Basic information: Stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation

The Panel “Stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation” addresses the future of our economy and jobs, especially after the pandemic, paying due attention to the related issues of social justice. It will also tackle the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation - one of the biggest future-oriented topics under debate. The Panel will also deal with the future of Europe in the areas of youth, sport, culture, and education.

This document provides you with background information on the different topics of the Panel. Most importantly, it lays out what the EU already does in these areas and what the users of the Multilingual Digital Platform (https://futureu.europa.eu) have expressed as their main concerns and wishes for the future. Lastly, the document also includes links for more information on many topics.

Your task

In this panel, we will invite you to deliberate and to formulate a set of recommendations for the Union’s institutions to follow-up on for the future of Europe in the areas of economy, social justice and jobs, education, culture, youth and sport, and digital transformation. For example, recommendations can state which general direction to follow or how to solve a specific problem.

Over the course of three sessions, you will discuss and collaborate directly with other citizens from all over Europe, together with whom you will draft the recommendations. At the third and last session, you will collectively vote on the recommendations, which will be presented and discussed with the other participants in the Conference Plenary.
**Stronger Economy, Social Justice and Jobs**

The coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for European and global economies. It has had a direct impact on individuals, families and businesses, particularly small- and medium-sized businesses, which form the backbone of our economy.

EU countries need to work together to ensure that our unique social market economy allows businesses to thrive, while protecting those in need.

**What does the EU do?**

The EU is notably working on a fair and inclusive recovery that will repair the economic and social damage caused by the pandemic, while investing in a green and digital future.

To do so, it has agreed on an unprecedented €1.8 trillion financial package. This covers both the EU’s 2021-27 budget and NextGenerationEU - a recovery instrument designed to make our economies and societies more resilient and sustainable.

**Input from the Multilingual Digital Platform (19 April – 2 August 2021)**

The topic of ‘A stronger economy, social justice and jobs’ has received a total of 708 ideas, 1,172 comments and 159 events up to 2 August 2021. Contributors stress the importance of Europe becoming more inclusive and socially fair, especially in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and point to several perceived challenges related to that, such as lack of support to young Europeans and lack of collaboration among the Member States. The most often suggested mechanism to make Europe more inclusive and socially fair is the Unconditional Basic Income throughout the EU. Additionally, the contributors believe that the well-being of various groups of people, especially, the most disadvantaged ones, is pivotal to EU's successful functioning and further growth. The various ideas can be grouped according to the following themes:

- Taxation for an inclusive and fair economy
- Social protection and social security
- Economic recovery
- Challenging the current economic model
- More inclusive, socially just Europe
- Boost jobs
- Innovation – boosting growth

**Taxation for an inclusive and fair economy**

A group of contributors make suggestions for addressing social, economic and environmental problems though fiscal rules.

A large pool of ideas under this theme advocates greater tax justice, fair taxation and combatting tax fraud. Suggestions include taking measures against tax avoidance, introducing a financial transaction tax (see idea), as well as avoiding ‘social dumping’ by harmonising fiscal rules and minimum wages across the member states (see example of idea). One of the most commented and endorsed ideas concerns the introduction of a global or EU minimum tax to address tax havens (see idea).
Furthermore, a variety of possible taxation measures for an inclusive and fair economy are highlighted on the digital platform. The taxation subjects are currently twofold. First, tax measures to promote fair competition between companies, such as either a common Value Added Tax (VAT) system for e-commerce or requiring companies to only pay VAT in their home countries (see idea) and a VAT related to the source of goods to promote local consumption and thus support the local economy (see example of idea). Secondly, taxation related to the environment and climate change, with amongst others calls for an EU carbon or a sustainability tax (see example of idea). The last group of taxation measures falls under miscellaneous, ranging from taxation to promote gender equality, with a call to allow the application of the zero or reduced VAT rate for female sanitary products (see idea).

In line with cross-cutting calls for federalisation under other topics, a substantial strand of ideas within the topic of ‘A stronger economy, social justice and jobs’ revolves around a Fiscal Union. Some contributors express the opinion that more EU own resources or a budget independent from the Member States is the way forward for a more united European future (see example of idea).

Social protection and social security
Ideas under this theme generally promote a unified EU approach to social security, or, in other words, minimum European standards ranging from parenting and the family to the right to accessible housing and pension policies.

The most recurring sub-theme, with several ideas being highly endorsed and commented on, concerns the unconditional basic Income to ensure the ability of each person to participate in society (see example of idea). Similarly, related to this sub-theme is the group of ideas discussing income gaps in the EU, suggesting a limited salary difference within the same company (see example of idea), or monitoring the income of politicians (see example of idea), and a general call for more measures to create a more humane Europe (see example of idea).

Next to an unconditional basic income, there is a recurring call for measures to address (youth) unemployment (see example of event). For the ageing population, contributors discuss the need for coordinated retirement policies and pensions across EU Member States is tackled (see example of idea). The specific situation of mobile Europeans is also raised with a suggestion for a voluntary European Public Pension Fund for people having lived in multiple Member States (see idea).

The right for accessible, affordable housing is another sub-theme related to social security discussed by contributors (see example of idea).

Lastly, there is a group of more administrative ideas, for instance, the introduction of a digitised (common EU) social security card and transferable social rights for mobile Europeans (see example of idea).

Economic recovery
A pool of comments and ideas on the platform expresses concern about rising public debt in the EU: discussing the role of the European Central Bank (ECB), calling for a review of the Stability and Growth Pact rules (see idea), legislation on current account imbalances amongst others (see example of idea).

Ideas revolving around the promotion of local consumption and production, with SMEs as the growth engine, are seen as pivotal to the EU’s economic recovery. In addition, taxation is also proposed as a tool to promote economic recovery by way of tax breaks for strategic industries or as an incentive to promote local consumption or buying European, by labelling and taxing the distance consumer goods have travelled (see example of idea).
In the same vein, with regard to the COVID-19, contributors discuss the need for financing future possible pandemic preparedness measures (see example of idea). Additionally, contributors stress the importance of working together globally on economic recovery (see example of event). There are calls for increased solidarity among Member States with, for example, an expansion of the Recovery Fund (see idea).

**Challenging the current economic model**

Within this theme, the current European economic system is discussed from a more ideological perspective. Participants highlight the perceived shortcomings of the current economic model. More specifically, one camp of contributors proposes an building on capitalism and the free market, with more internal competition, reduced regulatory burden, or even a Business Management approach (see example of idea). Another camp promotes a more social or human centred market economy (see example of idea).

Moreover, the second most endorsed idea under this topic since the launch of the platform proposes an updated model that would reform the EU economic governance, the European Semester, the mandate of the ECB, EU own-resources and strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union (see idea). This particular idea resonates with other calls on the platform that call for reform of the EU economic model to achieve an inclusive and equitable European welfare.

**More inclusive, socially just Europe**

With ideas concerning LGBTI rights and representation (see idea), the gender pay gap, and gender quota, several contributors on the platform call for a more inclusive, socially just Europe that could be achieved by, for example, developing a social equality measurement index (see example of idea). Related ideas concern measures against sexual assault and domestic violence, with calls in particular for initiatives to support victims (see idea).

Suggestions also include further implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights in order to establish the social dimension of Europe, facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities, people living at the poverty threshold and similar (see example of idea and event).

**Boost jobs**

First of all, contributors emphasise the need to simplify tax and labour policies in the EU in order to avoid fiscal and social dumping (see example of idea).

Secondly, there is a call to foster better working conditions across the continent, for instance, by introducing a shorter working week (see example of idea). Other ideas under this theme include facilitating telework or work across EU borders (see example of idea), banning unpaid internships, mandatory overtime and precarious working contracts (see example of idea), or investing in childcare infrastructures to reconcile private and professional life.

Thirdly, there is an emphasis on the development of careers, with calls for programmes and measures to facilitate access to the EU job market, with internships across Member States and an online job-platform (see example of idea).

Contributors highlight the importance of supporting young people, in particular, when it comes to access to the job market (see example of event).
Innovation – boosting growth

Contributors suggest boosting growth via investments in high-tech research, skills, knowledge and expertise (artificial intelligence, blockchain, nanotechnology, energy storage, lab-grown meat, etc.). Additionally, several ideas identify the need for technological independence, for example, by advancing in EU’s hardware manufacturing capacity.

Investments in research and education are seen as of utmost importance, with support for knowledge sharing via an open network of laboratories or a European Infrastructure Agency (see idea). Another suggestion discusses a kind of Spotify for science, an accessible knowledge bank containing 3D printing models (see idea). In connection with research, one of the suggestions is to facilitate patents via a patent fund (see idea).

Secondly, the digital economy is seen as a prerequisite to innovation and growth, with discussions on cryptocurrency and local digital currencies that would be parallel to the Euro (see example of idea). When it comes to cryptocurrency, contributors feel that regulation is needed to protect citizens (see example of idea).

Environment and climate change are also discussed in relation to innovation, with ideas around climate neutrality goals and the leading role that the EU could play in establishing and investing in a (global) Green Economy (see example of idea). Several ideas discuss a practical implementation of the Green Economy with, for example, investing in organic farming and farm-to-fork initiatives (see idea).

Lastly, the funding of start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is generally perceived as an innovation driver (see example of idea). Contributors propose to support SMEs via, for example, an EU fund providing starter capital for SMEs (see idea), or an online commerce platform dedicated to European SMEs (see idea).

Find out more about the topic:

The dedicated page on the Multilingual Digital Platform
An economy that works for people
The Recovery plan for Europe NextGenerationEU
Social inclusion and security
Economy
A Recovery plan for Europe (Council of the EU)
Climate finance - financing the climate transition

Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

Education, culture, youth and sport policies primarily fall under the responsibility of Member States. Still, the EU supports and complements their actions by facilitating cooperation between them. This includes financial support and related activities, such as the Erasmus+ programme for transnational mobility and the Creative Europe programme supporting the Cultural and Creative sectors.

What does the EU do?

The EU supports efforts to provide the best possible education and training. It promotes multilingualism in Europe, encourages mobility of students, trainees, teachers and young people, and facilitates exchanges of information and experience.
The EU also safeguards and promotes its cultural heritage, its cultural and linguistic diversity and supports the cultural and creative, including audio-visual, sectors.

In order to give young people more opportunities in education and the job market, and to make sure they can participate fully in all areas of society, the EU has developed various actions, in dialogue with young Europeans and through the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps.

_input from the Multilingual Digital Platform (19 April – 2 August 2021)_

Ideas posted under the topic of ‘Education, Culture, Youth and Sport’ cover a variety of themes, given its multi-thematic nature. As elsewhere on the platform, the call to foster an EU identity is a recurrent underlying sentiment for themes identified in this topic with interventions related to, amongst others; exchange, exposure, and mobility. This topic has generated an overall volume of 1,437 contributions, consisting of 484 ideas, 692 comments and 261 events. The various ideas can be grouped according to the categories as presented on the multilingual digital platform:

- Foster common EU identity
- Future-proof education
- Inter-EU mobility
- Youth unemployment
- European heritage

**Foster common EU identity**

Several ideas relate to establishing more EU media portals (TV, radio and social media) to better engage European citizens when it comes to EU matters and issues, with the ultimate goal of strengthening European identity and core values (see example of idea). Favouring the circulation of European media productions, for example by establishing a common EU media market, is also advanced as idea by multiple participants (see example of idea). One idea is the creation of a specific EU media platform tailored for learning of languages. (see idea).

A sub-theme of ideas relate to education where contributors suggest the implementation of a mandatory course about the history and institutions of the EU in all European secondary schools as a tool for younger generations to build interest and a sense of ownership with regard to the EU, thereby enhancing the EU identity building process (see example of idea). Other ideas related to education to foster a common EU identity suggest various forms of exchange or twinning between schools in different Member States to foster friendship across Member State borders (see idea).

The establishment of a common European language is seen as something which could foster European integration according to many participants. (see example of idea). The discussion goes over the various advantages and disadvantages of such a common European language and the various possible languages, including Esperanto, Latin (see example of idea), or English (see example of idea).

The sub-theme of sport in relation to fostering a common EU identity discusses the organisation of more cross-country, inter-European sports events and the possibility of creating a European sports team which could compete in international events (see example of idea).

Another idea, which is also extensively mentioned in other priorities, advocates the establishment of a European public holiday on the 9th of May to foster European community building initiatives all across the continent (see example of idea).
Another area of focus is the ‘DiscoverEU’ initiative. Some participants proposed to extend the DiscoverEU initiative to every young European aged 18 years old (see example of idea).

Future-proof education

Many ideas express the need to rethink education in the current digitalised era, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic changed teaching practices in schools and universities. According to many contributors, rethinking education in the digital age is a prerequisite for Europe's future global competitiveness and modernisation (see example of idea). This call goes hand in hand with the need to promote ICT in schools and universities, also by subsidising schools to buy hardware (see example of idea).

The promotion of soft-skills, and specifically artistic activities, is often seen by respondents as another key step in developing EU students' critical thinking and reinforcing their global values, especially at a young age (see example of idea). The implementation of inclusive educational methods, and more in general the promotion of diversity in education, is considered an important objective for the future of education in the EU (see idea).

A sub-theme of ideas raises the need to reform educational practices to raise adults who are able to be active citizens of the EU. Next to exchanges and education on the EU, as discussed above, this sub-theme gathers ideas discussing the need to encourage active social participation of young students in schools (see idea) or instill cross-cultural skills with for example more foreign language learning practices (see idea).

A group of contributors raised the need to rethink the current educational system in order to prepare our youth for the future they will face. Contributors call for education on climate change (see example of idea) and mechanisms to improve the STEM skills of young people, e.g. via an EU wide STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) basic skills programme (see idea). Additionally, as raised in the topic of digital transformation, contributors call for training of youth in digital well-being.

A strand of ideas also discusses the alignment of (vocational) education with the working world (see example of idea), and encouraging of entrepreneurial skills in education (see idea).

Inter-EU Mobility

Some participants propose to create an EU-led online portal for application to higher education courses in the EU. This portal could also allow prospective students to simultaneously apply to different programs within the European Union (see example of idea).

Another sub-theme raised by several contributors concerns the expansion of the Erasmus scholarships to include young people not in university, for instance by extending it to high school students, including those in vocational education. This would give the opportunity to live abroad, exchange good practices, learn new languages and cultures, and expand their skillsets in general to those who have not gone into higher education (see example of idea).

One of the most widely endorsed ideas within the theme of education concerns the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Treaty in order to facilitate professional and academic mobility in Greece (see idea).

Youth unemployment

Another of the most endorsed ideas under this topic of education, culture, youth and sport concerns the growing “not in employment, education or training” (NEET) proportion of young people in Europe. In particular, participants highlight that NEETs are one of the most vulnerable groups in today’s European society and express strong concerns that NEETs will be the next victims of the COVID-19 economic fallout. For this reason, contributors feel that it is crucial for
the EU to take immediate and concrete actions, not only to counter the NEETs’ phenomenon but also to assure better working conditions in youths-dominated sectors (see example of idea).

**European heritage**

Under this theme contributors call for protection and celebration of European culture and heritage, for example by way of introducing an EU culture commissioner (see idea) and in general invest more in the preservation of common EU cultural memory.

**Find out more about the topic:**

The dedicated page on the Multilingual Digital Platform

**Education & Youth**

Education (European Commission)
Erasmus +
Erasmus+
European Youth portal
European Youth Event (EYE): European Parliament event for young people

**Culture**

Culture and Creativity
Creative Europe programme 2021-2027 (Council of the EU)

**Sport**

Sport in the EU

**Digital transformation**

Digital technologies are changing our lives. Screen time is on the rise, as the world has to adapt to new conditions for remote working and education. We want to make sure the digital transition leaves no one behind, putting people first and creating new opportunities for business. Digital solutions are also key to fighting climate change and achieving the green transition of our economy and society.

**What does the EU do?**

The European Union’s digital strategy aims to make this transformation work for people and businesses. To shape Europe’s digital future, the European Union is focusing in particular on data, technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, infrastructure and connectivity.

**Input from the Multilingual Digital Platform (19 April – 2 August 2021)**

The topic of ‘Digital transformation’ has generated 346 ideas, 815 comments and 97 events, making a total of 1,258 contributions. Ideas range from more abstract suggestions on themes such as sustainability and durability to more specific suggestions concerning digital education and digital health and digital voting. The contributors on this topic stress the need for digital

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1 This part summarises the relevant input from the Multilingual Digital Platform as part of the First Interim Report. For further details, please refer to the Report.
transformation with regard to the future economy, collaboration, health and other areas of life. However, they also highlight several challenges related to digital transformation, such as ethical considerations, GDPR shortcomings, and cyber threats. The various ideas can be grouped according to the following themes:

- Digital economy
- Digital innovation
- Digital sovereignty and ethics
- Cyber threats
- Digital voting
- Digital data
- Digital voting
- Pollution, sustainability and durability
- Technology for people
- Digital health
- Education and training

**Digital economy**

A theme also under the topic Stronger economy, social justice and jobs, a large number of ideas under this topic call for the digital economy to be embraced. One idea, for example, discusses the implementation of an EU blockchain platform (see idea). Other contributors also discuss cryptocurrencies with requests for governments to adopt cryptocurrencies to benefit and develop a digital and economically active society (see example of idea), or rather discuss the need for cryptocurrencies to be regulated or banned (see example of idea).

In addition, several ideas advocate the introduction of a digital euro as a secure and convenient payment method (see example of idea).

**Digital innovation**

The ideas submitted on the platform concerning digital growth advocate first and foremost increasing the EU's role in further developing artificial intelligence (AI) tools (see event). One of the ideas calls for increased planning and regulation with regard to current AI possibilities in order to make them safer and more accessible (see example of idea). Nonetheless, the use and development of AI are the subject of discussion among contributors, some highlighting the future risk of creating AI more capable than the human brain (see example of idea).

Related, there are several challenges identified with an increased digital society according to contributors. This event, for example, discussed the increased digitalisation of our society and inequality among population groups (termed digitalisation losers). The other disadvantages of increased digitalisation discussed included dehumanisation, robotisation, and increased monitoring and surveillance of individuals (see idea).

On a more basic level, contributors call for accessible and affordable digital services and appliances (see example of idea).

**Digital sovereignty and ethics**

The ideas submitted on the platform to boost digital sovereignty focus on Europe’s strategic independence in terms of hardware, software and social media platforms, as well as on
advancing EU’s digital development and production, especially in relation to other actors such as the US or China (see example of idea). For instance, one of the ideas suggests to develop and promote Europe’s own chip production (see idea).

A similar strand of ideas puts a strong emphasis on the ethical aspect. Specifically, contributors want to boost EU’s digital sovereignty via European social media platforms that would be fully in line with European values, standards, transparency and ethics (see example of idea). Additionally, an idea calls for a fair digitalisation based on human rights, including labour and trade union rights, improved working conditions, and collective bargaining (see idea).

Cyber threats
As regards the cyber threats theme, the ideas revolve around Internet safety and security (see example of event). For instance, participants stress that the EU should be able to defend itself in case of online threats and digital warfare; some go even further by suggesting the creation of a European cyber army, which could also provide support for digitalisation in the EU countries that are lagging behind (see example of idea).

Digital voting
Within the digital voting theme, a number of contributors on the platform point out the advantages of electronic voting, in particular in the context of the pandemic (see example of idea). This theme, which has received a significant number of comments under the topic of ‘Digital transformation’ since the launch of the Conference, has been explored from the point of efficiency, safety and innovation, not from the perspective of enhancing democracy. There are however some opposing views in the comments which point out a number of disadvantages of electronic voting. Contributors suggest applying blockchain technology or setting up Europe’s own highly encrypted mailing system, as possible means of ensuring the security of digital voting in the EU.

Digital data
When it comes to the digital data theme, contributors emphasise the progress made so far, mentioning that the EU is a leader in protecting individuals in the digital world. Nevertheless, there is a call for further improvement in this area (see example of event). For example, suggestions focus on modifying GDPR laws to make it easier to refuse the online collection of personal data, as well as on improving data security not only across the EU but also in the candidate countries (see idea).

Simultaneously, there is a call for a more comprehensible legislation without burdening users with constant requests for consent (see example of idea).

Pollution, sustainability and durability
In several cases, contributors link digitalisation to climate change, stressing, for example, that increased digitalisation efforts would help reduce pollution. For instance, there is a call to introduce a digital product passport accessible via QR codes providing information on product origin, composition, environmental impact, recycling and final handling (see idea).

Another strand of ideas revolves around digital waste, calling, for instance, for new products to be produced with recycled electronic waste (see idea).
Additionally, there is an emphasis on durable, repairable and fairly and ethically produced digital equipment, which could be promoted, for instance, with lower taxes. (see idea).

Lastly, some contributors point out that satellite deployment contributes to space pollution and call for tackling this issue (see example of idea).

Technology for people
Suggestions contain a range of specific ideas proposing technological and digital tools for European citizens.

A large pool of ideas discusses creating digital citizenship and the digital unification of the EU (see idea), for example, by creating a framework which helps all EU countries to work together on IT projects. This idea is developed further with several suggestions for all encompassing digital portals for citizen participation, daily life identification needs (see idea), a European Social Network dedicated to the expression of public opinion (see idea), and Europe-wide identification via a digital ID (see idea).

Additionally, there is a call for stronger consumer protection in an online environment (see example of idea), for instance, by making it easier in the future for consumers to change their mind with regard to purchases.

Another idea discusses the need to ensure that major crowdfunding platforms can be accessed from all Member States (see idea).

Digital health
Within the theme of digital health, a number of ideas on the platform propose concrete measures to improve the health of citizens in the digital world, such as employee rights to disconnect from work (see idea), introducing a social media day off (see idea), or fostering youth digital training to promote healthy and conscious use of technology.

Simultaneously, there is a call for digital health integration within the EU (see example of idea), for instance, by creating a single platform for electronic health management – which would be particularly interesting for the many Europeans using cross-border mobility possibilities – and by introducing a (European) digital health ID-card (see example of idea) that contains information on vaccinations and health insurance. However, there are privacy and data protection concerns. These themes are equally addressed under the Health topic.

Education and training
Within the theme of education and training, a number of ideas on the platform advocate comprehensive EU-wide awareness-raising efforts at all levels, starting at primary school level and continuing along the education pathway (see example of idea and event), stressing that the development and promotion of digital skills is a top priority for the economy (see example of idea).

One sub-theme calls for investments and efforts to boost the digitalisation of education (see example of idea). In this connection, contributors discuss the need to boost digital literacy in all EU countries, for instance, by launching an advertising campaign in the media to give more visibility to digital transformation (see idea).
**Find out more about the topic:**

- The dedicated page on the Multilingual Digital Platform
- A Europe fit for the digital age
- Digital transformation in the EU
- Digital single market
- Artificial intelligence
- Digital Europe - digital future for Europe
- Cybersecurity in Europe: stronger rules and better protection
- Data protection in the EU

**Find out more about all EU policies and activities:**

- European Parliament website
- Council of the EU website
- European Commission website

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This document was prepared by the Common Secretariat of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Please follow the digital platform on the Conference on the Future of Europe (www.futureu.europa.eu) to see more information and to read the posts of other citizens who have already posted their ideas and thoughts. To find out more about the ideas submitted so far, please also consult the first interim report from the Platform.