



European
Universities
Community



The voice of European students

POLICY PROPOSALS

on the Future of Europe

from the
European Student Assembly 2022



Conference
on the **Future**
of **Europe**

Our Initiative

European Universities Community

The main objective of the European Universities Community (EUC) is to make students' voice be heard and enable them to shape their future.

This grassroots initiative gathers students from European University Alliances and has come out of the ground in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, launched jointly by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council.

Initiated first by French Universities, EUC is based on the following key actions:

- the contribution onto the multilingual digital platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe
- the Inaugural Session of the European Student Assembly
- the Manifesto on the Future of the Universities in Europe
- the promotion of multilingualism and multiculturalism within the student community

Our Project

European Student Assembly

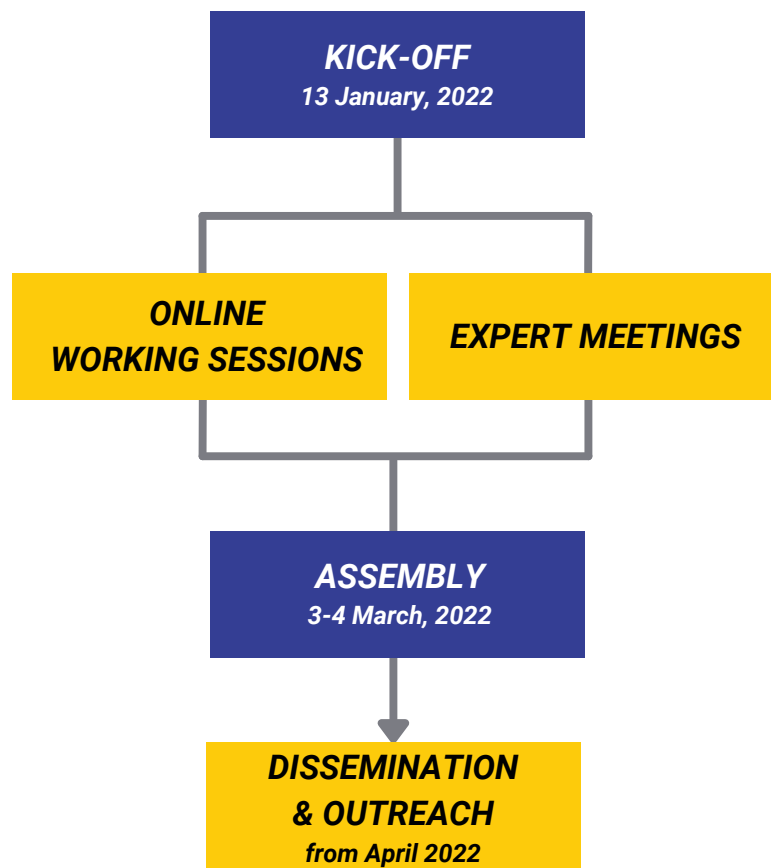
During an intensive preparation phase, students from all European University Alliances have been invited to debate and design solutions on a series of contemporary issues organised into ten Panels.

On 3rd and 4th March 2022 the inaugural session of the European Student Assembly brought together 275 students designated in 38 European University alliances, 144 universities and coming from 28 countries in Strasbourg.

This inaugural session of the European Student Assembly was the first of a series of gatherings giving students a public voice in the European Union. This was a vibrant opportunity for students to call decision makers to act through 89 Recommendations. They have been published on the digital platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

This publication of students' Policy Proposals reflects their determination to be heard and to have a concrete impact on their future that could lead to a political response from the European institutions.

MILESTONES



The 275 students have been selected out of more than **900 student applications** across Europe.

The selection process was based on **academic excellence** and **motivation**. It ensured the best representation of **genders, ages, countries** and **fields of study**. As a result, the ESA managed to unite students from Bachelor to PhD, 57% of whom were female, with a common interest for the future of Europe.

The **onboarding session** was held online on January 13, 2022, with the participation of more than 250 students.

Each of the 10 Panels **have met several times** between January and March 2022, with the help of student **coordinators** and **facilitators**.

Experts have been invited to help students to identify the **stakes** and **issues** their Panel had to deal with. Online working sessions were held to let **students exchange their ideas** and work on their recommendations.

They also mobilised their community and **gathered the opinion of their peers** in each represented university.

During two days in Strasbourg, students attended **round table discussions** and **Panel working sessions**. They finally presented these 89 Recommendations in front of the Assembly and **passed** them as a whole.

From April 2022, EUC stays on the task of making these Policy proposals be largely **broadcasted** and **studied** by the largest number of EU decision makers and stakeholders.



PANEL 1

HOW CAN THE EU REUNITE ITS PEOPLE AROUND ITS COMMON VALUES?

Executive Summary

The founding principles of the EU - human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, and respect for human rights - although broadly uncontested - are endangered by populist parties and extremist movements. Also, current challenges put the EU under pressure, which is why the identity of the European project must be strengthened. To reunite the EU citizens around jointly defined European values and to keep these values alive, we have elaborated different policy proposals on several topics. All of them aim at shaping the EU as a role model for all generations. Especially during the current situation, it is important to stand together as Europeans and protect and promote our core values.

Problem Statement

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men prevail.”

Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) sets the main European values. These values are in crisis as we live in a time when more and more people prefer their bubbles and fixed parameters over open exchange and having to face different perspectives and the complexity of life. This phenomenon goes hand in hand with the development of an increasingly value-driven society or “Wertegesellschaft” (Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2020, S. 1) which invites fake news, propaganda, populism, and even war to spread in Europe. We are witnessing a steep decline in common European values. If we as European citizens in charge of our common future don't take action to counteract the current corrosive tendencies, the European Union will soon just be the faint remembrance of a once-idyllic union of peaceful neighbours we failed to defend when we still had time to do so. This is why we won't take up the fight against the ongoing shift towards a value society, but instead, use the power of this general reorientation to unite the EU population around our core values. We want to state to you as the audience, that the following proposals are general ideas from European Youth which should be further developed. We kindly ask you to consider our proposals as initial ideas which should be implemented with the help of your respective institution or due to your mandate whenever it is possible.



Policy Proposals

1.1 | To reunite European citizens under the EU values, we should let people discover other cultures. **We suggest that the EU introduce a fund for enhancing interactions between citizens for helping people to concretely experience European context and values** in their own country or abroad. This fund should be decentralised and easy to access for all associations that share the European values in all of the Erasmus+ countries. The usage of this fund by these associations should be aimed at organising international activities open to everyone such as education, social events, civic engagement projects, or any other activities aimed at enhancing the sense of belonging in Europe. European associations such as ESN, BEST, EESTEC, or other (minor) associations could join this fund and propose their project to be approved.

1.2 | To strengthen the European values among EU citizens, it is highly important to engage with the citizens' education as early as possible. In our early years, our values and choices are shaped by our many interactions with other people, especially teachers. Therefore, we propose that **the EU encourage further multicultural activities for the education of young children**. European children should be able to participate in cross-border initiatives like the European Voluntary Service (additional fund) or DiscoverEU. Exposure to direct benefits and diverse people fosters the integration of European values for our youth. Early contact with a foreign language is proven to greatly benefit the development of many skills. Possible implementations may include trips and visits to other countries and European institutions; mobility at young ages (before 17); promoting European involvement by creating panels; or conferences for the youth. We call for additional funding and lowering the age required to take part in EU youth initiatives.

1.3 | Teachers also have a key role in transmitting values and thus, in the deconstruction or perpetuation of biases and stereotypes. Mutual understanding in plural societies is based on the capacity to endure ambiguity as well as a multiplicity of perspectives as a resource, not a danger or disturbance. These competencies could be learned and trained every day in day-care centres, pre-schools, and school classrooms provided that **teachers are given the opportunity to experience multiculturalism as well through incentives such as a European Teacher Exchange Year**, additional mobility, and working in tandem with teachers from another country.

1.4 | The EU needs to live up to its values as a role model to reunite European citizens around them. According to the Eurobarometer, 58% of Europeans think that the migration policy of the EU is one of the biggest issues in Europe. We, therefore, suggest that **the EU should change its migration policy and reconsider the Dublin Regulation**. The values of the EU - especially human rights - also need to be implemented in its migration policy. Solidarity between the EU Member States should be enhanced when it comes to the proportional relocation of all migrants. If human rights are disregarded in migration issues, **a new conditionality mechanism should be implemented**, leading to consequences for the countries that do not respect fundamental rights.



1.5 | European values must also be reflected in the European economy. The EU taxonomy offers better transparency in the field of climate change by making European companies, as well as participants on the financial market, disclose their level of conformity with certain environmental objectives. **The taxonomy should not only reflect environmental issues but also be further expanded to European Values.** We recommend including measurable data, especially equality (gender, minorities, and other marginalised groups), human rights (especially in the production chain), and democracy/plurality (especially concerning unions) into the taxonomy. Considering the current timeline and evolution of the EU Taxonomy, we propose a starting date in 2025 for one dimension, adding another dimension each year. **A platform for CSR reports with a ranking** would also act as a vehicle for the population to see the reports as well as as an incentive for the companies themselves.

1.6 | To reunite European citizens under the EU values and to try and re-establish the feeling that citizens can influence the decisions made on a central level through bottom-up initiatives, we propose **the creation of local Panels about EU issues in each Member State.** The goal is to strengthen the relations between people and EU politics within a deliberative democracy model. Based on a topic to discuss, each panel invites experts to shed light on the topic, facilitate the collaboration within the group and assist in draft preparation. The Panels consist of a proportional amount of people depending on the population of the country and are randomly chosen. If a person participates in one panel, they should have fewer chances to participate in the next one, to have more variety. For all panels, spots are reserved for minority groups, randomly selected, too. Local members of the European Parliament are invited to attend as well. The panels should take place once a year in each Member State. After a Panel-Meeting, the document will be approved by the participants. Every panel creates a document with policy recommendations, which will then be sent to the European Parliament. The final document should be discussed in the European Parliament in due time.

1.7 | Fake news and extremist propaganda is not a new problem, but the contemporary possibility to spread information in a targeted yet massive and effective way has opened the door to the creation of convincing extremist propaganda with harmful consequences to the general public. It is important to take action to help society shape strong criteria to choose reliable media sources for them to build their line of thought, countering aggressive narratives, fake news, and extremist propaganda. We, therefore, propose the EU take action via **the establishment of a state-of-the-art digital interactive platform** that would serve as a fact-checking instrument where people can double-check the information they are being exposed to. In addition to this, it is important that the EU engage in the **regularisation of the exposure to manipulated information and click baits.** A first step to achieve this could be the annexation of reliable sources in posts dealing with sensitive information, like the addition of the World Health Organisation link in every post that mentioned COVID-19.



1.8 | To promote European values in an increasingly value-driven society, enhanced communication with the European population is necessary. To achieve this goal, it is crucial to further develop the European communications platform. Hence, we propose **establishing EUCPRA - EU Communications & PR Agency**. The Agency would integrate different communications strategies from the EU institutions and communicate with the EU population in its entirety. This organisation should be led by an experienced communicator and form a voice for the EU as a whole. The possible competencies of the Agency may be, firstly, **launching an initiative #IamEU**, covering social media campaigns, public talks, festivals, etc. It will target the EU population as a whole and be aimed to accumulate the thoughts of Europeans and how people resonate with the EU values. Secondly, **a European programme streaming on public broadcastings and social media**, a venue where people can express their opinions and ask questions to politicians. For each programme there should be MEPs and people from the different Member States. The programme could take place regularly in different Member States. The topics of the programme could either be voted by the European population or cover current relevant issues. Thirdly, **promoting the EU values during the European Week of Regions and Cities (#EURegionsWeek) through multicultural events**. The events might be cultural activities, information booths, festivals, exhibitions, and food events.

1.9 | Increasing subsidies for independent media coverage of the EU: The European Parliament invited media outlets to apply for funding totalling €8.8 million for "*impartial and factual information*" about the European Parliament. At the same time, Member States have their own models for media subsidies which mostly only apply to media based in their territory. The EU institutions should replicate this media subsidy model for pan-European media outlets that report on EU issues and values.



PANEL 2

HOW CAN THE EUROPEAN UNION BECOME MORE RESILIENT TO CYBER-ATTACKS?

Executive Summary

With higher education institutions in the European Union (EU) becoming increasingly digitally advanced, the lives of the European Youth appear even more intertwined with and dependent on digital networks as constituents of the infrastructure, safety, and quality of European education and research. The European Youth's Digital Sovereignty needs to be founded on the resilience of all connected services and products. This policy paper addresses the current vulnerability of higher education institutions (HEIs) in eight recommendations aiming at defining necessities, promoting cooperation within, and between the public and private sectors, and empowering students in increasing their cybersecurity knowledge and skills.

Problem Statement

The third objective of the European Strategy for Universities states: *"Empower universities as key actors of change in the twin green and digital transition"*. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the citizens of the EU have become increasingly dependent on digital tools. The Higher Education Sector is a good example of that tendency, as the sudden introduction of online classes, as well as other remote teaching and learning methodologies, led to an increase in the online presence of both administrative and academic information. Overall, the accelerated pace of digitalisation has to be read as a signal to bring social attention to the question of cybersecurity, also at a European level. Cybersecurity serves as one of the main challenges of the century and Higher Education Institutions are no exception: students, staff, and academics find themselves confronted with unprecedented challenges of cybersecurity. However, these actors are often not aware of the degree to which keeping a safe cybersphere is important. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) own critical data and research material that needs to be protected so that the European Higher Education Sector can stay relevant within an increasingly competitive global environment. Ensuring Academic freedom, while protecting research data on delicate topics like the human genome, becomes a challenge. Therefore, the question is: How can the EU become more resilient to cyber-attacks?

This proposal answers to this question by focusing on what the European Institutions could do for HEIs regarding the improvement of cybersecurity. By implementing the Policy Recommendations below, the EU will position itself internationally, raise awareness about a pressing issue among its younger citizens and overall become more cyber-resilient.



Policy Proposals

2.1 | Implement baseline requirements on cybersecurity for HEIs. The implementation and continuous development of EU baseline requirements on the subject of cybersecurity are a precondition to the resilience of HEIs. Security enhancing methods (e.g. open-source and multi-factor authentication) are to be introduced into the educational sector. We call upon the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) to develop these standards, involving HEIs' expertise. Retention of ERC subsidies needs to be subject to compliance because receiving funding cannot come without the obligation of proper cybersecurity.

2.2 | Support cybersecurity solutions through European funding. The EU should maximise access-to-finance for cybersecurity research. The European Cybersecurity Competence Centre, together with the Network of National Coordination Centres, make strategic investment decisions and pool resources from the EU budgets. These two actors should play a key role in delivering the ambitious cybersecurity objectives of the Digital Europe Programme and Horizon Europe programmes. This can be done through coordination among stakeholders and any other interested parties, by sharing mutual goals regarding expertise and capacities among research and industrial communities.

2.3 | Establish cyber-resilience internal structure within HEIs. We recommend the EU to provide HEIs with ENISA-certified Cybersecurity Office teams consisting of at least: Chief Security Officer, Security Manager, Security Analysts, Security Engineers, Applications Security Administrators. We recommend the Cybersecurity Office team work closely with ENISA in terms of research and prevention of cyber-attacks.

2.4 | Improve cybersecurity cooperation between HEIs and alliances. Research and Development innovative exchange programmes and tools are needed to collect opportunities from different countries and to involve students in economic outputs. For this purpose, the implementation of common databases could link HEIs and alliances to share scientific data. The creation of cybersecurity-related criteria, as proposed in Recommendation 1, during future European Universities Initiative (EUI) funding calls would encourage further inter-HEI cooperation, including information exchange, counterpart meetings, joint bargaining in front of software providers, within alliances in ensuring their institutions' cyber-resilience.

2.5 | Support cooperation between companies and HEIs. To foster collaboration in the cybersecurity field, the EU should emphasise public-private partnerships by implementing new funding and open innovation strategies both at the local and national levels. The Commission should incentivise HEIs, students, and companies via grants or scholarships to plan challenge-based, interdisciplinary activities around the topic of cybersecurity. The aim is to increase professional formation among students and support them in following a career and academic interest in cybersecurity.



2.6 | Support balanced growth of human capital. The EU should tackle the issue of female underrepresentation in the field of cybersecurity. As women account for only one-fourth of cybersecurity professionals, increasing this number may constitute a viable solution for the growing overall shortage of workers in this field. We recommend the creation of an international network focusing on the education and training of women in STEM fields.

2.7 | Raise awareness among students. The EU must ensure that every student has a right to the protection of their data throughout their studies and therefore the EU must guarantee that all students are aware of the cybersecurity challenges. Thus, we ask the EU to institute an annual award of the European HEI of Cybersecurity, to the HEI that has most proactively increased the awareness of cybersecurity and empowered young people. The criteria will be created in collaboration with ENISA awareness programmes, with one of the criteria being that the HEI offers every student free access to secure antivirus software.

2.8 | Support activities within HEIs that foster youth participation. We advise the EU to create integrated multidisciplinary committees to promote student engagement, generate informational content, and implement awareness-related activities. This engagement should be focused on universities and their student councils to create locally addressed policies and follow-up on the harmonisation of European cooperation best practices.



PANEL 3

LEARNING FROM THE PANDEMIC – DO WE NEED A EUROPEAN HEALTH UNION?

Executive Summary

The differences in health strategies in the past few years have highlighted how integration and cooperation between European countries are crucial in overcoming global health problems. This proposal will address how different areas of health (e.g. mental health, digital health, healthcare workers, health costs, and research) can benefit from a collective response by the further development of the European Health Union with a focus on the harmonisation of public health policies.

Problem Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a European Health Union (EHU). The mental and physical health of millions of citizens has been affected by the pandemic. This reveals the importance of taking care of overall health to have properly working societies that can withstand global problems in times of crisis. Therefore, the European Union needs to take immediate action on the topic of health, as every single person on the planet is now affected by it. Moreover, it has not only limited the health of the population but also national economies. Although most European Member States offer almost universal coverage for a fundamental range of health services, there are still disparities in health care coverage.

Considering the topic of health within the EU, Member States are sovereign and therefore able to create and implement their own laws. Hence, the chosen strategies in approaching the pandemic and other health-related topics (i.e., digital health, costs, policies and regulations, healthcare workers, scientific research) vary widely within Europe. Sovereignty also applies to many other areas, in which through the years, the members of the EU have converged and integrated their strategies, generating more efficient systems and further benefits for the European citizens. That is why EHU should follow next.



Policy Proposals

3.1 | Enabling a legal, ethical, technological, and financial framework for the integrity, quality, and standardisation of health data across European countries; for better interoperability of health systems as well as a more efficient collaboration on joint innovative projects.

3.2 | Reducing the gap between basic sciences, health research, and the healthcare sector by funding multidisciplinary projects and teams, further developing joint curricula, and establishing guidelines for the harmonisation of the work practices of the three stakeholders.

3.3 | Promote health literacy among European citizens, and Member States to prevent misunderstandings and clinical errors, providing the foundation of knowledge needed to create a unified and coherent set of digital tools, to be used by the European Health Union (e.g. European Health Insurance Card).

3.4 | Increase risk management support within the Member States during health crises and include binding elements in EU policy regarding the topic of health. This could lead to more harmonised strategies within Europe, potentially expanding to a global level.

3.5 | Improve access to mental health care, considering the different needs and vulnerabilities of the populations, especially young people who were one of the most affected by the pandemic.

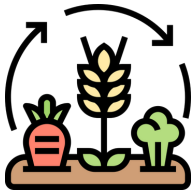
3.6 | Improve working conditions for healthcare workers to make their job more attractive and to make them stay in the job longer without mental health problems so that the healthcare workers shortage will be eased and the patients get the best care there is.

3.7 | Centralise medical products (e.g. vaccine, medications) **purchase** and negotiation with biopharmaceutical companies.

3.8 | Develop health hubs in highly populated Europe regions and near borders that specialise in cutting-edge treatments and/or rare diseases to progress faster in healthcare innovation. These hubs would be able to treat any European citizen in the same conditions.

3.9 | Provide effective access to critical health services, ensure sufficient health insurance coverage for the entire population, as well as proper geographic distribution of health services across different regions in each country.

3.10 | The European Health Union must ensure the confidentiality of European citizens' health data by creating a secure platform coordinated between the Member States and their government services, which would only be accessible by doctors within the Member States.



PANEL 4

AGRICULTURE VS. SUSTAINABILITY – WHAT CAP FOR THE FUTURE?

Executive Summary

This Policy Proposal presents a more self-demanding Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). New strategies are proposed to make the CAP greener. We introduce them in a way that does not subordinate environmental goals to internal market ones. However, the new CAP will defy the myth of its inefficiency by being mindful of impact-driven initiatives. A nonconformist CAP is possible, and we must implement it in earnest.

Problem Statement

The new CAP is the greenest in the records, and the European Commission claims that 40% of total expenditure support climate action. But is it enough? According to the European Environmental Agency, planned reforms will only reduce emissions by 5% on 2005 levels. This violates the binding annual targets set by the Effort Sharing Regulation for 2030. European environmental researchers have questioned expenditure claims with more than 3.600 of them signing a position paper calling for more action in setting biodiversity targets.

The issue of greening the CAP exists in an institutional and legal context. Article 11 TFEU and article 37 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights set forth the commitment of the EU to look for the protection of the environment and sustainability of development in all its policies. The CAP organises its funding following pluriannual policy cycles. The new CAP policy cycle (2023-2027) is opening as a political agreement was founded upon by the European Parliament on 23rd November 2021. Now that the Commission is reviewing the national CAP plans the European Parliament has still the last word to influence the CAP by issuing non-binding reports. This is especially the case in a new CAP budget that gives room for Member States discretion. A green CAP requires compromise, and the European Parliament should be vocal in alerting the Commission that the Member States' national interest is not necessarily the same as the environment's.

The definition of sustainability should be subject to peer review and consensus by independent experts, including the Commission Joint Research Centre. We acknowledge that, on each criterion and for each region, this definition must be re-examined.



Policy Proposals

4.1 | Actively phasing out pesticide and chemical fertiliser use in the EU over the next three CAP cycles. Besides emitting GHGs, these products deteriorate the mineral and biological soil composition, increasing our dependence on them year after year. The EU should strive to align with its foreign policy, as it supports and funds the initiatives of Bhutan, a country that plans to raise and import only pesticide and fertiliser-free produced agrifoods. We propose a longer transition period than the rest of our proposals because we recognise the potential impacts on production and prices. These products could be divided into three categories according to their pollution impact, with each category banned in a cycle. We recommend Member States to campaign against agriproducts being discarded on aesthetic grounds to counterbalance the resulting partial decline in production.

4.2 | Adoption of a Common Accreditation Framework to encourage young farmers under the age of 40 to drive environmentally-friendly farming practices. The basis of this proposal lies in mandating vocational farming training in rotation along with crop cycles in the Member States. Young people under rural development should be targets of a scheme emphasising sustainable farming practices, fostering research and development, and encouraging age diversity and gender-balanced participation. We want to streamline processes to give young farmers tools and skills with an EU-wide recognition to make them drivers of sustainable farming practices.

4.3 | Remove the hectare criterion as the guiding principle for the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund basic income support. CAP should move to universal minimum farmer income, with bonus criteria to increase payment allocation. Farmers should get economic incentives to implement sustainable measures: reintroduce natural pollinators and pest controllers, regenerative crops, and seasonal crops, reducing pesticides and fertilisers. This encourages farming more fertile soils, repurposing the rest through greening direct payments. Reduced land utilisation in agriculture will impact biodiversity positively and be useful for protecting farmers from small Member States, who tend to have smaller farming units and increased land-use competition.

4.4 | Insert mirror clauses in the new EU-Third Countries/Regional Blocks free trade agreements. This would mean that trading partners wishing to export their agricultural products to Europe must comply with its phytosanitary and environmental standards. Given the strong constraints on EU farmers, Europe cannot accept to put trade above environmental and consumer protection. We support the French presidency of the Council initiative to introduce said clauses to push for global climate goals and incentivize other countries to follow. This guarantees an equal playing field before EU consumers, who should access agriproducts of comparable quality.

4.5 | Enhance crop diversification and cultivation of endemic plants. This topic is of growing concern for the Commission, which funds projects like “*Diverfarming*” to support research diversification through crop rotation and intercultures, which are tied to environmental resilience and market flexibility. It stops biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and water pollution. Farmers are held back by risk aversion and short tenancies halting investment recovery. Thereby, we request the Commission to issue a Code of Conduct. This Code would be signed by lessors who commit to lengthening contracts for crop diversification, to insurance givers to issue reports predicting weather events affecting crops, and to demand the Commission that the approval of National CAP Plans pend on providing dispute resolution channels.

4.6 | Take a step forward in EU Ecolabelling assessment criteria. We propose a labelling scheme based on the measurement of the carbon footprint of each consumer product, with the aim to include additional measurements once this system is well-established. Implementation will be phased in, with major food retailers bearing the primary cost of certifying their suppliers. A method like the Nutriscore colours is recommended as consumers need to identify the impact of what they buy easily. Reduced demand for carbon-intensive products (meat and dairy) is a social necessity. If we are to move towards sustainable development, we need policies that tackle consumption trends and consider how they drive environmental degradation in less affluent regions.

4.7 | Accelerate the transition to circular food systems. First, we propose promoting regenerative agricultural practices based on principles including but not limited to agroforestry and permaculture, based on local environments. Second, identify food waste sources at all stages of the supply chain and advocate regulations to create a less wasteful system. The Garot law in France is an example, introducing an obligation for supermarkets to redistribute unsold goods. Third, capture the value of food waste by transforming it into valuable materials and products and improving current composting systems. A specific emphasis should be placed on implementing these principles in urban contexts. This will improve the resilience of food systems in face of the increased pressure faced by ecosystems due to climate-induced hazards.

4.8 | Promote internship schemes in farming. Establish a practical information network on farming and help agricultural businesses to achieve concrete projects (short or long term) by the mobility of students and young people who are interested in farm life across different farms. Young people with no prior knowledge of farming are the main group of concern. With this we hope more of them would be inclined to go to the farms since picking a future in farming is a bigger step to take without a general idea of the farm life. By recognising a validation of competencies on farming skills, we could help the youth start their own farming business. We would like to promote the WWOOF initiative on a European scale. This would widen the network for farmers, exchange of practical information, promote young farmers, and peer-based education. This could also benefit traditional farmers to better take sustainability into account in their production. There would be criteria for farmers to enter the network (paperwork, security checks, social checks, etc.). The certification for the interns will be delivered after a report of the skills acquired.

4.9 | A great number of CAP-related policies require close monitoring of environmental factors. Due to the scarcity of available data for an efficient decision-making process for future policies we propose a new, European-wide monitoring programme. The aim is threefold: i) to evaluate if the conditionality for receiving CAP funding is met; ii) to check if sustainable criteria are implemented (for example, sustainable eco-schemes); iii) to evaluate if measurements proposed in CAP have a significantly positive impact on ecosystems, biodiversity, water, and air quality, soil nutrients... We need new environmental indicators and proxies (general and particularised to the variety of agricultural and ecological contexts of the EU). The implementation could be centralised and carried out by a European Institution, or the funding could be derived from national agriculture ministries.



PANEL 5

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OR DEGROWTH – WHAT ECONOMIC MODEL CAN THE EU ADOPT FOR TOMORROW’S WORLD AND HOW CAN IT BE DURABLY SETTLED?

Executive Summary

This policy proposal introduces solutions to shape the future economic system of the European Union. It takes social, economic, and environmental factors into consideration to mould a sustainable, efficient, and resilient Europe.

Problem Statement

Designing the economic system of the future is a huge challenge which needs to be addressed, because this is the actual frame in which States, companies and people interact. It is of utmost importance to find a sustainable system that is able to react and adapt on certain issues, for example climate change. It is vital to ensure that the European Union is heading towards a more united and resilient future. We need to overcome the fossil age and the exploitation of nature. Consequently, a new economic system ought to be implemented. It must be circular, inclusive, sustainable and resilient, whilst its framework must consider environmental boundaries and social minimum standards, bringing key actors together towards better livelihoods. Green economy accounts for the environment and the value of natural assets, in planning and decision making, and focuses on the quality and sources of economic growth - as opposed to today’s focus on the growth number only.



Policy Proposals

5.1 | Member States have different environmental, economic, and social characteristics. Therefore, **each EU Member State should acquire the highest possible specialisation by region in activities and sectors where it has sustainable comparative advantages. Higher education and research will play a key role in this specialisation process.**

5.2 | According to the European Commission, only 38% of waste is recycled in the EU. We recommend **transitioning to a circular economy, including a circular bio-economy, by giving incentives to companies to develop policies based on this model.** Actions to be taken include reduction of waste of resources in the production process, emphasising the utilisation of renewable resources, plant and animal by-products, biodegradable materials and. raising awareness of local communities about the advantages of the circular economy.

5.3 | 21 EU Member States are coastal and European citizens have an inseparable connection with the sea, a source for prosperity and sustainable development. We recommend the **adoption of a new production development model based on the Sustainable Blue Economy** (centred around sustainable use of ocean resources) **which considers the three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental, and economic.**

5.4 | Free allowances under the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) will be phased out from 2026 when the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) becomes operational, and eliminated by 2035. The free allowances hinder a fast achievement of net-zero emissions. **Phasing out of free allowances should be accelerated and eliminated by 2030. The funds gathered from carbon imports should be used for the green transition in Europe.**

5.5 | The Global South is likely to experience significant shocks from the implementation of a CBAM and decarbonization efforts. The EU needs to support the Global South in decarbonisation as climate change is a global challenge. **Dialogue with the Global South should be increased, to better understand funding needs. Setting up a separate EU fund to be included in the next Multiannual Financial Framework will help finance the transition of developing countries.** Enhanced communication with partners (IMF, World Bank) must help identify additional sources of funding for the Global South.

5.6 | Forest biodiversity is important for providing clean air, capturing carbon dioxide emissions, and preventing soil erosion and climate change. Deforestation is a serious threat both within the EU and in the rest of the world, with the EU being responsible for the destruction of 10% of the forests worldwide (WWF). **Member States should adopt baselines and national targets for reforestation based on their situation. This could be integrated into the current ETS (for within the EU) and a CBAM (for imports), refunding allowances costs for firms that actively participate in reforestation projects that reduce their deforestation activities subject to submitted proof yearly.**



5.7 | Since 70% of European citizens live in cities, and this generates 23% of all the greenhouse gas emissions from transport, investments in cycling projects are essential so that urban mobility becomes more sustainable, smart, and healthy. **A ban on car access to city centres should be imposed, and investments in bike infrastructure should be supported by the EU, creating safer bike lanes, cycle paths, and bike-only streets.**

5.8 | The European Environment Agency shows that trains emit 28.39g of CO₂ per kilometre per passenger, making it the least carbon-intensive mode of transportation, compared with 244.09g for planes. Train travel is under-utilised due to difficulties of cross-border travel, train infrastructure, and high cost. **A common subsidised transport ticket system based on single tickets across providers and borders should be established which would ensure fair prices and adequate cooperation and protection in the case of transport incidents, such as cancelled or delayed trains. The implementation of standardised long-distance train infrastructure should be prioritised when new or cross-border connections are established. A marketing campaign should underline the clear benefit for both the environment and the consumer of travelling by rail instead of flying.**

5.9 | The fossil assets of the 11 largest European banks represent 95% of their total equity in 2021, it is, therefore, urgent to settle key steps to reach net-zero emissions. **By 2030, fossil assets** (assets related to the exploration, development, transportation, and use of coal, oil, and gas) **must not represent more than 50% of a bank's portfolio, with penalties in the case of infringements.**

5.10 | The price of energy has skyrocketed and the transition from fossil fuels to sustainable ways to produce energy is costly. The generation of energy by citizens contributes to the democratisation of the energy production process. **A system where energy consumers (farmers, households, small and medium enterprises) can become renewable energy producers should be implemented, through funding and regulation.**



PANEL 6

RE-THINKING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE: HOW SHOULD THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY OF TOMORROW LOOK LIKE?

Executive Summary

With the rise of digitalisation and the impact of COVID-19, the European Union faced many challenges in transforming its institutions into accessible and inclusive digital platforms for all Europeans. Therefore, the main focus is to ensure that everyone across Europe is aware of their rights and about digital tools and their benefits. The following document provides recommendations in the fields of online education and voting, multi-linguistic representation, and information accessibility, among others. It answers the question of how digital transformation could enhance democratic participation.

Problem Statement

We are in the middle of a digital transformation: not only have human activities been subject to change in the digital age, but even entire political systems experience a great shift concerning their governance structure, the politics of information distribution, and citizens' right to participate.

However, while some EU citizens have the socioeconomic advantage to live in a well-developed country with suitable infrastructure or a well-funded educational system in which access and use of digital tools is no obstacle, other regions of Europe still struggle to include all people in the digital space. The European digitalisation process reveals an increasing trend towards a deep social component, risking further societal cleavage across the European Union.

It is therefore the responsibility and challenge of political leaders to ensure equal and safe participation in the digital spaces for all European citizens. We must benefit from the effects of the increasing digitisation in our society, making them accessible and perceptible for everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of digital alternatives of communication and participation. It is necessary that the EU invests in policies for the digital transformation and makes sure that nobody falls behind the level of participation that prevailed before the pandemic. Digital tools enable citizens to virtually get in contact with supporters and opponents alike, fostering rich and fruitful discussions about the future of democracy.

Consequently, we have identified 10 key areas in which the EU should take action and we propose 10 policy recommendations on how to achieve an inclusive digital democracy for the future.



Policy Proposals

6.1 | Spotlight lenses – Enhancing the visibility of existing mechanisms and inventing new ones. Despite the existence of the European Citizens' Initiative and the European Parliament petitions, many citizens are unaware of these mechanisms. We need to promote them at a national, regional, and local level, and take advantage of the public salience of the European elections to do so.

6.2 | Our opinion matters – Implementing Permanent Citizen Councils. Participatory democracy mechanisms must be strengthened. This should be done by making them permanent and more impactful. On one hand, by institutionalising the citizens' panels and implementing them on the national level. On the other hand, by maintaining and reforming the multilingual digital platform of the CoFoE after 9th May 2022.

6.3 | Vote from home – Online voting as an option, not a solution. Secure, transparent, and straightforward online voting through a digital platform is a necessity. It should be accessible from anywhere and equal for everyone.

6.4 | The EU has my back – EU's principles for safer digital spaces. All activities organised by the European institutions must ensure that every participant feels safe in digital spaces. Mechanisms to prevent and combat hate speech and discrimination should be put in place.

6.5 | Popular democracy – Implementing an unbiased digital platform. The EU should work actively towards making the existing digital platforms more inclusive, engaging, and comprehensive for everyone. Young people must have easy access to transparent information and equal participation opportunities to develop themselves into conscious, active, and critical citizens.

6.6 | Include to integrate – Enhancing inclusivity by expanding options. To ensure that every citizen has equal access to information, an 'easy language' option on all EU and governmental websites, mindful colour coding for the visibly impaired, adjustable letter size, and audio-accessible content should be implemented.

6.7 | Language Umbrella – European multilingual cohesion. Even though the official European documents are already translated into the 24 EU languages, this excludes nationally-recognised minority languages of countries within the Union as well as those spoken in the potential EU member states. Thus, we strongly encourage easier access to official publications in all these languages to improve cohesion in Europe.

6.8 | Educate to excel – Enhancing critical digital literacy among all EU citizens. Digital literacy enhancement needs to happen so that all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic, educational status, and age, are equipped with the tools and skills to participate in the digital spaces. Creating additional community services and transforming the already existing ones could greatly contribute to this cause.



6.9 | Rise, get involved, and see the world – Enriching early education with European mobility and the development of democratic competencies. The EU should focus on fostering exchange programmes in primary and secondary education to increase knowledge about the EU and its values. Pre-academic exchange programmes are a core value to build and solidify a European identity in younger generations.

6.10 | Culture on the go – Using augmented reality to educate. Strong digital connections bring Europe closer together. Using augmented reality offers everyone a chance to visit important European landmarks and discover the diversity of European cultures with the assistance of your mobile device. Therefore, we encourage EU Representations in member States to use augmented reality to bring the European Union closer to citizens.



PANEL 7

SOCIAL MEDIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS – HOW CAN THE EU REGULATE DIGITAL PLATFORMS WITHOUT LIMITING FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND THE FREE EXCHANGE OF THOUGHTS?

Executive Summary

The policy proposal below is a response to a rapidly growing involvement of social media in daily life of European citizens of different ages. The main goal is to make the digital space safer, more transparent and more equitable through, inter alia, the creation of a European Regulatory Agency and Committee for Protection of Children’s Participation Online, increased involvement of citizens in providing recommendations to regulatory bodies, modification of content prioritisations and content moderation, and unified model of reports of activity and transparency of digital platforms.

Problem Statement

The rapid and ever-evolving growth of social media has brought with it challenges of hate speech and privacy concerns, and legislative intervention appears to be the best way forward to address the protection of individual rights by the companies governing the social media landscape. The interaction between individual social media platforms’ voluntary governing principles and the wider framework of international human rights and data privacy legislation requires further development.

Hate speech and hate crime have seen a sharp rise across Europe and have become a particularly serious and worrying phenomenon – offline and online. It is important to highlight that according to the Council of Europe (Recommendation n.º R (97) 20), hate speech covers all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.

Everyone should have the right to benefit from public measures to promote the responsible use of cyberspace and to protect against all forms of discrimination and crime. Therefore, it may be necessary to sanction or even prevent all forms of expression which spread, incite or justify hatred based on intolerance.

According to the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech of 2019, *“addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence, which is prohibited under international law.”* Freedom of expression, which includes the freedom of speech, is a fundamental right, defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the right to hold opinion without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Whilst freedom of thought is an absolute civil right that cannot be restricted, freedom of expression can be restricted as a means to prevent harm to other fundamental rights, for example, dignity and integrity.



Article 19, para. 3, of the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), requires limits on freedom of expression to satisfy the three-part test of legality, legitimacy, necessity, and proportionality.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011, establish a voluntary framework for the human rights responsibilities of private businesses. The European Union has already developed a framework to regulate this issue, for instance, the “Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law”. The European Commission has also proposed two legislative initiatives to upgrade rules governing digital services in the EU: the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA). However, this is not enough to provide adequate answers to this complex issue. In the light of this problem, we propose some measures to the EU to tackle this challenge to balance and protect those fundamental rights.

Furthermore, amidst increasing consumer concerns relating to online privacy, the GDPR and other legislation are increasingly important in providing individuals full control over their personal data and centralising the regulatory environment by corresponding to EU regulations. Such regulation is critical to ensure the protection of the personal information of EU residents and citizens whilst using social media.



Policy Proposals

Transparency of Communication and Code

7.1 | There should be higher standards of data transparency. Thus, we propose that personal consumer data held by social media companies should be available to the users of the platforms, with the information provided in clear language about the permissions, reasons, and period of use of the data, and an option to download and modify those. Furthermore, proprietary data relating to internal social media procedures should be made available to external researchers for auditing purposes.

7.2 | Users should have the option of providing recommendations as to the operation of social media platforms to regulatory bodies, particularly around moderation and curation.

7.3 | Every social media platform should be subject to transparency reporting according to a Europe-wide regulatory framework. The companies should also have an obligation to be transparent about any government requests for customer data.

Content Moderation

7.4 | We propose a European Regulatory Agency that would be an independent body carrying out the moderation of content published on social media platforms to ensure the correct balance between freedom of expression and other fundamental rights.

7.5 | We propose the creation of a framework for social media platforms to establish protocols for monitoring hate speech and fake news, within a reasonable time after notification. Trending content will be verified at different levels - initially by automated machine systems and further by human moderators.

Fundamental Rights on the Internet

7.6 | We propose a European Charter on Human Rights in the Digital Era, inspired by the Portuguese Charter on this topic, as a way to harmonise the legislation amongst the Member States.

7.7 | We propose the inclusion of hate speech (see the aforementioned definition) in the European Union Crimes List, which would make it easier for the Member States to hold a person who committed this crime responsible even if this crime affects a person in a different Member State, creating a united front in combating crime.

Protective and Educative Measures

7.8 | We propose that social media platforms make available up-to-date resources about mental health issues and guidance as to safe practices. The platforms should publish original content on the duties and responsibilities that come with the freedom of speech, with the aim to educate their users on information consumption and promotion.

7.9 | We propose the creation of an independent body that will be in charge of the protection of children's participation online, which will draw on the experience of child rights organisations. This will ensure that children's freedom of expression is not only encouraged but protected by procedures that set the standard of ethics.

7.10 | Labelling should be given priority over de-platformisation. In the case of demonetisation, there must be a specific system to appeal this decision.



PANEL 8

HOW SHOULD THE EU POSITION ITSELF IN A GLOBALISED WORLD, VIS-À-VIS OTHER ACTORS SUCH AS THE US, CHINA, OR RUSSIA, AND WITH REGARD TO CONFLICTS IN ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Executive Summary

The proposal urges the EU to adopt a more united and assertive foreign policy. It aims to overcome organisational hurdles and simplify internal processes. It encourages the incorporation of national defence capabilities into the Common Security and Defence Policy, as well as a novel approach to non-military insecurities. To reinforce open strategic autonomy, it proposes a comprehensive, continent-wide strategy on energy independence. It also suggests a broad strategy for stronger neighbourly cooperation and the protection of human rights, through the inclusion of Human Rights as a core pillar for the single market and EU migration policy.

Problem Statement

On the global stage, the EU has historically struggled to transition from a spectator to an actor, particularly its Common Foreign and Security Policy has faced significant shortcomings. However, the EU's swift and coordinated response to aggression by the Russian government and its humanitarian and military support to Ukraine, opens a window of opportunity to broader foreign policy adjustment, heralded by High Representative Josep Borrell as the Union's "geopolitical awakening". Challenges to a more united and assertive foreign policy remain. On an institutional level, the often-observed deadlock in reaching consensus on key decisions as well as obstacles to communication and cooperation between national governments need to be addressed. The EU also faces key challenges in fostering the strength of the single market, implementing the European Green Deal to achieve climate neutrality, and diversifying energy sources. The EU needs to set an example for a human rights-based migration policy as well as the promotion of the rule of law, human rights, democracy, and non-discrimination within its borders, in its neighbourhood, and across the globe.



Policy Proposals

We, the students of Panel 8 of the European Student Assembly:

8.1 | Recommend that the European Council, pursuant to Article 48.7 TEU, votes on the **adoption of Qualified Majority Voting (QMV)** and the **Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP)** wherever possible. We encourage the elimination of special legislative procedures in upcoming treaty amendments and the complete application of the OLP and QMV to Council procedures.

8.2 | Recommend that the **Foreign Affairs Council increases the frequency of meetings** to twice a month, maintaining a more updated and informed conversation on foreign policy, trade, security, and defence.

8.3 | Propose that, pursuant to Articles 42.3 TEU & 2.4 TFEU, the **European Corps (Eurocorps) becomes an official branch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)**, and therefore a part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

8.4 | Encourage the EU to view **non-military insecurities**, such as but not limited to water, climate, and corruption **as part of its aspiration to be a security-provider**, and to collectively find multi-stakeholder solutions for emerging soft insecurities.

8.5 | Support the European Commission's proposals on sustainability such as increasing investments in renewables, improved insulation technologies, and the **inclusion of nuclear energy in the green taxonomy**. This aims to encourage open strategic autonomy and the diversification of energy sources, making the EU less dependent on external energy supplies.

8.6 | Recommend to include **Human Rights as the fourth pillar of the European Commission's proposal on the legal framework for the participation of non-EU countries in the single market**, in addition to labour, security, and environmental standards, as defined by Action 7.

8.7 | Recommend the EU endorses the **engagement with its neighbouring countries on a civil society level** following environmental, social, and governance criteria. It should be achieved by fostering educational exchange, promoting small and medium enterprises' growth, and renewing infrastructures with direct investments.

8.8 | Recommend **empowerment of the Fundamental Rights Officer** with the authority to directly access relevant data from national and European authorities and the power to issue binding resolutions to Frontex promoting fundamental rights. Further, the European Parliament should compel Frontex to be fully transparent in its operations and measures.

8.9 | Propose and support, in reaction to current exceptional events, the **immediate recognition of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova as candidates for membership of the EU** and swift engagement in accession negotiations with them. Furthermore, we urge the EU to support these countries in the thorough implementation of the Copenhagen criteria.



PANEL 9

CLIMATE REFUGEES AS A NEW CHALLENGE FOR EUROPE – HOW SHOULD THE EUROPEAN UNION PREPARE TO DEAL WITH REFUGEE CRISES TO COME?

Executive Summary

All people are entitled to certain human rights which extend to protection against climate crisis-induced harm. Taking the responsibility of the EU for the current climate crisis into account, we urge the EU to work towards greater policy coherence at the EU level in addressing the challenge of just and effective climate transition, including counter climate crisis-induced migration. We emphasise mitigation, address the root causes of climate-induced migration, and propose starting from 2022 more concrete legally binding steps to adapt to climate change.

Problem Statement

Forced migration due to the climate crisis is imminent. The Global Climate Risk Index, which analyses the extent to which regions have been affected by the climate crisis, has found that climate change has a broad and exigent impact worldwide. The 2019 report showed that the poorest countries are the most vulnerable to escalating climate harm due to lower coping capacity and resources to rebuild. Meanwhile, the OECD has shown that developed countries have produced 79% of global emissions from 1850 to 2011, meaning much of the adaptation and mitigation work lies with them. Women, especially, are affected by natural disasters and their aftermath, due to socioeconomic status and patterns. Women and girls are disadvantaged by their dominant societal roles, limited education, and financial resources leaving them with fewer options to relocate to avoid the effects of natural disasters.

Although other regions of the world are more affected by changes in temperature, the EU is also experiencing the effects of the ongoing climate crisis. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 37,700 people within the EU were forcefully displaced because of climate disasters. While a report by the World Bank estimates that 200 million people will be displaced in the coming three decades. The EU will not only be affected by climate harm, but also by those who will seek safety within its borders. Households in Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru are already experiencing climate-related hazards, and State reports claim that these environmental stressors are already inducing migration. Currently, more than 1.14 million people are facing starvation due to drought. The clearest examples, however, are in the Pacific Islands. The sea level is rising at a rate of 12 millimetres per year in the western Pacific and has already submerged eight islands. Two more are on the brink of disappearing, prompting a wave of migration to larger countries.

The EU must act in advance, or risk missing the chance to decrease the scale of this oncoming crisis. As such we present the following recommendations:



Policy Proposals

9.1 | We recommend the EU to **recognize the term ‘environmentally displaced person’ legally** defined as: “a person being displaced in order to escape the effects of environmental disaster, climate change and unsustainable exploitations of natural resources”.

9.2 | We urge the EU to **encourage legal recognition of ‘environmentally displaced persons’ in human rights laws** in State and inter-State levels to:

- a. provide humanitarian protection independently from national laws or State discretion,
- b. grant persons eligible for humanitarian protection equal benefits as those receiving subsidiary protection in recognition of the rights to life, to existence with dignity, to a safe, healthy, and clean environment, and ensure principles of freedom and self-determination of every human being are respected.
- c. increase its humanitarian protection and aid budget as well as use its adaptation financing program for vulnerable countries (similar to the United Nations).

9.3 | We fully support **further mitigation actions of the EU such as the implementation of the Climate Law** (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119) under the European Green Deal on preventing the possibility of forced migration due to climate change through:

- a. using its existing adaptation infrastructure to provide protection and safeguard measures by incorporating the construction of resilient infrastructure and increasing opportunities for paid employment (i.e. habitat rehabilitation, alternative labour options during droughts) whilst creating sustainable development policies tailored to each region that deeply involve communities, turning into long term employment that leads to economic growth,
- b. following a gender-sensitive approach to those defined under the first clause as the climate crisis is a deeply gendered phenomenon and will have consequences for potential displacement,
- c. ending the subsidisation of extraction of fossil energy sources and increasing its financial incentives for renewable energies,
- d. increasing financial investments to explore alternative eco-friendly energy sources, within the private sector,
- e. creating a unified labelling system and reduced advertisement for environmentally damaging products,
- f. increasing the current carbon tax at a legally binding European minimum level, taking 116 euro Mt/Co2 as a steering point like Sweden incorporates.

9.4 | We call upon the European Union institutions to **increase public awareness of, accessibility to and education on climate change, international cooperation, and environmentally displaced persons** through:

- a. an increased budget on research as well as information dissemination, such as the educational material available School education gateway, eTwinning, and EPAL.



b. an education module for member states based on EU-led research, the involvement of stakeholders (e.g. civil society, private sector, local authorities, native communities) for a just and effective climate transition.

9.5 | We urge the categorisation of climate events, the risk they present to people, and climate endangered areas which should be carried out by an independent, inter-state EU body/agency to differentiate between rapid-onset climate events and slow-onset climate events with an approach based on science and defined reliable indicators, as in the Global Climate Risk Index 2020.

9.6 | We recommend redefining or expanding the existing framework (e.g. the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC)) to cover temporary displacement of 'environmentally displaced persons'. Potential application cases should include the mass influx of environmentally displaced people in case of a rapid-onset or potential mass-casualty-event, taking into consideration the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 for early warning systems.

9.7 | We emphasise the need for a concrete strategy to address the issue of environmental migration in the long term: A centralised system should be created in order to treat the applications of environmentally displaced persons which can utilise existing legal processes under the supervision of already existing authorities (e.g. the European Union Agency for Asylum). The goal is to ensure a fair allocation of resources and beneficiaries among the member states. Different strategies should be taken into account concerning rehabilitation, resettlement, as well as the importance of integration of environmentally displaced persons and, consider beforehand a smoothly permanent integration of displaced persons that may not have the possibility to return to their homeland or do not have the possibility to find durable protection in another State.



PANEL 10

ONLINE IS GOOD, IN-PERSON IS BETTER? HOW TO BUILD FUTURE-ORIENTED, DIGITALISED, AND YET INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Executive Summary

Involving an increasing number of students, researchers, staff and citizens, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are at the forefront of innovation. They have been strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a shift of to an online format and highlighted existing inequalities amongst student communities. The universities' capacity to shape the future and fulfil their intellectual and social role in European societies depends on their ability to cooperate with common goals as well as to ensure diverse and pluralistic programmes. In these recommendations, we insist that the European Union ensure an equal and inclusive access of all students to digital and on-site education. We believe that the European Universities Initiative has a pioneering role to play in the transformation of the European Higher Education Area.

Problem Statement

Education and research are common goods to be nurtured. At the forefront of innovation, hosting an increasing number of students and European citizens, universities must lead the change towards a common future. Throughout the pandemic, higher education shifted to an online format, thus raising the debate of how higher education should be delivered in the future. Meanwhile, the mental health of students appeared to have seriously regressed with higher levels of isolation and loneliness. Besides, the quality of online education appears sometimes lower than traditional class learning. The pandemic highlighted existing inequalities amongst student communities, stressing issues such as access to IT tools or student accommodation. With higher education now being accessible to everyone, students tend to come from more diverse demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the European Union's motto, "United in diversity", universities tackle challenges both at the global and local levels. Their capacity to shape the future and fulfil their intellectual and social role in European societies, therefore, depends on their ability to cooperate with common goals as well as to ensure diverse and pluralistic programmes.



Policy Proposals

10.1 | Digital education quality assurance. Inequality within European countries regarding digital education is creating a lot of differences within universities. All students do not have the same access to digital equipment, internet, and training. Without IT skills, students are unable to connect and develop academically and professionally. All students have been affected by COVID-19, and the structures and quality of their education have decreased. Funding has become highly necessary to ensure the digitalisation of education and support universities in providing students with adequate digital equipment, access to the internet, laptop, and cloud platform enabling online studying. While financing digital training and education, we urge the European Commission to set up guidelines for training and create a label for European University alliances to meet basic requirements, as part of the Digital Education Plan, which describes the European policy on digital strategy and promotes the fostering of a high performing digital education ecosystem including infrastructure, connectivity, and digital equipment.

10.2 | Networking is the future. Digital mobilisation has become one of the biggest trends throughout the past years. A significant part of it is networking. Students are pushed to network and connect with companies and labour unions in order to be present in changes within industries and communities. We recommend the launching of a European scheme to connect students to students, at different stages of their studies: start-during-post graduation. It should be accessible for everyone, which implies ensuring access to equipment and platforms. In addition, students should be empowered to influence industries and promote innovation and creativity from a next-generation point of view. Though digitised, education should still enhance 'tangible' practical learning in a pioneering way. Under the umbrella of European Universities, theoretical education could be connected with industrial workplaces through a closer collaboration of companies or hiring organisations and universities. Initiatives could emerge such as orientation weeks in which representatives from the industry would virtually guide students through their facilities or laboratories, discuss significant matters and exchange their know-how on an European level.

10.3 | Digital training for faculty members. We recommend that the European Commission support initiatives improving the digital skills of students and teachers. Disadvantaged students should benefit from free courses. Resources should be developed to help teachers adapt to the digital era, including suitable training and appropriate teaching tools providing faculty members with upgraded teaching methods that may enhance and significantly help improve the quality of teaching and learning, while making it more inclusive. This can be done by establishing minimal requirements concerning the use of digital appliances, and providing faculty members with innovative ways of using online platforms, software, and applications to improve student engagement, interest, and attention during online classes. These recommendations would increase the quality of learning and teaching, change the way digitalisation is viewed, and prevent educational issues that occurred during the pandemic. The future is digital, and funding and programmes are needed to move forward and to make sure everyone is part of the movement.



10.4 | Accommodation - making our educational system accessible. Across Europe, the provision of accommodation is not fitting the demand of what our society needs. Students compete with other members of society, often immigrants and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, for poor quality housing, which is creating additional pressure on the whole ecosystem of society. Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) and the society where they reside, are meant to coexist and thrive, not consume and deprive, which the current status quo entails. Equity and pension funds dominate the student accommodation market across Europe, viewing it as a safe investment venture, with their main goal being profit and not what is best for the students. HEIs are becoming a part of the problem by encouraging these partnerships, with students being withheld their degrees by outstanding rent arrears from these corporations. To protect mobility and truly make our higher education systems accessible and inclusive to the citizens of Europe, accommodation is fundamental and should be supported by EU funds. We insist that the European Union would allocate resources from the European Investment Bank for the European Universities Initiatives in order to build purpose-built student accommodation that is sustainable, affordable, and accessible.

10.5 | Celebrating women in action. To date, there is a lack of female role models for young girls to feel inspired and represented across industries and sectors (e.g. science, technology, and others). Additionally, older women often face lower access rates to more executive and senior positions due to stereotypes and societal expectations imposed on them. It is important to create strong model references for young women to make sure they are equally represented, as well as have informed access to all professional and educational opportunities without discrimination. The EU, through higher education, has to highlight, celebrate, encourage and promote female talent and participation in all sectors and industries. We recommend the creation of a cross-industry and cross-country network of women with mentorship programs or events, both in-person and online. A solid online network would be supported by a website, important social media presence, strong marketing campaigns and the contribution of educational institutions at all levels, as well as other governmental and industry associations.

10.6 | Inclusive structures and bases for University students across EU. Structural differences between European universities such as unequal economic and social standards need to be acknowledged and tackled. We recommend that the EU empower its cohesive funds in the area of higher education to support the poorest as well as latest member states, to reduce existing differences in, for example, buildings, equipment, and accessibility, and to ensure sufficient educational opportunities for everyone in the EU. More and equal opportunities should be provided to students coming from non-EU countries to promote equality in education.



a. **Physical spaces.** During the pandemic, the study spaces of many universities reduced their schedule and thus the access to resources. In order to create European campuses, dedicated study spaces must be set up offering equal access to information, and up-to-date and performant technological material. Guidelines on libraries and workspaces must ensure that every student works in the best conditions. We suggest that a common fund be led by the EUC alliances to provide a state-of-play analysis of infrastructures that need to be upgraded or built.

Universities must offer sufficient spaces and equipment for students to study or take part in online classes as well as spaces for students, staff, and citizens to gather. University staff have their own rooms and faculties to work and so should the students. We recommend EUC alliances to establish all-accessible technical laboratories with essential tools, scientific apparatus, and digital supplies to allow passionate students to get engaged and share their knowledge and skills within their social circle without any hindrance. This would open doors to innovative outcomes while raising the number of citizen scientists in the society, bring universities closer to citizens and deepen cooperation between students and staff.

b. **Digital infrastructure.** Cloud-based education would allow students and other academics to access educational content, tools, databases, and software without having to download them onto their laptops or other devices. This would reduce the economical burden of buying high-end computers while providing access to cutting-edge technology. To achieve a digitalised and inclusive higher education in Europe, students should be able to access a platform where they could share paperwork, scientific research, and ideas in the form of articles. Their academic work would be published in an online, open, and accessible library that would include a large variety of literature, from articles to handbooks and more. Additionally, highlights of “best written” or “article of the week” would promote student exchanges. This would prepare students for the research environment beyond their Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. To allow closer cooperation between students from different universities, as many activities as possible should be organised between Universities, both physically and digitally, which would foster the spread and exchange of ideas across institutions.

c. **Design-based education.** Changes are needed to make education and learning innovative and engaging. It is not enough to study a degree and acquire competencies: students must have a say in their curriculum. Design-based education is a student-centred approach to education at all levels. Flexible learning paths must be designed to ensure that graduates develop the skills of the 21st century combining research-based education, multiculturalism, and multilingualism, in a strong global and European perspective, in line with their interests and future professionals goals. An open educational structure should be promoted to give students the opportunity to practise leadership skills and critical thinking, to solve practical problems, to gain exposure to entrepreneurship, to see a bigger picture, and demonstrate the ‘value’ of learning rather than focusing on ‘only’ scoring highest in tests. This shift away from standardised learning will prepare students to make a positive impact on the social and economic wellbeing of their communities and surroundings.



Applying a student-managed learning process would drive their motivation and self-development and active engagement in education by taking matters into their own hands. In addition, due to the changing demands of the labour market and society, universities should put more emphasis on improving young people's cognitive skills instead of gaining knowledge. Furthermore, investing in test scores should not be the goal. This will create an opportunity for students to identify their own learning needs, set their own goals, and ensure the quality and outcomes of their studies. This system improves the competitiveness level of European education worldwide.

10.7 | Student Democracy in European Universities. The European Universities Initiative must encourage the promotion of student councils within the alliances, in line with the values of EU Democracy. This can grow into a European Universities Initiatives-wide European Student Parliament, where a representative from each alliance would share knowledge, collaborate, and work together for the best interests of the students in Europe. This collective of representation can be founded on the model of the Inaugural session of the European Student Assembly. This model should be the base of European student democracy.

Members of the European Student Assembly 2022 and authors of the recommendations

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Cunha	Joana	Instituto Politécnico Do Porto	ATHENA	Panel 1
Freitas	Ana Rita	Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave	RUN-EU	Panel 1
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Göztürk	Elif Deniz	University of Strasbourg	EPICUR	Panel 1
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Kroisenbrunner	Lukas	St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences	E ³ UDRES ²	Panel 1
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Mochan	Sandro	University of Mannheim	ENGAGE.EU	Panel 1
Morales Wyden	Ines	Sciences Po	CIVICA	Panel 1
Piu	Sara	Università degli Studi di Cagliari	EDUC	Panel 1
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Rehman	Meesam	Pécsi Tudományegyetem	EDUC	Panel 1
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Sollima	Roberta	Università' degli Studi di Palermo	FORTHEM	Panel 1
Strikos	Konstantinos	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	EPICUR	Panel 1
Szymczak	Izabela	Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie	UNA EUROPA	Panel 1
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Brejčák	Adam	Technical University of Košice	ULYSSEUS	Panel 2
Eid	Daniel	Bocconi University	CIVICA	Panel 2
Geneletti	Giulia	Sciences Po	CIVICA	Panel 2
Handro	Valentin	Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara	UNITA	Panel 2
Hanifah	Dina	Vrije Universiteit Brussel	EUTOPIA	Panel 2
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Kučuk	Suzana	University of Ljubljana	EUTOPIA	Panel 2
Le Ray	Amanthis	Sciences Po	CIVICA	Panel 2
Lempinen	Tomi	Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences	ULYSSEUS	Panel 2
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Mun	Amber	Université Paris 8	ERUA	Panel 2
Nović	Renato	University of Zadar	EU-CONEXUS	Panel 2
Olteanu	Andrei	University Babeș-Bolyai	EUTOPIA	Panel 2
Pludra	Agneszka	Adam Mickiewicz University	EPICUR	Panel 2

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Redemann	Lukas	Saarland University	TRANSFORM 4EUROPE	Panel 2
Reyes-Bernal	Marco	Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie	UNA EUROPA	Panel 2
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Rupp	Marco	University of Mannheim	ENGAGE.EU	Panel 2
Santos Rábago	Carlos	Universidad de Cantabria	EUNICE	Panel 2
Scherrer	Ian	Université de Rennes 1	EDUC	Panel 2
Schützenhofer	Johannes	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences	EPICUR	Panel 2
Tonneau	Aymeric	Université Paris Nanterre	EDUC	Panel 2
Ullrich	Malena Carlotta	Erasmus University Rotterdam	UNIC	Panel 2
van Beek	Rijk Vegard	University of Amsterdam	EPICUR	Panel 2
Villaverde	Pol	Universitat Pompeu Fabra	EUTOPIA	Panel 2
Zachariou	Andrea	University of Cyprus	YUFE	Panel 2
Amador Pla	Fernando	Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya	UNITE!	Panel 3
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Baali	Nadir	University of Montpellier	CHARM-EU	Panel 3
Belén	Vega	Universidad de Sevilla	ULYSSEUS	Panel 3
Bousof Sbai	Imane	Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV)	AURORA	Panel 3
Brida	Michael	Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences	RUN-EU	Panel 3
Cardoso da Silva	Lucas	University of Oslo	Circle U.	Panel 3
Clerebaut	Christian	University of Liège	UNIC	Panel 3
Domínguez Díaz	Francisco Antonio	Universidad de Sevilla	ULYSSEUS	Panel 3
Faria Marques	Daniela Sofia	Polytechnic of Leiria	RUN-EU	Panel 3
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Gutierrez Ramos	Alejandro	Vrije Universiteit Brussel	EUTOPIA	Panel 3
Hacini	Farhane	Sciences Po, Freie Universität Berlin	CIVICA, UNA EUROPA	Panel 3
Khen	Aleko	Technical University of Darmstadt	UNITE!	Panel 3
Kudrinko	Sloan	Semmelweis University	EUniWell	Panel 3
Lahmar	Gaston	Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France	EUNICE	Panel 3
Lis	Marta Marianna	Heidelberg University	4EU+	Panel 3
Miressou-Got	Eleonore	Grenoble INP - UGA	UNITE !	Panel 3
Munyuki	Fadzai	Göteborgs Universitet	EUTOPIA	Panel 3
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Steffan	Leonie	MCI The entrepreneurial School	ULYSSEUS	Panel 3
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Takács	Félix	Semmelweis University	EUniWell	Panel 3
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Despiniadi	Vasiliki	Agricultural University of Athens	EU-CONEXUS	Panel 4
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Foissy	Anne	University of Bordeaux	ENLIGHT	Panel 4

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Henilans	Daniels	Häme University of Applied Sciences	RUN-EU	Panel 4
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Kwiecień	Magdalena	MCI The entrepreneurial School	ULYSSEUS	Panel 4
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Lambistos Casado	Inés	Universidad Complutense de Madrid	UNA EUROPA	Panel 4
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Maimuna	Maisha	Pécsi Tudományegyetem	EDUC	Panel 4
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Khismatouline	Aisee	Luiss University	ENGAGE.EU	Panel 5
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Vögele	Julia	MCI The entrepreneurial School	ULYSSEUS	Panel 5
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Abhinaya Murthy	Abhinaya	The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)	CIVICA	Panel 7
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Pipa-Despres	Cloé	CY Cergy Paris Université	EUTOPIA	Panel 7
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Sarralde	Margarita	Universidad Autónoma de Madrid	CIVIS	Panel 7
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Baird	Kervelle	University Côte d'Azur	ULYSSEUS	Panel 9
Barthel	Anaëlle	Sorbonne University	4EU+	Panel 9
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Christodoulidis	Marios	Cyprus University of Technology	Eut+	Panel 9
Drelon	Martha	Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France	EUNICE	Panel 9
Eustace	Jordan	Trinity College Dublin	CHARM-EU	Panel 9
Formisano	Riccardo	The University of Trieste	TRANSFORM 4EUROPE	Panel 9
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Gotarda	Léo	Paris Lodron University of Salzburg	CIVIS	Panel 9
Grasu	Madalina	National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA)	CIVICA	Panel 9
Güler	Hikmet Hilmi	Pécsi Tudományegyetem	EDUC	Panel 9
Marciani	Eleonora	University of Bologna	UNA EUROPA	Panel 9
Mühürdar	Duygu	İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi (ITU)	EELISA	Panel 9
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Perez	Pedro	Polytechnic of Leiria	RUN-EU	Panel 9
Piccinin	Febe	University of Bologna	UNA EUROPA	Panel 9
Pranjal	Nandi	University of Barcelona	CHARM-EU	Panel 9
Quadt	Teresa	University of Malta	SEA-EU	Panel 9
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Broka	Linda	Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	E ³ UDRES ²	Panel 10
Cánovas Alonso	Sandra	KU Leuven	UNA EUROPA	Panel 10
Daly	Áine	Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest	RUN-EU	Panel 10
Diamantis	Dimitris	Technical University of Crete	EURECA-PRO	Panel 10
Elbrecht	Jana	Hertie School	CIVICA	Panel 10
Faucon	Théo	Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne	UNA EUROPA	Panel 10
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Kommu	Vineel Teja	Universität Potsdam	EDUC	Panel 10
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Kožina	Karlo	University of Zagreb	UNIC	Panel 10
Lucas	Maelle	Université de Bretagne Occidentale	SEA-EU	Panel 10
Polykarpou	Andreas	University of Cyprus	YUFE	Panel 10
Postolachi	Bogdan	Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg	EURECA-PRO	Panel 10
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Spendel	Milan	Stockholm School of Economics (SSE)	CIVICA	Panel 10
Todoran	Ana	University of Bucharest	CIVIS	Panel 10
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Colomba-Petteng	Leonard	Sciences Po	CIVICA
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Le Men	Maël	Grenoble INP - Université Grenoble Alpes	UNITE!
Menu	Sabine	Université de Strasbourg	EPICUR
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Pipa-Despres	Cloé	CY Cergy Paris Université	EUTOPIA
Plateau	Brigitte	Grenoble INP - Université Grenoble Alpes	UNITE!
Răducanu	Emil	CY Cergy Paris Université	EUTOPIA
Rase	Louis	Grenoble INP - Université Grenoble Alpes	UNITE!
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