INFRA4NEXTGEN

Data Summary

Make it Strong: Building a Resilient Europe

Rumiana Stoilova, Petya Ilieva and **Martin Velichkov**
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

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GREEN
DIGITAL
HEALTHY
MAKE IT STRONG
EQUAL

Abstract

Background: In the context of an increased focus from the European Commission on the next generation and intergenerational solidarity, the Make it Strong pillar focuses on two areas. First, the double transitions of young people – from school to work and from youth to adulthood – and, second, generational experience of fairness and solidarity. This theme – and this report – therefore investigates young people's education, employment, family formation as well as intergenerational solidarity and participation in democracy.

Aim: This report provides a snapshot of the state of affairs of the theme "Strong Europe" and demonstrates to all users the potential of organising data from multiple surveys. It aims to provide evidence for NextGenerationEU initiatives by analysing data broken down by age groups, and by country (or group of countries). The report also considers differences within younger respondents when it comes to levels of education, gender, and rural-urban division.

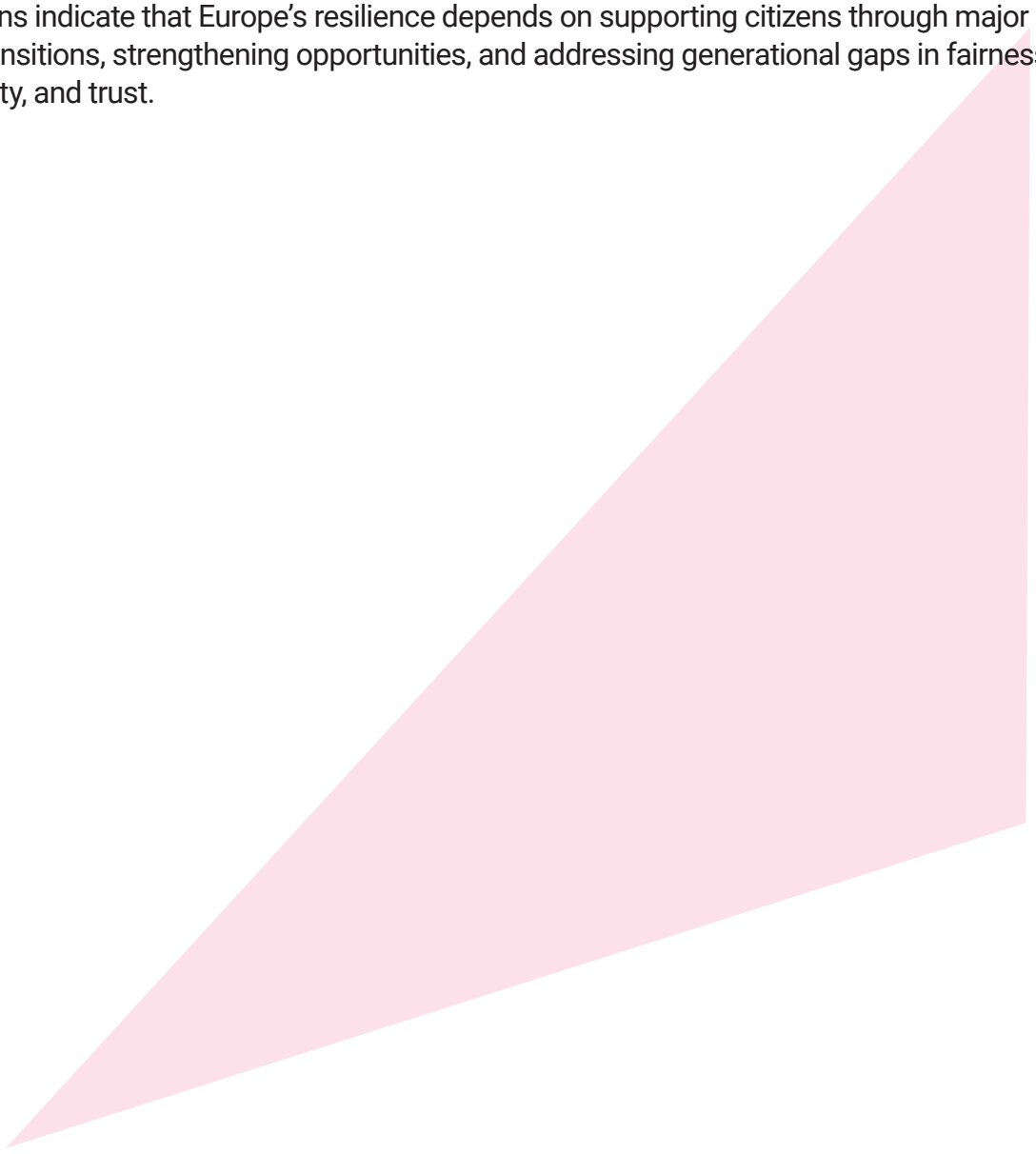
Data: The report relies on data from three major cross-national surveys: the European Social Survey (ESS), Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) and International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). Questions from these projects that focus on education, employment, family, intergenerational solidarity and fairness, and democracy have been selected for inclusion.

Results: The findings show that perceptions of fairness in education vary across generations, with older Europeans viewing their opportunities as less fair. Participation in lifelong learning is highest among young adults in most countries, though middle-aged adults lead in Sweden and Finland, highlighting the need for continuous learning throughout life.

In the labour market, middle-aged Europeans express the strongest preference for independent work, reflecting the complex effects of digitalisation and labour market change. Persistent gender and educational gaps remain in returning to work after parental leave, impacting most women and people with lower education levels. Perceptions of wage fairness are lowest in eastern European and rural regions, pointing to ongoing regional and socioeconomic disparities.

Family formation decisions are closely linked to financial stability, housing, and childcare access, with younger and lower-educated adults expressing lower confidence in meeting these preconditions. Patterns of intergenerational solidarity vary significantly across Europe, depending on the balance between family-based support and welfare provision. In countries with stronger welfare systems, reliance on family financial transfers is lower while, in those with limited institutional support, families play a compensatory role.

Younger Europeans report relatively higher trust in democratic institutions but lower voter turnout than older groups, although they engage more in civic and protest activities. These patterns indicate that Europe's resilience depends on supporting citizens through major life transitions, strengthening opportunities, and addressing generational gaps in fairness, security, and trust.



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1 Introduction

Building a strong and resilient Europe depends on the ability of societies to offer fair opportunities and shared prosperity across all generations. Europe's future strength lies not only in its economic and technological competitiveness, but also in the solidarity that connects young and old, ensuring that progress benefits everyone. A crucial part of this strength rests on how effectively young people navigate the double transition – from school to work and from youth to adulthood – as these early life-course stages shape future wellbeing, social inclusion, and trust in institutions. Yet, in many economically developed countries, young people today often perceive their life opportunities as worse than those of their parents – a challenge that calls for renewed commitment to intergenerational fairness and social cohesion.

Young people and generational solidarity are therefore central to Europe's long-term resilience. As highlighted in the *Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024–2029*, Ursula von der Leyen underlined that 'decisions taken today must not harm future generations' and called for greater engagement between people of different ages. For the first time, a Commissioner has been appointed for Intergenerational Fairness, with the mandate to ensure that policies are shaped with long-term generational balance in mind.

This report contributes to this agenda by examining how Europeans of different ages perceive key aspects of fairness, solidarity, and trust. It also seeks to understand how these values shape experiences in education, work, family life, and interactions with democracy – areas central to the EU's social and economic cohesion. Building on insights from the Political Guidelines and the Recovery Plan for Europe, the report explores current societal challenges and the opinions of young people, with policy relevance placed at the top of the conceptual model.

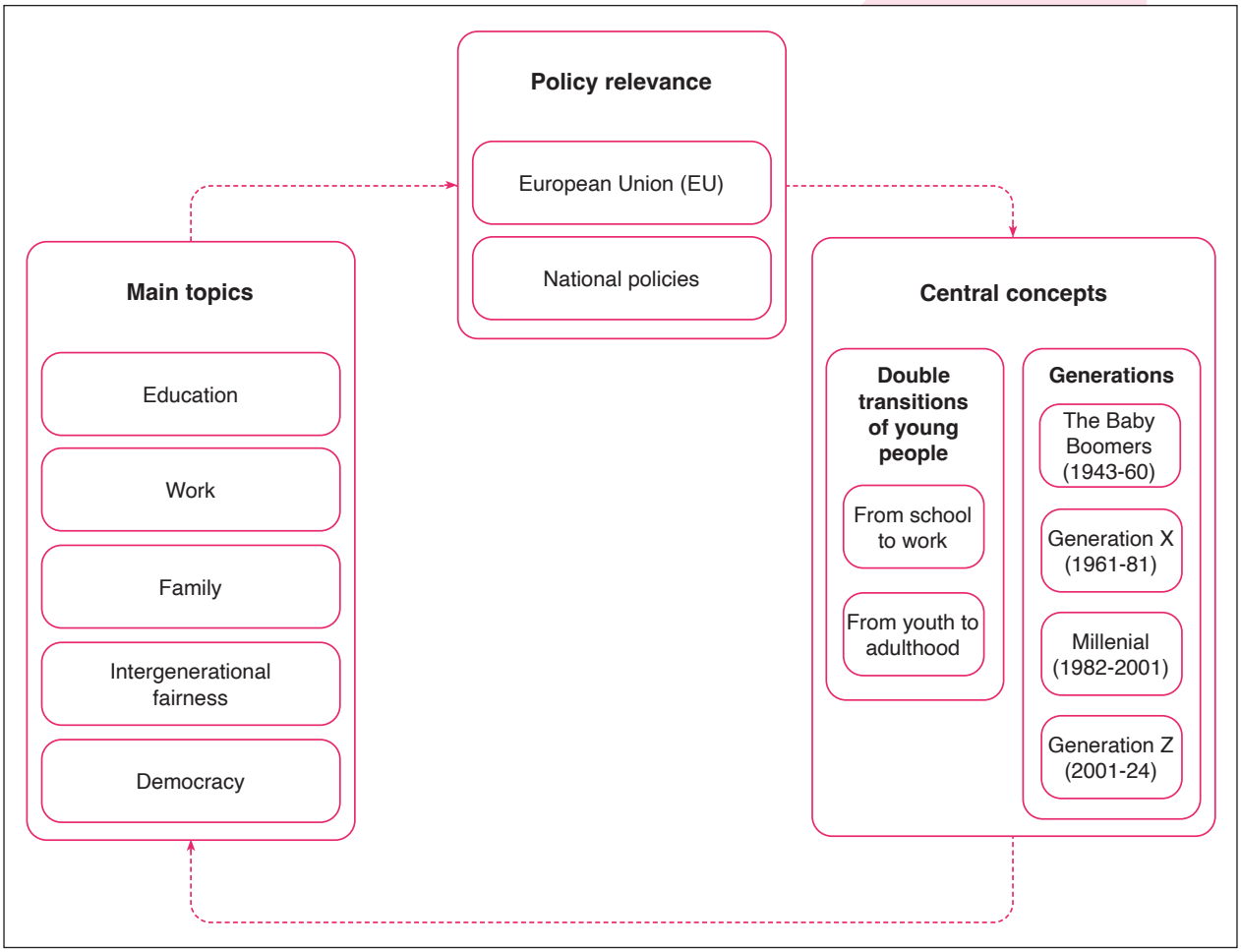
At the core of the analysis lies a life-course transition framework (Figure 1), recognising that all generations pass through similar stages of life, but under different social and economic conditions. Young people (under 35) are primarily navigating the double transition – from education to employment and from youth to adulthood. Middle-aged adults (35–54) often balance work and family responsibilities while facing job insecurity in rapidly changing labour markets, while older adults (55+) are entering or preparing for retirement and may require new forms of care and social support.

The conceptual framework builds on these life-course transitions to illustrate how generational cohorts interact with major social domains such as education, work, family, and democracy. It highlights that perceptions of fairness and solidarity are interconnected across the life course – shaping whether young people can afford to start a family, whether parents and children can rely on one another for support, and whether citizens trust democratic institutions to respond to their needs. Grounded in the two key concepts of *generational cohorts* and the *double transition*, the report examines five main themes: education, work, family, intergenerational solidarity, and democracy.

Each topic is analysed through the lens of these life-course concepts, highlighting how experiences and challenges differ across generations. Furthermore, the analysis

considers the policy relevance of these topics at both the national and European Union levels, emphasising how policy frameworks can promote generational equity and strengthen social cohesion. Taken together, these themes shed light on how Europe's strength depends not only on competitiveness and inclusiveness, but also on fairness and opportunity across generations. By linking people's lived experiences to broader political priorities, this analysis explores how intergenerational solidarity and fairness can be reinforced to sustain Europe's social cohesion in the decades to come.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the Make it Strong pillar



2 Data and analysis strategy

The analysis draws on several cross-national survey programmes that together provide a rich and reliable evidence base for understanding generational dynamics across Europe. For this data summary, we drew on three key sources: the *European Social Survey (ESS)*, the *Generations and Gender Survey Round II (GGS)*, and the *International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)*. These large-scale, high-quality surveys capture people's attitudes, values, and life circumstances, enabling comparative analysis of how experiences and perceptions differ across countries, age groups, and time.

The **European Social Survey (ESS)** collects cross-national data every two years and, to date, has completed eleven rounds between 2002 and 2024. For this analysis, we draw specifically on Round 9 (2018/19) and 11 (2023/24). To ensure the accuracy and comparability of the results, we applied the recommended post-stratification and population weights, correcting for both non-response bias within countries and differences in population sizes across them.

The **Generations and Gender Survey (GGS)** provides panel data on life-course and family dynamics. The second round (GGS II) forms the basis of our analysis. This dataset offers unique insights into how individuals move through different stages of life – from forming families to balancing work and care responsibilities – and how these processes vary across social and institutional contexts. The supplied weights, which account for sample design, post-stratification, and national sampling differences, were applied to ensure representativeness.

The **International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)**, running annual international surveys since the early 2000s, offers complementary data on people's attitudes toward work, family, and social institutions. For our summary, we include ISSP data from 2015 and 2022, covering between 13 and 17 EU Member States depending on the year. Post-stratification weights were again applied to maintain cross-national comparability and demographic representativeness.

Together, these datasets enable a comprehensive examination of how Europeans of different generations perceive fairness, solidarity, and trust, and how these perceptions are shaped by the major life transitions and institutional contexts they experience.

3 Results

3.1 Education

3.1.1 Fairness of educational opportunities

Key findings:

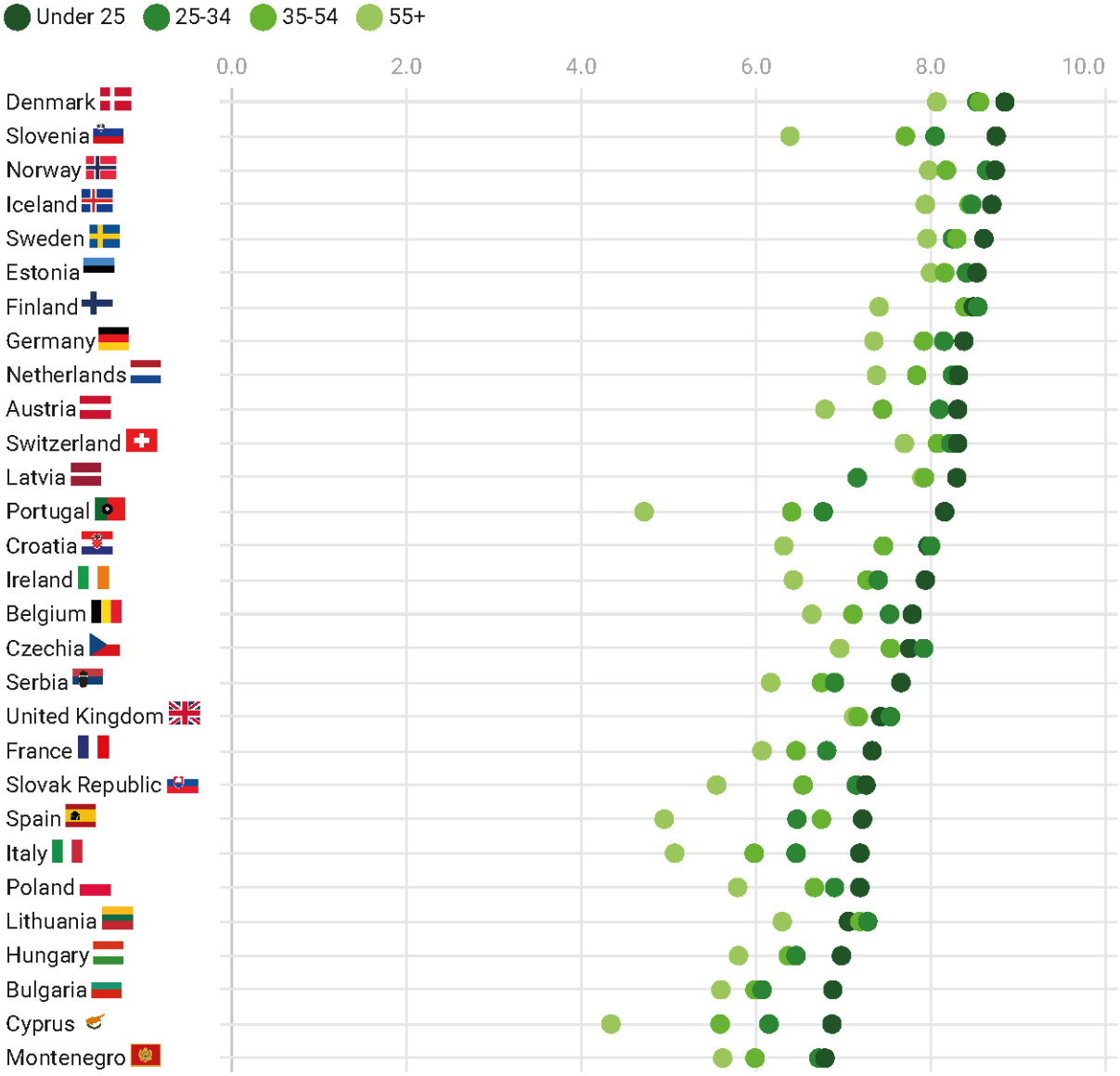
Age	The perceived fairness of educational opportunities declines systematically with age, with older generations consistently rating their chances as less fair than those of younger cohorts.
Education	Higher education among young Europeans is linked to more positive perceptions of fairness.
Country	The age gap in perceived fairness of educational opportunities is especially pronounced in Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Slovenia.

This section explores how different generations and counties perceive the fairness of educational opportunities. Fairness in education is a crucial dimension of social cohesion, as it affects both individual life chances and broader trust in institutions. Previous research indicates that perceptions of fairness vary significantly, not only between countries but also between individuals with different levels of education (Stoilova & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2023). Understanding these patterns is crucial for policy, particularly to motivate young people – especially those not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) – to invest in their education and prospects.

Figure 2 shows clear generational differences in perceptions of educational opportunities. Across the entire sample, as well as within each country, older respondents consistently report having had fewer fair opportunities compared to younger generations. The gap is particularly pronounced in Portugal, Cyprus, Slovenia, Spain, and Italy, where older generations rate their opportunities significantly lower than the youngest age group. By contrast, countries such as Great Britain, Latvia, Switzerland, and Estonia display the smallest intergenerational gaps, while the Nordic countries stand out for reporting the highest levels of perceived fairness across all age groups.

It is also important to interpret these findings in light of the response scale. Perceptions were measured on an 11-point scale, with 5 representing the midpoint. Mean values fall below this threshold only among respondents aged 55+ in Cyprus and Portugal, and approximate the midpoint in Italy and Spain. In all other cases, mean scores remain at or above the midpoint, suggesting that—despite generational differences—most respondents across countries assess their educational opportunities as more fair than unfair.

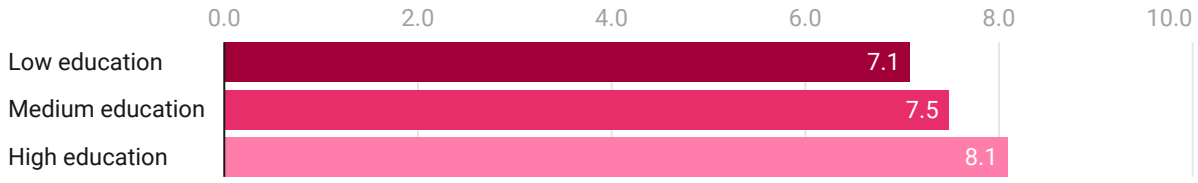
Figure 2. Fairness of educational opportunities by age and country



European Social Survey Round 9 (2018/19). Own calculations (n=47,279). Based on responses to 'Compared to other people in [COUNTRY], I have had a fair chance of achieving the level of education I was seeking.' Respondents rated this on an 11-point Likert scale from 0 ('Does not apply at all') to 10 ('Applies completely').

An increased educational level tends to increase the fairness perceptions of the opportunities to achieve a desired level of education among young people in all European countries (Figure 3). Among young people across all European countries, higher levels of education are associated with more positive perceptions of fairness in educational opportunities. Those aged under 35 years old with low levels of education evaluate their educational opportunities more negatively compared to the medium and more highly educated groups.

Figure 3. Fairness of educational opportunities among young Europeans by education



European Social Survey Round 9 (2018/19). Own calculations (n=10,313). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Based on responses to 'Compared to other people in [COUNTRY], I have had a fair chance of achieving the level of education I was seeking.' Respondents rated this on an 11-point Likert scale from 0 ('Does not apply at all') to 10 ('Applies completely'). Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Cyprus, Czechia, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovak Republic.

3.1.2 Participation in lifelong learning

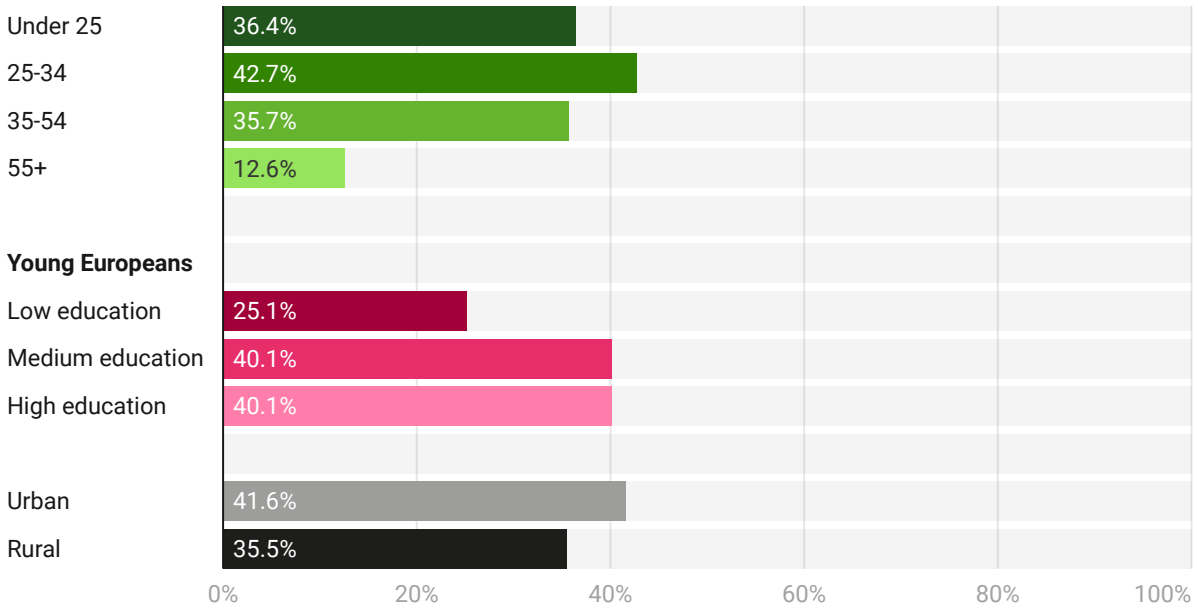
Key findings:

Age	Participation in job-related learning is lowest among the oldest age group and highest among those aged 25–34.
Education	Among younger Europeans, participation increases with educational attainment.
Urban vs. Rural	Urban residents participate more frequently in lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning is crucial for developing professional skills across all age groups, supporting adaptation to the evolving labour market and helping to reduce intergenerational tensions within workplaces and the broader labour market. In this section, the data provide insights into participation in job-related lifelong learning over the previous 12 months.

Participation in lifelong learning is significantly lower among the eldest age group, at around 13% (Figure 4), while individuals in the younger and middle-aged groups report participation rates between 35% and 43%. Among younger Europeans, those with medium and higher levels of education are more likely to engage in lifelong learning than their less-educated peers. Urban residents also participate more frequently than those in rural areas. Despite the growth of online learning opportunities driven by digitalisation, young people in urban areas continue to demonstrate higher engagement, likely reflecting both greater access to training programs and higher availability of in-person opportunities.

Figure 4. Participation in lifelong learning by age group, education and place of living



European Social Survey Round 9 (2018/19). Own calculations (n=49,318 for age; n=10,968 for education; n=11,028 for place of living; differences due to missing values). Share of respondents who answered 'Yes' to 'During the last twelve months, have you taken any course or attended any lecture or conference to improve your knowledge or skills for work?'. Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Cyprus, Czechia, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovak Republic.

3.2 Work

3.2.1 Work orientations

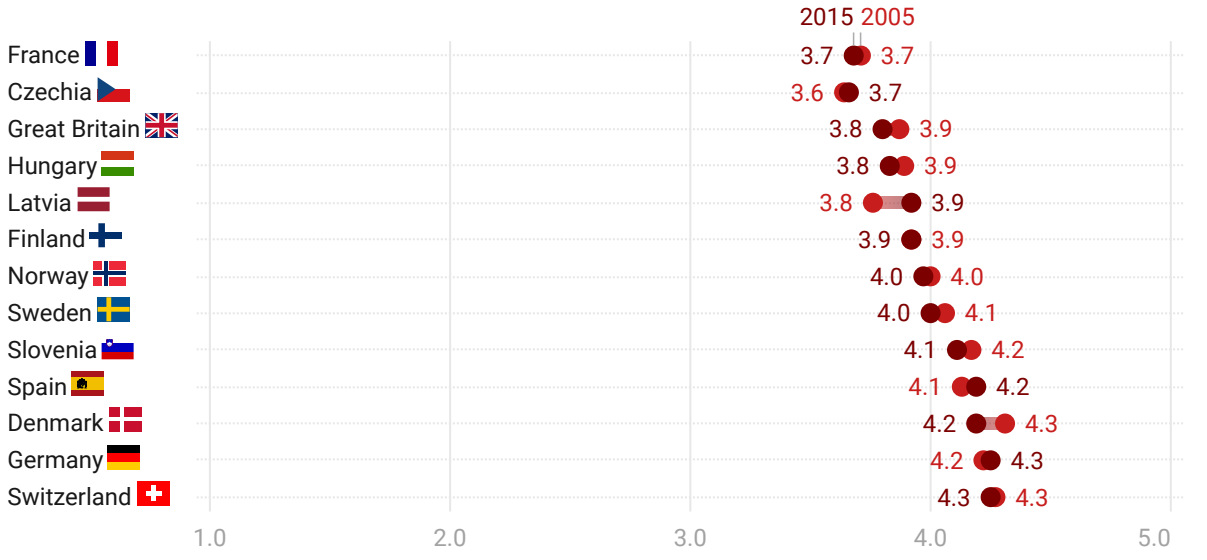
Key findings:

Age	Younger people in Europe do not consistently value independent work more than older groups. The middle-aged group expresses the strongest preference for independent work in most countries.
Gender	No significant differences in perceived importance of independent work and job security among young Europeans.
Education	Lower educated people value job security slightly more than high educated people among young Europeans.
Urban vs. Rural	No significant differences in perceived importance of independent work and job security among young Europeans.
Country	Among young Europeans perceived importance of job security is the highest in Spain, Croatia, and Austria; lowest in Denmark.

Independent work has increasingly become a focus of employment research (Carlton et al., 2016). New forms of employment are emerging through digitalisation, freelancing, and platform-based work. The literature distinguishes two main types of independent work: one comprises highly educated, high-earning professionals who enjoy greater autonomy over their work and personal life; the other consists of lower-earning workers who cannot secure stable employment at a desirable wage level.

Across all countries, the perceived importance of independent work remained remarkably stable between 2005 and 2015 (Figure 5). No country shows a substantial increase or decrease over the decade, indicating a consistent cultural or economic valuation of independent work. However, the level of importance varies: Switzerland, Germany, and Denmark consistently rate independent work the highest, highlighting strong recognition of autonomy and self-directed work. By contrast, France and Czechia report the lowest perceived importance, suggesting a comparatively weaker orientation towards independent work. However, the differences between countries remain quite small.

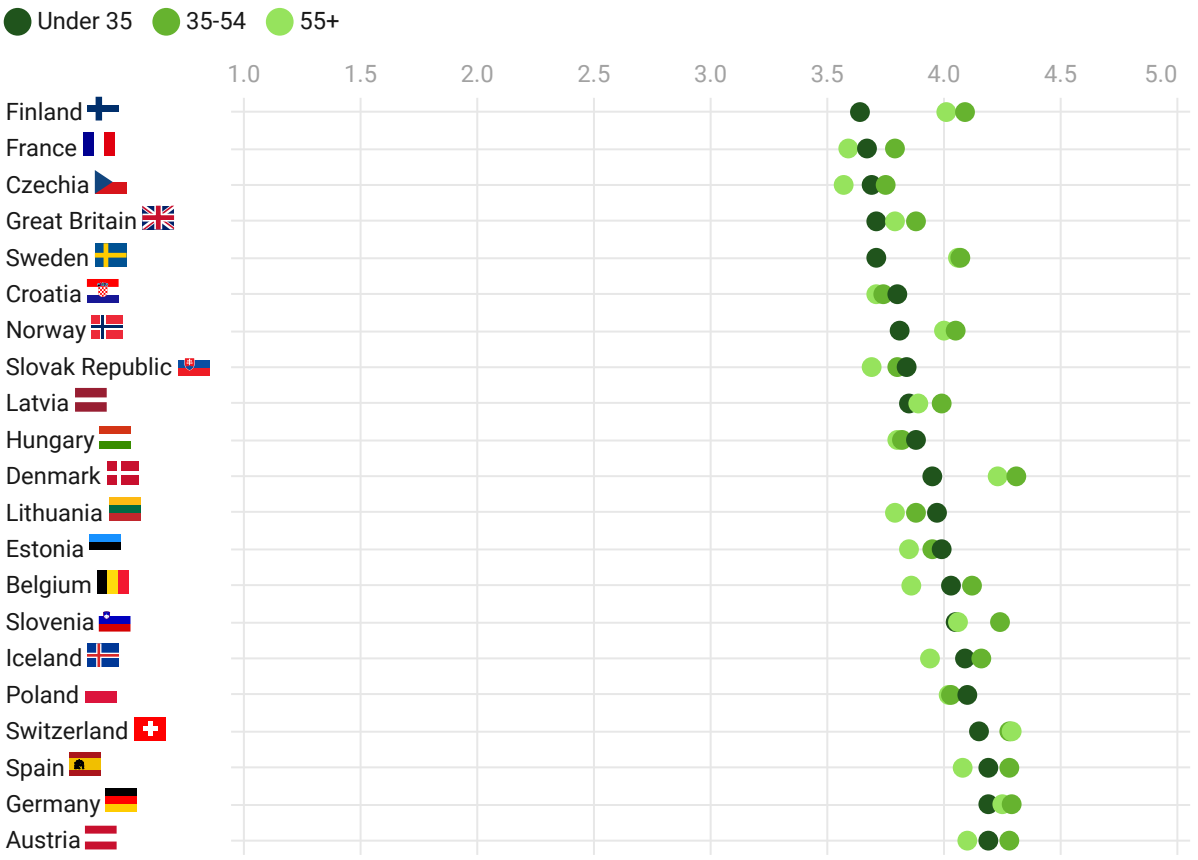
Figure 5. Perceived importance of independent work, by country



International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) 2005 and 2015. Countries where data is not available for both years are excluded. Own calculations (n=15,992 in 2005 and 16,887 in 2015). Mean values based on a scale from 1 ('Not important at all') to 5 ('Very important') for the importance of having a job that allows someone to work independently.

Perceptions of the importance of independent work are relatively high across Europe and across all age groups (Figure 6). Younger people (below 35) do not consistently value independent work more than older groups and the middle-aged group expresses the strongest preference for independent work in most countries, particularly in Denmark, Switzerland, and Germany. Younger respondents report high scores in Austria, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland, while the lowest values are found among young people in Finland, France, and Czechia. The largest generational gaps between the youngest and oldest cohorts are found in Northern Europe (Denmark, Sweden, and Finland). By contrast, the smallest gaps appear in Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Germany where attitudes remain stable across generations.

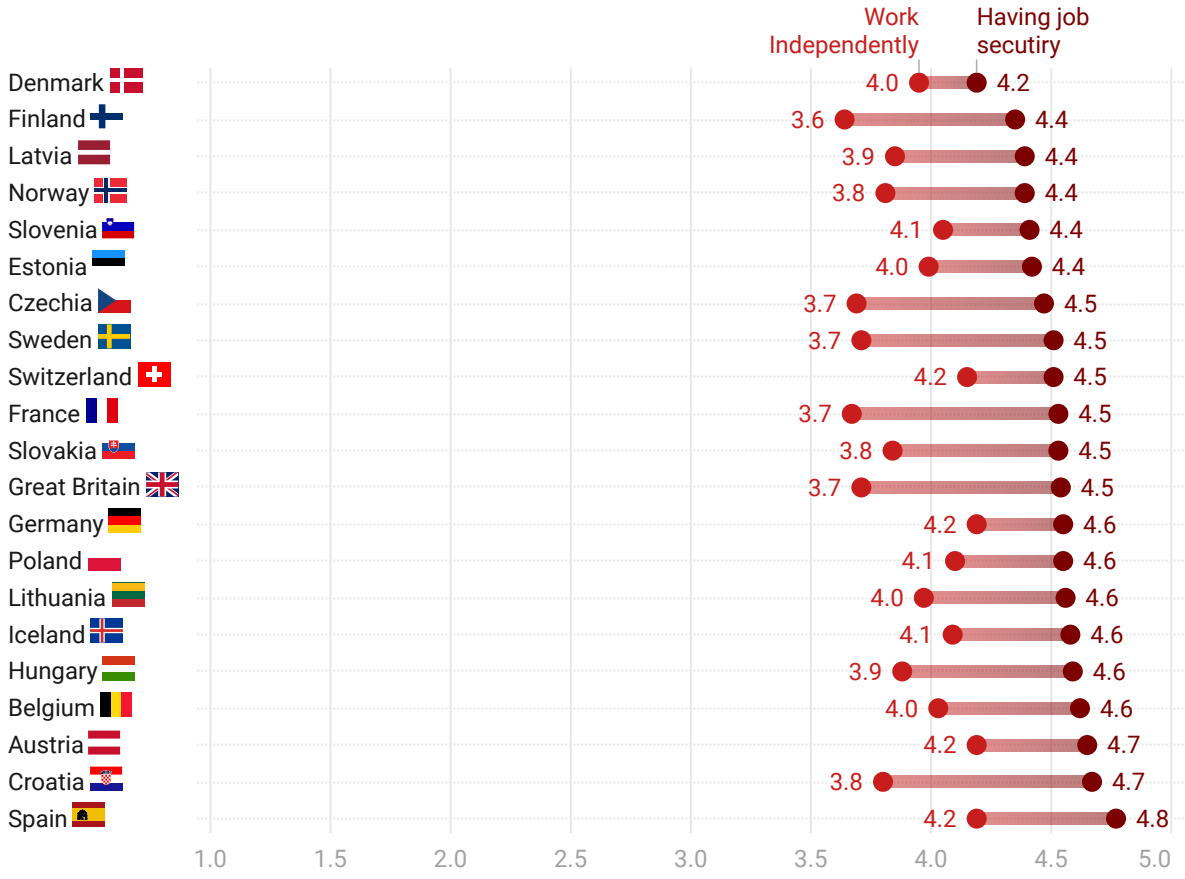
Figure 6. Perceived importance of independent work by age and country



International Social Survey Programme, 2015. Own calculations (n=27,495). Mean values based on a scale from 1 ('Not important at all') to 5 ('Very important') for the importance of having a job that allows someone to work independently.

Young Europeans consistently show a stronger preference for job security over independent work in every country, indicating that younger cohorts continue to value stability and predictability more than autonomy and flexibility (Figure 7). This suggests that traditional expectations of secure work remain central to young people's labour market orientation. Nonetheless, this trend should be re-assessed as another decade has passed since the last time these questions were fielded. Given the fast-paced developments in work, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and in digitalisation, work orientations.

Figure 7. Perceived importance of independent work vs. job security among young Europeans by country

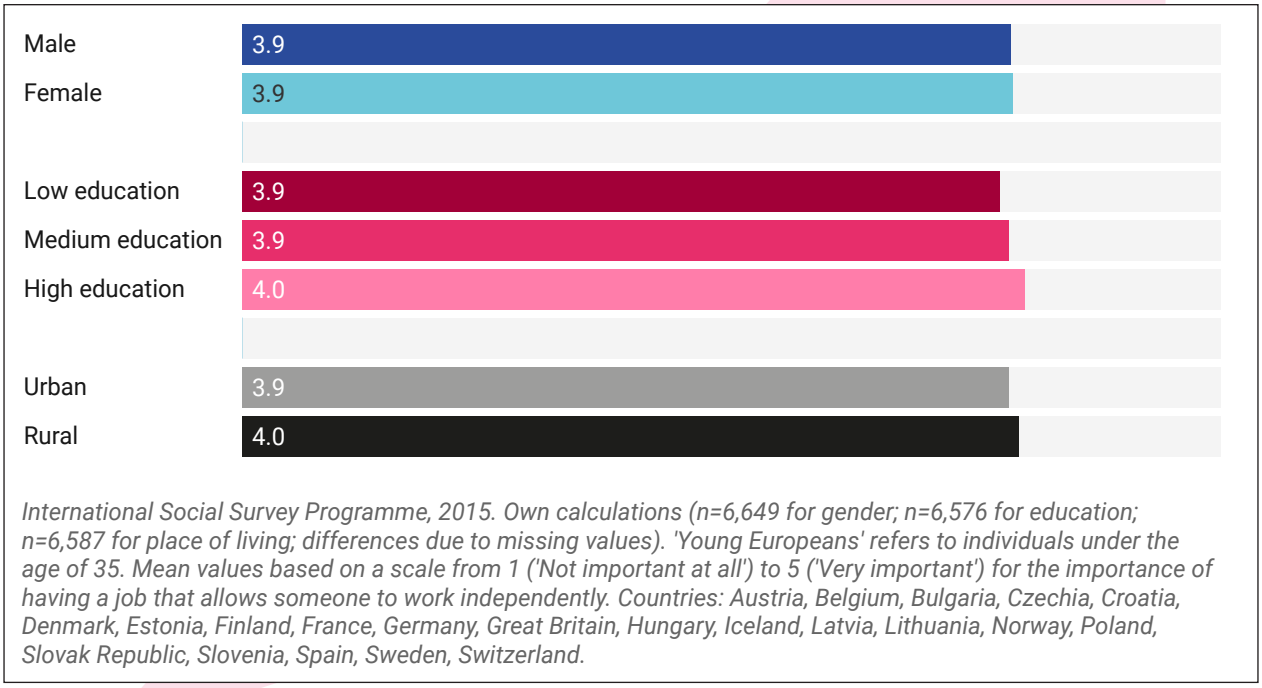


International Social Survey Programme, 2015. Own calculations (n=6,660 for independence at work and n=6,685 for job security; difference due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Mean values based on a scale from 1 ('Not important at all') to 5 ('Very important') for the importance of having a job that allows someone to work independently and having job security.

When it comes to the perceived importance of independent work, there are no significant differences by gender, education level, or place of residence among younger Europeans overall (Figure 8). By contrast, slight differences appear in the importance attached to job security: respondents with lower levels of education assign somewhat greater importance to secure employment compared to their highly educated peers. Nevertheless, across gender, education, and urban–rural divides, no substantial differences emerge (Figure 9).

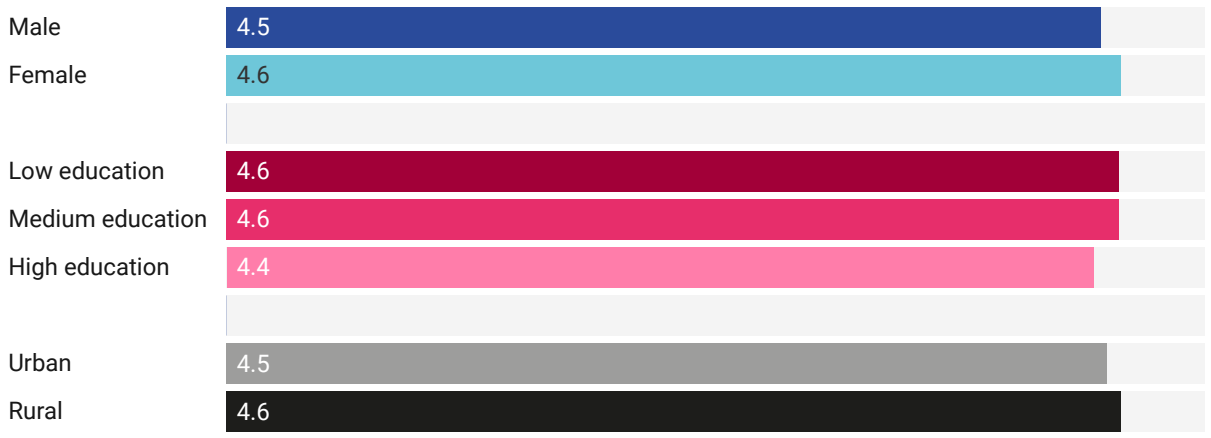
Taken together, these findings point to the enduring significance of job security as a key aspiration for young people across Europe, cutting across social and demographic groups. At the same time, the relatively uniform attitudes across gender, education, and domicile suggest that the preference for stability is broadly shared, reflecting a common generational concern in the context of labour market uncertainty and economic change.

Figure 8. Perceived importance of independent work among young Europeans by gender, education and place of living



International Social Survey Programme, 2015. Own calculations (n=6,649 for gender; n=6,576 for education; n=6,587 for place of living; differences due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Mean values based on a scale from 1 ('Not important at all') to 5 ('Very important') for the importance of having a job that allows someone to work independently. Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

Figure 9. Perceived importance of job security among young Europeans by gender, education and place of living



International Social Survey Programme, 2015. Own calculations (n=6,674 for gender; n=6,599 for education; n=6,610 for place of living; differences due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Mean values based on a scale from 1 ('Not important at all') to 5 ('Very important') for the importance of job security. Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

3.2.2 Resuming work after maternity/parental leave

Key findings:

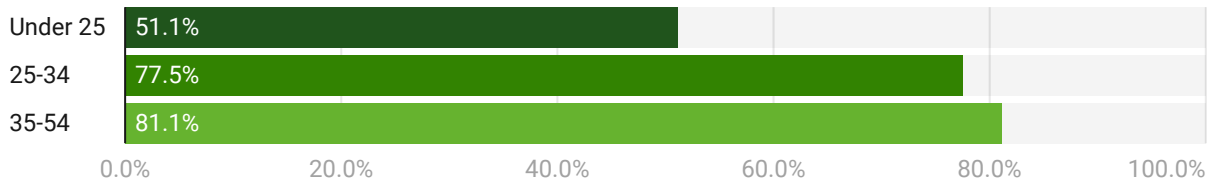
Age	Opportunity to return to work following parental leave increases with age.
Gender	Women face greater challenges than men in their opportunities to return to work.
Education	Parents with higher levels of education are more likely to have the opportunity to return to work.
Country	Opportunities to return to work vary significantly across countries, ranging from 65% in Czechia to over 90% in the United Kingdom.

The transition from school to work represents a critical phase in the broader shift from youth to adulthood, and its quality is commonly assessed through indicators such as unemployment and inactivity (Blokker et al., 2023). Beyond these general measures, an important yet distinct dimension concerns the opportunities for young people to resume employment following maternity or parental leave.

This aspect carries considerable policy significance, as it highlights the shared responsibility of governments and employers. Governments are tasked with providing adequate childcare services, while employers play a pivotal role in facilitating a smooth re-entry into the workforce. The presence of effective policies and supportive workplace practices is essential not only for enabling parents to return to work but also for helping them adapt to potential changes in professional responsibilities, which may necessitate additional training or upskilling.

Evidence from the GGS data indicates that a substantial majority (80%) of parents currently on maternity or parental leave report having the opportunity to return to work. Nevertheless, these opportunities vary considerably across countries, ranging from approximately 65% in Czechia to over 90% in the United Kingdom. Opportunities to return to work also differ by age among those on leave: 51.1% of parents under 25 report having this option, compared with 77.5% of those aged 25–34 and 81.1% of those aged 35–54 (Figure 10). These variations underscore the influence of both national policy frameworks and life-course stage on the capacity of parents to reconcile work and family responsibilities, with important implications for labour market integration and family well-being.

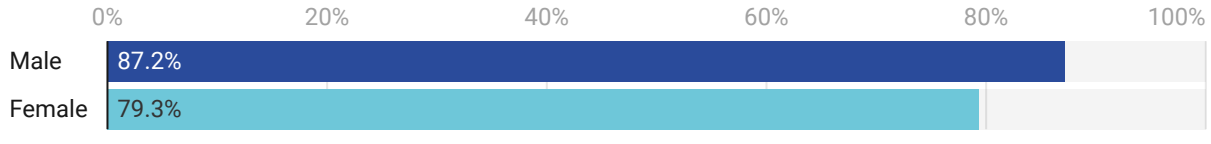
Figure 10. Opportunity to resume work after maternity/parental leave, by age group



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-2023. Own calculations (n=2,996). Share of respondents who answered 'Yes' to 'Do you have the opportunity to resume your work after your maternity/parental/childcare leave has ended?'. Sample: people on maternity, paternity, parental or childcare leave. Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom.

Gender differences in the opportunity to return to work after maternity or parental leave are also notable, with women facing greater challenges than men. Among parents currently on leave, 20.7% of women report not having the option to return to their previous job, compared with 12.8% of men (Figure 11). These disparities highlight persistent gender inequalities in the labour market and underscore the need for policies and workplace practices that actively support women's re-entry into their careers following parental leave.

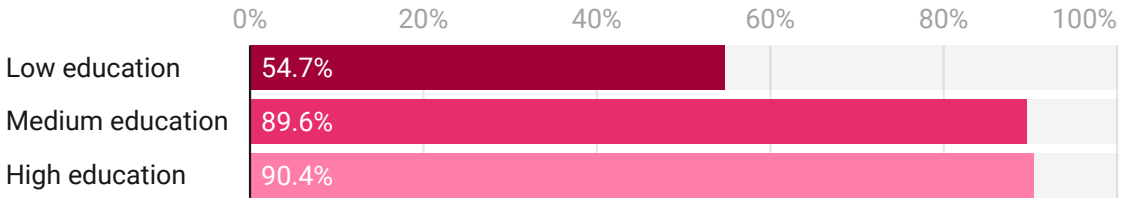
Figure 11. Opportunity to resume work after maternity/parental leave, by gender



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-2023. Own calculations (n=2,994). Share of respondents who answered 'Yes' to 'Do you have the opportunity to resume your work after your maternity/parental/childcare leave has ended?' Sample: people on maternity, paternity, parental leave or childcare leave. Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom.

Educational attainment also plays a significant role in shaping opportunities to resume work after maternity, parental, or childcare leave. Parents with higher levels of education on leave at the time of data collection are more likely to have the opportunity to return: 55% of those with low education, 81% of those with medium education, and 91% of those with higher education report being able to resume work after leave (Figure 12). In particular, women with low educational attainment represent a key target group for policy initiatives aimed at ensuring a smooth transition from parental leave back into employment.

Figure 12. Opportunity to resume work maternity/parental leave by education



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-2023. Own calculations (n=2,537). Share of respondents who answered 'Yes' to 'Do you have the opportunity to resume your work after your maternity/parental/childcare leave has ended?'. Sample: people on maternity, paternity, parental leave or childcare leave. Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom.

3.2.3 Fairness of net pay

Key findings:

Age	Perceptions of pay fairness generally decline with age, with younger adults reporting slightly more favourable assessments than older adults in most countries.
Gender	Among young Europeans, women perceive their pay as only slightly less fair than men.
Education	Among young Europeans, those with higher education view their pay as marginally fairer than those with medium or low education.
Urban vs. Rural	Among young Europeans, people in rural areas report pay fairness as just a little lower than their urban peers.
Country	Western and Northern European countries tend to exhibit higher perceptions of pay fairness across all age groups, whereas Eastern and some Southern European countries show more negative perceptions, particularly among older adults.

Fairness of net pay perception is a central dimension of labour market outcomes, reflecting not only economic conditions but also broader social and institutional contexts. An important question is whether educational opportunities are effectively translated into fair income, and for whom and in which context this occurs. This issue is significant because individuals' perceptions of pay fairness are closely linked to quality of life, influencing both subjective well-being and the extent to which personal goals are perceived as being fulfilled.

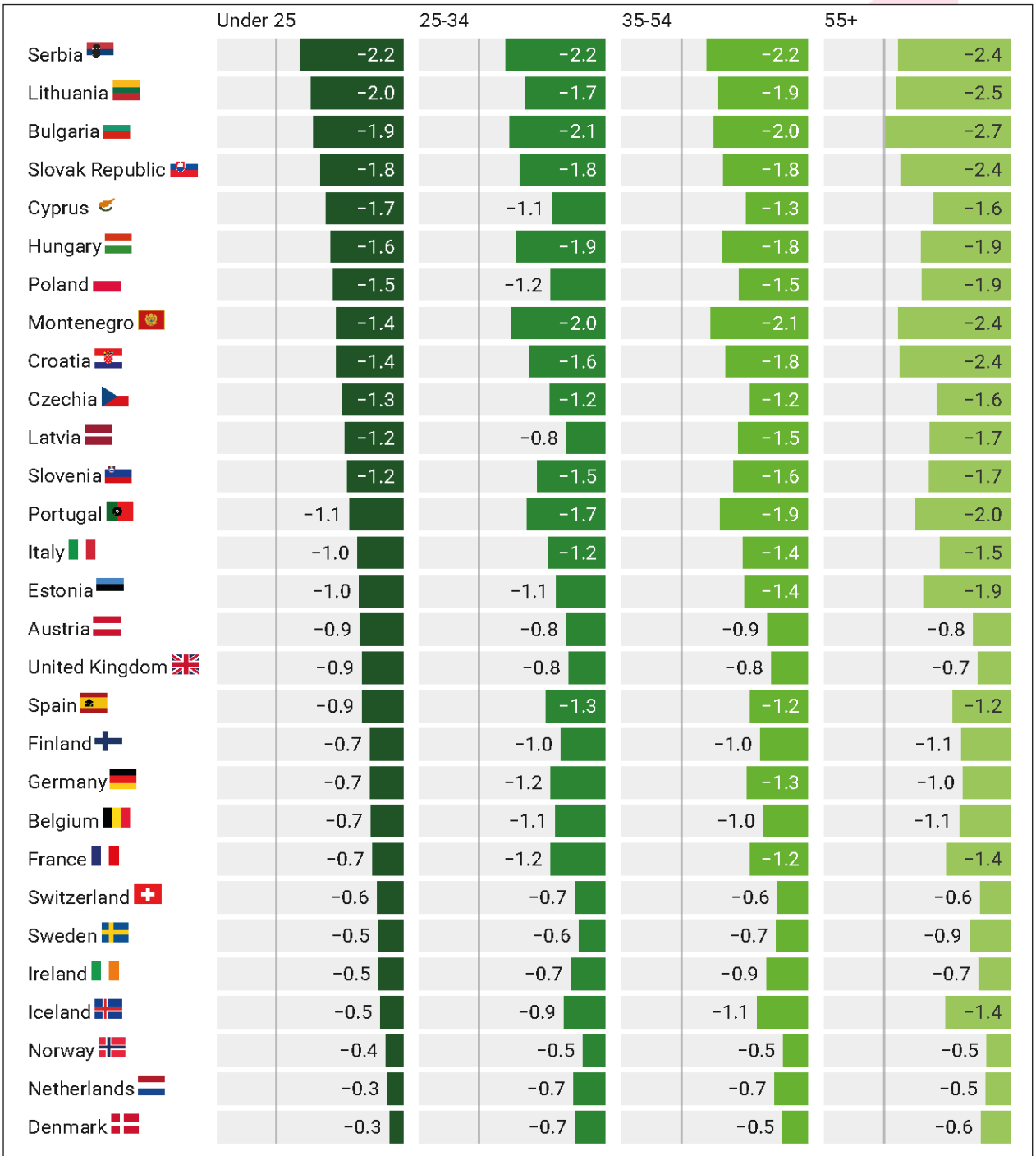
To analyse fairness, we rely on an indicator from the European Social Survey, which uses a nine-point scale, where 0 indicates that pay is fair, -4 represents extremely unfairly low pay, and +4 represents extremely unfairly high pay. Across all groups and countries, perceptions are consistently negative, indicating a general tendency to view pay as unfairly low.

Analysis of fairness of net pay by age and country reveals notable patterns (Figure 13). Across most European countries, younger adults tend to report slightly more favourable perceptions of pay fairness than older adults, although this trend is not uniform. Western and Northern European countries generally exhibit smaller gaps and higher perceptions of fairness across all age groups, while Eastern European and some Southern European countries show more pronounced negative perceptions, particularly among older adults.

Perceptions of unfair pay often worsen with age, reflecting possible cumulative experiences of labour market inequalities or generational differences in expectations. However, a few countries show relatively stable perceptions across age groups, suggesting that strong labour market institutions or social policies may buffer against age-related disparities in pay

fairness. Overall, these patterns highlight that both national context and life-course stage play a crucial role in shaping whether individuals feel that their earnings are fair. Countries with stronger social protection systems and more equitable labour market policies tend to mitigate age-related declines in perceived pay fairness, while transition economies and countries with greater labour market volatility show more pronounced negative perceptions.

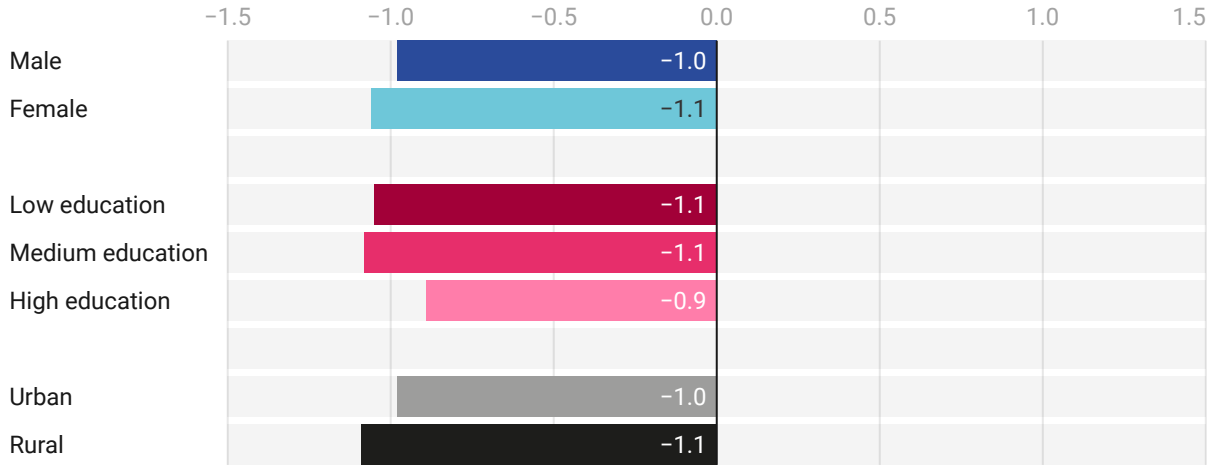
Figure 13. Fairness of net pay by age and country



European Social Survey Round 9 (2018/19). Own calculations (n=41,416). The answer scale consists of nine degrees, where 0 means that pay is fair, -4 indicates extremely unfairly low pay, and 4 indicates extremely unfairly high pay.

Among young Europeans, perceptions of pay fairness differ only slightly by gender, education, and place of residence (Figure 14). Young women report almost the same levels of fairness as young men, with only a marginal gap. Differences by education are also minimal, though those with higher qualifications tend to rate their pay as just a bit fairer than peers with lower or medium education. Similarly, rural residents express slightly lower fairness perceptions compared to those in urban areas. Overall, the variations are small, but they still point to subtle ways in which background and context shape how young Europeans view earnings.

Figure 14. Fairness of net among young Europeans by gender, education and place of living



European Social Survey Round 9 (2018/19). Own calculations (n=7,478 for gender; n=7,446 for education; n=7,473 for place of living; differences due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. The answer scale consists of nine degrees, where 0 means that pay is fair, -4 indicates extremely unfairly low pay, and 4 indicates extremely unfairly high pay. Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

3.3 Family: Conditions before people have a (or another) child

Key findings:

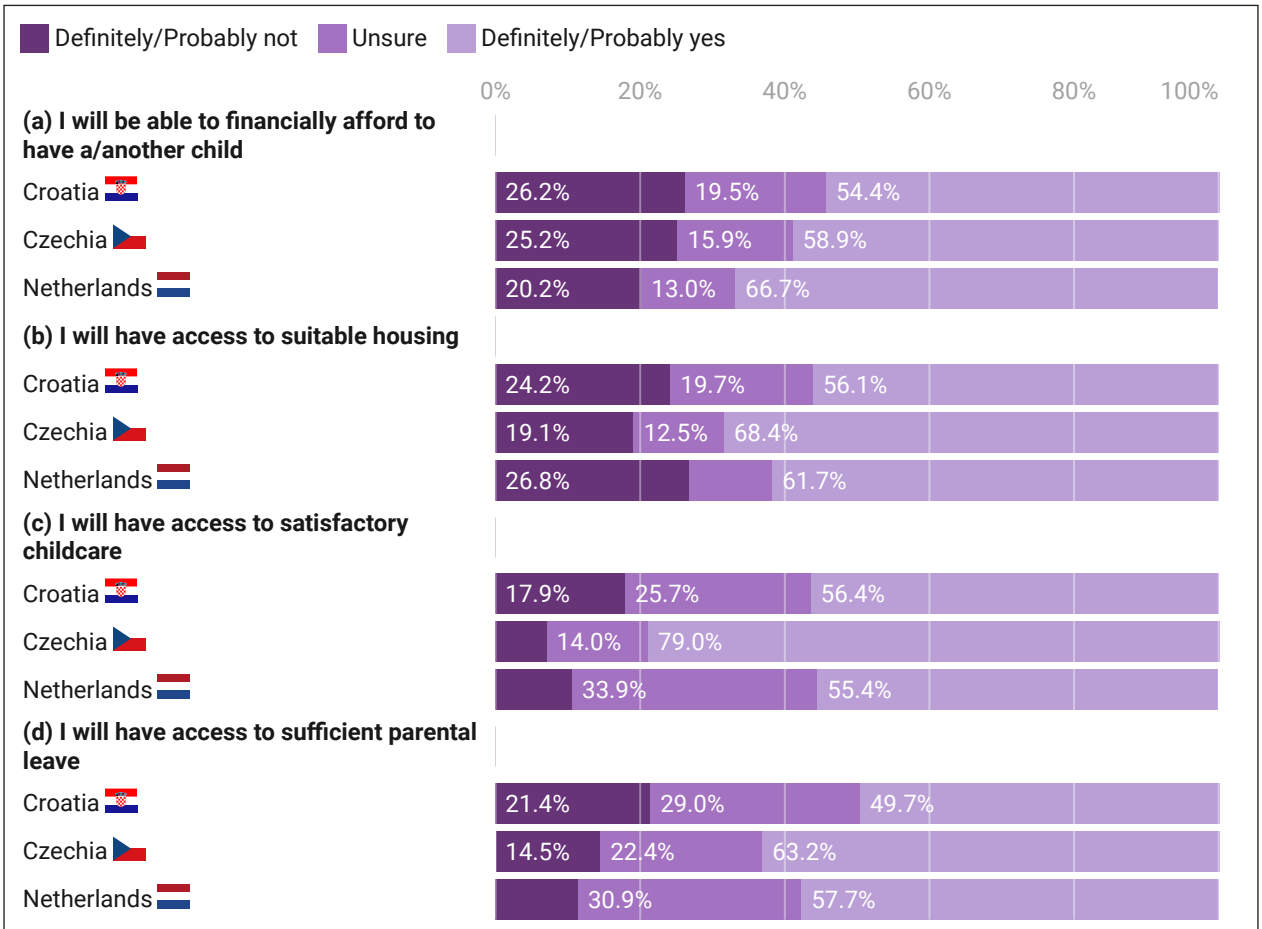
Age	There is a clear age gradient: the youngest age group (under 25) is less confident in meeting all four preconditions for having a/another child, while confidence generally increases with age.
Education	Among young Europeans, there is a pronounced educational gradient in confidence about meeting preconditions for having a (or another) child, with lower-educated individuals generally less confident across all aspects, especially their financial readiness.

Europe faces a significant demographic challenge due to an aging population and relatively low birth rates. Researchers often refer to the "triple transitions" in Europe – digital, green, and demographic – which underscore the importance of understanding family-related decisions (Petmesidou and Guillen, 2022). Questions about the intentions and preconditions for having children, as well as the roles of families, governments, non-profit organisations, and employers in providing care for children and the elderly, are therefore essential.

Based on the GGS data from three countries – Croatia, Czechia, and the Netherlands – covering the optional questions on preconditions for having a/another child, we examine respondents' perceptions of preconditions, such as financial stability, access to suitable housing, satisfactory childcare, and sufficient parental leave, which they believe can be met within the following three years (Figure 15).

Confidence in meeting these preconditions varies across countries. In Czechia, satisfactory childcare is seen as the most attainable, with 79% of respondents indicating they are definitely or probably confident that they would have access to satisfactory childcare. In the Netherlands, financial stability ranks highest, with 67% expressing confidence in meeting this condition. In Croatia, perceptions are more evenly distributed, with roughly 50–55% of respondents confident that all four conditions can be met. Overall, across the three countries, financial stability and housing are perceived as relatively secure, while childcare and parental leave show greater variability. These differences highlight areas where policy and support systems may significantly influence family planning decisions in these three national contexts.

Figure 15. Conditions before people have a/another child by country



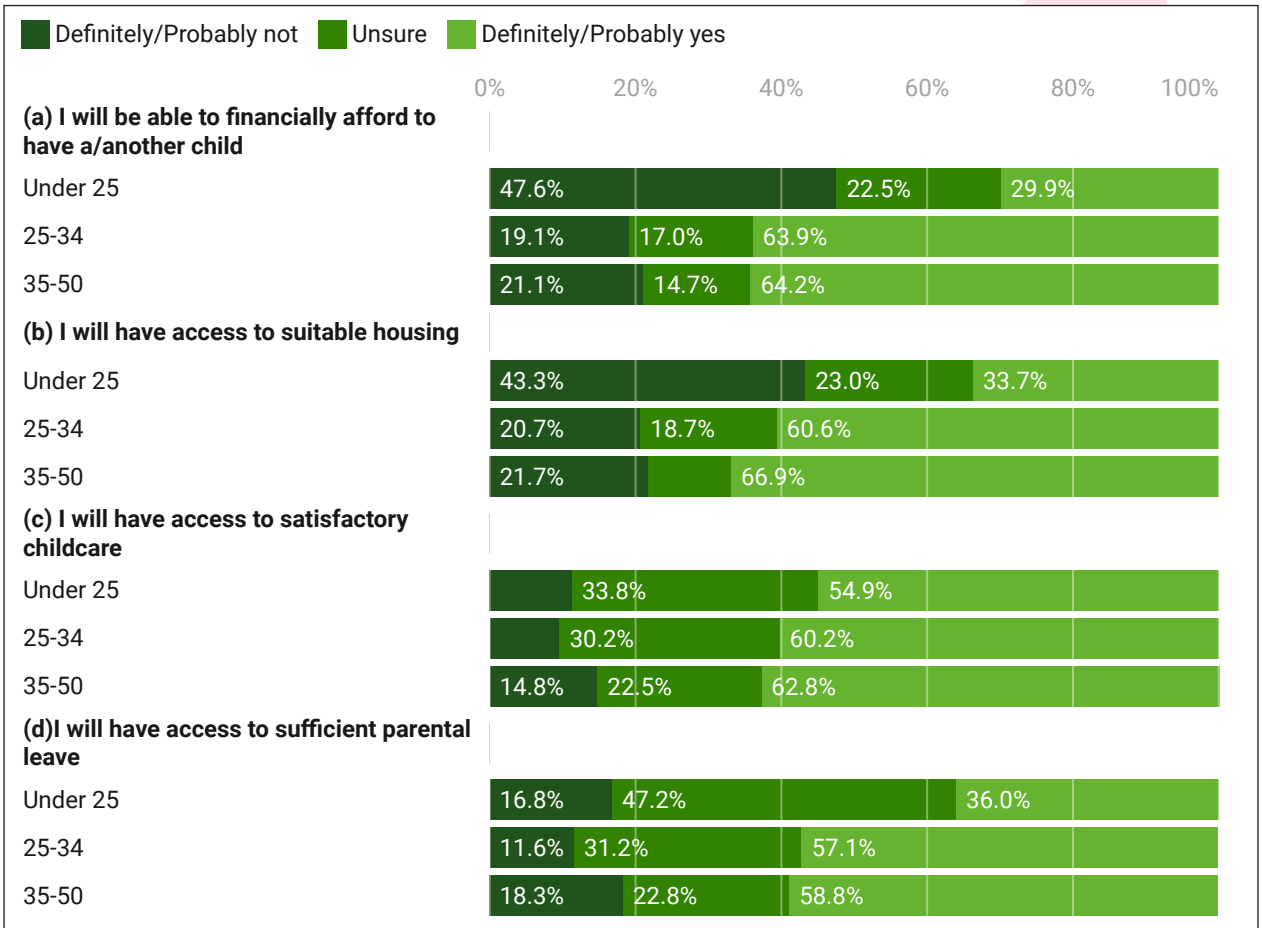
Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-23. Own calculations (n=(a) 13,662; (b) 13,437; (c) 13,417; (d) 13,194). Sample: Female age <50; Male with a female partner age <50; Female with a female partner age <50. Data reflects responses to whether various conditions for having a/another child are expected to be fulfilled within the next three years.

Examining how confidence in meeting the preconditions for having a (or another) child varies by age provides insight into the life-stage challenges that influence family planning decisions (Figure 16). As expected, the youngest age group (under 25) is less confident in meeting all four preconditions for having a (or another) child. Only about 30-35% of them feel certain that they will be financially ready, have suitable housing, and sufficient parental leave within the next three years. This pattern likely reflects the challenges young adults face at the start of their careers, including lower incomes and the transition from education to work.

Older respondents, by contrast, are roughly twice as confident in their financial conditions, likely due to greater job stability, accumulated savings, and more established career paths. The importance of suitable housing decreases with age, reflecting greater stability or established living arrangements among older adults. Interestingly, confidence in meeting childcare preconditions does not vary much by age: around 40% of respondents in each age group are unsure that satisfactory childcare will be available if they decide to have a (or another) child.

Even though the youngest group shows higher levels of struggle across most preconditions, it is important to note that concerns about meeting these conditions remain relevant among older age groups as well. Around 40% of respondents in older groups are still unsure or only somewhat confident about their ability to meet key conditions, highlighting that uncertainty about family planning persists across life stages.

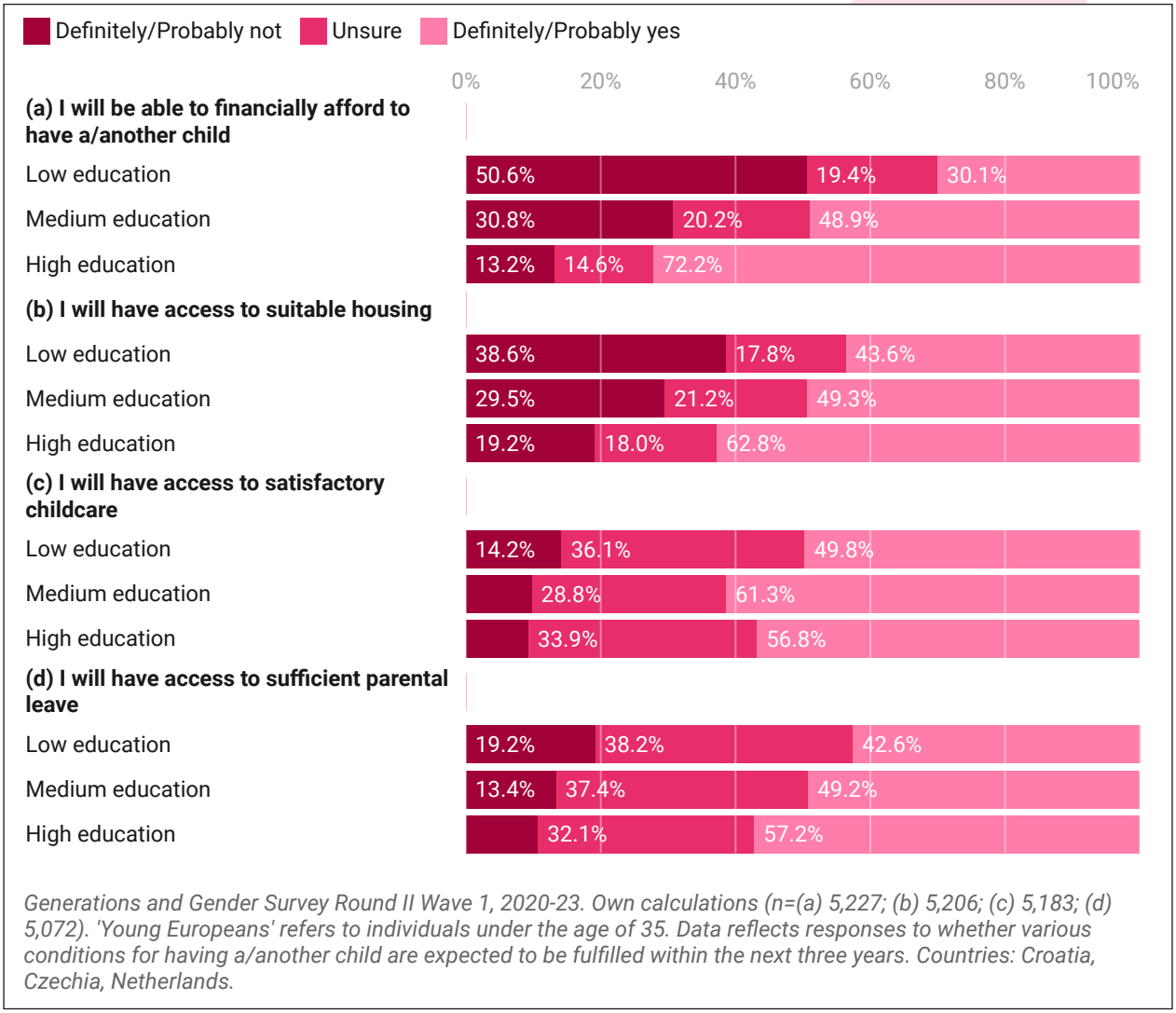
Figure 16. Conditions before people have a/another child by age



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-23. Own calculations (n=(a) 13,662; (b) 13,437; (c) 13,418; (d) 13,194. Sample: Female age <50; Male with a female partner age <50; Female with a female partner age <50. Data reflects responses to whether various conditions for having a/another child are expected to be fulfilled within the next three years. Countries: Croatia, Czechia, Netherlands.

Examining confidence in meeting preconditions for having a (or another) child among young Europeans reveals a clear educational gradient (Figure 17). Young people with lower levels of education are generally less confident across all aspects, particularly regarding their financial ability to afford a child. Among highly educated young adults, financial readiness is less of a concern, but satisfactory childcare and sufficient parental leave remain key challenges, with fewer than 60% expressing confidence in meeting these conditions. Thus, even highly educated youth face uncertainty around childcare and parental leave, highlighting the need for targeted policies that address support-related constraints in family planning.

Figure 17. Conditions before people have a/another child among young Europeans by education



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-23. Own calculations (n=(a) 5,227; (b) 5,206; (c) 5,183; (d) 5,072). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Data reflects responses to whether various conditions for having a/another child are expected to be fulfilled within the next three years. Countries: Croatia, Czechia, Netherlands.

3.4 Intergenerational solidarity

The concept of intergenerational solidarity refers to the mutual responsibilities, support, and resource-sharing between different generations in society. This includes the help parents provide to their children, the care children give to aging parents, and the role of government in supporting these processes. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as imbalances or gaps in support can create tensions between generations and influence life course decisions, such as entering the labour market, starting a family, or planning for old age.

3.4.1 From parents to their adult children

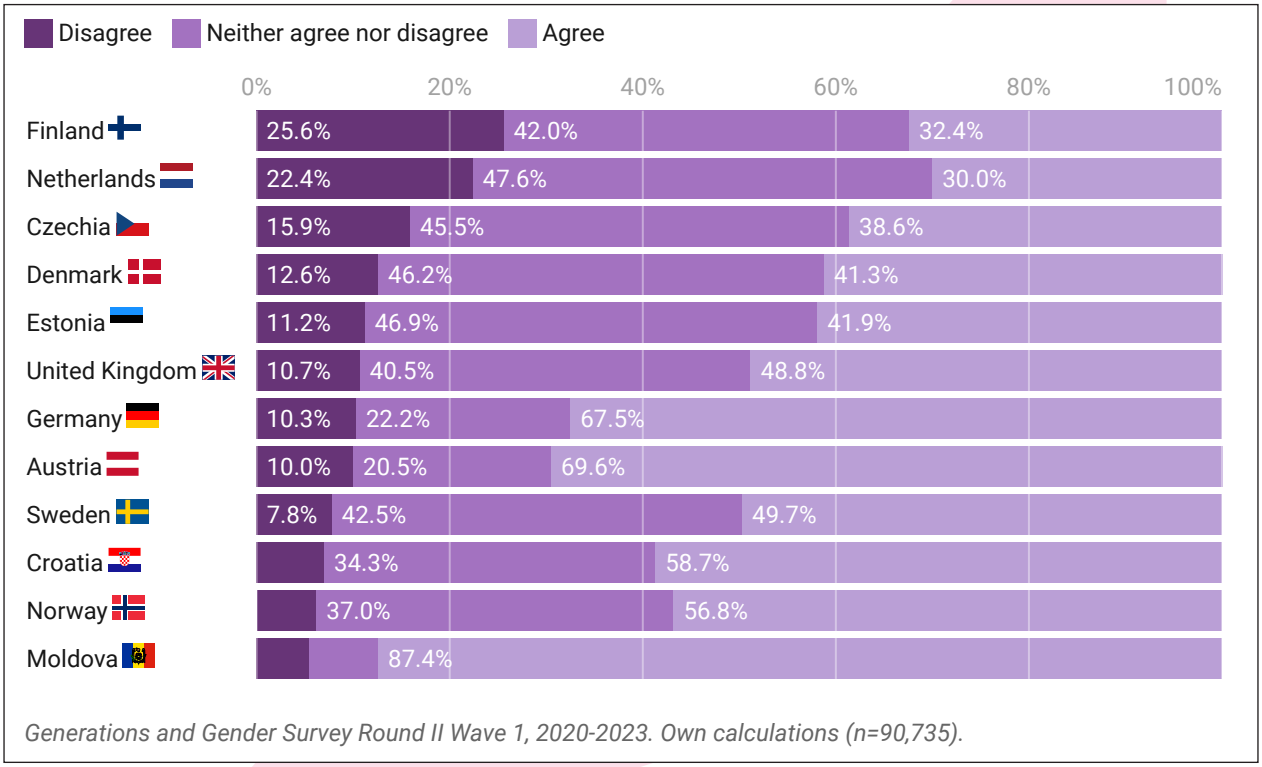
Key findings:

Age	Younger Europeans seem to be more in favour of the statement that parents ought to provide financial help to their adult children when they are in financial difficulties.
Education	No major differences were identified between differently educated young Europeans who agree or strongly agree that parents should help their adult children financially when they need help, and regardless of educational level over half the sample showed support for this view.
Country	Although there are large variations by country in support for the view that parents should help their adult children financially when they need it, there does not seem to be an easily identifiable geographical pattern. Variations could be attributed to different statal and institutional systems of support.

First, we focus on the question of whether parents should financially support their adult children facing difficulties, which can arise from economic, social, cultural, or personal factors. For example, limited job opportunities can make the transition from school to work particularly challenging for young people, and the lack of accessible or high-quality childcare can hinder young parents' ability to maintain dual incomes within the household. These challenges highlight the broader context in which parental support is needed and they shape how society perceives parents' responsibility to provide financial assistance to their adult children when needed. Understanding these dynamics is essential for informing policies that balance support between generations while encouraging young adults' independence.

Figure 18 shows that perceptions of parental financial support for adult children vary considerably across European countries. For example, Moldova represents an outstanding case, with the highest level of support for this statement at 87%. Among EU member states included in the data, Austria stands out with the highest support, at nearly 70%. The lowest levels of support are observed in the Netherlands (30%) and Finland (32%). While the geographic distribution of results does not necessarily indicate a clear cultural pattern, it may reflect the extent to which financial support can be relied upon from national governments.

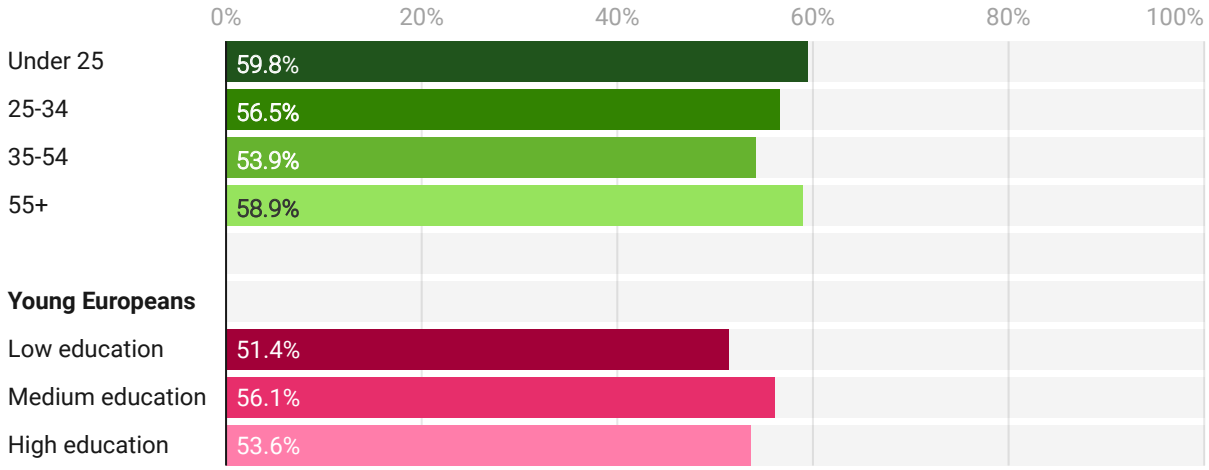
Figure 18. Parents ought to provide financial help for their adult children in financial difficulties by country



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-2023. Own calculations (n=90,735).

In contrast to the observed differences between countries, there are no pronounced age differences in views on whether parents should financially support their adult children, although younger and older Europeans seem slightly more in favour of this statement (Figure 19). Among younger Europeans (under 35), education does not seem to have a major impact on their views. Just over half of young people across all educational levels agree or strongly agree that parents have an obligation to provide financial support when needed, with those of medium education showing slightly higher support (56.1%) compared with lower-educated (51.3%) and highly educated (53.6%) peers.

Figure 19. Parents ought to provide financial help for their adult children in financial difficulties by age and among young Europeans by education



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 20-2023. Own calculation (n=91,523 for age and n=23,383 for education). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Share of respondents who answered 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' to 'Parents ought to provide financial help for their adult children in financial difficulties'. Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom.

3.4.2 From children to their parents

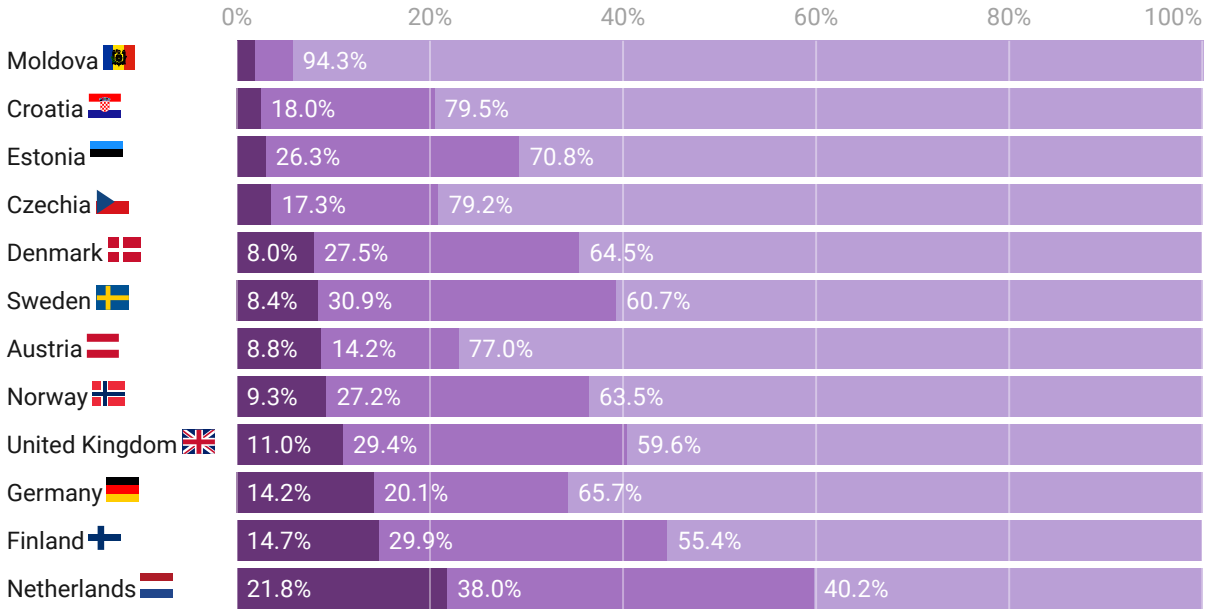
Key findings:

Age	The youngest generation (under 25) appears most supportive of children providing care to their parents.
Gender	Men appear somewhat more supportive of the idea that children should provide care to their parents.
Education	No major differences between respondents with lower, medium or higher levels of education with regards to attitudes to children providing care to their parents.
Country	Although there are large variations by country in support for the view that children should help their parents when they need it, there does not seem to be an easily identifiable geographical pattern. Variations could be attributed to different statal and institutional systems of support.

The theory of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) highlights the multiple ways in which family members support one another, including emotional closeness, shared values, and practical or functional support. One important aspect of this solidarity is the care that adult children may provide to their aging parents when they face health or other difficulties. This section examines societal attitudes toward children's responsibility to support and care for parents in need, considering how these expectations vary across age, education, and cultural contexts.

Looking at attitudes toward children providing care to parents in need by country, we again observe significant country variation (Figure 20). Support for this responsibility is highest in Moldova, where 94% of respondents agree that children should help their parents in need, making Moldova an outstanding case, as was also seen for parental financial support to adult children. Among EU member states, the highest level of support is observed in Croatia (79%), while the lowest levels are reported in the Netherlands (40%) and Finland (55%). These differences may reflect variations in social policies, welfare support, and cultural expectations regarding family obligations across countries, highlighting the role of both government and societal norms in shaping intergenerational care.

Figure 20. Children should care for parents in need by country



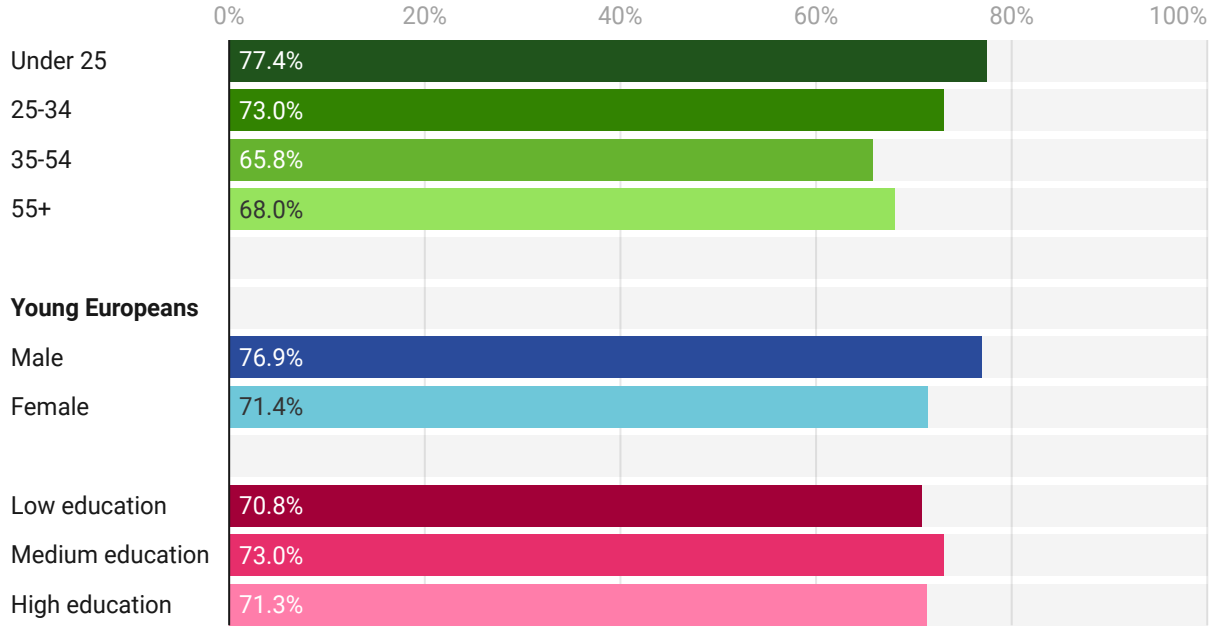
Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 20-2023. Own calculations (n=91,524). Distribution of respondents to 'Children should take responsibility for caring for their parents when parents are in need'. Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom.

Examining attitudes by age, the youngest generation appears most supportive of children providing care to their parents, with 77% of respondents under 25 agreeing with this responsibility (Figure 21). Support is somewhat lower among the middle-age group (35-54), where around 66% endorse this view, and increases slightly among older adults to 68%. This pattern may reflect a combination of factors, including generational differences in values, personal experiences with family caregiving, and expectations about reciprocal support within families. Overall, while support for children caring for their parents remains strong across all age groups, younger adults show the highest level of endorsement, suggesting that intergenerational care continues to be a widely recognized social norm.

Looking at gender differences among younger Europeans, men appear somewhat more supportive of the idea that children should provide care for their parents, with 77% agreeing compared to 71% of women (Figure 21). This finding may seem counterintuitive, given that women traditionally spend more time on caregiving than men. It suggests the importance of linking subjective perceptions with actual time-use patterns: while men may express stronger agreement in principle, women's greater involvement in day-to-day caregiving responsibilities could shape their views differently, reflecting the practical realities of balancing work, family, and care obligations.

With regard to education, the data show no major differences between younger European respondents with low, medium, or high levels of education (Figure 21). The broad consensus highlights how deeply rooted this norm remains across social groups, even as societal changes affect family structures and welfare systems.

Figure 21. Children should care for parents in need, by age group and among young Europeans by gender and education



Generations and Gender Survey Round II Wave 1, 2020-2023. Own calculations (n=91,523 by age; n=25,337 by gender; n=23,546 by education). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Share of respondents who answered 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' to 'Children should take responsibility for caring for their parents when parents are in need'. Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom.

3.4.3 Role of government

Key findings:

Age	Preferences for primary childcare providers are fairly consistent across age groups in European countries, with family members and government agencies chosen at similar rates.
Gender	Men slightly prefer family-based care for children, while women show a marginally higher preference for government agencies and private providers; these differences are more pronounced when it comes to assistance for the elderly.
Education	Higher-educated young Europeans favour government and private care for both children and the elderly, whereas lower-educated respondents rely more heavily on family members.
Urban vs. Rural	Urban respondents tend to favour government agencies for both childcare and elderly care, whereas rural respondents clearly prioritise family-based support.

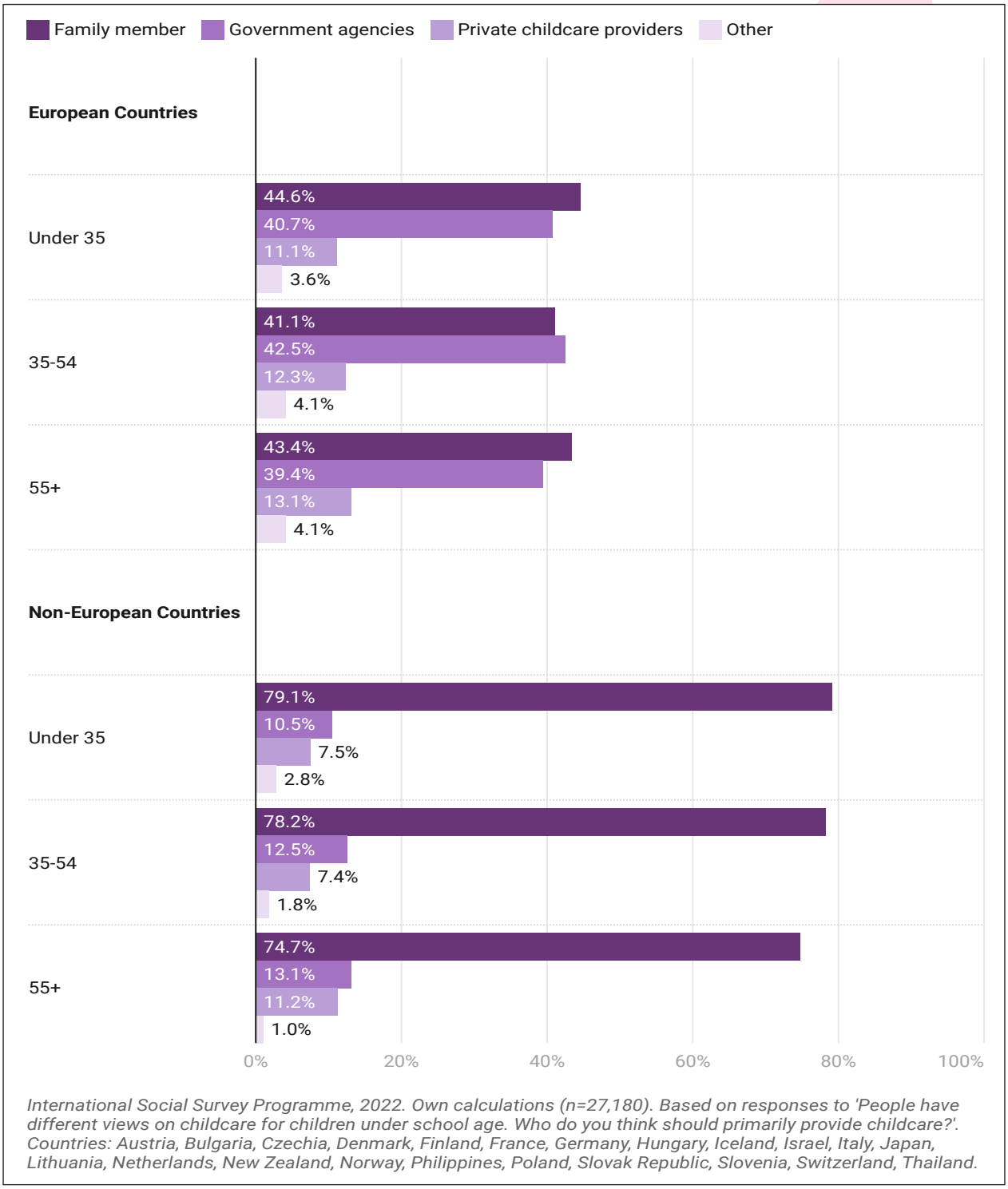
Building on the discussion of intergenerational solidarity within families—where parents support their children and, in turn, children support their parents—an equally important question is the role of government in providing care across generations. The state's involvement can reduce the direct burden on families and shape expectations of intergenerational solidarity. Two key areas illustrate these dynamics: the provision of childcare and support for the elderly. In both cases, preferences vary regarding who should be the primary provider of assistance—family members, government agencies, private providers, or other actors. Examining these preferences offers valuable insight into societal expectations about the balance of responsibility between families and the state, and the extent to which individuals place trust in public versus private solutions to care needs across generations.

Figure 22 presents preferences for primary childcare providers for children under school age, comparing European and non-European countries across different age groups. In European countries, opinions are relatively balanced between family members and government agencies: among younger respondents (under 35), 45% prefer family care, while 41% favour government provision. Similar patterns are observed among those aged 35–54 and 55+, with government agencies consistently chosen by about 40–42% and family members by around 41–44%. Private childcare providers remain a minority preference across all age groups (11–13%).

In contrast, respondents in non-European countries show a much stronger preference for family-based childcare. Among the youngest group (under 35), nearly 80% favour family members as the primary providers, compared with only 10.5% who prefer government agencies. This trend holds across older groups, with family care supported by 78% of those aged 35–54 and 75% of those aged 55+. Government agencies, private providers, and other options play only a marginal role in these countries.

These results highlight a sharp divide between European and non-European contexts: while Europeans are more evenly split between family and government responsibility for childcare, non-Europeans overwhelmingly rely on family members. This contrast underscores the central role of institutional arrangements in shaping intergenerational fairness, as the availability (or absence) of public childcare services directly affects the extent to which families must shoulder the burden of care.

Figure 22. Primary childcare provider preferences for children under age among European and non-European countries, by age group



International Social Survey Programme, 2022. Own calculations (n=27,180). Based on responses to 'People have different views on childcare for children under school age. Who do you think should primarily provide childcare?'. Countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand.

Figure 23 examines childcare preferences among younger Europeans, disaggregated by gender, education, and place of residence. Overall, men and women show broadly similar views, with men slightly more likely to prefer family members and women somewhat more inclined toward government agencies or private childcare providers.

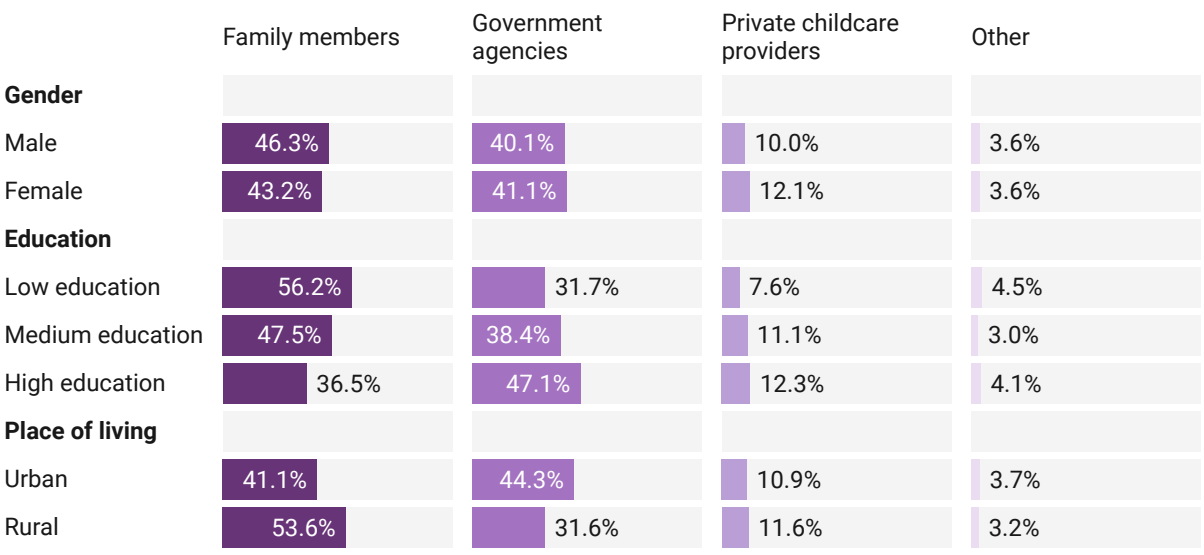
More pronounced differences emerge when looking at education. Younger people with higher education place greater emphasis on government agencies as the primary childcare provider (47%), while only 36.5% prefer family care. By contrast, those with low education lean strongly toward family members (56%), with government support mentioned by less than one-third (32%). An educational gradient is also visible in preferences for private childcare providers, which are chosen more often by highly educated respondents than by those with lower levels of education.

A notable contrast emerges between urban and rural respondents. In urban areas, preferences are almost evenly divided, with 44% favouring government agencies and 41% preferring family care. In rural areas, however, family members are clearly the dominant choice (53%), while government agencies are mentioned much less frequently (32%).

Taken together, these findings suggest that education and place of residence are stronger predictors of childcare preferences than gender. Higher education and urban living are associated with greater reliance on government childcare provision, while lower education and rural residence correspond to stronger expectations of family-based care. This may reflect higher awareness among urban and more educated populations of the potential benefits of institutional day care. Lower expectations of rural inhabitants toward governmental day care institutions may be influenced by the limited availability of accessible facilities in small settlements, as well as stronger cultural traditions of family-based care. Economic factors, such as the perceived cost of institutional care and reliance on local family networks, may also play a role in shaping these preferences.

This divide is closely tied to questions of intergenerational fairness, as reliance on families—particularly in rural or lower-educated groups—can reinforce inequalities in access to quality childcare and shape opportunities for both parents and children.

Figure 23. Primary childcare provider preferences for children under age among young Europeans by gender, education and place of living

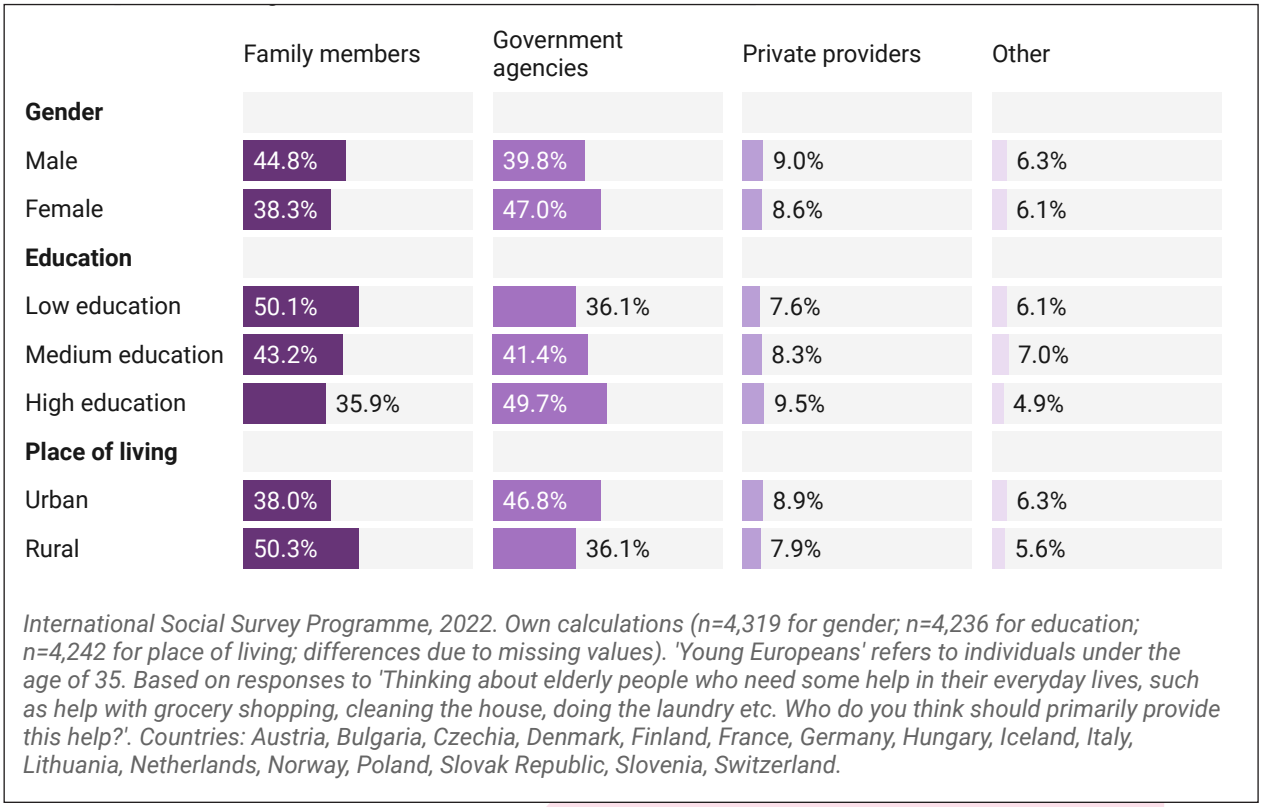


International Social Survey Programme, 2022. Own calculations (n=4,235 for gender; n=4,153 for education; n=4,157 for place of living; differences due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Based on responses to 'People have different views on childcare for children under school age. Who do you think should primarily provide childcare?'. Countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland.

Similar patterns are observed when looking at preferences for the primary source of assistance for elderly people with everyday activities among young Europeans (Figure 24). As with childcare, men are more likely to favour family members (45%), while women show a stronger preference for government agencies (47%), with private providers and other sources playing a smaller role. Education continues to shape expectations: higher-educated respondents rely more on government agencies (50%) and less on family (36%) and lower-educated respondents favour family care (50%) over government provision (36%). Place of residence also matters, with urban young people leaning toward government agencies (47%) and rural respondents prioritising family support (50%).

These patterns suggest that education, gender, and urban-rural residence shape expectations about elderly care: higher education, female gender, and urban living are associated with greater reliance on institutional support, while lower education, male gender, and rural residence correspond to stronger expectations of family-based care. These patterns reflect traditional cultural norms, as well as lower affordability and accessibility of alternatives for the elderly. Limited availability and high transport costs may prevent lower-educated and rural inhabitants from using non-family care options. Addressing Europe's demographic challenges therefore requires targeted measures that support both early childcare and elderly care, with particular attention to the needs of low-educated and rural populations.

Figure 24. Primary source of assistance preferences for elderly people with everyday activities among young Europeans by gender, education and place of living



International Social Survey Programme, 2022. Own calculations (n=4,319 for gender; n=4,236 for education; n=4,242 for place of living; differences due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Based on responses to 'Thinking about elderly people who need some help in their everyday lives, such as help with grocery shopping, cleaning the house, doing the laundry etc. Who do you think should primarily provide this help?'. Countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland.

3.5 Trust in democracy

Strong societies rely on trustworthy democratic institutions, making the analysis of trust in these institutions as well as understanding how citizens perceive and engage with these institutions essential for understanding the political landscape. Voting behaviour reflects generational patterns of active citizenship, as highlighted by Aassve et al. (2024). A key challenge is to increase participation in national and EU elections, reduce non-voting, and channel the non-traditional forms of political engagement that are more attractive to younger generations into conventional voting behaviour. This section explores trust in institutions, voting behaviour, and forms of active citizenship from a generational perspective.

3.5.1 Trust in Parliament

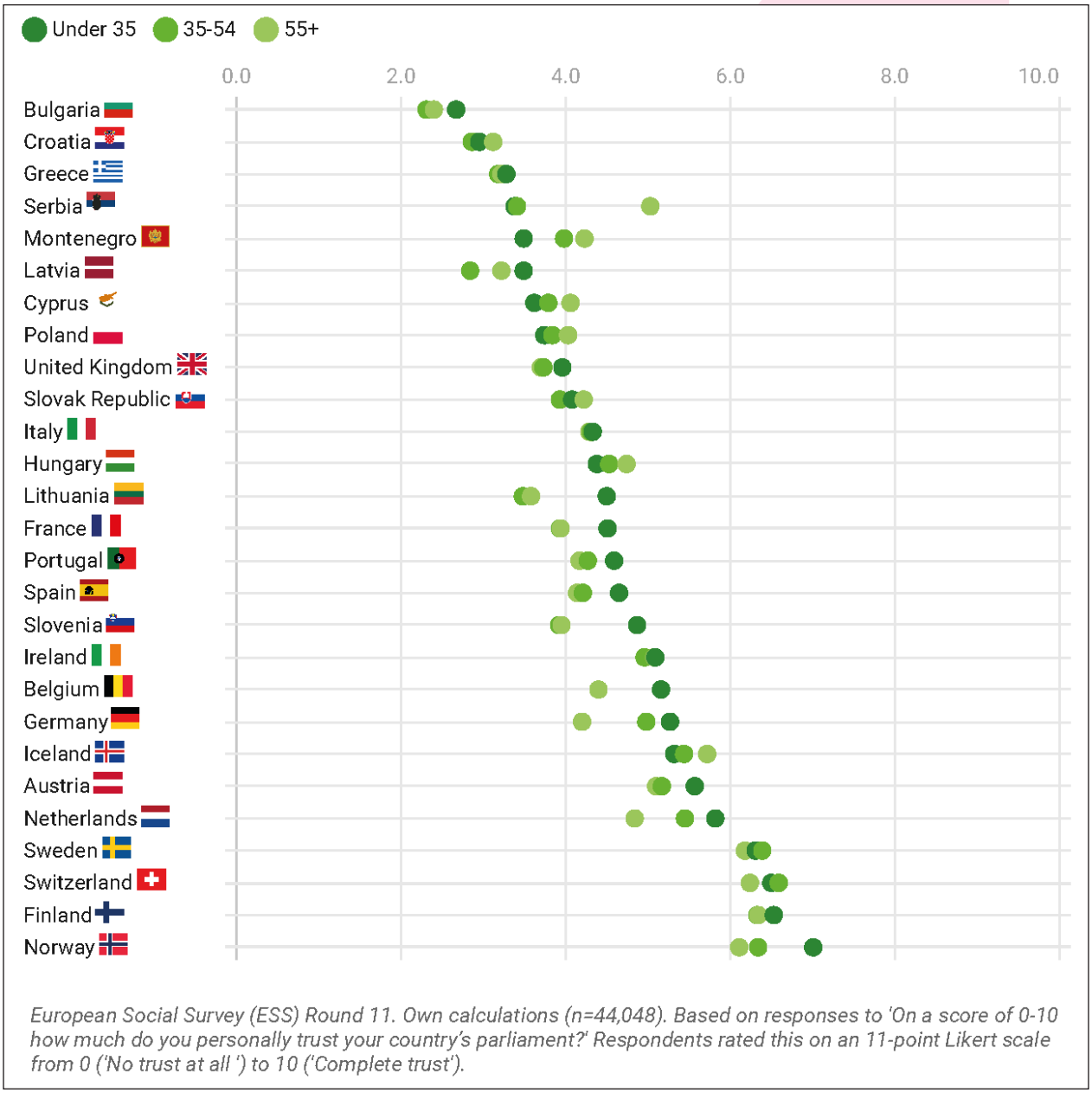
Key findings:

Age	Generational differences in trust in national parliaments are present but not uniform, with younger people often slightly more trusting in Western Europe, while in parts of Eastern and Southern Europe older generations express higher levels of trust.
Education	Young Europeans with higher education tend to show slightly higher trust in national parliaments, while those with medium education report the lowest levels.
Urban vs. Rural	Urban youth generally express slightly more trust in national parliaments than rural youth, though the difference is modest.
Country	Trust levels vary widely across countries, with the highest confidence found in Nordic countries and Switzerland, and the lowest in several Eastern and Southern European states.

Trust in national parliaments is a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy, shaping how citizens view the effectiveness and fairness of political institutions. Looking across European and neighbouring countries, substantial variation can be observed in average levels of trust, ranging from very low values in Bulgaria (around 2.3–2.7 on a scale from 0 to 10 across age groups) and Croatia (around 3) to comparatively high trust in Norway (6–7), Switzerland (6.2–6.6), and Finland (around 6.3–6.5) (Figure 25).

This pattern reflects a well-documented East–West divide in trust in democratic institutions, with Northern and Western Europe showing considerably stronger confidence in national parliaments than Southern and Eastern Europe. When broken down by age groups, generational differences appear but are less uniform than in other areas of social life. In many countries—including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands—young people under 35 express slightly higher levels of trust than older generations. In contrast, in Cyprus, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland, and Serbia, trust increases with age, with older adults reporting higher confidence in parliament. Still, in some contexts such as Italy or Greece, differences by age are minimal, suggesting that trust is more strongly shaped by national political contexts than by generational divides.

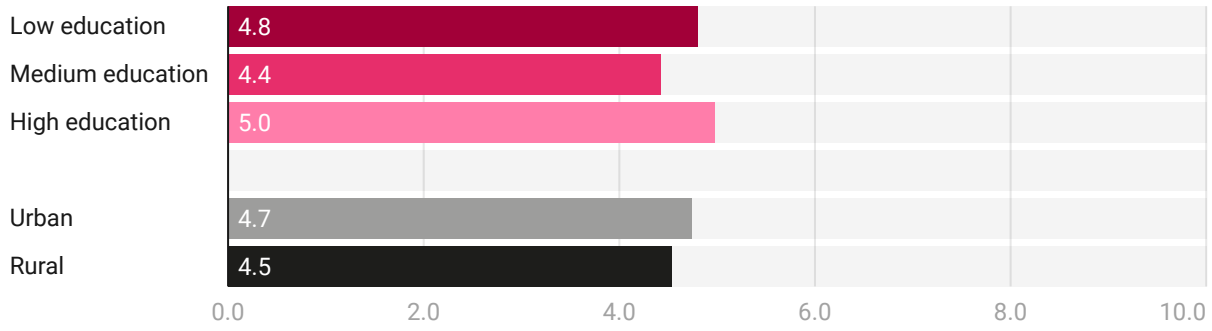
Figure 25. Trust in national Parliament, by age and country



European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11. Own calculations (n=44,048). Based on responses to 'On a score of 0-10 how much do you personally trust your country's parliament?' Respondents rated this on an 11-point Likert scale from 0 ('No trust at all ') to 10 ('Complete trust').

Among younger Europeans, trust in national parliaments shows modest differences by both education and place of living (Figure 26). Young people with higher education report the highest trust, followed by those with low education, while medium-educated respondents show slightly lower confidence. Regarding place of living, urban youth express slightly more trust than their rural counterparts. Overall, these differences are relatively small, suggesting that trust in national parliaments among young Europeans is broadly similar across education levels and residential contexts, with only minor variations.

Figure 26. Trust in national Parliament among young Europeans, by education and place of living



European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11. Own calculations (n=9,216 for education; n=9,263 for place of living; differences due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Based on responses to 'On a score of 0-10 how much do you personally trust your country's parliament?' Respondents rated this on an 11-point Likert scale from 0 ('No trust at all ') to 10 ('Complete trust'). Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

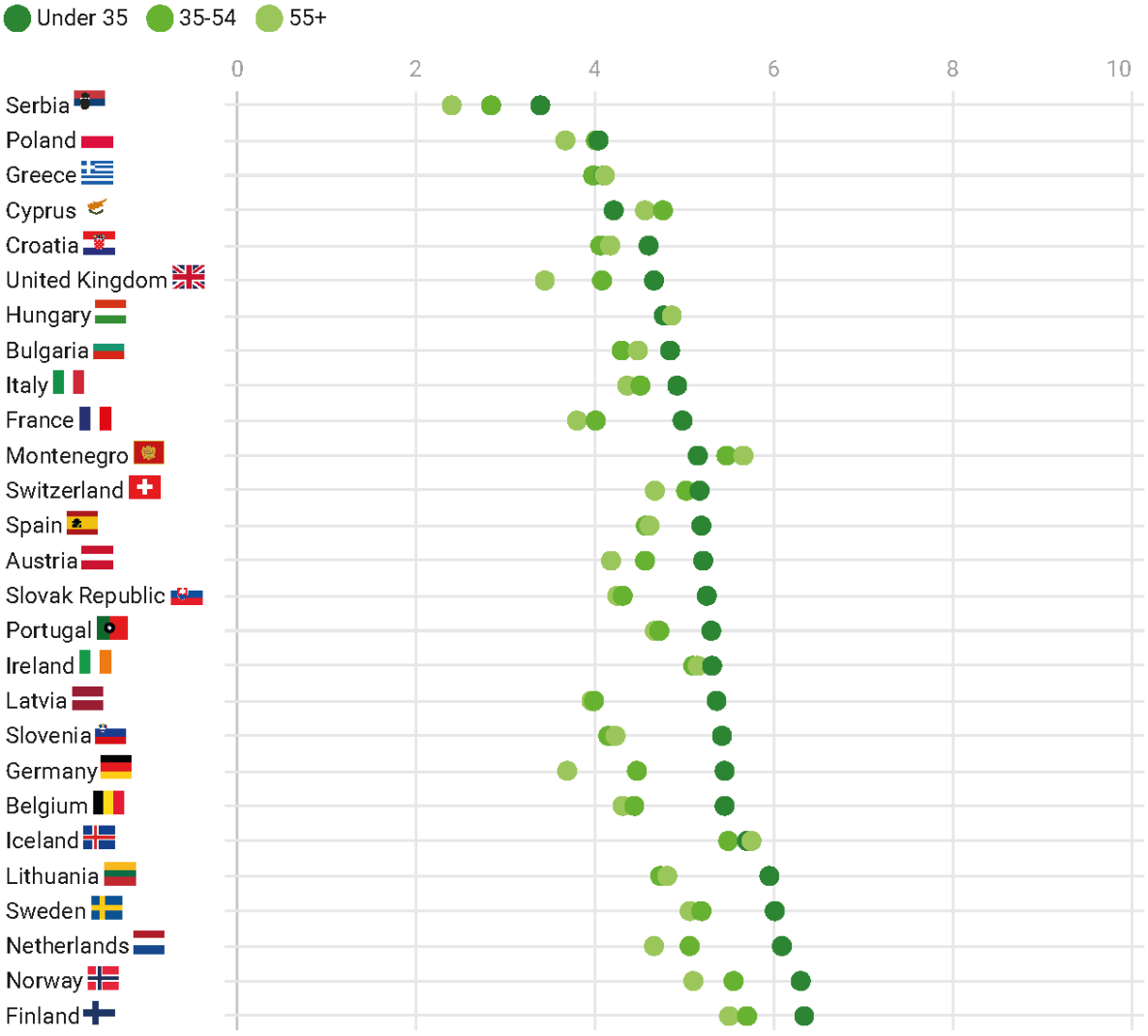
3.5.2 Trust in the European Parliament

Key findings:

Age	Younger Europeans generally show higher trust in the European Parliament than middle-aged and older adults.
Country	Trust levels vary widely across countries, with the highest confidence in Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and Lithuania, and the lowest in Serbia, Poland, and Greece.

Trust in the European Parliament shows notable variation across countries and age groups, reflecting both national political contexts and generational perspectives (Figure 27). Among young Europeans (under 35), the highest levels of trust are observed in Nordic countries as well as in the Netherlands and Lithuania. By contrast, the lowest trust among young people is reported in Serbia, followed by Poland and Greece. When looking at generational patterns, younger adults generally exhibit higher trust in the European Parliament compared with middle-aged and older adults in most Western and Northern European countries. In some Southern and Eastern European countries, such as Cyprus, Hungary, Montenegro, and Greece, trust either increases with age or shows minimal generational differences. The generational patterns suggest that younger Europeans, especially in countries with stronger EU integration, remain relatively supportive of supranational democratic institutions. Moreover, trust in the European Parliament is generally higher than in national parliaments among young Europeans.

Figure 27. Trust in the European Parliament, by age and country



European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11. Own calculations (n=42,140). Based on responses to 'On a score of 0-10 how much do you personally trust the European parliament?' Respondents rated this on an 11-point Likert scale from 0 ('No trust at all ') to 10 ('Complete trust').

3.5.3 Voting behaviour

Key findings:

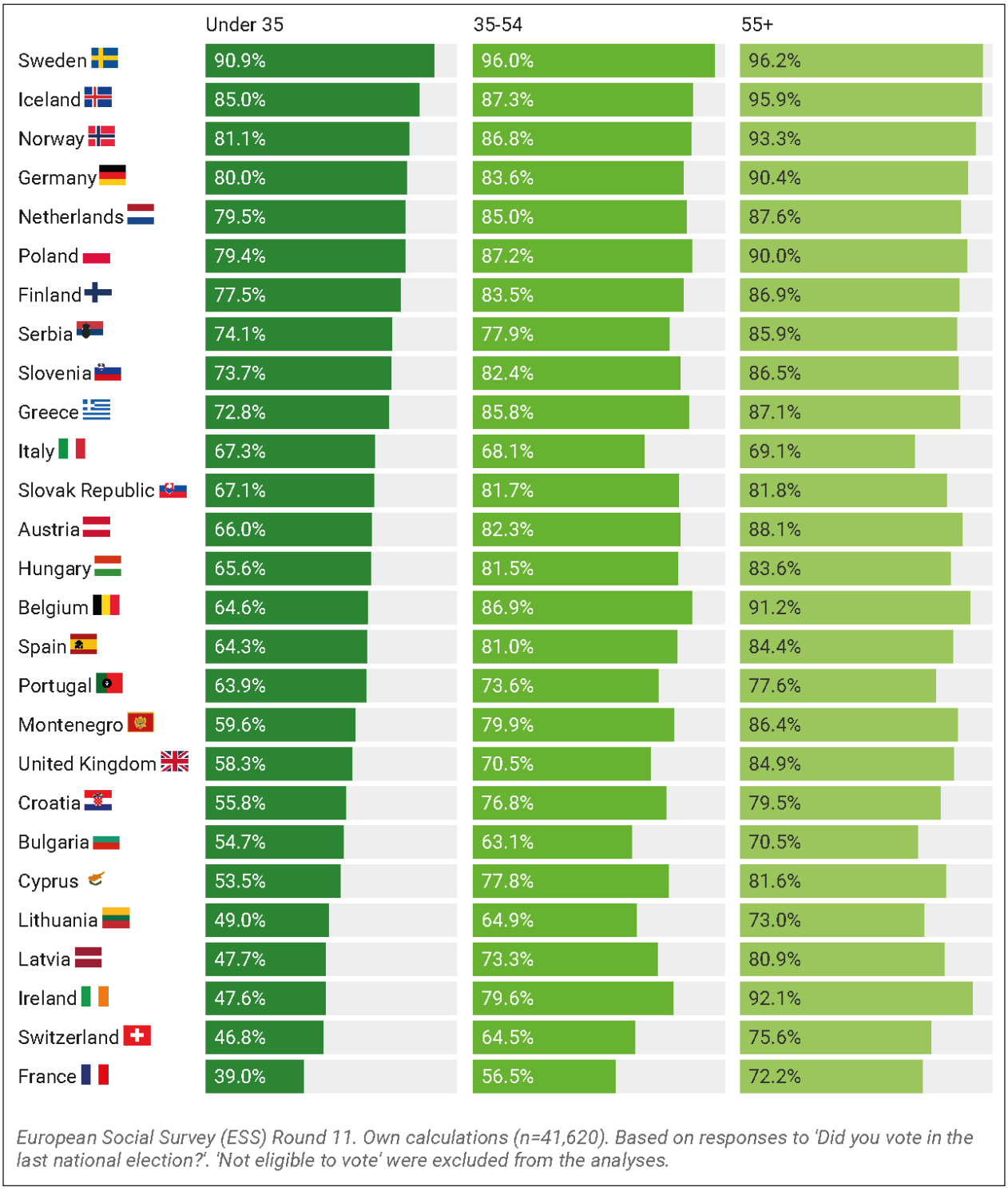
Age	A clear age gradient is visible, with older generations showing the highest turnout, middle-aged groups in between, and younger adults the least likely to vote.
Gender	Among younger Europeans, men report slightly higher turnout than women, but the difference is small.
Education	Among younger Europeans, education shows a strong divide, with highly educated people far more likely to vote.
Urban vs. Rural	Among younger Europeans, no urban–rural divide is observed when it comes to likelihood to vote.
Country	Nordic countries stand out with the highest youth turnout, while Southern and Eastern European countries, along with Switzerland and France, display significantly lower participation among young people.

Voter turnout is a key indicator of democratic participation, and examining differences across generations provides important insights into how engaged young people are in shaping the political future of Europe.

Voting turnout varies substantially both across countries and between age groups (Figure 28). Across all European countries, turnout is consistently lower among young adults under 35 compared to middle-aged and older voters. This generational gap is particularly striking in Ireland (48% among under-35s vs. 92% among those 55+), France (39% vs. 72%), and Latvia (48% vs. 81%), where youth turnout lags far behind that of older cohorts. At the same time, notable country differences emerge. The highest youth turnout is found in Sweden (91%), Iceland (85%), Norway (81%). By contrast, the lowest youth turnout is reported in France, Latvia, and Switzerland, where fewer than half of young people vote.

These patterns highlight both a persistent generational divide in political participation and striking cross-country differences, with youth turnout particularly weak in parts of Western and Southern Europe, while more balanced across age groups in countries like Sweden and Italy.

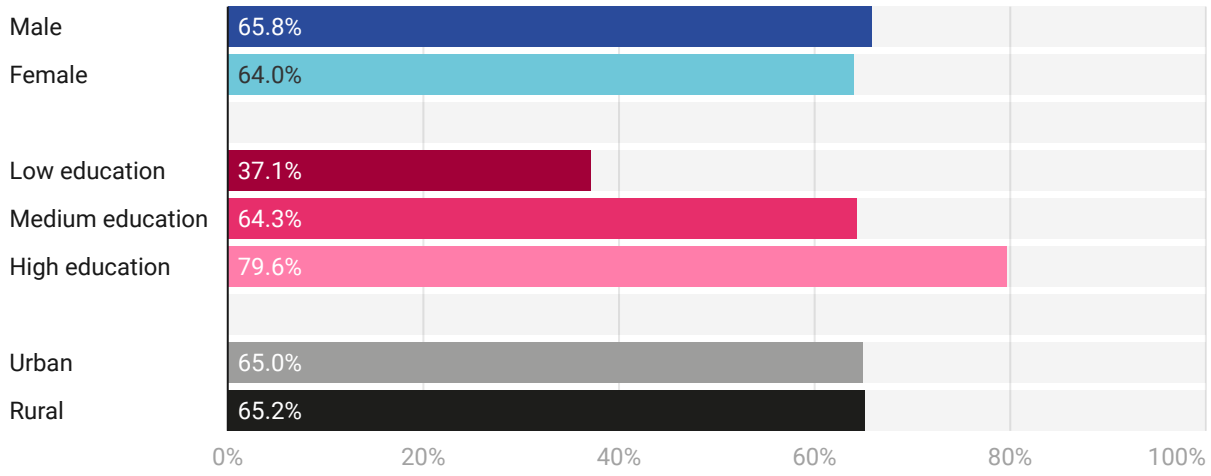
Figure 28. Voting turnout by age and country



European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11. Own calculations (n=41,620). Based on responses to 'Did you vote in the last national election?'. 'Not eligible to vote' were excluded from the analyses.

Among younger Europeans, gender differences in voting turnout are modest, with men (66%) slightly more likely to vote than women (64%). Place of living also does not matter significantly, with turnout nearly identical in urban and rural areas. By contrast, education shows a strong divide: turnout rises steeply from just 37% among those with low education to 80% among the highly educated, underscoring the role of educational attainment in fostering political participation.

Figure 29. Voting turnout among young Europeans, by gender, education and place of living



European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11. Own calculations (n=7,620 for gender; n=7,578 for education; n=7,604 for place of living; differences due to missing values). 'Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Based on responses to 'Did you vote in the last national election?'. 'Not eligible to vote' were excluded from the analyses. Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

3.5.4 Active citizenship

Key findings:

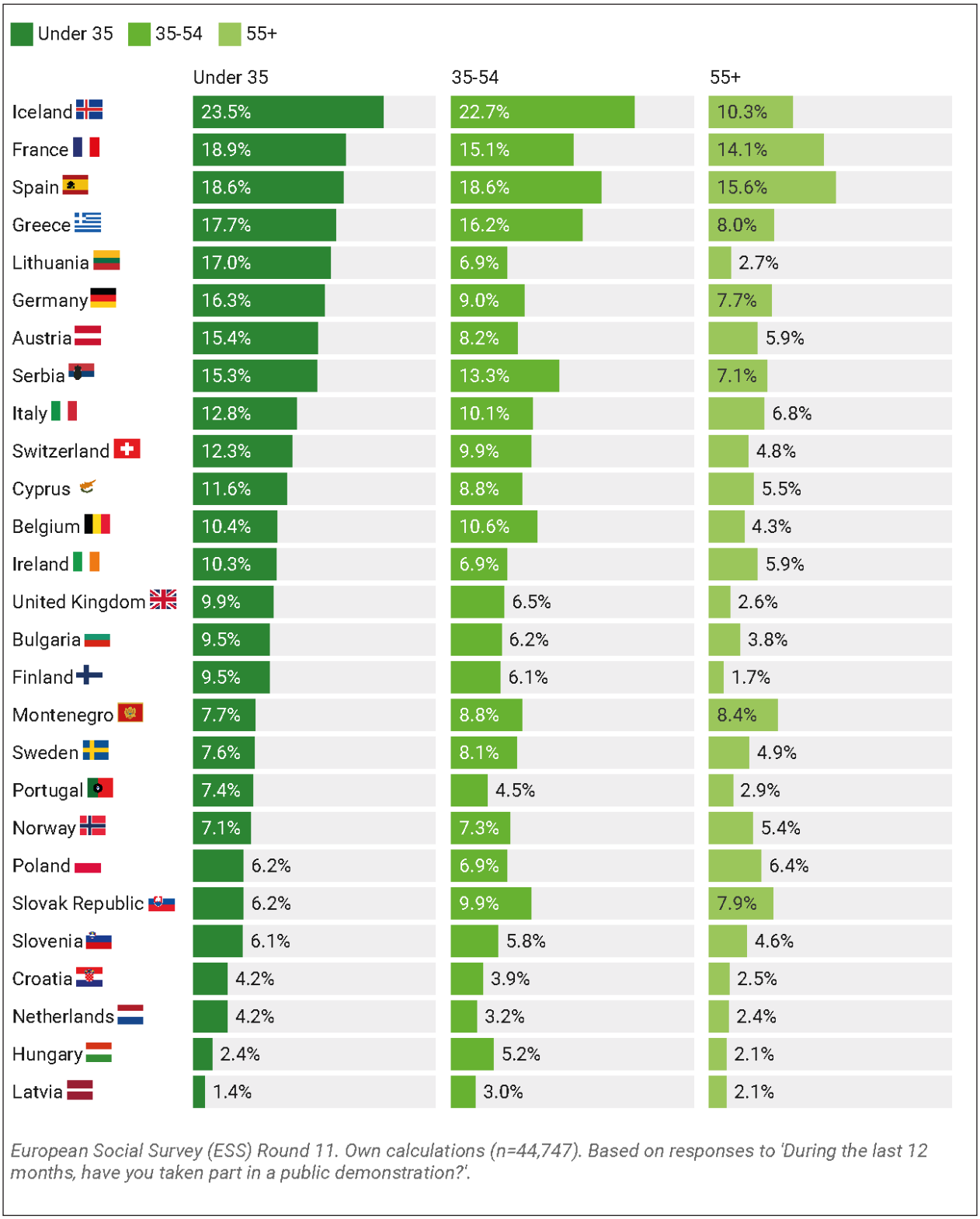
Age	Younger adults participate in demonstrations more frequently than middle-aged and older adults, emphasising the generational nature of this form of civic engagement.
Gender	Among younger Europeans, women are slightly more likely than men to participate in demonstrations.
Education	Participation rises sharply with education, with highly educated young people engaging most frequently.
Urban vs. Rural	Urban residents are more likely than rural residents to take part in demonstrations.
Country	Participation in demonstrations varies widely across countries.

Active citizenship refers to the ways individuals participate in civic and political life beyond voting, such as through demonstrations, petitions, and community initiatives, reflecting the multiple avenues through which people can influence society and public decision-making.

Participation in demonstrations varies considerably across countries and age groups, reflecting both political culture and opportunities for civic engagement (Figure 30). Among younger Europeans (under 35), the highest participation is observed in Iceland (23.5%), France (19%), Spain (18%), and Greece (18%), while the lowest levels are found in Latvia (1%), Hungary (2%), and the Netherlands (4%).

Across most countries, young adults are more likely to participate in demonstrations than middle-aged (35–54) and older adults (55+), highlighting the generational nature of this form of active citizenship. The generational gap is particularly pronounced in Lithuania and Iceland, whereas in countries such as Montenegro and Poland participation rates are more similar across age groups. These patterns indicate that demonstrations remain a form of political engagement primarily used by younger generations, though national contexts strongly shape the extent and prevalence of participation.

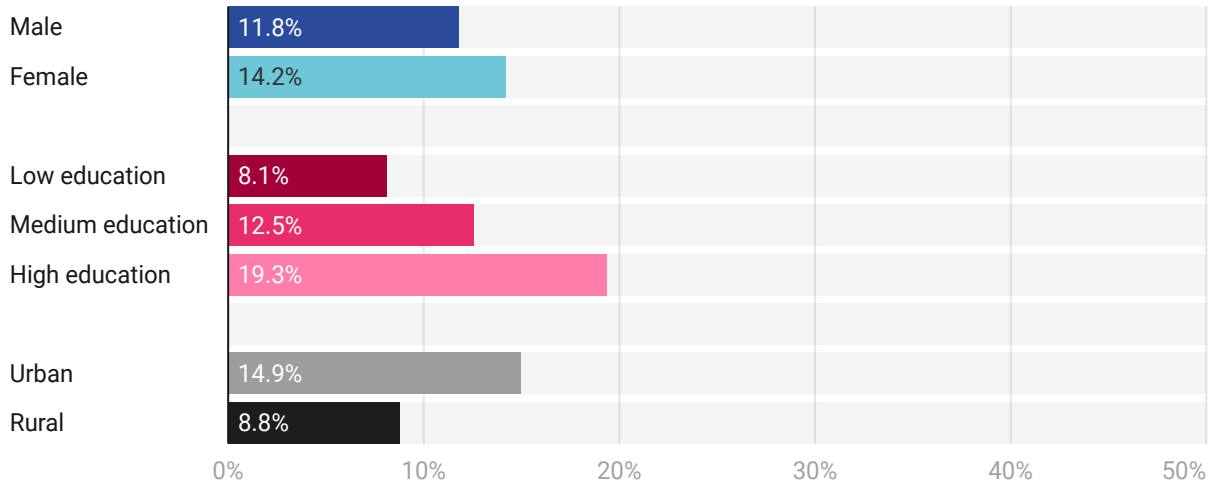
Figure 30. Participation in demonstrations, by age and country



European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11. Own calculations (n=44,747). Based on responses to 'During the last 12 months, have you taken part in a public demonstration?'.

Among young Europeans, participation in demonstrations shows notable differences by gender, education, and place of living (Figure 31). Women are slightly more likely to take part in demonstrations than men. Education strongly influences participation: 19% of highly educated young people engage in demonstrations, compared with 12.5% of those with medium education and only 8% of those with low education. Place of living also plays a role in participation in demonstrations, with urban youth participating almost twice as much as those living in rural areas, suggesting that access to opportunities, networks, and local infrastructure shapes levels of active engagement.

Figure 31. Participation in demonstrations among young Europeans, by gender, education and place of living



European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11. Own calculations (n=9,571 for gender; n=9,704 for education; n=9,704 for place of living; differences due to missing values). Young Europeans' refers to individuals under the age of 35. Based on responses to 'During the last 12 months, have you taken part in a public demonstration?'. Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

4 Conclusion

This report presents key findings on five themes central to Europe's future – education, work, family, intergenerational solidarity, and democracy – viewed through a generational lens. The results reveal how opportunities and perceptions differ across age groups, and how these differences shape Europe's social cohesion and resilience.

Education remains a key foundation for opportunity and inclusion across generations. Perceptions of fairness in education remain uneven across generations. Older Europeans tend to view their educational opportunities as having been less fair compared to younger cohorts, while among young people, those with higher education levels report more positive experiences.

However, lower-educated youth perceive significantly less fairness than their peers with secondary education in almost half of the countries studied. Strengthening access to high-quality vocational education could improve both participation and perceptions of fairness among disadvantaged groups. Data on lifelong learning show that young adults aged 25–34 are the most active participants in most European countries, with the notable exception of Sweden and Finland, where middle-aged adults engage more often. This pattern underscores the importance of promoting continuous learning at all stages of life to sustain employability and adaptability in a changing labour market.

Work remains a central domain shaping generational experiences and opportunities. The findings on work orientations indicate that younger people in Europe do not consistently value independent work more than older groups; it is the middle-aged population that expresses the strongest preference for independent work in most countries. Digitalisation and new forms of work continue to shape employment opportunities, highlighting the need for policies that both safeguard stable employment and support responsible self-employment and digital entrepreneurship. Such measures can create viable pathways into work for young people currently outside education and employment. Yet, challenges persist around gender equality in the labour market, particularly regarding the return to work after parental leave.

Women continue to face greater obstacles than men, with notable national differences linked to childcare availability, labour protections, and anti-discrimination frameworks. These challenges are especially pronounced among women with lower education levels, underscoring the need for targeted support for their reintegration into the workforce. Moreover, perceptions of pay fairness vary significantly across Europe, with lower satisfaction reported in Eastern European and rural regions. This points to the importance of strengthening regional and youth employment strategies that promote decent work and fair wages in less advantaged areas.

The size of the next generation in Europe depends on the decisions of today's young people about whether to have children and on the societal conditions that enable them to raise children. Decisions about having a (or another) child are strongly influenced by individuals' confidence in meeting key preconditions – including financial stability, access to suitable housing, satisfactory childcare, and sufficient parental leave – which reflect broader social and economic realities. Recent data reveal clear differences across age and education groups.

There is a marked age gradient, with the youngest adults (under 25) showing the lowest confidence in meeting all four preconditions for family formation, while confidence tends to increase with age. Similarly, a pronounced educational gradient emerges: lower-educated young Europeans are generally less confident across all aspects, particularly regarding their financial readiness to have a child. These findings underscore that perceived readiness for parenthood is shaped not only by age and life stage but also by educational and socioeconomic inequalities, pointing to the need for targeted policies that strengthen financial stability and support family formation among younger and less-educated groups.

Patterns of intergenerational solidarity reflect the balance between family and institutional support. Cultural norms and welfare systems shape attitudes towards mutual support between parents and adult children. In countries with limited welfare provision, such as Moldova, family-based assistance is much more common, while in Nordic countries and parts of Western Europe, where public welfare systems are stronger, family financial transfers are less frequent. These findings illustrate that where institutional support for the elderly or for young families is limited, families often compensate through informal care and financial help. Strengthening welfare services can therefore promote both individual wellbeing and intergenerational balance.

Finally, trust in democratic institutions and participation in civic life remain essential for Europe's democratic resilience. Although young people tend to express higher trust in both national and European parliaments, their voter turnout remains lower than that of older generations. However, they are more likely to participate in demonstrations and civic initiatives, suggesting alternative forms of engagement. Differences in participation by education level are particularly strong among young people, underlining the importance of civic education and inclusive participation opportunities. Fostering trust, dialogue, and active citizenship can help bridge generational divides and strengthen democratic legitimacy across Europe.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that Europe's resilience depends on how effectively it supports people through the major transitions of education, work, family life, and democratic participation. Addressing generational differences in fairness perceptions, work orientations, and trust can help policymakers design more inclusive strategies that respond to people's real experiences and expectations. Focusing on the needs and aspirations of young people – while ensuring that progress benefits all generations – will be essential to building a strong, cohesive, and future-oriented Europe.

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Citation: Stoilova, R., Ilieva, P., and Velichkov, M. *Building a Resilient Europe (2025)*, Make it Strong Data Summary, Infra4NextGen Project.

Graphics and editorial by Dr Ruxandra Comănaru, Dr Eric Harrison, Kethia Nzola, Stefan Swift (City St George's, University of London); Dr Yuliya Kazakova (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, NIDI KNAW); Dr David Consolazio (University of Milan); Navdeep Carahaa, and Andrea Sambrano (University of Warwick).

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