expert panels on health migration and sponsor policies to prevent and/or mitigate it:

3. The EU must monitor the recruitment processes of cross-border agencies and establish a code in which states experiencing imbalances in care retain the right to enlist those they have trained for at least 5 years of service post-graduation, especially during times of crisis.

The EU can monitor and manage the outflow of healthcare workers from less developed states to Western countries by intervening and setting a multilateral code of practice to ensure that states in the west do not actively recruit from those experiencing imbalances, and that states with a scarcity of healthcare workers need to retain the requirement that

³²⁵ Andor, László. 2019. “Fifteen Years of Convergence: East-West Imbalance and What the EU Should Do About It.” *Intereconomics* 54 (1): 18–23.

³²⁶ “Labour Migration of Doctors and Nurses and the Impact on the Quality of Health Care in Eastern European Countries: The Case of Poland.”

³²⁷ Eurostat (2018) Healthcare personnel statistics – nursing and caring professionals, Accessed March 2 at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Healthcare_personnel_statistics_-_nursing_and_caring_professionals.

healthcare professionals will stay in-country for at least five years. Moreover, the EU must guide international recruitment agencies and monitor cross-border recruitment activities while supporting states such as Poland in developing their local healthcare systems. Until Eastern EU Member States can offer further opportunities for career expansion, the EU can devise policies to discourage Western countries from actively recruiting their doctors and nurses.

8.8 Policy Recommendations

- Allow low GDP EU Member States to complement the vaccinations acquired by the EU with joint vaccination procurement initiatives with non-EU states. Increase EU engagement for vaccination in the EU's non-member neighborhood.
- The EU must optimize public health interventions by reintroducing non-pharmaceutical interventions and establish one unified and overarching standard for health measures in the form of NPIs. The Conference on the Future of Europe will develop a format to debate stronger EU level NPI, such as a red-yellow-green system of EU-wide regional assessments — based on incidence rates — that trigger specific government policies and interventions.
- The EU must monitor the recruitment processes of cross-border agencies and establish a code in which states experiencing imbalances in care retain the right to enlist those they have trained for at least 5 years of service post-graduation, especially during times of crisis.

CONCLUSION

Solidarity has been a corner stone of the European integration process. The past two decades of global crises, however, have brought to light numerous challenges that – if not addressed – might upend the long-term prospects for deepening European Union integration. The current pandemic and climate change are further testing solidarity within the EU. In working to establish policies and participatory institutions that incite solidarity, we submit that the EU can collectively approach these challenges and work towards strengthening results-oriented multilateral relations between Member States and between citizens and the transnational EU level.

The aforementioned policy recommendations will serve, we hope, as a starting point for the EU to consider reforms to current policies and infrastructure at the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Conference, starting in May 2021, could be a pivotal moment for Europe's integration project, and we believe that the issues discussed at the Conference cannot be adequately approached without considering the problem of solidarity first. With an ever-changing European demographic with shifting priorities and values, the EU needs policy that takes into account the concerns of its diverse set of Member States and equally diverse citizen constituencies. Fostering multi-level solidarity by way of reforming pre-existing institutions and policies forms the core of our recommendations. We are confident that the EU can repair tensions and work collaboratively with Member States and citizens towards a solidarity-oriented EU polity.

SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational Exchange Programs and Erasmus +:

- Extend the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree program to bachelor students to limit the number of students held back by inconsistent credit conversions, and hence increase the accessibility of Erasmus across the EU.
- Create an online information portal as an extension of the Erasmus Student Network website that lays out funding opportunities for Erasmus and the relevant experiences of past Erasmus students to improve the accessibility of Erasmus equally across Member States.
- Further promote the traineeship program on the Erasmus website to diversify participant outcome goals and bridge financial barriers that create a gap between low and high GDP Member States.
- Hold a Conference comprised of past participants on the improvement of the Erasmus program as a solidarity mechanism moving forward and incorporate student views into the Conference of the Future of Europe.

Europarties:

- Make the use of Europarty logos on national campaign material mandatory to increase awareness.
- Introduce more EU languages apart from French, German, and English on the Europarty website to increase user accessibility.
- Expand individual membership to include the average citizen and expand their roles so they can participate in decision and policymaking.
- Adopt the German "Bundestag" system of voting, with each citizen casting two votes: One for a locally elected official and one for a Europarty. Address this

system at the Conference on the Future of Europe alongside the discussion of transnational lists.

- Unify the electoral system by establishing sixteen as the universal voting age, allowing all EU citizens over sixteen to vote in their country of citizenship (possibly residency), and the creation of a transnational ballot list.

The European's Citizen Initiative (ECI):

- Implement social media shareability on ECI websites for individual initiatives to mobilize supporters.
- Include ECI Day in the Conference on the Future of Europe, where ECI organizers, activists, citizens, and EU members could be hosted to discuss the future of ECIs as well as hold Q&As.
- Incorporate skill-sharing platforms and citizen lobbying aid to the ECI registration process to ease the complexity of registration and give organizers the tools they need for producing successful initiatives.
- An initial public hearing in EU Parliament should be held if an ECI reaches 200,000 signatures within the first six months.
- Establish mechanisms that enable ECIs to reach the EU Parliament and Council for consideration.

Disinformation and Misinformation in the EU:

- Establish an EU Common Digital Platform Standard and Agenda for Future Data Policy to streamline communication between the EU, Member State institutions, and digital platforms; create a protocol for disinformation and misinformation research and serve as an outline for future policy regarding personal data and privacy.
- Update the EUvsDisinfo site through expanding the scope beyond Russian disinformation campaigns, prioritizing the visibility of current popular false claims, and increasing accessibility to all languages spoken in the EU.

- Convene two committees during the Conference on the Future of Europe to debate and plan the above two recommendations. Representatives from multiple stakeholders and citizens should be part of conversations about the new guidelines, and citizens, researchers, and disinformation experts should make up the committee to plan the expansion of EUvsDisinfo.
- Collaborate with Member States' TV and radio stations to improve understanding of the EU's role in citizens' daily lives through an information source they already trust and bring the concerns of citizens closer to EU officials.

Migration within the EU:

- Encourage a system of shared responsibility in response to the migrant crisis specifically through the use of a coalition to evaluate Member States to ensure they are actually safe destinations for migrants, and to evaluate whether they have adequate resources to host these migrants; coalition will create a biannual migration safety index for the EU that illustrates their findings.
- Establish a system of shared responsibility by increasing *all* EU Member States' ability to manage and provide safety for migrants; implemented through the measures the European Commission outlines in their New Pact on Migration and Asylum.
- Provide funding to the Urban Partnership to enable multi-stakeholder communication including EU officials, local leaders, EU citizens, and migrants.
- Foster stronger communication with the Urban Partnership to incorporate the Urban Partnership's suggestions for EU migration policy.
- The Conference on the Future of Europe should organize a Conference involving post-2015 refugees to better incorporate their voices into EU migration policymaking.

The EU Recovery Fund and Economic Solidarity:

- Task the EU Parliament with establishing an expert commission to assess whether the Recovery Fund will exacerbate debt situations and potentially cause a longer economic recession than 2011 Sovereign Debt Crisis.
- Evaluate the lasting effects of the Recovery Fund on EU citizens: Will they perceive the Recovery Fund as having had a positive impact on their economic and social welfare five or ten years from now?
- Initiate stronger public debate in Parliament and in the Conference on the Future of Europe with the goal of establishing Eurobonds and a Universal Basic Dividend.
- Sponsor public campaigns through respective national central banks to produce model programs on how to educate EU citizens on Eurobonds.

UBI in the EU:

- Conduct more UBI trials in different EU Member States to gather information on the effects of UBI.
- Increase awareness of UBI through posting information on the Conference of Future of Europe website after a debate/discussion between experts in the field to explain how UBI can impact citizens and to encourage people to sign the ECI.
- Increase funding for financial education: teach students the basics of budgeting, saving, and investing to help promote healthy habits and help them manage UBI if implemented in the EU.

EU Health Policy and the Impacts of COVID-19:

- Allow low GDP EU Member States to complement the vaccinations acquired by the EU with joint vaccination procurement initiatives with non-EU states. Increase EU engagement for vaccination in the EU's non-member neighborhood.
- The EU must optimize public health interventions by reintroducing non-pharmaceutical interventions and establish one unified and overarching standard for health measures in the form of NPIs. The Conference on the Future of Europe

will develop a format to debate stronger EU level NPI, such as a red-yellow-green system of EU-wide regional assessments — based on incidence rates — that trigger specific government policies and interventions.

- The EU must monitor the recruitment processes of cross-border agencies and establish a code in which states experiencing imbalances in care retain the right to enlist those they have trained for at least 5 years of service post-graduation, especially during times of crisis.

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