

# Builders of Progress: Europe's NextGen

The War in Ukraine  
Through the Eyes of Youth

*Insights from a survey of  
7,367 young Europeans*



# BUILDERS OF PROGRESS: EUROPE'S NEXT GEN

## THE WAR IN UKRAINE THROUGH THE EYES OF YOUTH

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A **large majority** of young Europeans want the EU to step up and provide strong support for Ukraine.
- They see **EU foreign policy tools as essential**, with sanctions on Russia, sending weapons and military aid, and **helping Ukrainian refugees** a priority.
- They want the **EU to ramp up plans to phase out energy dependence** and accelerate the transition to **renewable energy**.
- A significant proportion of young Europeans would like to see European countries **increase their military spending** and **integrate their armies**.
- The young Europeans are **worried about the implications of potential military action** by the European Union in the Ukraine conflict. Strikingly, still nearly half of those surveyed (**44%**) **would support it** even if it risks nuclear conflict.
- Three top priorities for the young Europeans are, nevertheless: tackling **poverty** and inequality; protecting the **environment**; and **public healthcare**.



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# BUILDERS OF PROGRESS

*Builders of Progress* is a research project exploring the main concerns and hopes of young Europeans aged 16 to 38. It examines their opinions regarding a wide range of societal issues – including climate change, political participation and the European Union. The research findings intend to stimulate debate and provide informed advice on how to shape a progressive future with and for young people.

The project is conducted by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of Anny Klaw-Morf Stiftung, Društvo Progressiva, Felipe González Foundation, Fondation Jean Jaurès and the Party of European Socialists (PES), and in co-operation with ThinkYoung - the research organisation that has co-ordinated the surveys and examination of the findings.

More information on the project [can be found here](#).

**FEPS**  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



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## Introduction

As the war in Ukraine comes into its twelfth week following Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022, no one can yet predict how or when it will end. Representing a dramatic escalation of an eight-year conflict, the following are certain: the existing security order in Europe has been shattered; the military invasion sent shockwaves around the world; and it marks what could be a fundamental turning point for European integration and co-operation.<sup>1</sup>

Europe's greatest security crisis since the violent breakup of the Yugoslav Federation in the 1990s has required unprecedented decision-making on security and defence, humanitarian aid, EU enlargement and energy security.<sup>2</sup> It is shaping the EU's action more broadly. Described by some as a 'paper tiger', often showcasing slow and timid policy decision-making shrouded by internal division and complicated procedures, the 27-member bloc, in this instance, reacted quickly.<sup>3</sup> It agreed to impose the toughest sanctions on Russia ever seen while also sending a surge of bilateral military equipment and lethal weapons to assist Ukraine in holding off

Russian advances.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the EU has opened its borders to 5 million refugees, resulting in widespread solidarity and support from citizens for those able to flee.<sup>5</sup>

The EU has adopted a temporary protection scheme for people fleeing Ukraine as a result of the war, including the immediate access to fundamental rights – including basic healthcare, education, housing and welfare rights.<sup>6</sup> It has also released funds to help member states assist refugees escaping Russian military aggression against Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> This, accompanied by the ground-breaking military aid in the form of weapons and military equipment given to Ukraine and accelerated measures to become independent of Russian energy supplies, reiterates what could be argued is a sea change in EU security and European co-operation.

Against this background, between 25 March and 7 April 2022, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), together with ThinkYoung, surveyed over 7,360 young people aged between 16 and

1 João Rodrigues, M. (2022) The EU should rise to rescue a European democratic nation from foreign tyranny. The Progressive Post; Torreblanca, I.J. (2022) Why Ukraine has won the right to join NATO. European Council on Foreign Relations. European Power. 2 April 2; Wunderlich, U. (2022) Russia's invasion of Ukraine: A turning point for European integration? LSE. 5 April 5.

2 The international courts were unanimous in declaring the Srebrenica massacre of July 1995 a case of genocide, with both the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) ruling this way.

3 International Crisis Group (2022) The War in Ukraine Raises New Questions for EU Foreign Policy. Commentary, Europe & Central Asia. 5 April 5.

4 Wunderlich, U. (2022).

5 This number is calculated based on the UNHCR Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation. Statistics from 24 February to the 6 May, 2022. It does not include internally displaced persons, or refugees fleeing to non-EU countries.

6 Pirozzi, N. (2022) Has the war in Ukraine made the EU a geopolitical actor? Social Europe. 2 May; Dzidzic, L. Ukrain's refugees: hospitality required. Social Europe, 28 February.

7 Council of Europe (2022) Ukraine: €17 billion of EU funds to help refugees. Press Release. 4 April.



## Timeline of main developments in the period 25 March to 7 April (survey dates):

15  
March

On 15 March, the EU imposes its fourth major package of sanctions, including restricting the import of iron and steel from Russia and prohibiting new investments in the country.<sup>9</sup>

16  
March

On 16 March, the regional drama theatre in Mariupol, sheltering around 1,000 citizens, including children, is bombed.<sup>10</sup>

23 - 31  
March

Between 23 and 31 March, US intelligence sources, Ukrainian government statements, and later official Russian statements indicate that Russia will abandon its attack on Kyiv and northern Ukraine and attempt to regroup in the east and south of the country. This proves to be true on the ground in early April.<sup>11</sup>

24 - 25  
March

On 24 and 25 March, at the European Council, EU leaders adopted conclusions on Russian military aggression against Ukraine and set up a large Solidarity Trust Fund for reconstruction in Ukraine.<sup>12</sup>

3  
April

On 3 April, in Bucha, corpses of Ukrainians are found on the street. The mayor of the town speaks of 280 people buried in mass graves. Human Rights Watch reports war crimes in the occupied territories of Ukraine, including executions, torture and looting.<sup>13</sup>

4  
April

On 4 April, the EU allocates up to €17 billion to help member states assist refugees escaping Russian military aggression against Ukraine.<sup>14</sup>

38 across France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, and the UK to gain insights into what they think of the war in Ukraine. A development that is likely to be a particularly drastic experience for most of the respondents, as it is the first major war on the European continent that this generation has experienced.<sup>8</sup>

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first cross-national survey in Europe to ask young people's opinions about the war

in Ukraine. The results of the survey are therefore of particular value, and we hope they will stimulate reflection on what young people think about war and the kind of response they want to see looking forward.

8 Most of the respondents will have been too young to experience the Balkan war as a formative experience.

9 Brown, C. (2022) Russia's war on Ukraine: A sanctions timeline. Peterson Institute for International Economics.

10 Bachega, H. and Khimiak, O. (2022). Bomb hit this theatre hiding hundreds – here's how one woman survived. 22 March. BBC News.

11 Kaufman, E. and Herb, J. (2022) Ukrainians have pushed Russian forces back to the east of Kyiv, US official says. 23 March. CNN; Sheerin, J. (2022) Russia planning missile strikes for the sea. 28 March. BBC; Sangla, A. et al (2022) Russia-Ukraine news. 30 March. CNN.

12 Tamma, P. (2022) EU plans trust fund for Ukraine. 21 April. Politico; European Council (2022) EU Solidarity with Ukraine.

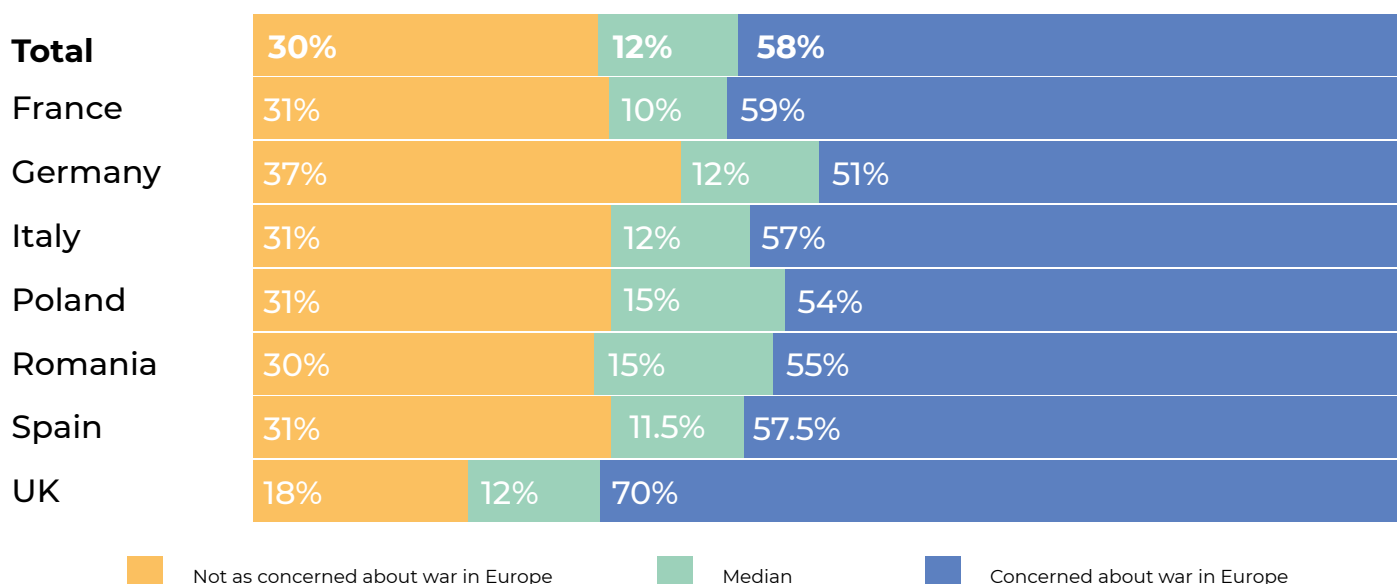
13 Rankin, J. and Boffey, D. (2022) Killing of civilians in Bucha and Kyiv condemned as "terrible war crime". 3 April. The Guardian; Human Rights Watch (2022) Ukraine: Apparent War Crimes in Russia-Controlled Areas. 3 April. Human Rights Watch.

14 Council of Europe (2022) Ukraine: €17 billion of EU funds to help refugees. Press Release. 4 April.



## War no longer a distant concern

**How concerned are you that war or conflict will spread across Europe in the next 5 years?**



*Respondents were asked to rank their concern levels from 0 (no concern) to 10 (very high concern). The graph groups those who had a lower level of concern (0-4), the median value (5) and those who had high levels of concern. (6-10)*

When asked how concerned they were about the likelihood of war in Europe on a scale of 0 to 10, nearly 60% of respondents chose 6 or higher – a sign that the young people surveyed believe this is a very real possibility.

This finding aligns with research from the European Council on Foreign Relations just weeks before the invasion, showing the public in Europe viewing the world in a pre-war rather than a post-war state. Predicting what would take place, they believed Russia was likely to invade Ukraine in 2022.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, this fear of war has existed among young people in

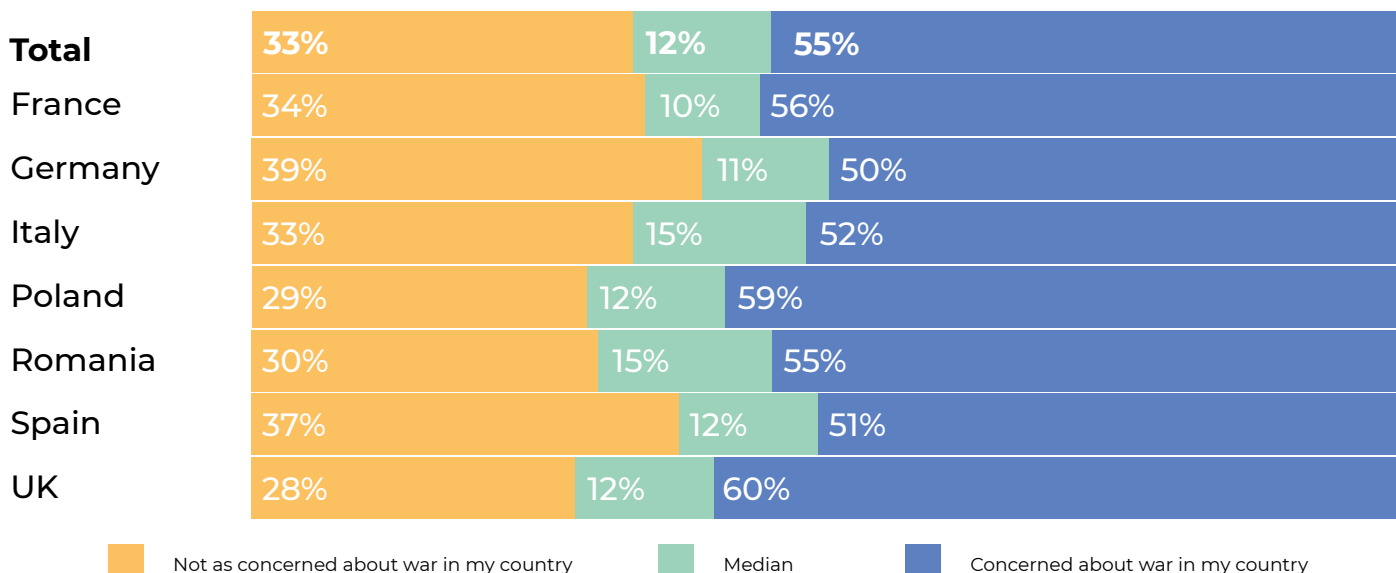
Europe for longer than is often portrayed in the public debate. For example, a 2016 FEPS survey found that over 70% of young Europeans feared that war (or the threat of war) would affect their quality of life.<sup>16</sup> Our survey showed that the highest concern that war will spread over Europe in the next five years was amongst young people in the UK (70%). Among countries within the EU, young people in Spain (57.5%) and France (59%) were the most concerned, although these figures are more in line with the EU average (55%), making the UK an outlier. Furthermore, every 1 in 6 young people in Romania and over 1 in 7 young people in the UK chose the

<sup>15</sup> Kratsev, I. and Leonard, M. (2022) The Crisis of European Security: What Europeans Think About War in Ukraine. February 2022. Policy Brief. European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

<sup>16</sup> Skrzypek, A. and Freitas, M. (2016) The future starts now! 10 cornerstones for a Dialogue Between the Progressive Family and the Millennials Generation. Foundation for European Progressive Studies. p. 49.



## How concerned are you that war or conflict will come to your country in the next 5 years?



*Respondents were asked to rank their concern levels from 0 (no concern) to 10 (very high concern). The graph groups those who had a lower level of concern (0-4), the median value (5) and those who had high levels of concern. (6-10)*

maximum level of concern in the survey (i.e., 10), highlighting the extreme concern levels shown by some young people.

Nevertheless, it is the young people in the UK who are the most concerned that the war will knock at the door of their country, with 60% choosing six or above. This is closely followed by young people in Poland (59%) and France (56%). Half of young Germans are worried, therefore, showing the least concerns in our sample.

From the figures in this section, some basic patterns can be discerned. First, the UK is an outlier concerning fears about an impending war. This may be because of previous key events involving Russian aggression, including the 'Salisbury poisoning' of Sergei Skripal and his

daughter, or linked to recent survey results from YouGov showing one in five people in the UK believing a Russian nuclear attack is likely.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, young Romanians represent by far the largest group of respondents who show very strong concerns about the war spreading across Europe and to their country (i.e., choosing 10 as an answer). Young Poles (compared to other young Europeans) are particularly worried about the war's spillover to their country. This can possibly be explained by Romania's and Poland's geographical proximity to the conflict and, for Poland in particular, by its turbulent history.<sup>18</sup> The large number of Ukrainian refugees arriving may also play a role, as the effects of the war are felt much more acutely in these two countries, which have taken in

<sup>17</sup> Corera, G. (2020) Salisbury poisoning: What did the attack mean for the UK and Russia? 4 March. BBC News; Prescott-Smith, S. and Mann, B. (2022) What do Britons think the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will be on the UK? YouGov. 11 March.

<sup>18</sup> Stockman, F. (2022) The War Next Door. 13 March. New York Times.





## The EU's geopolitical awakening: a watershed moment?

the highest and second-highest number of refugees of all countries in Europe.<sup>19</sup> Concerns about the war in Ukraine have also strongly influenced policymaking. The decision to use the European Peace Facility (a fund set up only one year ago and put in place to support partner countries with military training and defence equipment) to finance the sending of weapons to Ukraine in a large-scale conflict is unprecedented.<sup>20</sup> It marked the first time that the EU has provided lethal military equipment to a country under attack.<sup>21</sup> This alone led to the comment, “we have probably advanced more in building a geopolitical Europe in one week than we did in several years”, from Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.<sup>22</sup> This sentiment was echoed by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, describing it as a “watershed moment”.<sup>23</sup> The national response has also brought about some difficult and unprecedented decision-making. One of the most notable is Germany reversing a long-standing policy of blocking weapons from being sent to conflict zones.<sup>24</sup>

In this context, we asked two types of question in our survey. First, we wanted

to know how young people evaluate basic issues such as increasing the EU military budget and merging European armed forces. Second, we wanted to understand how young people assess the EU's response to the ongoing war in Ukraine and which specific foreign policy instruments and humanitarian aid they would like to see maintained or increased.



Photo by Olga Subach on Unsplash

19 BBC (2022) Where are Ukraine's refugees going? Accessed 5 May 2022; Dickerson, C. (2022) You cannot hosts guests forever: How long will Polish solidarity with Ukrainian refugees last? 3 May. The Atlantic.

20 International Crisis Group (2022); Ferrando, M. (2022) Is the European Peace Facility Really About Peace? Centre for European Reform.

21 Non-lethal military equipment, such as protective gear, logistical equipment, etc. has been delivered on previous occasions

22 Borrell, J. (2022) Defending Ukraine in its hour of maximum need. European Union External Action. 1 March 2022.

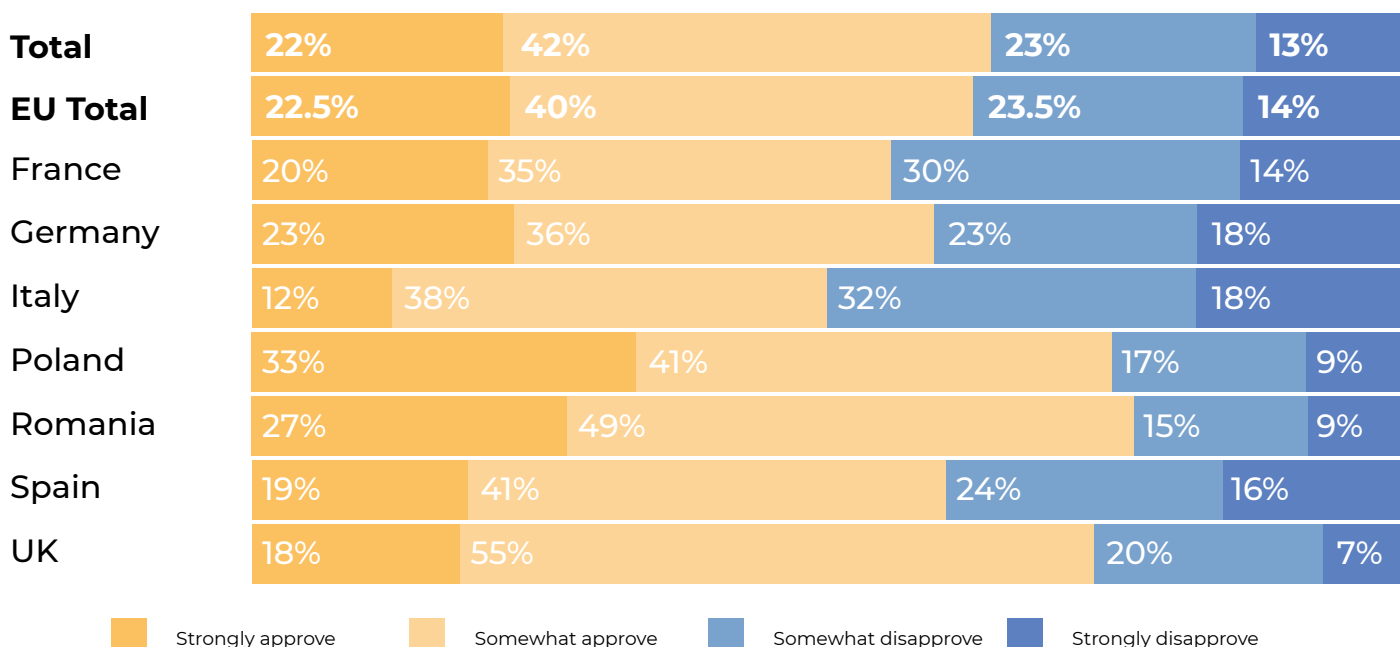
23 Rabinovych, M. (2022) The Russia-Ukraine war: A watershed moment for EU foreign policy? 23 March.

24 Herszenhorn, M.D., Bayer, L. and Burchard, V.D.H. (2022) Germany to send Ukraine weapons in historic shift on military aid. Politico. 26 February 26.





## Thinking about the current war in Ukraine, should EU countries spend more on their military?



When thinking about the war in Ukraine, 64% of young people want EU countries to spend more on their military. However, this support is not uniform, and there is a large divergence between countries. Support for an increase in the defence budget is lowest in Italy, where young Italians are split down the middle, and in France, where just over half of young people favour an increase in spending (55%). However, large majorities in the UK (73%), Poland (74%) and Romania (76%) favour increased defence spending. The support in Poland and Romania, in particular, is not surprising, given that these countries border Ukraine and that there are strong historical reasons for increased defensiveness towards Russia,

especially in Poland. Concerning the UK, this may be due to previous examples of Russian aggression like the 'Salisbury poisoning' as mentioned before, or the UK's wider role in security and defence globally alongside being one of the most vocal and largest contributors of military support and economic aid to Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> In France, heated debates about the cost of living during the election campaign at the time of the survey may have somewhat dampened the appetite for higher military spending (although a large part of the population still favours it).<sup>26</sup> Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's calls for greater cooperation between NATO and Russia after the end of the war, her

<sup>25</sup> Wilson Center (2022) Russia's Aggression Towards Ukraine – the British View: A Conversation with Michael Tatham, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy in Washington. Hindsight Up Front, Ukraine.

<sup>26</sup> Jourdain, M. (2022) How will Russia's war in Ukraine reshape the European political scene? Look to France. 7 April. Atlantic Council.

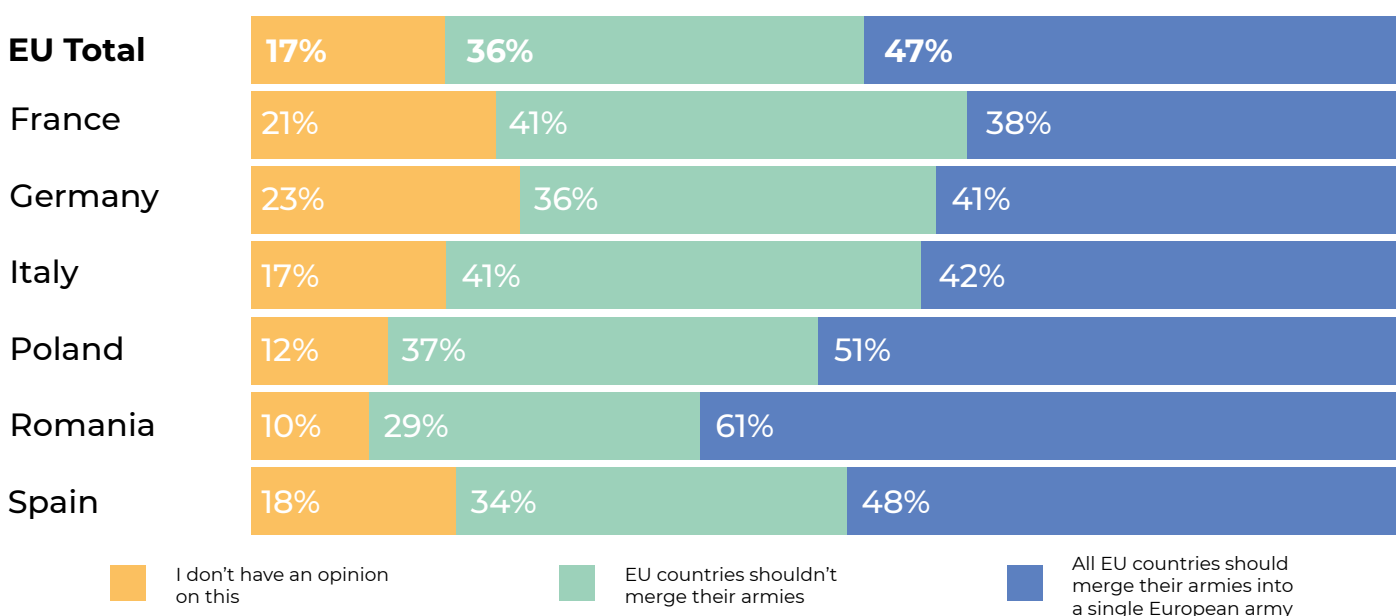


proposal to withdraw from the alliance's military command, and her suggestion that France stops supplying weapons to support Ukraine may also have influenced people's views on military spending. Her arguments may have resonated with her (considerable) constituency and convinced them that there is no pressing need to spend more on the armed forces.<sup>27</sup> The fact that France is the only EU member

state with its own nuclear weapons may also have made young French people feel confident about their national military capabilities.

We also wondered whether this new focus on security and military spending translates into support for the statement that all EU countries should merge their armies into a single European army.

### Should all EU countries merge their armies into a single European army?



Our results show that just under half of the European young people living in surveyed EU member states want to see the creation of an EU army (47%).<sup>28</sup> The lowest support was in France (38%) and Germany 41% while the strongest support came from Poland (51%) and Romania (61%). Interestingly, attitudes towards a European army do not seem to have

changed significantly since November 2021, when we asked the same question to an even larger sample of young Europeans (44.5% in favour of an EU army, 36% against and 19.5% with no opinion).<sup>29</sup> Reiterating varying views on the topic of defence, a recent survey by the European Council for Foreign Affairs highlighted the different preferences among EU Member States

<sup>27</sup> France 24. (2022). Le Pen wants France out of NATO integrated command, backs NATO-Russia links. French Presidential Election. 13/04/2022.

<sup>28</sup> These numbers exclude respondents from the UK.

<sup>29</sup> Dressler, M. and Howard, C. et al. (forthcoming). Builders of Progress: Europe's NextGen. Foundation for European Progressive Studies and ThinkYoung.

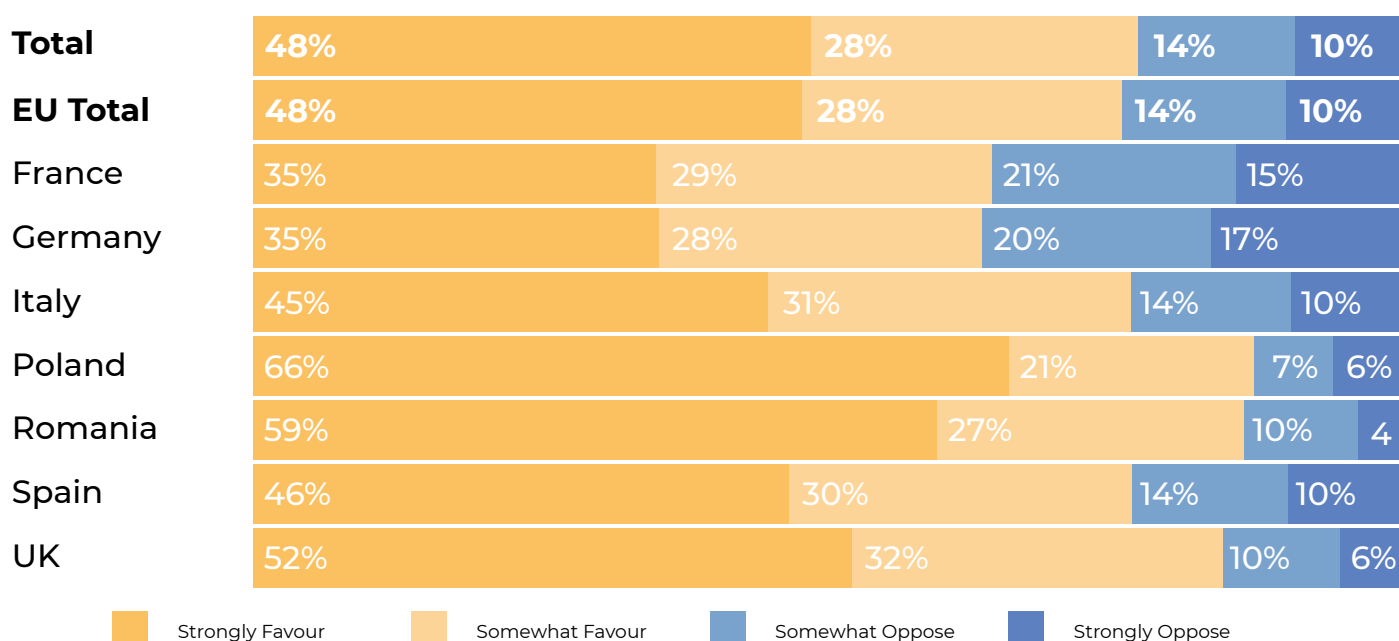


for the EU or NATO as the main bulwark for defence in Europe.<sup>30</sup> A preference for NATO may explain, why some people are less interested in a common EU army. Of course, it is just as possible that young people simply do not want a joint army or are generally critical of the idea of having armed forces.

In addition to these questions about structural changes in EU defence policy,

we also gathered the opinions of young Europeans about policies directly related to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Our first question concerned the strict sanctions the EU has imposed on Russia. The first package of sanctions was already agreed upon on the 23 of February, a day before the invasion began. Since then, five more sanction packages have followed (with a sixth in discussion), ranging from restrictive measures targeting individuals

### Should the EU keep strict economic sanctions on Russia?



linked to the Putin regime to strict economic sanctions and restrictions on Russian media in Europe.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that 76% of young Europeans support maintaining the strict economic sanctions currently imposed on Russia shows that they are seen as a critical response mechanism.

Furthermore, almost half of people

surveyed (48%) are strongly in favour of this measure. While still with a strong majority, young people in France and Germany are less in favour than their European counterparts. Compared to 65% of Polish, 59% of Romanian and 52% of UK young people being firmly in favour, only 35% of German and French young people share the strong sentiment. Moreover, 15% in

<sup>30</sup> Kratsev, I and Leonard, M. (2022).

<sup>31</sup> Wunderlich, U. (2022); Brown, C (2022)





France and 17% in Germany are strongly against it, much more than in Poland (6%), Romania (4%) and the UK (6%). In Germany in particular, the somewhat weaker support for sanctions is most likely related to the country's heavy dependence on Russian gas and the potential impact of sanctions on these resources on the economy, which was also highlighted in government discourse, especially in the weeks leading up to our data collection.<sup>32</sup> In France, on the other hand, the rhetoric of the far-right election campaign at the time of the survey may have played a role, focusing mainly on French interests and highlighting, among other things, the possible negative aspects of sanctions on the cost of living in France.<sup>33</sup>

There is also strong support for the EU supporting Ukrainian forces with (more) weapons. Many EU Member States have sent weapons and defence equipment to Ukraine, including all Member States covered in our survey.<sup>34</sup>

Overall, 68% of respondents support this, while only 32% oppose it. Again, support is strongest in the Eastern parts of the EU, as over half of young people in Poland and 41% in Romania are strongly in favour of sending more weapons. Support is weakest in Italy, where about 42% of respondents oppose or somewhat oppose more military aid. The latter may be

related to sympathies for Putin's regime among both the political elite and the broader public. Pro-Russia attitudes and anti-NATO sentiments are widespread in some political parties, especially among Italy's far-right, far-left and populist 5-Star Movement. But sympathy for Russia is also rooted in the Italian population: according to an SWG poll from late March 2022, about 12% believe the Russian invasion is justified.<sup>35</sup> An Ipsos poll from early April also found that only 61% of Italians believe that Putin, above all, is to blame for the war. Some analysts, such as Nathali Tocci, head of the Italian think tank Institute for International Affairs (IAI), predict that Italy could become the weak link in the alliance as the war drags on.<sup>36</sup>



32 Büüscher, A-K. (2022) Die Bedeutung von Gas für die deutsche Energieversorgung. 24 April. Deutschlandfunk; Deutschlandfunk (2022) Welche wirtschaftlichen Folgen hätte ein Embargo? 1 May. Deutschlandfunk; The Guardian (2022) Germany's Scholz pushes back against ban on Russian energy imports. 7 March.

33 Irish, J. (2022) Analysis: Eyeing win, inflation debate gives Le Pen chance to lay Russia ghost to rest. 12 April. Reuters; Jourdain, M. (2022).

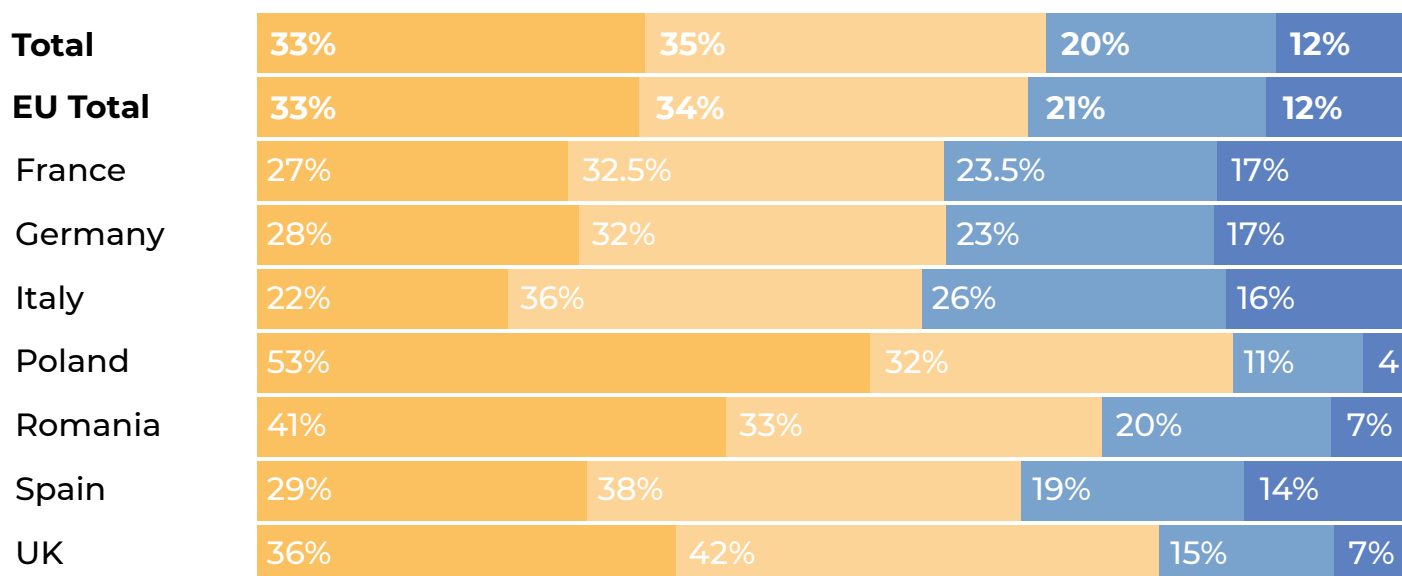
34 Cohen, J. (2022). Ukraine receives weapons support from around the world. The conversation. May 6, 2022.

35 Termometro Politico (2022) Sondaggi elettorali Swg, scende il Pd, il M5S recupera mezzo punto. 29 March.

36 Roberts, H. (2022) Italy and Russia: A love affair that hasn't quite ended. April 6. Politico; Mante, A. and Jones, G. (2022) Analysis: Italy's politics, public opinion, could weaken West's anti-Putin front. 7 April. Reuters.



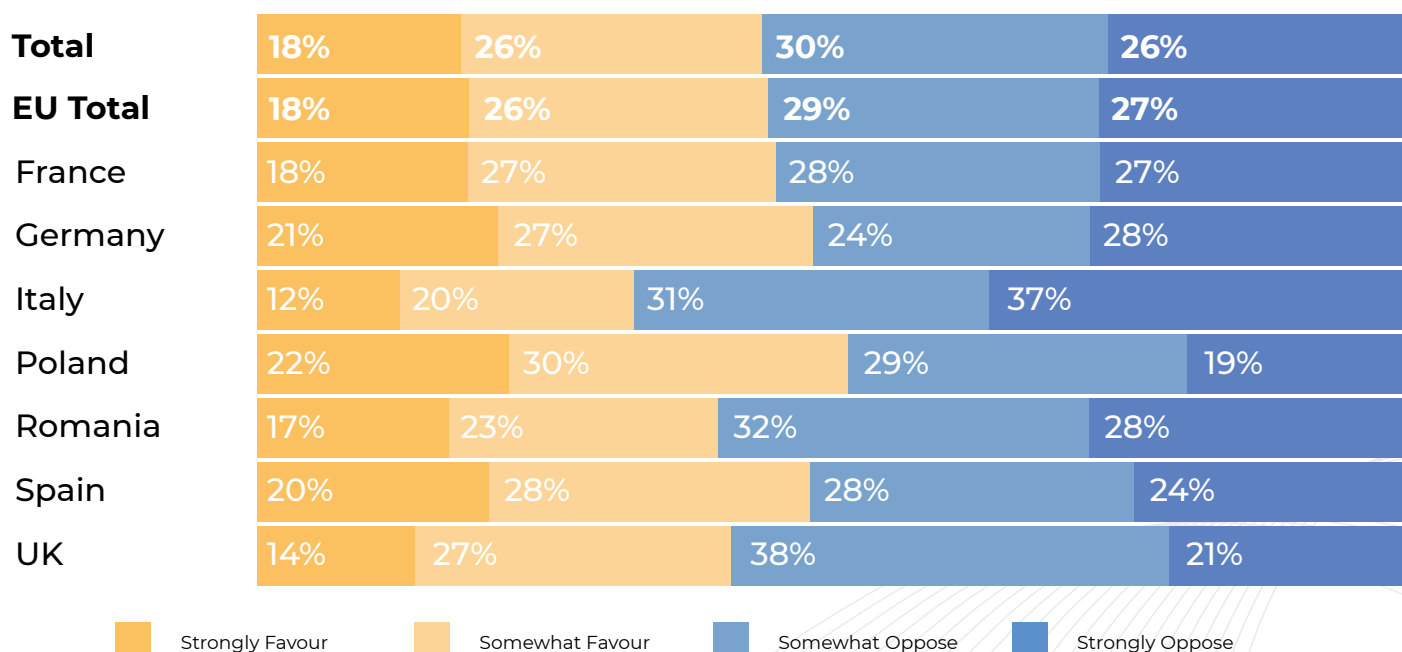
## Should the EU send (more) weapons and military aid to Ukrainian forces?



Young Europeans are much more divided on direct military action due to its potential for nuclear conflict, with responses much more evenly split among the four possible

answers. Just under half of those surveyed (44%) favour or strongly favour taking that risk to stop Russian aggression.

## Thinking about the war in Ukraine, would you favour or oppose the European Union taking military action even if it risks a nuclear conflict with Russia?



Strongly Favour Somewhat Favour Somewhat Oppose Strongly Oppose



There are also strong divisions between countries. While a small majority in Poland (52%) support military action, even if it risks a nuclear conflict, 68% of young people in Italy are against it, with well over a third (37%) strongly against military action.

These results seem high (especially the average figure of 44% and 52% in Poland), given the catastrophic stakes at play. Linking wider research on how worried Europeans are about nuclear confrontation to our findings on support for military action in the event of nuclear war – no clear conclusions can be made. As an example, while an INSA survey from mid-March 2022 shows that 81% of the entire population in France is worried about the potential for nuclear weapons to be used as a result of the war, our findings show that almost half (45%) of young people are willing to risk nuclear conflict through military action.<sup>37</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, a low proportion of the German population (32%) think the war will result in nuclear conflict – and 48% of our youth sample are willing to take this risk.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps links can be made to geographical proximity to the conflict region alongside general support for Ukraine, with young people in Poland the most willing to risk nuclear conflict and firmly favouring sanctions, military aid and humanitarian assistance. This is an area that would benefit from future research.

In summary, sanctions and military aid to Ukraine meet with broad approval among young people in Europe, while acceptance of nuclear war evokes divided reactions.

As far as the differences between the countries studied are concerned, it is noticeable that young Poles and Romanians, in particular, favour stronger measures to support Ukraine. Young Poles, especially, are also willing to make greater sacrifices (e.g., risking a nuclear conflict). This is consistent with the strong concerns in these countries about the spread of the conflict beyond Ukraine's borders, as well as the geographic and historical reasons discussed earlier. In the United Kingdom, strong fears of nuclear attack and previous targeted killings on British soil may help explain the strong willingness to support Ukraine. On the other side of the spectrum, specific concerns (e.g., gas dependence in Germany) or the potential impact of far-right and populist pro-Russia and contra-Ukraine support rhetoric (e.g., in Italy and France) may help explain somewhat weaker domestic backing for certain measures. To get to the bottom of some of the nuanced motivations for respondent's answers, deeper qualitative analyses are needed.

37 Cicero (2022) Griechen am ehesten auf der Seite Putins. Europaweite Umfrage zu Ukrainekrieg. 19 March.

38 Cicero (2022) Griechen am ehesten auf der Seite Putins.



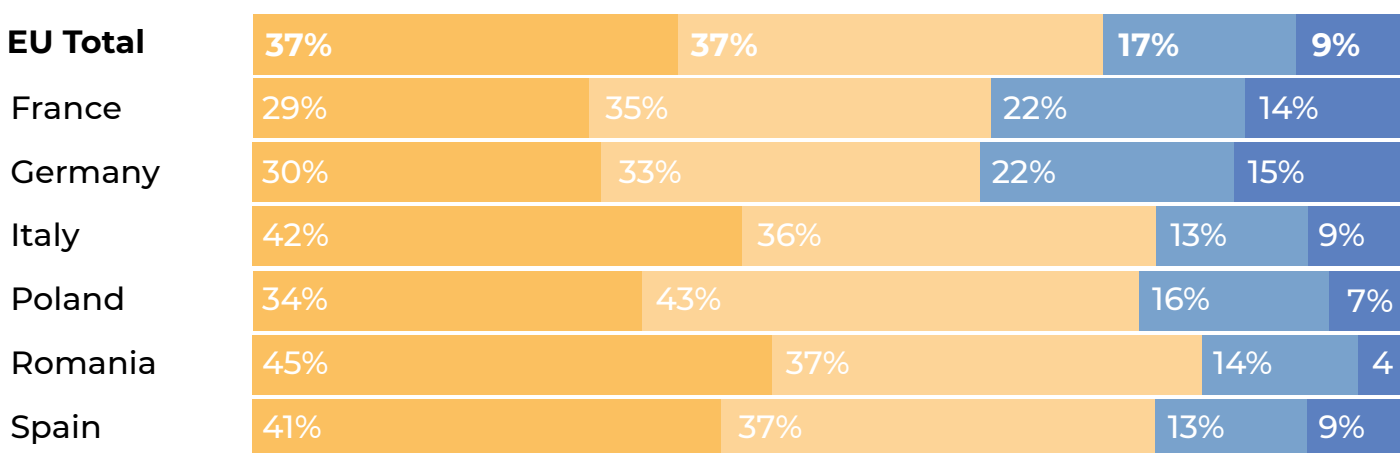


## The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine

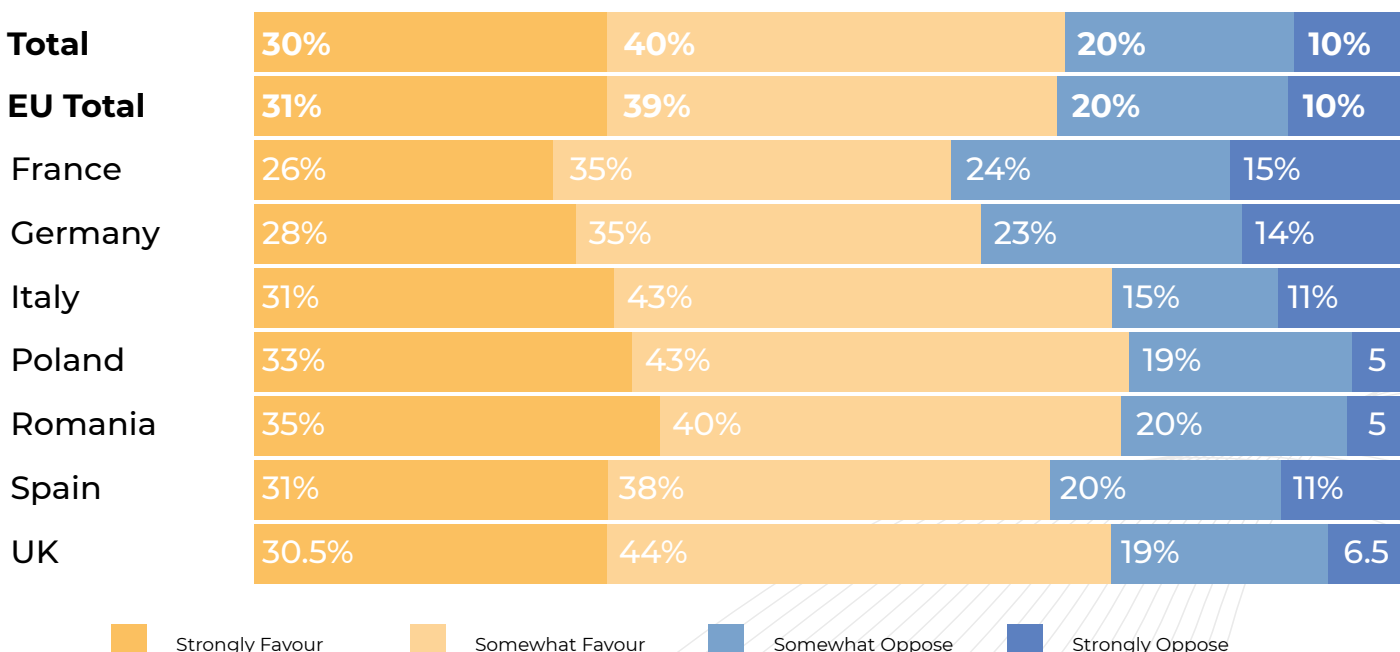
In recent weeks, however, it is not only the military and economic responses that have influenced the opinions of young Europeans. Since the beginning of the war, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine has been deteriorating daily. With

the number of casualties constantly rising and people fleeing from their homes, over 5.8 million people have been displaced to neighbouring countries, including Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia, and over 7.7 million have been

### Thinking about the war in Ukraine, would you favour or oppose the EU admitting thousands of Ukrainian refugees into your country?



### Thinking about the war in Ukraine, would you favour or oppose the EU spending much larger amounts of money to help Ukrainian refugees enter and settle in Europe safely?





internally displaced at the time of writing this policy paper.<sup>39</sup> With the war likely to further cause havoc to people's lives and force more Ukrainians to flee in search of safety, do young people in Europe think enough is being done to help refugees from Ukraine?

According to a large majority of European young people, helping Ukrainian refugees by welcoming them into their country is a key response measure. 74% of respondents are strongly and somewhat in favour of this. While young people in France and Germany are the least in favour (with 36% and 37% opposing this respectively), young people in Romania strongly favour helping Ukrainian refugees, with 82% in favour overall. Young Europeans also want much more EU money spent on helping refugees from Ukraine (70%). This view is most strongly held in Poland (76%), Romania (75%) and the UK (74%). This could be due to the cost and burden of providing assistance alone and the need for EU financial help, or a more general view that the EU must do more because it is a humanitarian crisis.

The openness to accepting refugees in Poland and Romania corresponds to the incredible solidarity with which refugees in both countries have been helped since the beginning of the conflict.<sup>40</sup> The fact that young people in these two countries are also among the strongest supporters

of more European funding for refugees could show the burden on civil society in helping refugees in these countries and that more public funding is seen as necessary to address the situation. This is not surprising, as it is estimated that half of the refugees leave Ukraine through these countries alone.<sup>41</sup> The situation in the United Kingdom seems to confirm the pattern of generally high concern about the spread of war and high support for some of the responses mentioned in earlier sections, such as increased military spending. The strong support for doing more to help Ukrainian refugees reflects national sentiment that the British government is not doing enough to help Ukrainians come to the UK, with the Home Secretary facing legal action for visa backlogs in resettling refugees through the Homes for Ukraine scheme.<sup>42</sup>

39 OCHA (2022) Ukraine: Humanitarian Impact Situation Report. 6 April; UNHCR Operational Data Portal: Statistics from 24 February to the 3 May, 2022.

40 Dickeson, C. (2022). Florea, A. et al (2022) In Romania, solidarity with Ukrainian refugees falls to civil society. 7 April. Voxeurope.

41 BBC (2022) Where are Ukraine's refugees going? Accessed 5 May 2022.

42 Taylor, D. and Halliday, J. (2022). Priti Patel faces legal action from Ukrainians stuck in visa backlog. Immigration and Asylum, The Guardian. 2 May.



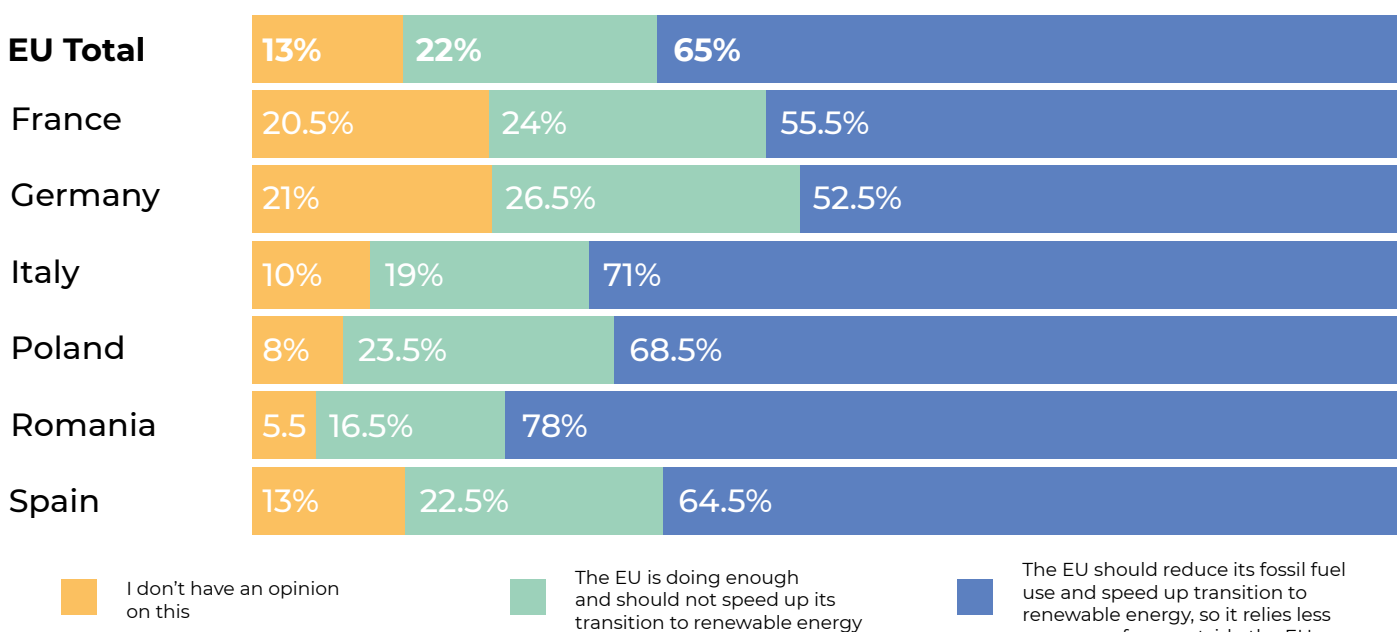
## The energy question: EU autonomy and (in)dependence

Heavy dependence on Russian energy has been a hot topic for years, but its importance has increased even more against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To stop funding Russia through gas, oil and coal imports,<sup>43</sup> it was agreed to phase out this dependence as a key priority. The EU agreed on a three-pronged approach, which includes the diversification of energy supplies, energy efficiency and

the acceleration of renewables. The plan, called REPowerEU, aims to make Europe completely independent from Russian fossil fuels before 2030.<sup>44</sup>

Against this backdrop of energy independence, we wanted to know the level of support among young people for accelerating the transition to renewable energy.

### Boost autonomy and speed up the green transition



Young people are strongly in favour (65%) of the EU reducing fossil fuel use, reducing energy dependence and transitioning to renewables. This large approval for the green energy transition should surprise no one after years of young people around the

world taking their protests to the streets to stop man-made climate change with more urgency. Despite this support, there are clear differences between countries. Our data shows that almost 80% of young people in Romania are in favour of the

43 Borrell, J. (2022) The war in Ukraine and its implications for the EU. European Union External Action. 14 March.

44 European Commission (2022) REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy. Strasbourg, 8 March COM(2022) 108 final





green energy transition. Young German and French people are more cautious of speeding up the transition (52.5% and 55.5%) when compared to their European neighbours. This could be due to the fact that France and Germany perform better in protecting the climate compared to the rest of the countries in our sample (except for the United Kingdom) according to the Climate Change Performance Index - and not due to young people's indifference to the issue.<sup>45</sup>

It should be noted that the relatively lower level of support in Germany may also be explained by the country's heavy dependence on Russian gas. In particular, the acceleration of the energy transition in the short term (and especially a sudden shift away from Russian gas) is often associated with strongly negative economic impacts, although studies on the topic remain divided. In other words: while Germany has already made major changes in its energy policy in recent weeks (e.g., cancelling the infamous Nord Stream 2 pipeline connecting Russia to northern Germany), respondents may be slightly more cautious about accelerating the transition even further in the short term.<sup>46</sup>

In Romania, on the other hand, there are several reasons that may explain the high levels of support. The country is less dependent on Russian natural gas. Still, its coal-intensive energy sector is ripe for

transformation, as Romanians experienced regular power outages as recently as last winter, leaving people sitting in cold homes and schools. Moreover, Romania's share of renewable energy is already above the EU average. The country is said to have some of the greatest potential for wind energy development in Europe, which could convince young Romanians that a rapid transition is possible.<sup>47</sup>

However, the issue of EU independence does not only concern the energy sector. Summarised in EU jargon under the term 'strategic autonomy', we also wanted to know whether young Europeans think greater EU sovereignty is necessary for defence, trade and digitalisation.

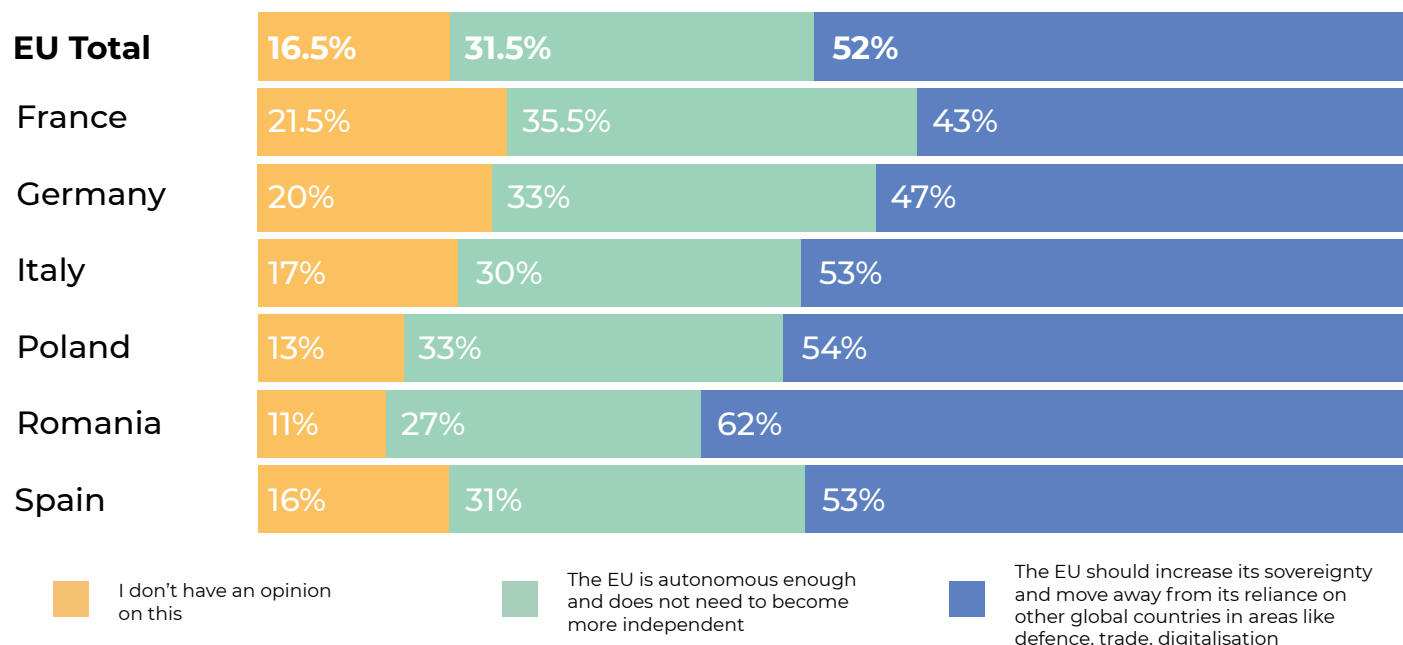
45 Burck, J et.al. (2021). RESULTS. Monitoring Climate Mitigation Efforts of 60 Countries plus the EU – covering 92% of the Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).

46 Büüscher, A-K. (2022). Die Bedeutung von Gas für die deutsche Energieversorgung. 24 April. Deutschlandfunk; Deutschlandfunk (2022) Welche wirtschaftlichen Folgen hätte ein Embargo? 1 May. Deutschlandfunk.

47 Morris, A. and Fiscutean, A. (2022) Conflict complicates energy policy shift in Eastern Europe. 11 April. Foreign Policy; Eurostat (2020) Renewable Energy Statistics.



## Should the EU reduce its fossil fuel use and speed up transition to renewable energy, so it relies less on energy from outside the EU?



More than half of the young Europeans surveyed believe that the EU needs to be less dependent on the outside world in these three areas, while only about one in three young Europeans believes that the EU is autonomous enough. The debate about more defence capabilities in the European Union is currently heavily influenced by the current conflict in Ukraine, as we discussed throughout this paper. By contrast, the arguments for autonomy in the other two areas are rooted in debates that have been going on publicly for several years.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of trade, the Covid-19 pandemic made many young people realise that economic interdependence cannot be taken for granted. Many young EU citizens felt this most acutely in supply

chain problems that led to the delayed availability or unavailability of many consumer goods.<sup>49</sup> This is a problem that has been exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine and is also increasingly reflected in rising inflation and rising prices for citizens in the European Union. In terms of digitalisation, discussions about the dependency on, and the increasing private control of companies such as Facebook, Amazon and Twitter, and public debates about personal data control in the context of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), are likely to have influenced young people's opinions on sovereignty. In addition, there are long-standing debates about disinformation, which have been exacerbated by misinformation about the war emanating from Russia.<sup>50</sup>

48 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2021). Survey on European Sovereignty.

49 Shea, J. (2021) Global supply chains: why are they no longer working? 5 November. Friends of Europe.

50 Scott, M. (2022) As war in Ukraine evolves, so do disinformation tactics. 10 March. Politico.

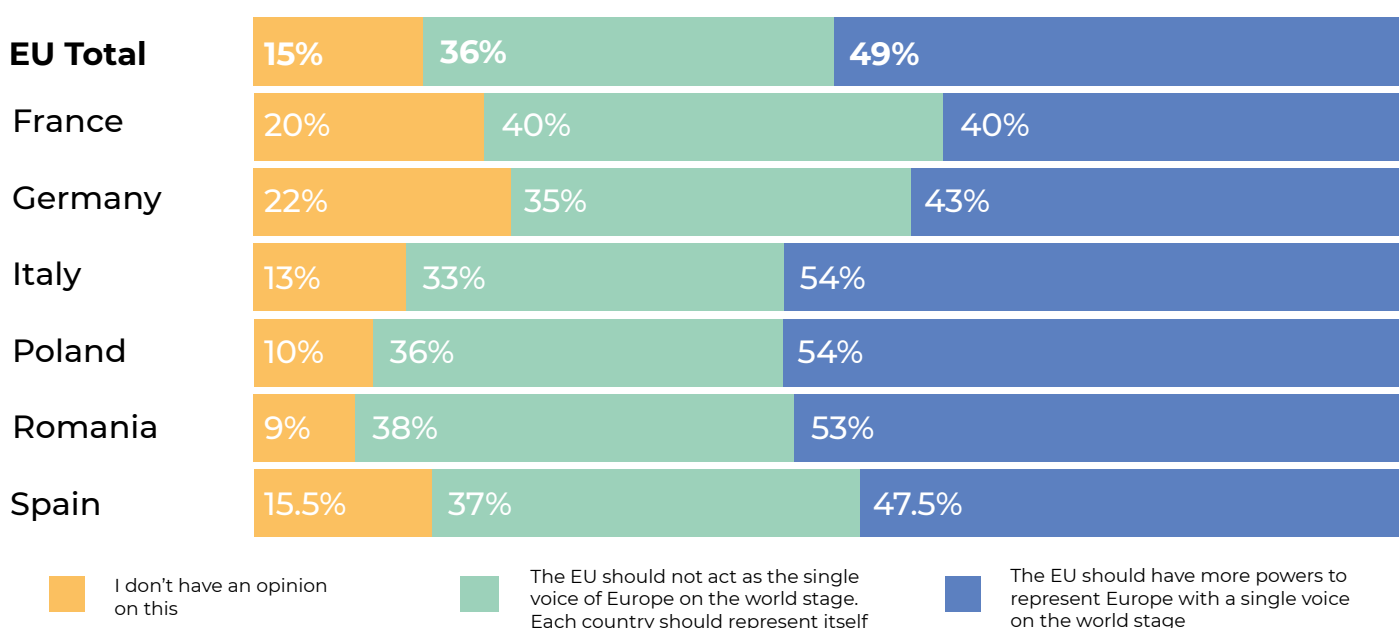


## Looking forward: priorities for Europe

Despite the challenges currently facing the EU and its member states described above, there is no absolute majority of young people in favour of amplifying the EU's single voice internationally. Just under half want the EU to better represent

Europe on the world stage. While this is, by some margin, the largest group, it shows that voices favouring greater national autonomy in foreign policy matters remain important even among young people.

### Should the EU have more powers to represent Europe with a single voice on the world stage?



Interestingly, a recent study by the Friedrich Eber Foundation (FES) found far greater support for strengthening EU sovereignty (73%) than the 49% of respondents who favour giving the EU more power to represent Europe on the world stage, or those who want more EU sovereignty in defense, trade and digitisation (52%). Looking more closely at the FES survey results, this could be because the main reasons for supporting EU sovereignty are EU citizens' perceived need to find global answers to problems

such as the fight against terrorism, climate change, and health threats. As we will see in the following section, these are some of the priority issues for young Europeans. In other words: While defence, trade, and digitisation are seen as important issues for supporting EU sovereignty, and a considerable group of young Europeans also want more power for the EU internationally, support for EU sovereignty is exceptionally high when it is linked to the most important concerns of EU citizens.<sup>51</sup>

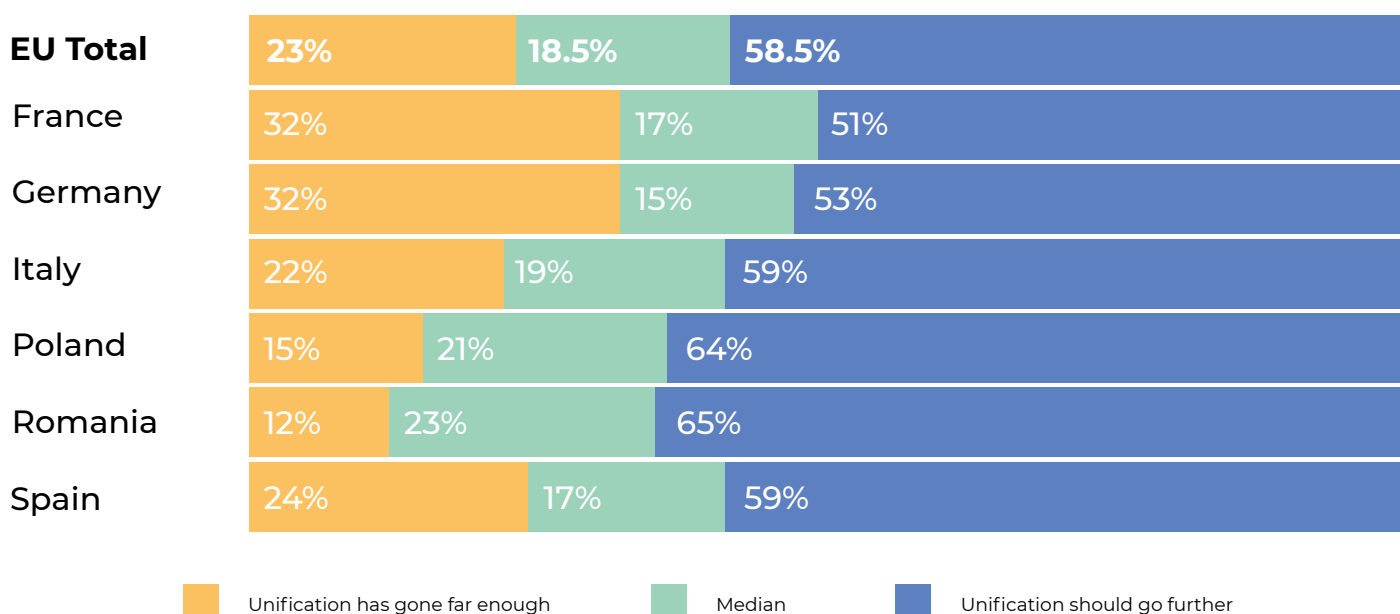
<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2022). European Sovereignty.



Finally, our study suggests that support for EU integration receives greater support than strengthening the EU in the external context. When asked about EU integration on a scale from 1 to 10, close to 60% of young people expressed a positive

opinion of EU countries further uniting and co-operating by choosing a value between 6 and 10. This sentiment is most pronounced in Romania (65%), Poland (64%) and Spain (59%).

### Do you think the EU should unite further, or has unification gone far enough?



*Respondents were asked to rank their level of support for unification from 0 (no support) to 10 (very high support). The graph groups those who had a lower level of support (0-4), the median value (5) and those who had higher levels of support. (6-10)*



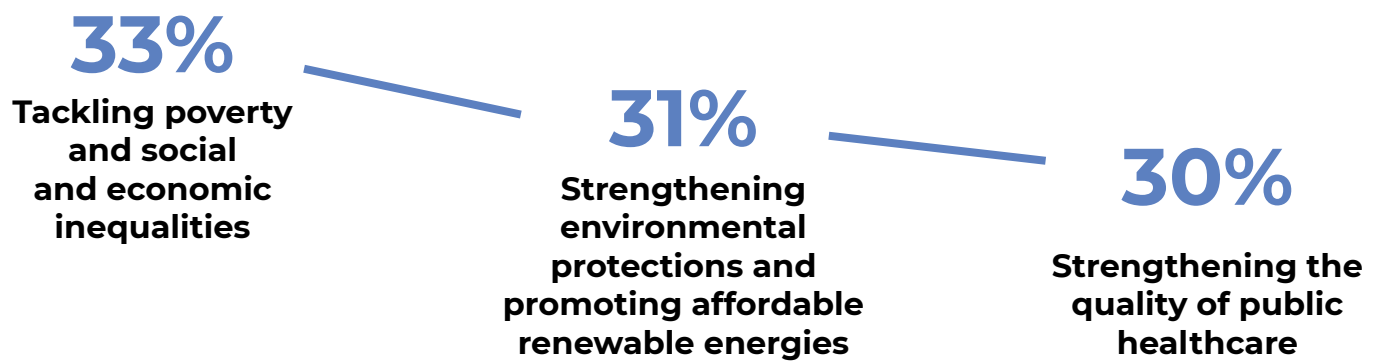


## Social inequality, healthcare and sustainability still the youth priority

That still leaves the look ahead. The question of what priorities young people have for the medium-term future of the EU provides interesting insights. Despite conflict on the EU's borders, only 19% of young people surveyed chose strengthening the EU internationally through better security and defence as a top-three priority from a

list of 13 possible answers we presented to them. Young people are focused on wider social issues, with poverty and inequality the number one priority, energy transition and protecting the environment, and public health and healthcare the second and third most important priorities for the EU over the next five years.

### TOP 3 PRIORITIES FOR THE EU IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS



*The visualisation shows the top three choices among young people in an EU Member State (excluding the UK) when asked to choose three priorities for the EU in the next five years from a list of 13 possible answers we presented to them.*

## Conclusion

Young Europeans woke up to a new world when Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February, drastically escalating a long-simmering conflict. For two generations of Europeans (i.e., Generation Z and Millennials) who were fortunate enough not to experience major wars in their immediate environment, this also means that new questions arise about issues such as military build-up. Other issues, such as humanitarian aid for refugees and the

EU's place in the world, appear in a new light because of the armed conflict.

We interpret the survey as showing that a large majority of young Europeans strongly support EU assistance to Ukraine through military and humanitarian aid, as well as limiting Russia's ability to act through strict sanctions. This shows that they are willing to bear the (economic) costs of helping Ukrainians defend



themselves. At the same time, it is not surprising that support for military action potentially leading to nuclear war is lower given the catastrophic consequences of such an event. The fact that almost half of the respondents are still willing to go this route to support Ukraine is one of the most striking results of our survey.

The coming weeks and months will show how the war unfolds. It will also become clear to what extent support

for measures such as sanctions, military aid, and welcoming refugees among young Europeans will outlast the looming economic difficulties in Europe created by the sanctions, and a generally difficult economic environment still affected by the pandemic. The future response of the EU and its Member States, both in their foreign and security policies and internal economic policies, will certainly influence how young people will remember this episode in history.

## Methodology

The data presented in this policy paper are from an online survey that was conducted by Pollfish, carried out for the Foundation for European Progressive Studies in co-operation with ThinkYoung, which coordinates the surveys and examination of the findings. The survey was launched on 25 March 2022, and the data collection exercise was finalised on 7 April 2022. Local panels were used targeting young people between the ages of 16 and 38 years old, with an overall sample size of 7,367.

The countries in scope were France (n=1019), Germany (n=1001), Italy (n=1131),

Poland (n=1002), Romania (n=602), Spain (n=1002), and the United Kingdom (n=1610). Quotas were applied for age, gender and education level and post-stratification weights were applied to ensure the results are nationally representative of basic demographics. The general margin of error is +/- 3% for the samples of 1000+ and +/- 4% for the sample of 600.

Where relevant, EU totals and Europe totals were applied to take into account the inclusion of the United Kingdom.



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# Builders of Progress: Europe's NextGen

