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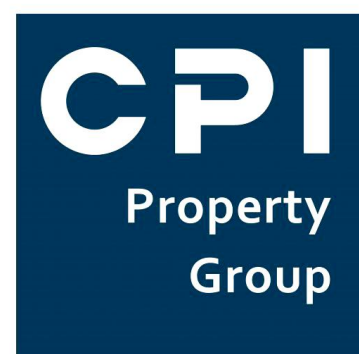
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THE EU AND ITS INSTITUTIONS EXPLAINED

The EU's structure and functioning can be quite complex due to its many Member States and areas of competence. This is a very brief summary which is going to be of help during the duration of the session on how the EU and some of its institutions work.

The EU is a political and economic union of 27 European countries that work together in various ways to promote common interests and objectives. The values of the EU are **human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights**. It is built on the concept of countries working together and agreeing to let go of some control over their governments to reach common goals, standards, and laws. Each Member State is recognized as a sovereign nation with the authority to govern its domestic affairs. However, their participation in EU institutions and policies varies. This flexibility is due to the **principle of subsidiarity**, where decisions are made at the most appropriate level of government. Member States may have **exclusive, shared, or national competencies**.

The EU on its own has several institutions. Some of the most important institutions which will be relevant during the session's span are:

The Institutional Triangle

The **European Commission** is the **executive body** of the EU. It proposes laws and policies by drafting legislative proposals, which are then reviewed by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. It also enforces EU laws by monitoring their implementation in Member States and can take legal action against those not complying.

The **European Parliament** is the EU's directly elected **legislative branch**, where Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) represent the interests of EU citizens. It plays a key role in shaping and approving EU laws, and its members are elected by citizens of each Member State in European elections.

The **Council of the EU** (also known as the **Council of Ministers**) represents the **national governments** of EU Member States and, along with the European Parliament, forms the legislative process. It plays a pivotal role in adopting EU legislation, making decisions on various policies, and coordinating the positions of Member States.

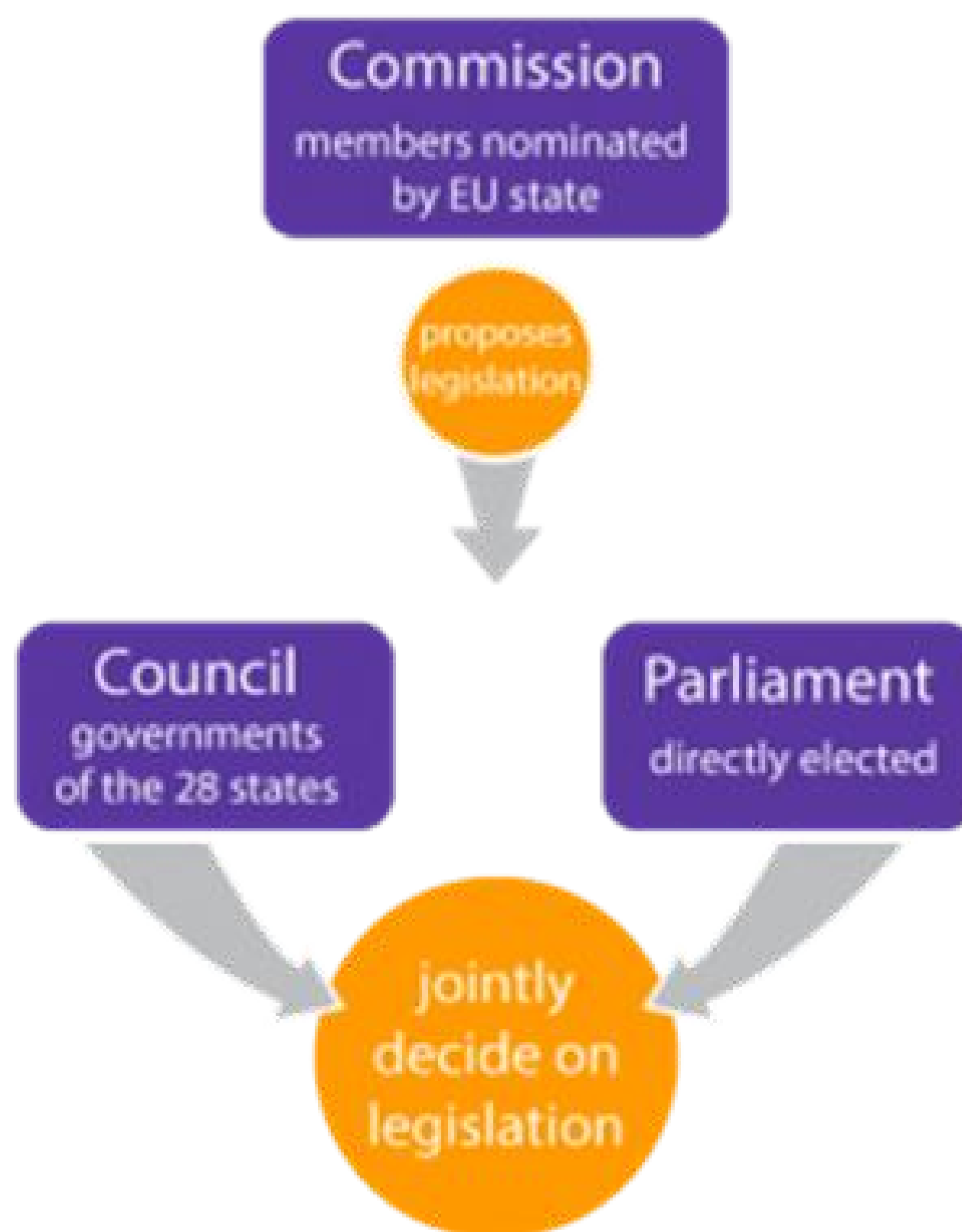




The European Council

The **European Council** is often confused with the Council of the EU or the **Council of Europe**¹ because of their name similarities, however, the two serve two different vital roles in the functioning of the EU. The European Council is a high-level body consisting of the **heads of State** of EU Member States. It provides the EU with strategic guidance and sets the broad political agenda, making important decisions on major issues like foreign policy, economic coordination, and institutional reforms.

EU decisions are made through a complex process of **negotiation and cooperation** among these institutions. Typically decisions involve the European Commission making legislative proposals, the Parliament and Council of the EU reviewing and amending them, and then reaching a compromise with all Member States.



¹ The **Council of Europe** is NOT an EU institution. It is an international organisation that promotes human rights, democracy, and the rule of law throughout Europe. All EU Member States are Member States of the Council of Europe, but there are other European countries that are also part of it.





Other Institutions

The **European Central Bank** ([ECB](#)) is responsible for **managing the Euro's monetary policy**, including issues related to interest rates and the money supply. Its main aim is to keep prices stable, thereby supporting economic growth and job creation. The use of a common currency within the Eurozone simplifies trade and financial transactions between Member States but also requires coordination on economic and fiscal policies to ensure the stability of the currency.

The EU's **budget** is a financial framework that supports the implementation of EU policies and programs. It is not set by the ECB but is rather adopted through the budgetary procedure by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Member States **contribute** a portion of their Gross National Income (GNI) **to fund the budget**, and these funds are used to finance initiatives like agriculture subsidies, regional development, research, and infrastructure projects, promoting economic and social cohesion across the EU.

The **European Court of Justice** ([ECJ](#)) is the highest court in the EU and is responsible for **interpreting and ensuring the uniform application of EU law**. It resolves disputes involving EU institutions, Member States, or individuals by providing authoritative legal interpretations. It consists of judges from each Member State, who serve as impartial interpreters of EU law. In cases where EU law interferes with national jurisdiction, Member States should turn to the ECJ for guidance.

The EU conducts a **common foreign policy** in areas where Member States have agreed to pool their resources. While the EU has a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, individual Member States still maintain their **foreign policies in areas that are not under EU competence**, such as national security and defence. This dual structure allows the EU to speak with a more unified voice on certain global issues while respecting the national sovereignty of its Member States in foreign policy.





Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)

21st Century Disenfranchisement: Recent political movements across Europe and the world suggest that a large proportion of the population no longer feels represented by mainstream politics. How can European countries address citizens' belief that they have been 'left behind', while ensuring governments' accountability?

By: **Natálie Steblová (CZ)**

Abstract

This Topic Overview analyses the issue of **underrepresentation** of the general public in the political mainstream. It discusses the close correlation between **populism** and the rise in support for **extremist parties**, as well as the causes for their prevalence. By establishing how these phenomena contribute to one another, it reflects on Europe's **historical experience** with similar situations and examines the effectiveness of **current measures** in combating the negative effects of these movements. Moreover, this Topic Overview provides the stimuli to go beyond and poses further questions for consideration, while providing useful research materials in multiple forms.

Introduction

Reflecting the widespread public **dissatisfaction with mainstream politicians**, **extreme right-** and **left-wing populist** movements across Europe are becoming more common. Often sprouting from **cultural** and **economic dilemmas**, these movements **gained momentum** during recent **crises** and, by using appealing **rhetoric**, achieved a wave of **electoral victories**. The rise of all things radical can be seen from **regional** to **EU-level** elections. The growing **discontent** with mainstream governments can be felt through **low electoral turnouts** and the **disconnect** between voters and their representatives. This is further exacerbated by a lack of political representation, especially from **minority groups**.

Key Terms

- **Populism** is a **political strategy** that claims to **represent the interests of ordinary people by opposing elites or the establishment**. It often arises from public dissatisfaction, while using simple, emotional messaging to address complex issues like inequality or national identity.





- **The gap in descriptive representation** refers to the **underrepresentation of certain social groups** such as women, minorities, or youth in political bodies, meaning the demographics of **elected officials don't reflect the diversity** of the population they serve. This gap can lead to a disconnect between the needs of these groups and the policies created by governments.
- **Polarisation** is when society's opinions or beliefs become **sharply divided**, leading people to opposing extremes and reducing willingness for compromise or dialogue.
- **Deradicalisation** refers to the **process of encouraging individuals** who hold extremist views **to abandon those beliefs**, often through education, dialogue, and rehabilitation programs. It aims to reintegrate individuals into society by changing their ideological convictions, preventing them from engaging in violence or supporting radical groups.

Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **The Counter Extremism Project (CEP)** is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) that **combats extremism** by disrupting extremist groups' recruitment, fundraising, and online activities. It **promotes policies** to prevent radicalisation and **supports deradicalisation initiatives** by establishing partnerships with governments, civil society, and the private sector.
- **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** is an EU body that provides **expert advice on fundamental rights**. It monitors the protection of minority rights and assesses the inclusion of marginalised groups in society, focusing on ensuring that their voices are represented in political and social systems. By doing so, it aims to **combat underrepresentation and promote equality** in political participation and decision-making processes.
- **European Youth Forum** is a European organisation **advocating for youth rights and political participation** across Europe, aiming to enhance democratic engagement among young people through campaigns, partnerships with institutions and research. Furthermore, it has established initiatives that promote youth representation, voter turnout, and involvement in decision-making processes.
- **National Governments** are the executive branches of Member States, tasked with implementing policies, enacting electoral reforms, and addressing public discontent with political representation.
- **National Electoral Commissions** are governmental bodies responsible for organising elections, maintaining voter registration, and ensuring fair electoral processes within a specific country.

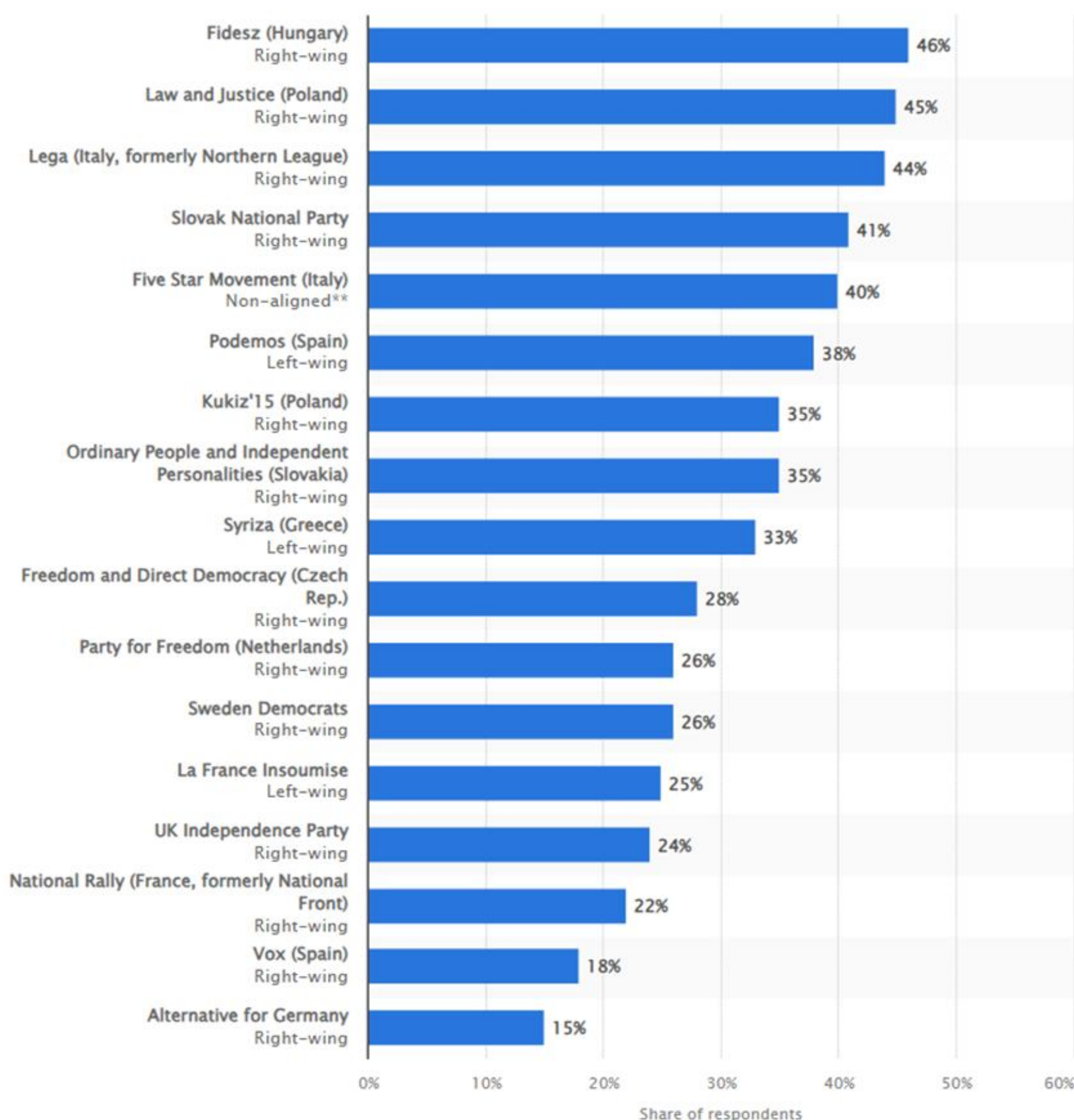




Key Conflicts

Reaching for the extremes

In August 2024 ahead of the upcoming regional elections in 2 German States, Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the left-wing populist party Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht, addressed a crowd at a rally in Thuringia, Germany. Meanwhile, across the same region, Alice Weidel, from the far-right Alternative für Deutschland, was delivering a speech. Though their political views differ starkly, both women have one thing in common: the thousands of people attending their rallies, **disillusioned and frustrated** by a political mainstream they see as **unresponsive**. These voters, **desperate for quick fixes** to complex social and economic problems, **flock** to leaders who promise **radical change**.



“Share of adults with a favourable view of populist parties in selected European countries as of 2019”, Statista, 2019





Across the EU, far-right and far-left movements are gaining momentum by exploiting **dissatisfaction with the status quo**. These movements often rely on **anti-immigration**, nationalist, and alarmist rhetoric, while presenting **simplistic solutions to complicated issues** neglected by traditional parties. As these extreme parties gain support, they push mainstream political actors to adopt more radical stances in response, intensifying political **polarisation** and perpetuating a cycle of populism. This, in turn, undermines effective governance. Leading to **violence** and a polarised society influenced by radical and often **untrue** rhetoric, this rising tide of extremism represents a serious **challenge** to European democratic institutions.

The Clash (of values)

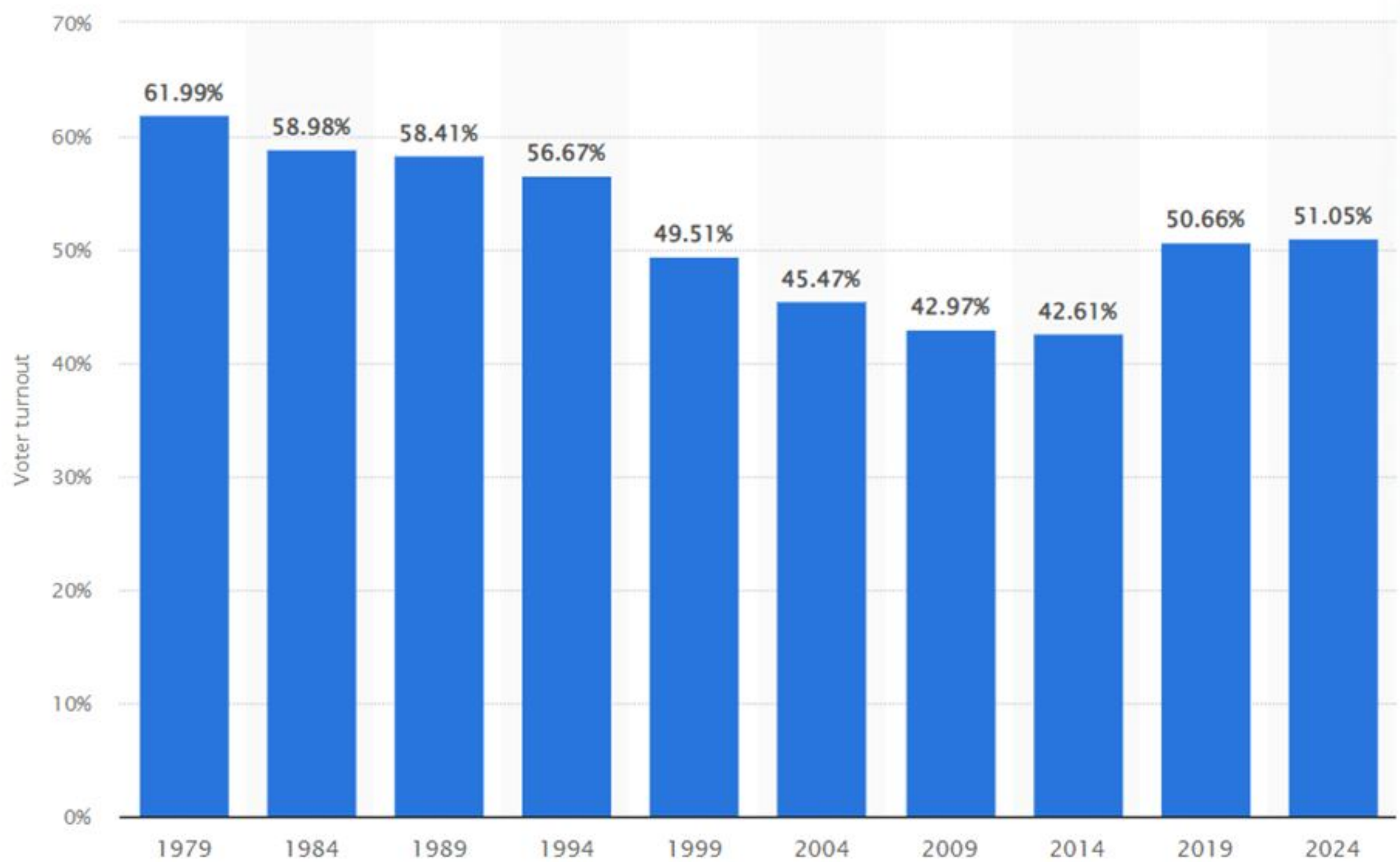
The sense of underrepresentation in European politics is intensified by a widening **values gap** between mainstream political leaders and the general public. This clash is evident in debates over issues, such as the war in Ukraine, where many citizens favour a pragmatic, negotiated peace rather than a full military victory for Ukraine. While support for Ukraine remains strong, a significant portion of European citizens advocates for **compromise**, challenging the firm stance taken by many EU leaders.

This divergence in values is also present **within the public** itself. Older citizens are more likely to vote, whereas younger generations demonstrate lower voter turnout while being severely underrepresented in both national and European politics. As a combination of these two factors, political agendas tend to reflect the interests of older voters. As a result, the needs of younger and minority voters are often marginalised, contributing to their sense of exclusion from the political process. This fuels further frustration with mainstream politics, laying the groundwork for the rise of populist movements across Europe.

Why even try?

With extremist parties on the rise and mainstream parties struggling to bring back disillusioned voters, many citizens are left **questioning whether voting is even worthwhile**. Frustrated with traditional political options and unwilling to support extreme alternatives, a significant number of people opt **not to vote at all**. In national and especially EU elections, voter turnout has often hovered around 60%, while the turnout in recent European Parliament elections was 51.05%.





“Voter turnout in the European Parliament Elections in the European Union (EU) from 1979 to 2024”,
Statista, 2024

Low turnout undermines the **legitimacy** of political representation, leaving large portions of the population feeling underrepresented, especially younger and minority voters. This, in turn, perpetuates a **cycle of disengagement**, where those who feel their voices are unheard continue to abstain from voting in future elections. Such low participation creates an environment ripe for populist and extremist movements to gain influence, as they thrive on dissatisfaction with the political mainstream.

Measures in Place

Keep the youth involved

Many non-profit organisations focus on youth political engagement, both in the form of simulations such as the European Youth Parliament (EYP) and Model United Nations and educational initiatives such as Politika (ne jen) pro mladé. This often involves discussion on global and European affairs and educational social media content. The EU additionally provides traineeships in its institutions to promote active citizenship.

Some Member States lowered the voting age to **16**, improving youth participation in EU parliamentary elections. However, in other Member States, **debate continues** over whether those under 18 should possess the right to vote.



Make them able (to vote)!

To **reduce the obstacles** connected to voting such as the travel to the election room or getting a voter's pass abroad, some states have introduced [mail-in ballots](#), making the voting process **more accessible** for citizens abroad and those facing **physical challenges** in coming to the election room. While some Member States have [made voting easier](#) for disabled individuals, barriers remain, and there is [no common policy](#) addressing them. Although voting by mail helps many, its impact remains [unclear](#) and some even argue it affects the voter [negatively](#).

Fighting the evil

Although populism is [hard](#) to stop due to its appealing radical policies, [numerous](#) NGOs and national initiatives aim to counter **misinformation** and radicalism. Projects like the Czech [demagog.cz](#) and the [European Fact-Checking Standards Network](#) verify politicians' statements. Some Member States, including [Italy](#) and [Spain](#), have launched programmes against misinformation. Some countries have national centres to address violence linked to extreme ideologies, such as the [Swedish Centre for Preventing Violent Extremism](#). On a larger scale, the European Commission's [Action for Democracy Plan](#) seeks to counter disinformation and promote citizen participation. This initiative has proven **efficient**, with most actions [completed](#) by December 2023 and the whole package [reviewed](#) in 2024. Similarly, the Digital Services Act ([DSA](#)) regulates online platforms to ensure safety and prevent extremist rhetoric from spreading.

Food for thought

- Acknowledging the rise of extremism and the general discontent with current political representation, how can we fight populism and the side effects it has on society?
- How can we keep young people involved in politics, while prioritising agendas that support minority voters?
- How can we encourage mainstream politicians to prioritise representing their citizens, while avoiding extremist agendas?

Further Research

1. [The Rise of Populism](#): An episode of the 'What's wrong with democracy?' podcast discussing the characteristics and rise of populism around the world.
2. [Youth engagement in politics: indifferent or just different?](#): A TED talk exploring the problem of youth political engagement and our perception of it.
3. [The Rise of Populism – A Different Lens](#): A video by Monash University offers a view of the worldwide rise of populism and explores the possibility of it being only a temporal shift in global politics.
4. [Why Are World Leaders Like Biden So Old Now? An Age Breakdown](#): A video by Vox taking a closer look at the demography of today's world leaders and the population.
5. [European Populism, From Left to Right](#): An Article by the Montaigne Institute analysing how Europe's history shapes today's politics.



Historical context

Populism winning the hearts of the underrepresented is **not exclusive** to the 21st century. Emerging in the late 19th century, it influenced major political movements of the 20th century and continues to make headlines today. Historical examples underscore the gravity of our voices and what might happen if we fail to control current populist movements.

The regimes that were ruling Germany and the USSR in the 20th century, are often described as populist. Historian Hannah Arendt argues that the movements in both countries were populist, and the **lack of societal structure** contributed to the rise of the regimes. While some draw parallels between contemporary populism and 20th century regimes, the contexts differ. Nonetheless, similarities with current European movements are concerning. Racism and hostility toward refugees can be seen in today's populist parties. Although these movements lack **support** comparable to the ones of the 20th century, the dangers of their **hateful rhetoric** and associated violence cannot be underestimated. Given the **death toll** from past movements, controlling modern populism and learning from history is **crucial**.





Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET I)

Topic Sentence: *Following Brexit, issues surrounding the status of Gibraltar have re-emerged. As discussions on Gibraltar's future relationship with the EU linger without resolution, what measures can the EU adopt to avert the establishment of a "hard border" between Spain and Gibraltar?*

By: **Karolína Bejčková (CZ)**

Abstract

This Topic Overview addresses **the most pressing issues** affecting the Spain-Gibraltar border, its post-Brexit development, and the impact these issues have on Gibraltar and workers from both sides of the border. It discusses the relationship between Spain and Britain regarding Gibraltar, their differing views regarding **the sovereignty of this territory**, and it calls attention to the current lack of effective permanent measures in place.

It sets focus on how these issues **affect people** crossing the border every day, while also taking into account the history of the territory and the states involved.

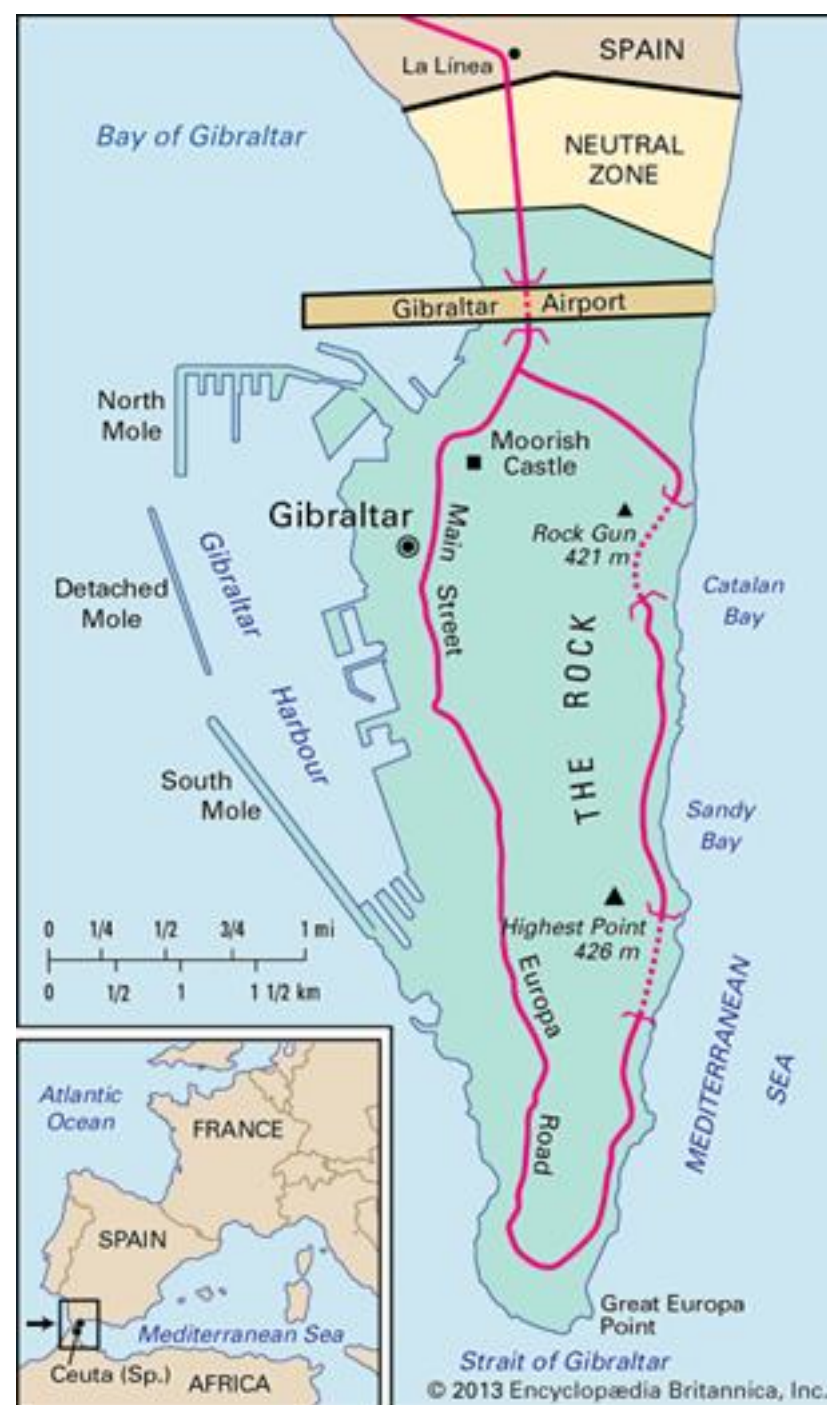
Introduction

Gibraltar is a British overseas territory located south of the Iberian Peninsula. Unlike other British overseas territories, **Gibraltar was a part of the EU**, along with the UK.

Historically, Gibraltar was captured by the British fleet in 1704 and was ceded to Britain in 1713, with Spain having made several unsuccessful attempts to seize Gibraltar since then. Nowadays, Gibraltar's history still **influences British and Spanish policies** regarding the territory.

After the UK officially left the EU in January 2020, the issue of the border between Gibraltar and Spain has not been completely solved. In December 2020, the EU and the UK reached **an agreement in principle** that Gibraltar would remain part of EU agreements, such as the **borderless area of Schengen**, while a permanent agreement would be negotiated.





“[Map of Gibraltar](#)”, Britannica, 2024

However, a deal has not been reached yet and Spain has issued a warning to the UK that if [the stalemate](#) surrounding the negotiations continues, Spain will **impose a hard border** on Gibraltar.

Key Terms

- A **[hard border](#)** is a border between countries that is strongly controlled and protected by officials, police, or soldiers.
- **The Entry/Exit System (EES)** will be an automated IT system registering travellers from third countries each time they cross an EU external border. It will register the person's name, type of travel document, their biometric data¹, and the date and place of entry and exit, ensuring compliance with fundamental rights and data protection.
- **The Schengen Zone** consists of 29 European countries that have removed internal border controls. The free movement of people through the Schengen Zone enables every EU citizen to travel, work and live in an EU country without special formalities.
- **Sovereignty** is the authority of a state to govern itself or another state. Sovereignty can be [gained](#) through occupation, annexation, accretion, cession or prescription.

¹ A [type of data](#) that describes and classifies measurable human characteristics, such as [facial image and fingerprints](#).



Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **Spain** is threatening Gibraltar with the creation of a hard border and is playing a central role in discussions regarding the territory's status. From the beginning of the 16th century until 1713, Gibraltar was part of Spain, after which it was ceded to Britain. Afterwards, Spain made several unsuccessful attempts to regain Gibraltar. In 1969, Spain closed the land border with Gibraltar and it took 16 years for the border to be fully reopened. This history continues to influence Spain's policies, for example, opposing British sovereignty over Gibraltar.
- **The United Kingdom** holds sovereignty over Gibraltar. The elected government of Gibraltar has executive competence for all matters with the exception of defence, external affairs and internal security. The governor, who is the representative of the British monarch in Gibraltar, holds the responsibility for these matters. Gibraltar also maintains very strong ties with the UK.
- **The European Commission** is a body within the EU with exclusive competences such as customs union, common commercial policy or, under certain conditions, the conclusion of international agreements and shared competences such as economic, social and territorial cohesion, EU transport policy or the area of freedom, security and justice. The European Commission is also assisting in the negotiations between Spain and the United Kingdom on this matter.
- **Cross Frontier Group (CFG)** is an organisation comprised of trade unions, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce from Gibraltar and their Spanish equivalents. They have issued a statement calling for an agreement on Gibraltar's relations with the EU. The Group reiterates the unrest caused by **the prolongation of the treaty discussions** regarding the Spain-Gibraltar border and its effects on the **economic and social relations** between the two communities. They warn of the disastrous consequences that a no-deal outcome in the negotiation process could bring.
- **The regional government of Andalucía** is advocating for the rapid completion of the agreement between Spain and the UK. It is mainly because Andalusians are greatly affected by the border issues, as a large number of them work in Gibraltar and therefore have to travel across the border frequently.

Key Conflicts

United Kingdom and Spain

Gibraltar was captured by the British Fleet in 1704 during the War of the Spanish Succession and it was ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. The Treaty lacked specification on which parts of Gibraltar were ceded to Britain, it did not include any map or specific description of the ceded area. The signing of this treaty initiated the dispute between Spain and the United Kingdom regarding sovereignty over Gibraltar. This dispute is primarily over the territory of the **Gibraltar International Airport**.





Post-Brexit, there have been discussions about placing Spanish or EU border officials at Gibraltar International Airport and implementing Schengen border checks to avoid checks at the Spain-Gibraltar border. However, this proposal was not implemented due to sovereignty concerns.

Impact on citizens

One of the most pressing issues is how the stagnant negotiations affect **Gibraltarian, Spanish and British citizens** who cross the border daily for work, services or recreation. If a hard border were to be established it could lead to several travel complications. One of the groups affected are Gibraltarians and British expats² in southern Spain who have moved back to Gibraltar after losing their EU citizenship. This is because the new regulation has made it more **difficult** for them to stay in Spain with a maximum of 90 days in a 180-day period. About 15,000 workers cross the border from Andalucía every day. Gibraltar's economy depends on these Spanish workers as they make up **almost half of the workforce**.

However, the workers are not the only ones affected by these problems. British passport holders, including Gibraltarians with residence cards, are often subject to additional checks by Spanish border officials; they are frequently asked to **submit additional documents**, such as proof of a paid hotel reservation or a valid reason for the visit. This not only contributes to longer wait times but also adds inconvenience for regular travellers.

New border controls

After Brexit, the UK ceased to be part of **the Schengen zone** in 2021 when the transition period ended. Following this, Spain has taken a relaxed view on EU travel rules for the Gibraltar border. Spanish border guards have allowed Gibraltarians to enter and leave Spain without having their passport stamped or using up their 90-day in a 180-day period visa-free travel limit.

This allowed for negotiations on a new common travel area between Gibraltar and the Schengen Zone to take place. These negotiations have not been finalised yet and Spain has warned that if they remain deadlocked, **full border controls** between Gibraltar and Spain could be introduced.

² An expat is an individual living and/or working in a country other than their country of citizenship.





“Entry/Exit System”, Immigration Lawyers Spain, 2024

The EU also plans to introduce the new Entry/Exit System (**EES**) this November. It is an automated replacement for passport stamping and requires **biometric data** the first time it is used by a non-EU citizen. Gibraltarians would have to submit their fingerprints and facial photos before entering Spain or Gibraltar. There are several data concerns regarding this system as it requires both biometric data and other personal data of the person. This data would be stored for six months and if necessary, it could also be shared with non-EU countries or international organisations.

British sovereignty

In the past, two referendums regarding British sovereignty were held in Gibraltar. The **Gibraltar sovereignty referendum of 1967**, in which Gibraltarians were asked whether they wanted to remain under British sovereignty or fall under Spanish sovereignty. A majority of the people (99.2%) voted to remain under British sovereignty. The **Gibraltar sovereignty referendum of 2002** was based on a proposal by the UK Government to share sovereignty between Spain and the UK. Again, the majority of people (98.9%) voted against this proposal.

Neither Gibraltar nor the UK want to give up British sovereignty, nor do they want to undermine or diminish it. This is one of the concerns of the UK while discussing Gibraltar’s position with the EU and Spain and it has the potential to fragment these negotiations even further.

Measures in Place

New Year's Eve Agreement

Following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, a temporary agreement was made that **applied the rules of the Schengen area to Gibraltar**, allowing for the abolition of border controls between Spain and Gibraltar.

Gibraltar's airport and port became the new external borders of the EU. However, this arrangement is **only temporary**, as it was concluded at the end of 2020 and lasts for four years.

A permanent treaty

Negotiations are underway between Spain and the UK to **create a permanent treaty** on the status of Gibraltar. This treaty would focus primarily on **free movement** across the Spain-Gibraltar border, the prevention of the creation of a hard border and concerns about the sovereignty of Spain and the UK.

Nevertheless, these negotiations **have not been finalised yet** and have been ongoing since the UK left the EU, so no deal has yet been concluded. There are many reasons why this progress is so slow and it comes from all three states involved. There has always been tension between Spain and the UK over what specific land was ceded to Britain in the Treaty of Utrecht, which contained no maps and left room for **various interpretations and disputes**. Another objection was raised by the Government of Gibraltar after Spain proposed the presence of Spanish law enforcement in Gibraltar, particularly at the airport; this was unacceptable not only to Gibraltar but also to the UK as the airport is a **joint civil-military facility**.

Non-governmental organisations

There are several non-governmental organisations such as the **CFG**, the **Comisiones Obreras (CCOO)** or **The Association of Spanish Workers in Gibraltar (ASCTEG)** are calling for a quick agreement on the Gibraltar-Spain border. They work with the Gibraltar and Spanish governments to represent workers and businesses affected by the issue. Their main concern is cross-border workers who are affected by this issue in their daily lives.



Food for thought

- How can the EU fight against the formation of a hard border between Gibraltar and Spain?
- What measures could be implemented in order to improve the relations between the United Kingdom and Spain?
- How could the development of this situation impact the people of Gibraltar and its surroundings, particularly those who have to cross the border every day? What steps can be taken to minimise these effects and protect the people affected?

Further Research

1. “[Why the EU is About to Impose a Hard Border in Gibraltar](#)”: A video by TLDR News explaining the situation on the Spain-Gibraltar border after Brexit.
2. “[The History of Gibraltar](#)”: An article by Historic UK about the relations between Gibraltar, Spain and the UK throughout history.
3. “[Borders, boots, and Brexit: What’s behind the Gibraltar and Spain impasse?](#)”: An article by UK in a Changing Europe about Gibraltar's relationship with the UK and Spain.





Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET II)

Shape For All: International conflicts like those in Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine have exposed the fragmented and ineffective foreign policies of EU Member States, revealing their inability to form a unified response to critical events. How can European governments become a force that protects human rights and ensures security in the most vulnerable countries in need of assistance?

By: **Leon Paladinić Pažulinec (HR)**

Abstract

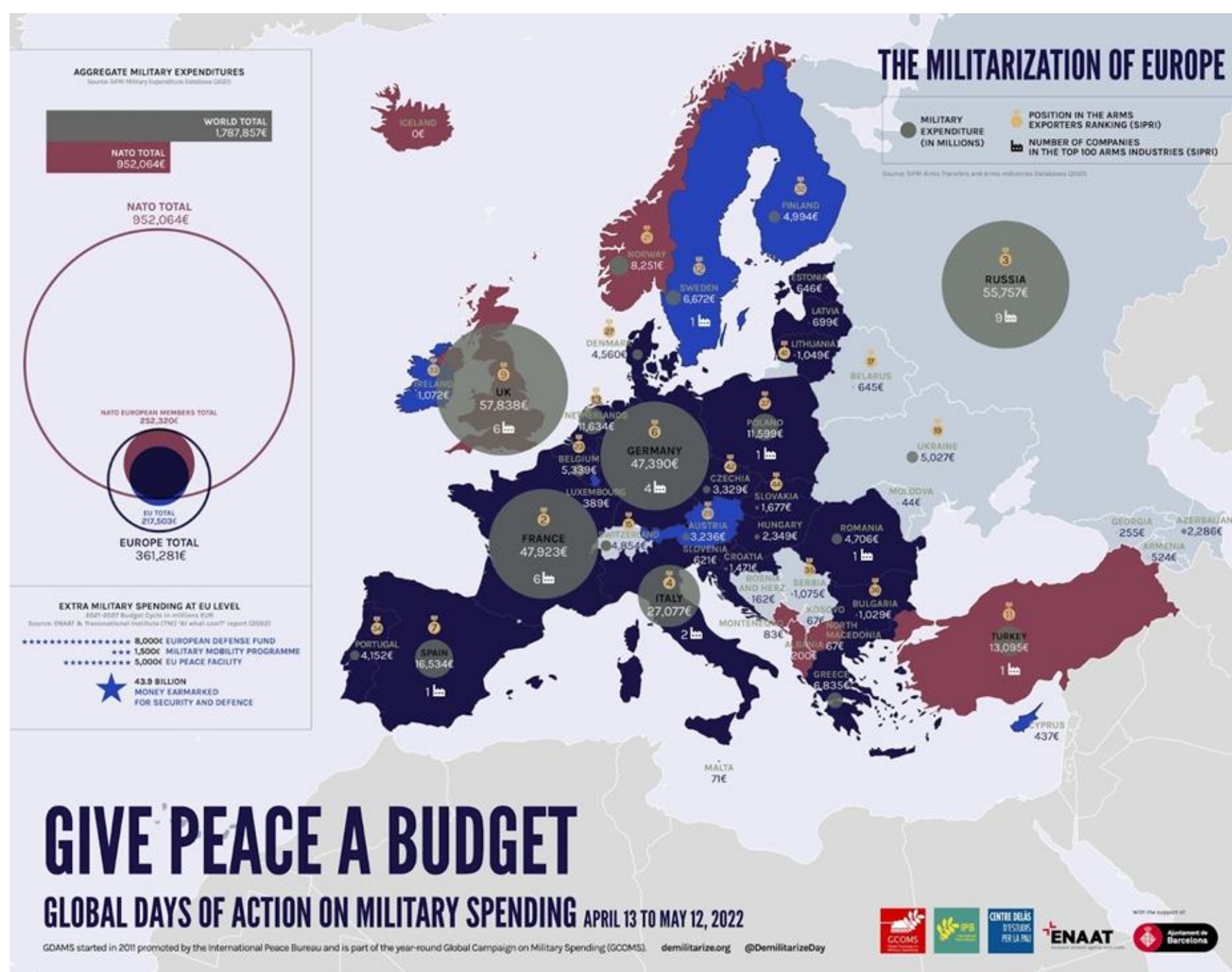
This Topic Overview covers how the foreign policy of Member States has become more dispersed in response to global crises. Moreover, it covers how this split casts doubt on the EU's capacity to adopt a **cohesive position** that protects **security** and **respects** human rights. It mentions constant difficulties reconciling **humanitarian duties** and **national interests**, as well as organising **relief** and **security operations**. It aims to address these problems through current EU frameworks like the Global Strategy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy; however, execution remains uneven.

Introduction

The EU's **disjointed** and **ineffectual foreign policies** have become evident by recent wars, where Member States are finding it difficult to adopt a **common position**. Member States frequently behave **autonomously** despite having similar values, which compromises their ability to advocate for human rights and deal with international issues as a group. As conflicts spread throughout Europe and intensify, they cause **instability** and **humanitarian crises**.

In order to guarantee a more robust and well-coordinated response, the EU needs to **reevaluate** how it can integrate its foreign policy in light of the **increasingly** unstable global context. Inaction risks eroding the EU's standing as an **international advocate for security and human rights**.





“The rising focus on defence in Europe”, Centre Delàs, 2022

Key Terms

- **Global crises** are events such as **war**, economic decline, pandemics, and extreme natural events that affect **all countries** in economic, social, cultural, political, and many other issues.
- **Vulnerable countries** in war are those who often face compounded risks, **including severe food insecurity, displacement, and the collapse of essential services**. In the case of Ukraine, the Russian invasion made the country substantially **more vulnerable**. Millions of Ukrainians have been **displaced, infrastructure was destroyed, and basic services** such as healthcare, food, and shelter were severely disrupted.
- **International assistance** during a **war** entails providing **aid** to **conflict-affected countries**, which is typically in the form of **humanitarian relief** or **military support**. For example, during the **Syrian Civil War**, the **United Nations (UN)** and **non-governmental organisations (NGOs)** offered food, medical supplies, and shelter to civilians, while certain countries provided military aid to either rebel groups or the government, depending on their political affiliation.
- **Humanitarian intervention** occurs when a **state** or **group of states** uses **military force** in **another** nation to stop human suffering, usually in reaction to widespread **abuses** of human rights or mass atrocities. Some contend that such interventions **violate** a **country's sovereignty** and risk causing **instability**, but advocates claim that the international community has a **moral obligation** to protect **vulnerable communities**.
- **Collective Security** is based on the notion that an attack on **one** state is an attack on **all**. This concept commits states to working together to **respond** to threats to peace or security.





- **Human Rights** as outlined in international treaties like the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, every person has the **fundamental right** to certain freedoms, such as the freedom from torture, the right to life, the right to free speech, and the ability to **obtain basic necessities**.

Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **The European Commission** is the **executive branch of the EU**. The Commission is responsible for **implementing** decisions, **maintaining** EU treaties, and overseeing day-to-day operations. Notably, it is the **only institution** in the EU with the unique authority to **initiate legislation** in the EU. **Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO)** works on both **natural** and **man-made crises**. This **branch** of the European Commission **oversees** operations to offer humanitarian relief and respond to emergencies **caused** by **wars** or **natural catastrophes**. DG ECHO **mobilises** resources to ensure that EU responses are prompt, with a focus on human rights protection and support for **marginalised groups**.
- **The European External Action Service (EEAS)** is in **charge** of coordinating the EU's **diplomatic** activities and responding to global crises, the EEAS is led by the **High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**. It closely collaborates to improve security and stability with partners across the globe and Member States.
- **The Council of the European Union** is a crucial body for **deciding** on foreign policy. The Council is made up of the ministers of state from **each Member State** and has the authority to **enact binding laws**, particularly those pertaining to military operations and sanctions under the **Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)**.
- **The United Nations (UN)** is a crucial player in international affairs, keeps an eye on human rights **violations** and **maintains** peace in war zones. Although it is **unable** to impose **legally binding** actions on the EU, it collaborates with **EU institutions** to further international peace.
- **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)** are typically **non-profit institutions**. They are sometimes called **civil society organisations** and are established on **community, national, and international levels** to serve a social or political goal such as a **humanitarian cause** or the **protection of the environment**. Despite **lacking** official legal status, NGOs like **Human Rights Watch** and **Amnesty International** monitor human rights abuses and push for international action, swaying public opinion and policy debates.
- **Member States** include the **27 nations** that comprise the European Union; each is **obligated** by collective **EU frameworks** such as the **CFSP**, but **maintains** autonomy over its foreign policy. This enables **each** member country to prioritise its **national interests** and respond to international problems using its **own** viewpoints and conditions.





- **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**, is a **military alliance** created in 1949 with **31 member countries** from North America and Europe. Its major goal is to ensure **collective defence**, in which an attack on **one** member is treated as an attack on **all**. NATO fosters peace and security through political and military measures, and it has developed to confront a variety of **global security issues**, such as **terrorism** and **cyber threats**.

Key Conflicts

Fragmentation of Foreign Policies

The disparity of foreign policies among Member States, which is especially noticeable in their **responses** to crises like the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Russia-Ukraine War, gives rise to a substantial dispute. Some Member States, motivated by **national interests** or **historical ties** to the parties involved, approach similar situations more **cautiously**, while others **advocate for** a uniform EU policy that emphasises human rights and adherence to international law. This **split** calls into question the EU's efficacy as a cohesive unit on the international scene and underscores the need for a more coherent foreign policy that upholds **common ideals** and **fosters stability** in the affected regions. For instance, during the Russia-Ukraine war, differing positions on sanctions and **military aid** exposed the challenge of aligning national policies with collective EU goals.

Balancing Human Rights and National Interests

The pursuit of national interests while **maintaining** the protection of human rights presents a significant challenge. Member States frequently consider the potential effects of human rights on their **geopolitical interests** and **economic ties**, in addition to the moral need to act in humanitarian situations. For instance, sanctions against **autocratic governments** can protect human rights but may also have unfavourable economic effects on the imposing state and its people. On the other hand, putting trade relations first could lead to complicity in human rights violations. The EU faces difficulties in **upholding** its commitment to human rights **without jeopardising** its **political** and **economic** interests as a result of this tension, which produces a **moral quandary**.





The war in Ukraine is likely to worsen Europe's economic problems

Short- and long-term implications of the Russia-Ukraine war for the European Union

	Short-term effects (1–2 years)	Long-term effects (3–5 years)
Trade and foreign direct investment	Collapse of exports to Russia. Reduced capital for EU firms.	Restructuring of supply chains and foreign direct investment flows away from Russia.
Refugees and reconstruction	Large inflows of refugees to EU states lead to additional fiscal costs.	No lasting effect. Most refugees are likely to return to Ukraine or enter the EU workforce. Contribution to the rebuilding of Ukraine.
Defense	Added costs of weapons and military support for Ukraine weigh on defense budgets.	Increases to EU defense budgets.
Efficiency	No short-term effect.	EU firms to reconsider their reliance on extended supply chains and just-in-time delivery schemes, causing further deglobalization and reduced efficiency.
Food	Higher food prices as Ukrainian and Russian crop yields fall, reducing global supply and damaging fragile developing economies.	No lasting effect.
Energy	Higher energy bills. Reduced efficiency from temporary reliance on outdated energy sources. Possible supply disruptions. Added costs from alternative sourcing.	New energy sourcing. More energy integration at the EU level. Accelerated transition to renewables.
Uncertainty	More precautionary saving.	Possible drive towards closer EU policy integration.



Source: Adapted from Olivier Blanchard and Jean Pisani-Ferry's Policy Brief, *Fiscal support and monetary vigilance: Economic policy implications of the Russia-Ukraine war for the European Union*.

“Economic consequences for Europe regarding the war in Ukraine”, PIIE, 2022

Security and Humanitarian Aid in Conflict Zones

The EU solutions are further complicated by the dual goals of ensuring **security** and delivering **humanitarian relief** in war zones. Member States frequently **find it difficult** to strike a balance between the need for extensive humanitarian assistance and military actions intended to **stabilise** regions. Although military action might offer instant security, it can **worsen** already-existing humanitarian situations and make it more **difficult** to distribute help. However, ignoring security concerns in favour of humanitarian relief alone could lead to a **vicious cycle** of **instability** and **violence**.

Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The EU's framework for foreign policy is **further complicated** by the **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** principle. The R2P places a strong emphasis on nations' obligations to protect their populations against severe human rights abuses. While some Member States **express caution** regarding unilateral interventions that would **violate state sovereignty**. For instance, Germany and Italy prioritise diplomacy and multilateral approaches to **conflict prevention and resolution**. Others support proactive measures under the **Responsibility to Protect**, saying that inaction might be equated with **cooperation** in **abuses**. **France**, for example, was a vocal advocate of **military involvement** in **Libya** in 2011 under R2P to avert large-scale civilian murders.





Measures in Place

European-Level Frameworks

Important legal structures have been put in place at the EU level to support a **cohesive foreign policy**. Priorities for external action are outlined in the **European Union Global Strategy**, as well as **The Common Foreign and Security Policy** that seeks to harmonise Member States' foreign policy actions. **The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)** provides funding for development initiatives that support human rights, while the **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)** funds global human rights enhancement projects. The **European Peace Facility (EPF)** has served as an **EU funding tool** designed to strengthen the **Union's capacity** to promote international peace and security. In contrast, **Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy Missions** are EU-led efforts that focus on **civilian components of crisis management**.

National-Level Initiatives

The national strategies used by Member States vary greatly. Germany, with its strong policies that prioritise humanitarian aid and refugee acceptance—especially during the **Syrian refugee crisis** with its "**Welcome Culture**"—exemplifies a proactive approach. Meanwhile, nations like **France** and **Italy** have created national action plans with job and language training opportunities to help refugees integrate.

Local-Level Efforts

In addition, NGOs and local groups are essential as humanitarian efforts and community support initiatives promote **social integration** and offer prompt assistance. Community sponsorship programs have been introduced by cities throughout **Europe**. Moreover, local EU programs, such as the "**Cities of Refuge**" project and the **EU Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)**, aim to develop support systems for vulnerable communities. Nevertheless, **financial constraints and administrative roadblocks** frequently impede the **long-term viability** and **effectiveness** of these grassroots projects.

Food for thought

- How do **moral** commitments affect the way the EU responds to humanitarian emergencies and the safeguarding of human rights?
- How can the EU successfully strike a **compromise** between the necessity of humanitarian help during times of conflict and concerns about **national security**?
- In what ways does **public opinion** influence the policies of Member States on the acceptance and assistance of refugees?
- What steps can the EU take to ensure that its reactions to global conflicts continue to be **morally** and **effectively** sound?





- What actionable plans can be developed to **improve** cooperation between communities, local groups, and Member States in addressing the needs of persons **impacted** by conflict?
- How can the EU enhance its measures for **early detection** and **prevention** of humanitarian crises in vulnerable areas?

Further Research

1. “[Israel Gaza war: History of the conflict explained](#)”: A news article that explains the historical context of the Israel-Palestine war.
2. “[Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia](#)”: An article further clarifying the details of the Ukraine-Russia conflict.
3. “[Multimedia Centre](#)”: A video about the social and economic consequences for the EU of the Russian war in Ukraine.
4. “[Can a divided EU have any meaningful policy on Gaza?](#)”: A video of how some Member States support Israel and others oppose its war against Hamas in Gaza.

Transnational impact

Conflicts like Israel-Palestine and the Russia-Ukraine war have a **transnational influence** that affects neighbouring states and the EU as a whole, in addition to the countries directly involved. **Migration waves**, particularly from Ukraine, have put tremendous strain on bordering countries like **Poland**, necessitating well-coordinated **humanitarian** and logistical responses. Sanctions and blocked trade routes have had an **economic knock-on** effect on **EU markets**, driving up **energy prices** and upsetting **supply chains**. **Security** concerns have also grown, leading Member States to reevaluate their defence plans in response to transnational threats like **cyberattacks** and **military buildups**. How long can the EU **endure** the escalating crisis of transnational conflicts before its **foundations begin to crumble**?

Spotlight on the Czech Republic

The **Czech Republic** has launched programs under its **CzechAid programme**, which focuses on humanitarian assistance and capacity building in **underdeveloped countries**, as well as offering integration support for **refugees**. Czechia has been an **outspoken backer** of Ukraine in the EU, pressing for **tough sanctions** against Russia. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, Czechia has **traditionally supported Israel**, emphasising the country's right to self-defence while simultaneously advocating for **humanitarian aid** in **Palestine**.





Committee on Committee on Culture and Education (CULT I)

Classroom Crisis: A shortage of qualified teachers in EU Member States, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is negatively impacting education quality and student outcomes, what measures can the EU take to assist Member States in providing high-quality education for future generations?

By: **María Gascó (ES)**

Abstract

The Topic Overview addresses the **teacher shortage** in Europe, which poses a critical challenge to **education quality**. This is driven by **high attrition rates**, **low perceived attractiveness** of the profession, and **variability** in **teacher training programs** across Member States. Furthermore, it describes the **measures** in place to enhance teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development, mainly through incentive-based methods established by national governments and Ministries of Education. Additionally, it highlights the **specific challenges** faced in **Czechia**.

Introduction

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." – Nelson Mandela 2003.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** intensified an ongoing issue: the **shortage of qualified teachers**. With fewer teachers to provide guidance and support, classrooms became **overcrowded**, student performance **dropped**, and it became increasingly difficult for teachers to provide the **individual attention** students needed for effective learning. Currently, at least **24 Member States** face this issue, undermining **education quality** and threatening millions of **students' futures**. The demand for qualified teachers **outpaces supply** due to low salaries, high attrition rates, and poor working conditions. Consequently, students are left with unqualified or overburdened teachers, leading to **learning deficits** that **perpetuate inequality** and **limit future opportunities**.



Which EU countries have teacher shortages?

■ Yes ■ No ■ No data



“Graph showing countries that suffer from teacher shortages”, Euronews, 2024

Key Terms

- The **education deficit** refers to the loss of knowledge and skills that students experience, often as a result of disruptions in formal education such as the **COVID-19 pandemic**.
- **Educational equity** ensures that all students have equal access to high-quality education and the resources necessary to succeed, regardless of their socioeconomic background.
- A **teacher shortage** occurs when there is a significant gap between the number of qualified teachers required and those available to meet educational demands, leading to overburdened staff and a decline in education quality.
- The **student-teacher ratio** measures the number of students assigned to each teacher, directly influencing the quality of education and the individual attention students receive. The ratio is calculated by taking the number of full-time pupils and dividing it by the number of full-time teachers in the same level.
- The **attrition rate** refers to the rate at which employees leave the profession voluntarily or involuntarily, often due to factors like job dissatisfaction, retirement, or stress.
- The **European Education Area (EEA)** is an initiative launched by the European Union with the goal of creating a unified, high-quality education space across EU Member States by 2025. The EEA seeks to ensure that learners **of all ages** can access quality education and training, **move freely** across borders for study and work, and benefit from educational systems that are **inclusive, fair, and adapted** to the changing needs of society.



Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **Member States** play a crucial role in shaping educational policies, implementing recruitment and retention strategies for teachers, and overseeing training programs within their jurisdictions through their Ministries of Education.
- **The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)** is the body of the **European Commission** focused on promoting education and training initiatives across the EU. It works to ensure high-quality education while addressing the lack of teachers.
- **Educational institutions**, such as schools, colleges, and universities, are central to the implementation of educational policies. They are directly affected by teacher shortages and play a key role in teacher training and professional development.
- **The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)** is a federation of national teachers' unions, representing the interests of education professionals at all levels, that brings together 125 education unions in more than 50 countries across Europe. It engages in social dialogue, influences education policies and runs campaigns and research to address key issues affecting educators.
- The **Teachers' Unions** are organisations that represent the interests of educators, advocating for better working conditions, pay, and professional development opportunities, in order to make the teaching profession more attractive and sustainable.

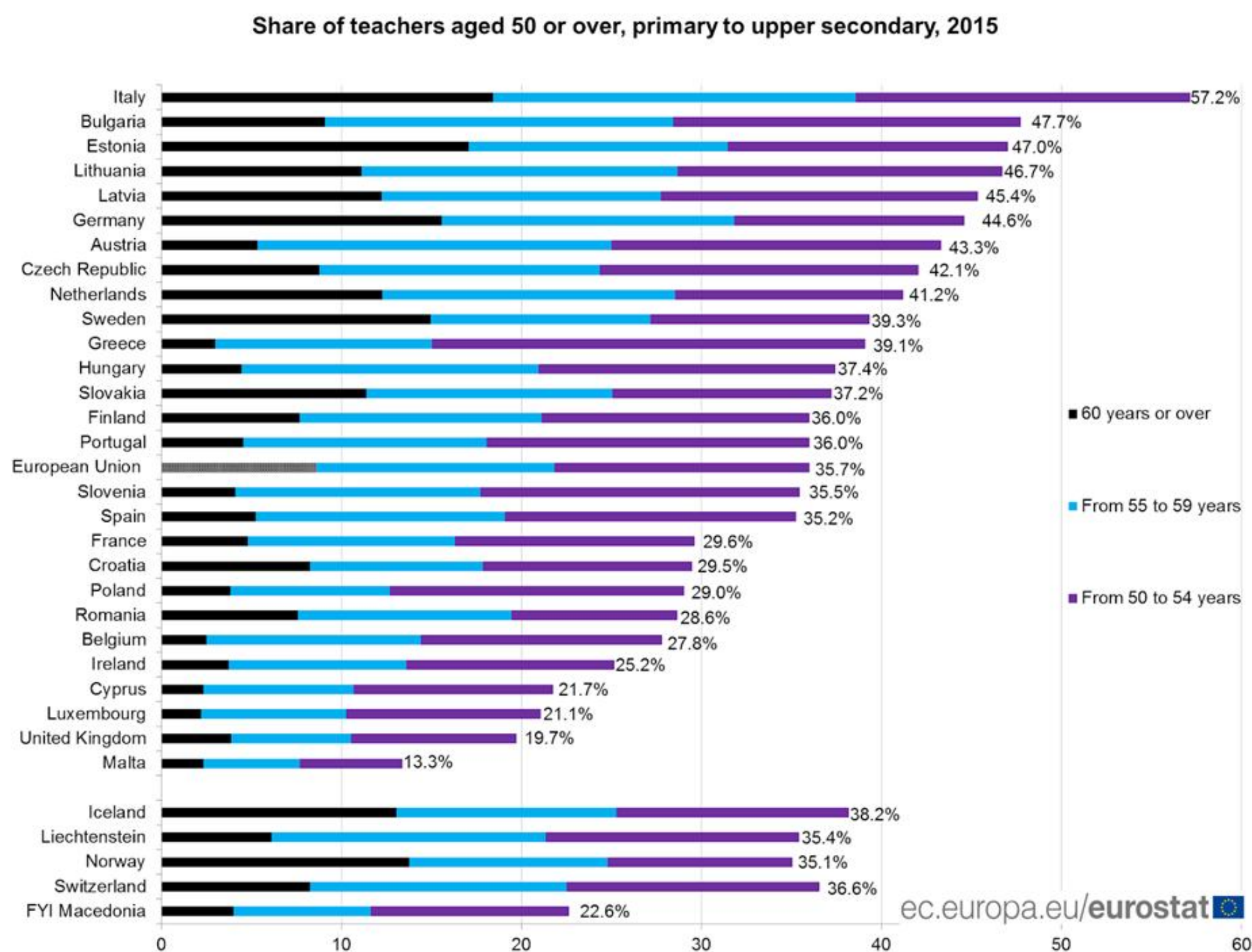
Key Conflicts

High Attrition Rates

One of the most pressing conflicts in the **education sector** in Europe is the **high attrition rates** among teachers, which have been exacerbated by an **ageing population** and increasingly **unfavourable conditions** in the workplace. Factors contributing to this high turnover include **job dissatisfaction**, **burnout**, and **inadequate support** from school administrations in terms of **financial resources** and teacher **well-being**.

The **ageing population** in Europe significantly impacts the teaching profession, as a large portion of the current workforce is **nearing retirement**. Additionally, older teachers may face challenges in **adapting** to **new technologies** and **modern teaching methods**, potentially affecting the **quality of education**. Addressing this **demographic shift** is crucial to maintaining a stable and effective education system in the coming years.



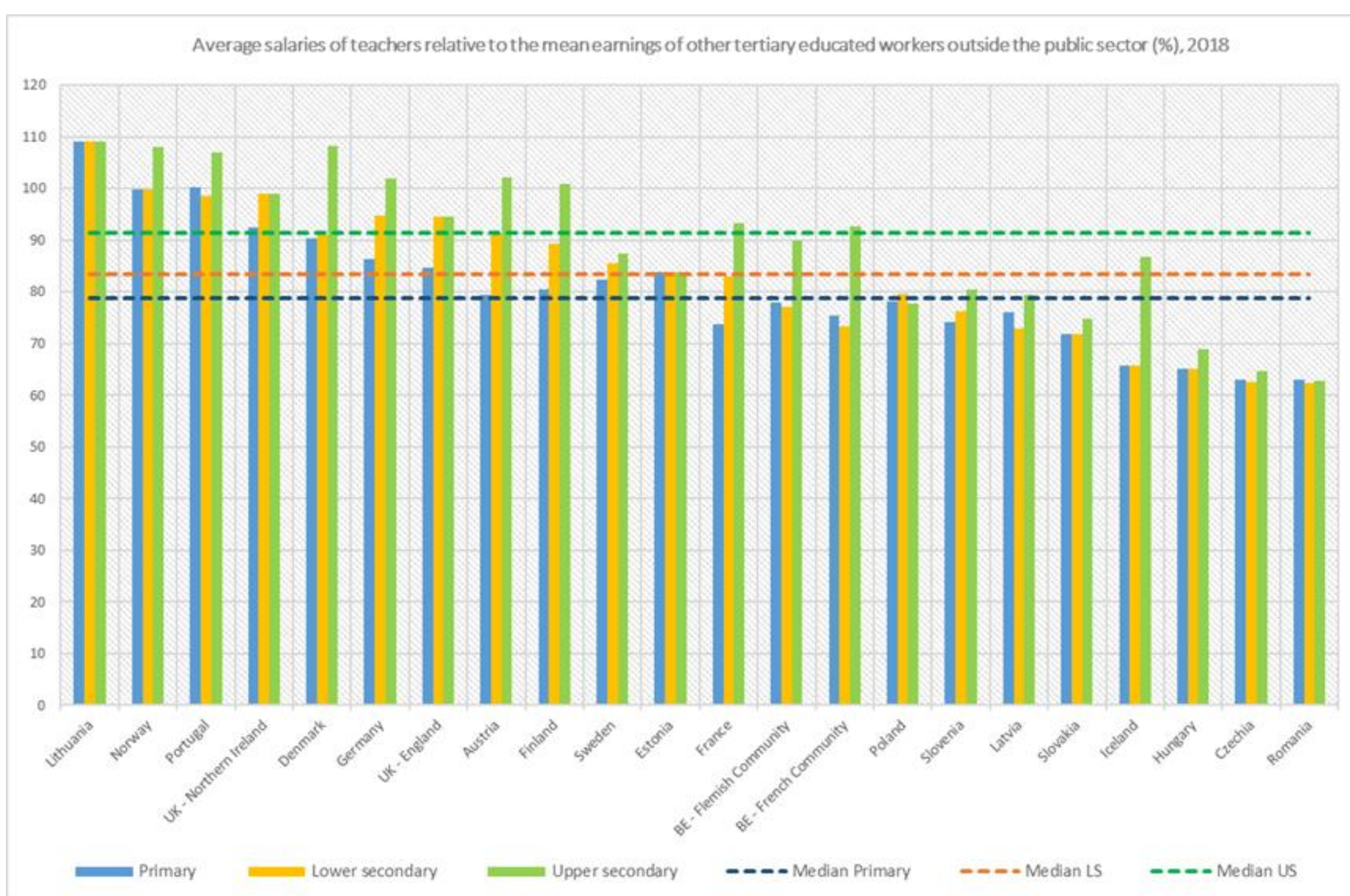


“Graph showing percentage of teachers over the age of 50 working in different European countries”, Eurostat, 2015

As **experienced educators exit** the profession, schools face challenges in maintaining educational quality. Remaining **staff** often become **overburdened** and **less effective** due to **increased class sizes** and **responsibilities**. The impact of high attrition rates extends beyond the classroom; students often **miss out on consistent instruction**, which can **hinder** their **academic progress**. When students experience unstable and inconsistent teaching, they **struggle** to build a **solid foundation** of knowledge, leading to **gaps in understanding** and **lower retention of information**. As a result, students also **miss opportunities** to **bond** with **teachers**, which can further **hinder** their **engagement** and **motivation** in the classroom.

Low attractiveness

Another significant factor affecting **teacher recruitment** is the **low perceived attractiveness** of the teaching profession compared to other career options. **Teaching salaries** in many EU Member States often **struggle to compete** with those of other professions that require similar levels of education and training. In over half of European education systems, teachers on average earn **10% less** than other tertiary-educated workers, which **discourages potential candidates** from entering the profession. Moreover, the widespread **perception of teaching** as a **less prestigious career** further complicates recruitment efforts. This lack of appeal is particularly evident in **high-demand subject areas** such as **mathematics** and **science**, where professionals can command significantly higher salaries in alternative sectors. As a result, potential teachers may opt for more lucrative and respected career paths, leading to a **decreased pool of qualified candidates**.



“Graph showing average salaries of teachers as percentages of tertiary educated workers in the country”, European Commission, 2018

Problems with teacher training

Different Member States adopt **diverse approaches** to **teacher preparation**, resulting in **inconsistencies** in the quality of training received by new educators. For example, **some countries** prioritise rigorous academic training, while others may emphasise practical classroom experience, leading to a **mismatch in teachers’ preparedness**. In some countries, less than **40% of teachers** reported feeling ready to use technology effectively in the classroom; a critical gap that became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. This **lack of preparation** leaves new teachers **struggling to adapt**, further affecting their job satisfaction, retention rates, and overall effectiveness.

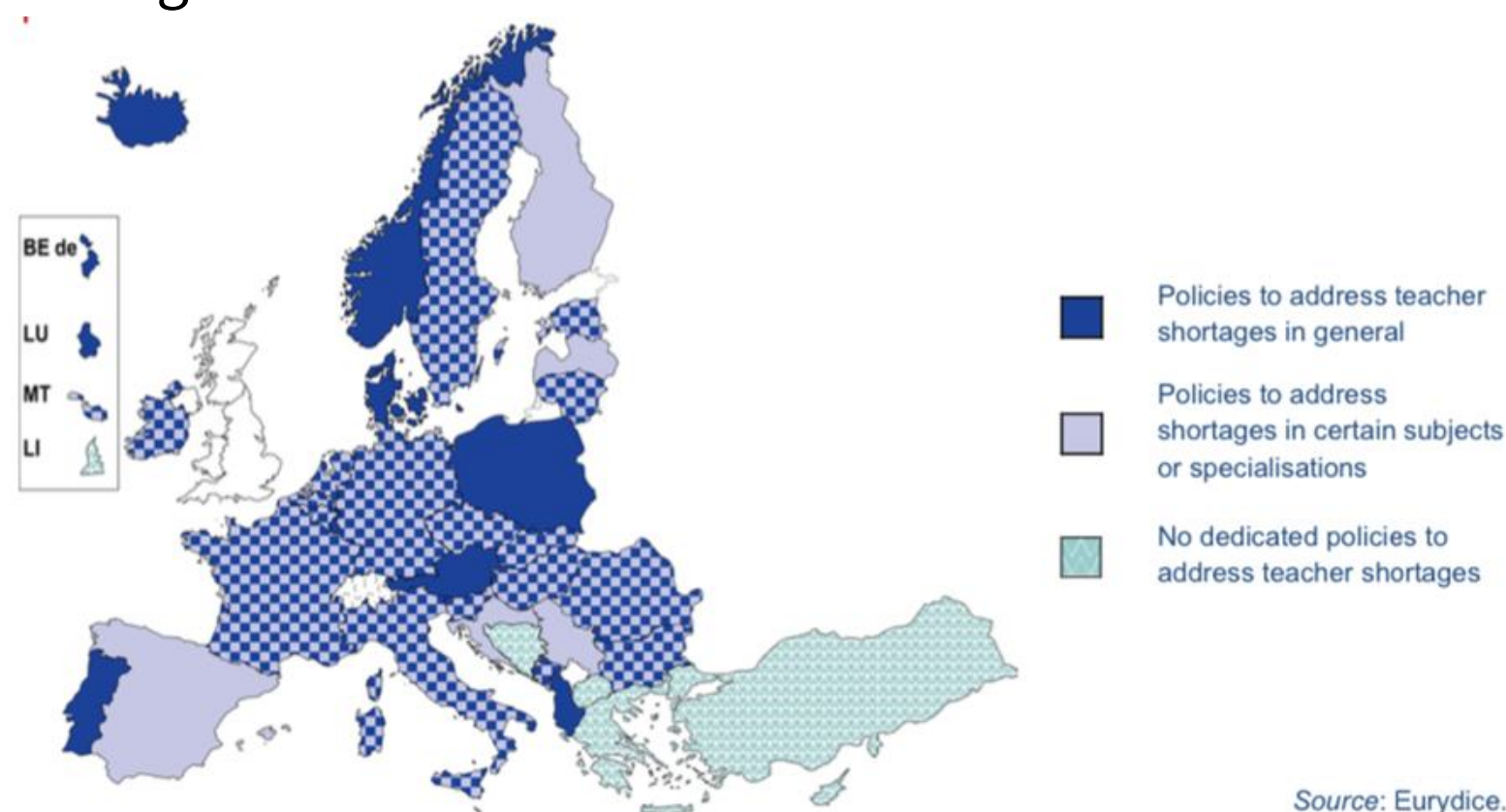
Moreover, differences in training may **hinder teacher mobility** within the EU, as qualifications may not be universally recognized. Teachers may find themselves needing to undergo additional certification processes or training to meet the specific requirements of another country, imposing additional time and financial strains.



Measures in Place

Policy frameworks

Policy frameworks such as the EEA enhance cooperation among Member States in education and training, by promoting the free movement of students and teachers, ensuring quality standards in education, and fostering inclusivity. Furthermore, the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) Framework encourages Member States to improve teacher recruitment and retention strategies, through fostering collaboration and sharing of best practices. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends on national implementation, which can vary significantly. Furthermore, consistent monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are needed across Member States, ensuring that policies lead to tangible outcomes rather than remaining aspirational goals.



*“Map showing countries with top-level policies to address teacher shortages in 2022/2023”,
Eurydice, 2023*

Financial incentives

To combat the teacher shortage in Europe, various **financial incentives** have been introduced. Some countries offer **signing bonuses**, **competitive salaries**, and **student loan forgiveness** programs for those entering the teaching profession, aiming to make the profession **more appealing**. For example, France has introduced **national policies** like the “Priority Education Zones,” which allocate additional resources to schools in disadvantaged areas, improving teacher retention through financial incentives and support. However, the impact of these financial measures **varies across countries**, with significant **disparities in funding** and **implementation** affecting their effectiveness.

Training programs

Robust **teacher training programs** in countries such as Estonia contribute to a **well-prepared teaching workforce**, which in turn enhances student performance. Estonia’s Digital Accelerator Program, develops educators’ digital skills, enabling effective integration of technology in classrooms. Additionally, the Erasmus+ program promotes teacher mobility and collaboration across Europe, facilitating cross-border training and sharing of best practices. While these programs improve educators’ professional competence and confidence, variability in training quality exists among different Member States.



Food for thought

- What specific strategies can be implemented to improve teacher retention rates, considering the existing challenges?
- How can the attractiveness of the teaching profession be enhanced to attract high-quality candidates?
- In what ways can local communities play a role in supporting teachers and addressing the issue of teacher shortages?
- What measures can be taken to standardise teacher training programs across Europe, ensuring that all teachers are adequately prepared for their roles regardless of their location?

Further Research

1. “[Chapter 1. The teaching profession](#)”: A report published by the European Commission, focusing on the state of education and training across Europe highlighting trends and challenges across Europe.
2. “[At least 24 EU countries struggle with teacher shortages — here's why](#)”: A short video providing a summary on the problem of teacher shortages.
3. “[Stressed out, burned out and dropping out: Why teachers are leaving the classroom](#)”: An article/interview examining the phenomenon of teacher attrition, focusing on the emotional and psychological challenges educators face in their profession.
4. “[The Silent Education Crisis: Teacher Shortages Are Spreading Around The World](#)”: An article addressing the growing global teacher shortage and its impact on education systems worldwide.
5. “[Declining performance and persistent staff shortages in education across Europe](#)”: An article focusing on declining student performance across Europe and the ongoing staff shortages in the education sector, highlighting how these issues are affecting school systems and teachers.

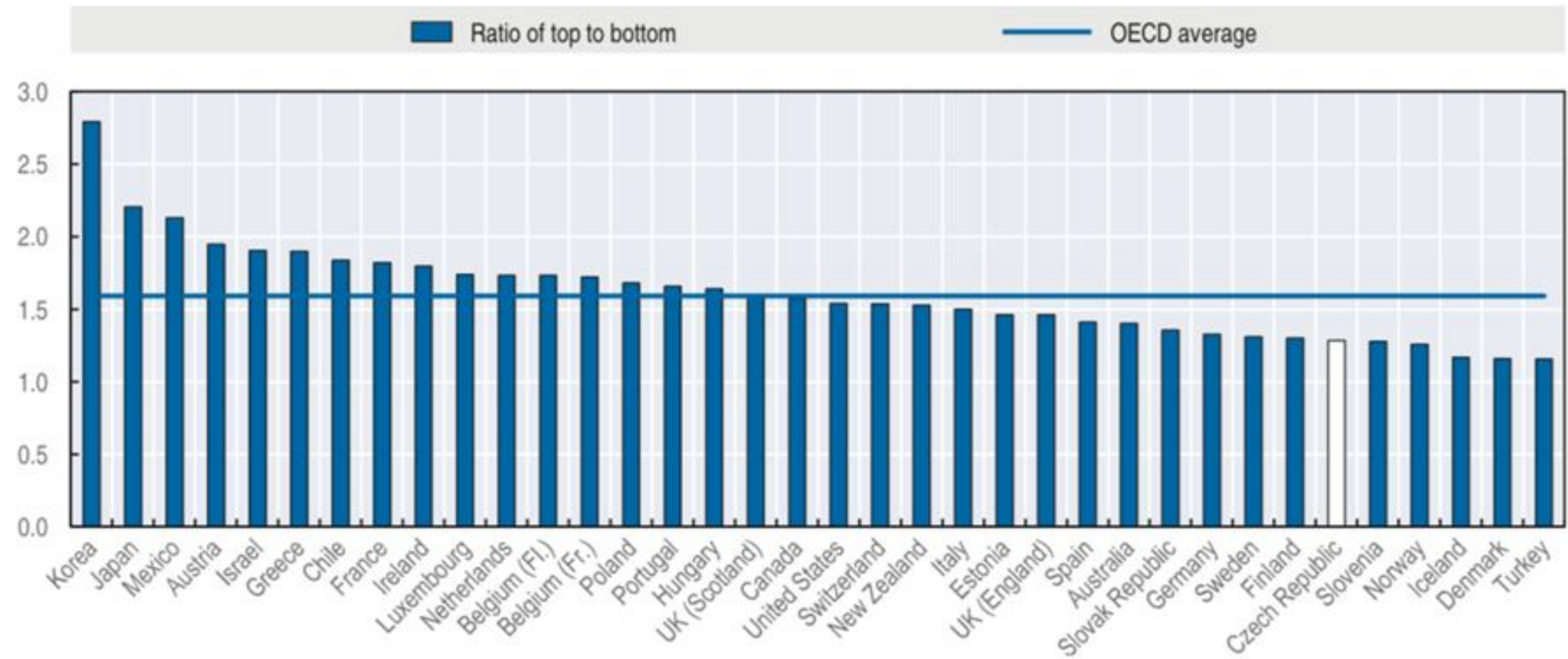
Spotlight on the Czech Republic

The **Czech Republic** faces significant **challenges** regarding **teacher shortages** and **educational quality**, reflecting broader trends seen across Europe. Nearly 30% of teachers were aged 55 or older, indicating an **impending wave of retirements** that could exacerbate existing shortages. Furthermore, it has one of the **biggest student-teacher** ratios in Europe with 18.7 compared to the EU average of 13.4.





In recent years, the Czech government has introduced several measures aimed at improving the **attractiveness of the teaching profession**. The **average salary** for teachers in the Czech Republic is **relatively low** compared to other EU countries. To combat this, the Ministry has pledged to increase **teachers' average salary to correspond to 130%** of the average wage in the whole economy. However, raising salaries **poses challenges**, especially considering that the wage for 2023 has **already increased** by nearly 3,000 CZK (approximately 122 EUR) from that of 2022.



*“Graph showing ratio of salary at top of scale to starting salary in lower secondary education”,
OECD, 2016*

On another note, **retention rates** among teachers in the Czech Republic are also **concerning**. Surveys indicate that many educators express **dissatisfaction** with their **working conditions**, leading to **one third** of Czech school teachers experiencing burnout and **only half** of the teachers **remaining in the profession** 5 years after starting.





Committee on Committee on Culture and Education (CULT II)

Broaden the Erasmus Vibe!: According to the European Commission's recent report, Spain, Italy, and France top the list for hosting the most Erasmus students and staff, potentially constricting and devaluing the Erasmus motto of cultural exchange. Given that over 30 countries participate in these programmes, how can the EU promote Erasmus to countries with lower levels of cultural mobility and internationalisation to ensure a more balanced exchange?

By: **Eyül Eren (TR)**

Abstract

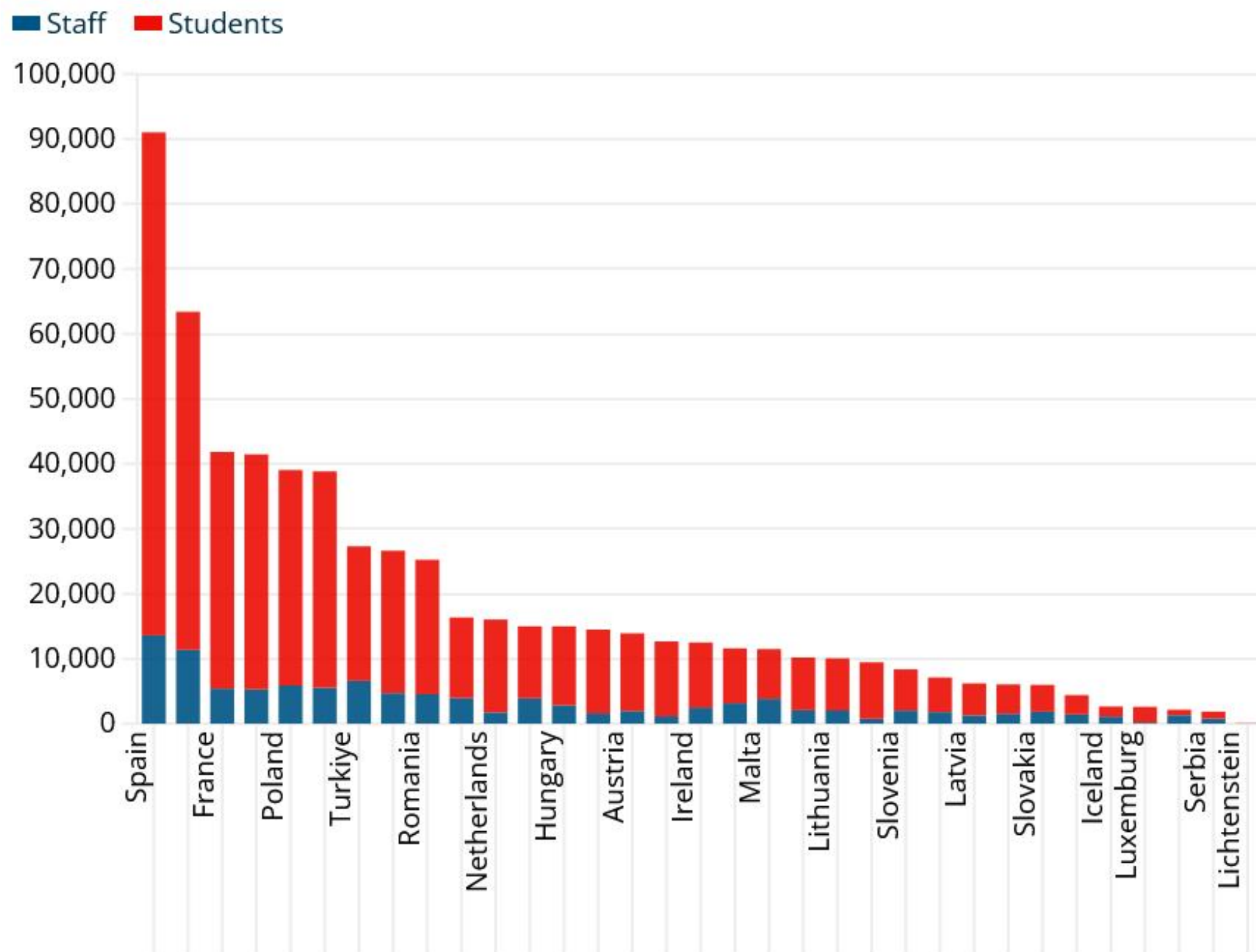
The Erasmus+ Programme, a flagship initiative of the EU, **fosters educational mobility across more than 30 countries**. Despite its success, the programme faces **significant imbalances**, with universities in countries like Spain, Italy, and France hosting the **majority** of participants, while other countries lag behind. **Financial barriers**, within sending and host countries, **insufficient grants**, **institutional challenges** due to lack of support and **cooperation**, and unequal **project capacity** hinder a truly balanced exchange. Measures such as targeted grants, specific institutional support, and the promotion of lesser-known destinations aim to address these disparities, yet **further efforts are needed** to fully realise equitable participation in Erasmus opportunities. How can the EU adopt more comprehensive solutions to ensure broader access and inclusivity?

Introduction

The Erasmus+ Programme, initiated by the EU in 1987, collaborating with more than **170,000** organisations, is one of the **flagship initiatives of the EU**. Presently, Erasmus+ counts **more than 15 million participants** in mobility activities, growing into a pivotal force for educational mobility, not only becoming **one of the biggest student mobility projects** ever but also one of the most successful projects of the EU. Its benefits are vast, including enhancing cooperation among nations, **strengthening international ties**, **providing language** and cultural skills, and significantly improving employability. Erasmus alumni are **44%** more likely to hold managerial positions and **half as likely to experience unemployment**, underscoring the role of the programme in **fostering career success and high-quality education**. However, the programme's motto of cultural exchange is endangered by the **unequal cultural mobility between countries**, with Spain and Italy hosting and sending over **25%** of participants, while countries like Latvia and Serbia see fewer than **10,000** students involved.



Considering the importance of the Erasmus programme and the **lack of measures** to **address cultural mobility imbalances**, it is essential to implement targeted initiatives now.



” Where do Erasmus+ participants go?”, Euronews, 2023

Key Terms

- **The Erasmus+ Programme** is an EU initiative that promotes educational mobility and cooperation across Europe and beyond, including a wide range of projects. These projects cover everything from training and digital knowledge-sharing platforms to cultural mobility initiatives. In the context of cultural mobility, Erasmus+ supports both student and staff exchanges, including student mobility for studies or traineeships, as well as staff mobility for teaching and training.
- **Cultural Mobility** refers to the ability to move between different cultural environments, allowing individuals the freedom to determine their own place within the cultural landscape.
- **Erasmus Grant** provides financial support to participants, adjusted for the living costs of host countries. While the European Commission sets the funding range, national agencies decide the exact amount students receive and whether to offer additional co-financing.

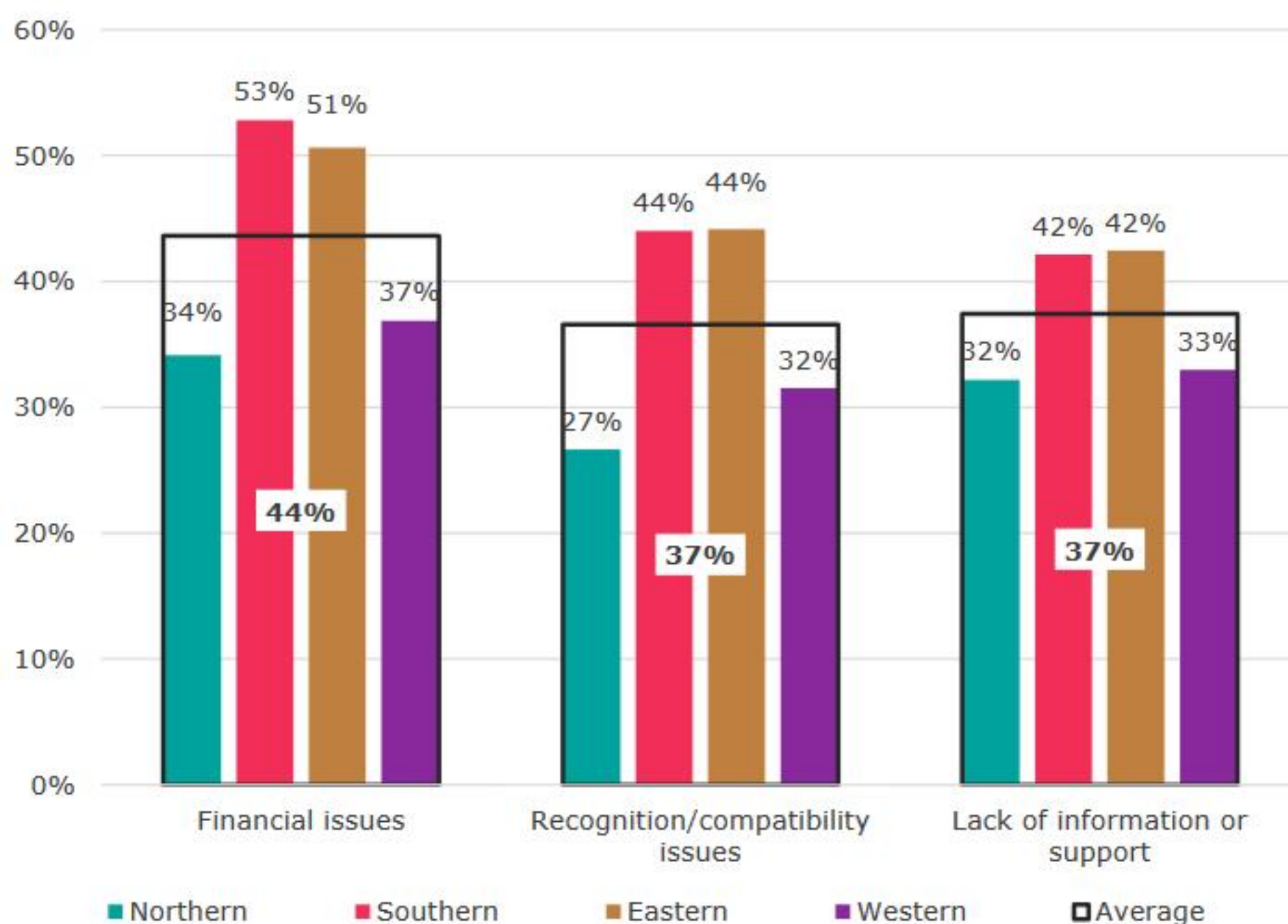
Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)**, as part of the **European Commission**, oversees the Erasmus+ programme. It sets priorities, manages the budget, and monitors implementation across participating countries to enhance mobility and internationalisation. DG EAC works with national bodies to ensure alignment with EU educational standards.
- **Universities and Higher Education Institutions** are key to the Erasmus+ programme, facilitating student exchanges while meeting EU standards for credit recognition, learning agreements, and student support. They can partner with any institution, provided both adopt the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education** and outline a project strategy.
- **National Erasmus+ Agencies** implement the programme through indirect management, with the European Commission delegating budgetary and operational responsibilities to them. This structure ensures that Erasmus+ is tailored to the specific educational, training, and youth systems of each participating country. Every EU Member State and associated third country appoints one or more National Agencies to manage, promote, and execute the programme at the national level.
- **The European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)** is responsible for managing certain Erasmus+ actions directly at the European level. It ensures effective implementation by working closely with DG EAC and National Agencies, providing technical support and monitoring outcomes.
- **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** supports Erasmus students by offering guidance, organising social and cultural events, and fostering integration. It collaborates with universities to improve the mobility experience and advocates for policies that enhance accessibility and student support across Europe.
- **Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**, such as **SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion & Diversity**, support Erasmus+ by promoting equal access to mobility for underrepresented and marginalised youth. They offer resources, training, and tools to ensure inclusion and diversity in Erasmus+ projects, enabling full participation in international exchanges.
- **Youth NGOs and Networks**, such as **Youth for Exchange and Understanding**, collaborate with the Erasmus+ programme to promote youth mobility. One of their focuses is to **inform young people** about Erasmus+ opportunities and help coordinate exchange programs between underrepresented and popular destinations.

Key Conflicts

Financial Constraints

One primary reason for the low levels of cultural mobility within the Erasmus programme is **financial constraints**, particularly for students from **Southern and Eastern Europe**, with **68%** reporting that **the Erasmus grant** was essential in determining their ability to participate. Although the **Erasmus+ programme's 2021–2027 plan** aims to increase inclusivity by expanding grants, several issues continue to hinder participation.



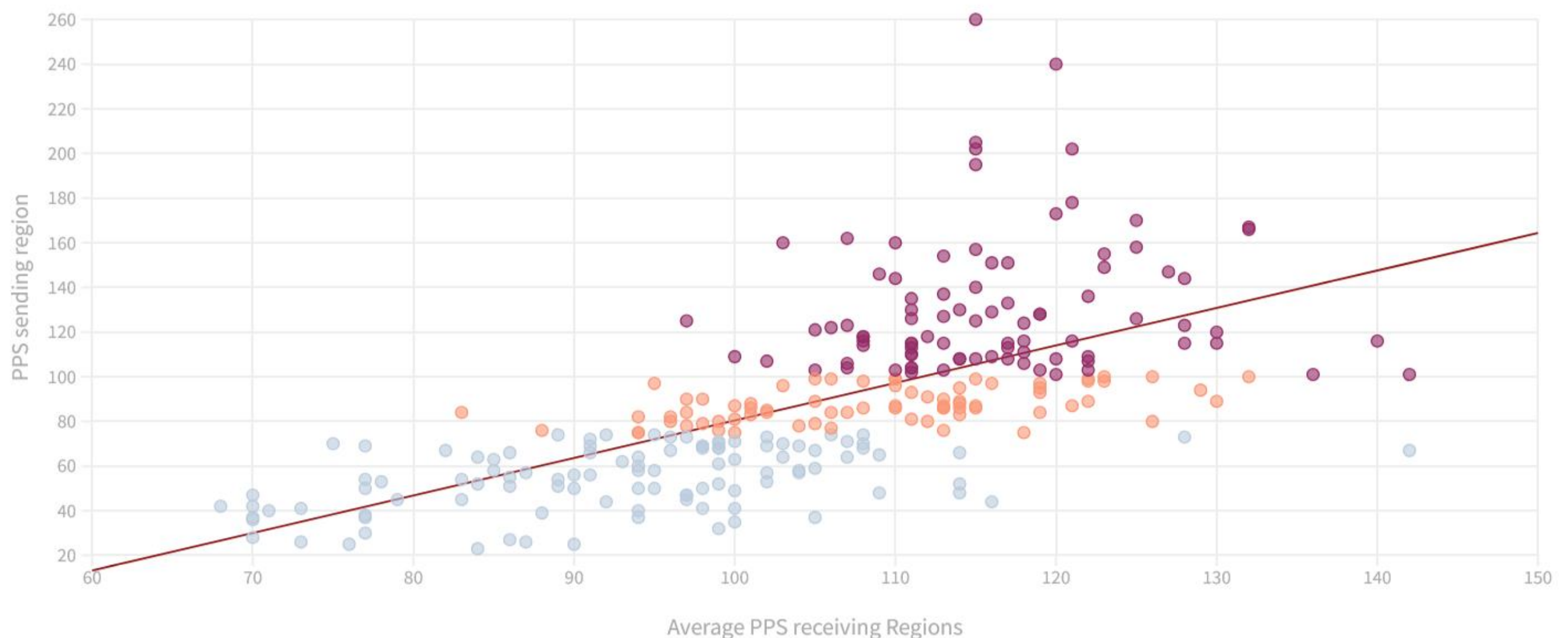
“Main groups of reasons for not participating in mobility, the perspective of nonmobile students, by region”, SEPIE, 2016

Erasmus+ grants are structured **based on the cost of living in different countries**, dividing destinations into **three tiers**: low, medium, and high living costs. The grant amount depends on the mobility destination and the cost differential between the home and host countries. In 2023, grants **ranged** from 292 to 606 EUR for medium-cost countries and from 348 to 674 EUR for high-cost countries. However, the system has **notable shortcomings**. **National agencies set the final grant amount** within the given ranges, creating inequalities even among students from the same group of countries. Additionally, the differences between the tiers **do not always reflect the real financial disparities** between countries. Furthermore, the gap between the minimum and maximum grant amounts within a tier undermines the system's transparency and consistency, leaving it up to institutions.

Moreover, grants are often received **after students have already moved to the host country**, complicating the mobility process. Even when received, they **cover only about three-quarters of the total costs** associated with studying abroad. This makes participation particularly difficult for students from economically disadvantaged regions and **limits their ability to choose high-cost countries as host destinations**.

The broader European **student housing crisis** exacerbates the situation. Rising accommodation costs in many countries, such as Belgium, have forced students to cancel their Erasmus semesters, as grants often fail to cover basic living expenses like rent along with lack of structural support mechanisms for students. The issue is compounded by the variation in co-financing levels across Europe. While some countries provide substantial national or university support in addition to EU funding, others rely almost entirely on EU grants. For instance, in 2021, Serbia allocated only €1.8 million for mobility grants, supporting 1,084 students, while Germany allocated nearly €93 million, enabling 45,670 students to study abroad.

This inequality is reflected in mobility trends: during the 2019–2020 academic year, 61% of students from economically developed countries studied in **similarly developed regions**, further reinforcing the economic divide within Erasmus+ participation.



“Graph showing the regions have similar economic levels by comparing the Purchasing Power Standards (PPS)”, Europe Data Journalism Network, 2022



Institutional Challenges

Non-mobile students¹ in Southern and Eastern Europe more frequently cited a **lack of information and support** compared to their peers in Northern and Western Europe. Additionally, a **lack of awareness about the benefits** of participating in Erasmus+ remained a significant barrier in these regions.

Under the Erasmus+ system, each university is free to sign agreements with any institution, provided both parties agree to adopt the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education** and present a specific strategy for the project. However, top-ranked universities often **prefer to partner with institutions of similar standing** due to a lack of incentive to engage with lower-ranked or resource-limited universities. This creates a "**rich-club effect**," which reinforces a **hierarchy within the Erasmus+ network** and makes it **challenging for certain regions** to participate fully.

Economic considerations also play a role in shaping mobility patterns, as some universities opt for partnerships with lower-cost countries, such as Romania, rather than higher-cost destinations, like the Netherlands or Sweden.

Structural Challenges

Formal recognition² of Erasmus+ mobility experiences is crucial to ensure qualifications are acknowledged across universities. However, **31.87%** of participants reported their experiences as **unrecognised**, with Southern and Eastern Europe facing **greater challenges** in this area.

Not only is the Erasmus+ programme notably more **selective** in Eastern Europe, but the **visa process** is also **much harder** for non-EU/Schengen citizens, who face stricter financial and documentation requirements, as well as higher visa costs.

The availability of mobility projects **varies significantly** by country. For example, Spain had 1,047 higher education projects in 2022, supported by a €157 million budget for Erasmus+, while Serbia managed only 37 projects with a mobility grant of €3 million.

Finally, **safety concerns** also impact mobility choices, as countries with higher public safety levels, such as Spain, Italy, and France, attract more participants compared to those perceived as less safe.

¹Non-mobile students in this context are the students who do not participate in study or exchange programs abroad and remain at their home institution for their entire course of study.

²**Formal recognition** in the context of Erasmus+ mobility ensures that the academic credits or qualifications earned by students during their exchange are fully acknowledged by their home universities.





Measures in Place

Several EU initiatives actively promote mobility to lesser-known Erasmus destinations, particularly in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. For instance, [the Western Balkans Youth Window](#) aims to boost participation in Erasmus+ by providing **additional funding and project support** to partners in the region. Similarly, the Erasmus+ **International Credit Mobility (ICM)** programme facilitates credit mobility between EU and non-EU countries, specifically targeting the Southern Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and Western Balkans. By **allocating extra funds to partnerships in lower-mobility regions**, ICM fosters balanced exchanges and diversifies available destinations for Erasmus participants.

Regarding financial concerns, [The Erasmus for All project](#) aims to address financial barriers that prevent many higher education students from participating in the Erasmus programme. It promotes fairness, inclusion, and equity in mobility grants among individuals and **across economically diverse countries** by proposing a **more viable scholarship scheme**. The project also focuses on keeping these issues at the forefront of policy discussions and engaging stakeholders in resource allocation strategies to widen participation in mobility.

Moreover, the **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** plays a vital role in advocating for student mobility. As a non-profit international student organisation, ESN **represents** Erasmus+ students at national and European levels, focusing on policies that **enhance mobility and inclusivity**. Through annual surveys and [reports](#), ESN collects data on student mobility trends to inform policymakers and improve the Erasmus+ programme.

Looking to support institutions, The [2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme](#) emphasises **simplified and inclusive application processes**, facilitating institutions in lesser-known Erasmus countries to host international students and staff. It prioritises streamlined **funding for small-scale partnerships**. Additionally, the [Capacity Building in Higher Education](#) project supports universities in Southern and Eastern Europe by strengthening their educational capacities and **international partnerships**. It includes joint projects that modernise institutions and develop new curricula, also strengthening relationships between higher education institutions. Furthermore, the [Erasmus Without Paper](#) initiative streamlines the administrative procedures involved in Erasmus+ mobility, **reducing the burden** on institutions and facilitating secure information exchange regarding student mobility.

For students, the [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System](#) aims to standardise academic credit transfer across European universities, ensuring that Erasmus+ students' coursework and **qualifications are recognised more uniformly**.

Although there are various measures and projects aimed at addressing the general issue of imbalances between cultural mobilities, most solutions **do not specifically target** this problem, and there is **limited focus on promoting Erasmus in countries with lower levels of cultural mobility**.





Food for thought

- How can the EU enhance financial support mechanisms for students from economically disadvantaged countries to ensure they can participate in the Erasmus programme without facing significant financial burdens?
- What specific strategies can be implemented to improve awareness and access to information about Erasmus opportunities for non-mobile students in Southern and Eastern Europe?
- What strategies can be employed to encourage a higher number of students and staff to choose high-cost countries, such as those in Northern Europe, for their Erasmus experiences?
- What measures can be taken to address the disparities in mobility project availability and funding across EU countries?

Further Research

1. [“Erasmus+ in a Nutshell”](#): A video quickly explaining the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme.
2. [“Who implements the Erasmus+ Programme?”](#): An article on who is in charge of the Erasmus+ Programme and how the system works.
3. [“Mobility Scoreboard Higher education background report 2022/2023”](#): A report assesses how well countries provide students with the necessary information and guidance on learning mobility, through top-level strategies, web portals, and personalised services.
4. [“Strategies for inclusive and sustainable student mobility”](#): A short blog from the UK about strategies for increasing student mobility.





Committee on Human Rights (DROI)

Protect Us!: *Given the annual 41% increase in the number of people displaced by natural disasters and ecological threats since 2020, the recognition of climate change dangers has significantly grown. Considering the New Pact on Migration and Asylum does not recognise climate stress as grounds to seek refugee status, how can the EU ensure the protection and human rights of refugees displaced by climate change?*

By: **Erin Warren (UK)**

Abstract

The Topic Overview goes through some of the biggest issues surrounding climate-displaced persons, such as the lack of **legal definition, effective protection, and accurate information** surrounding climate-displaced persons. It also recognises the current, potentially ineffective legislation on climate change and the effect these policies have on this issue. Lastly, it briefly discusses the **measures already taken** and introduces relevant bodies discussing both climate change and climate displacement, such as the work of the Platform on Disaster Displacement ([PDD](#)) and Institute for Economics and Peace ([ICPP](#)).

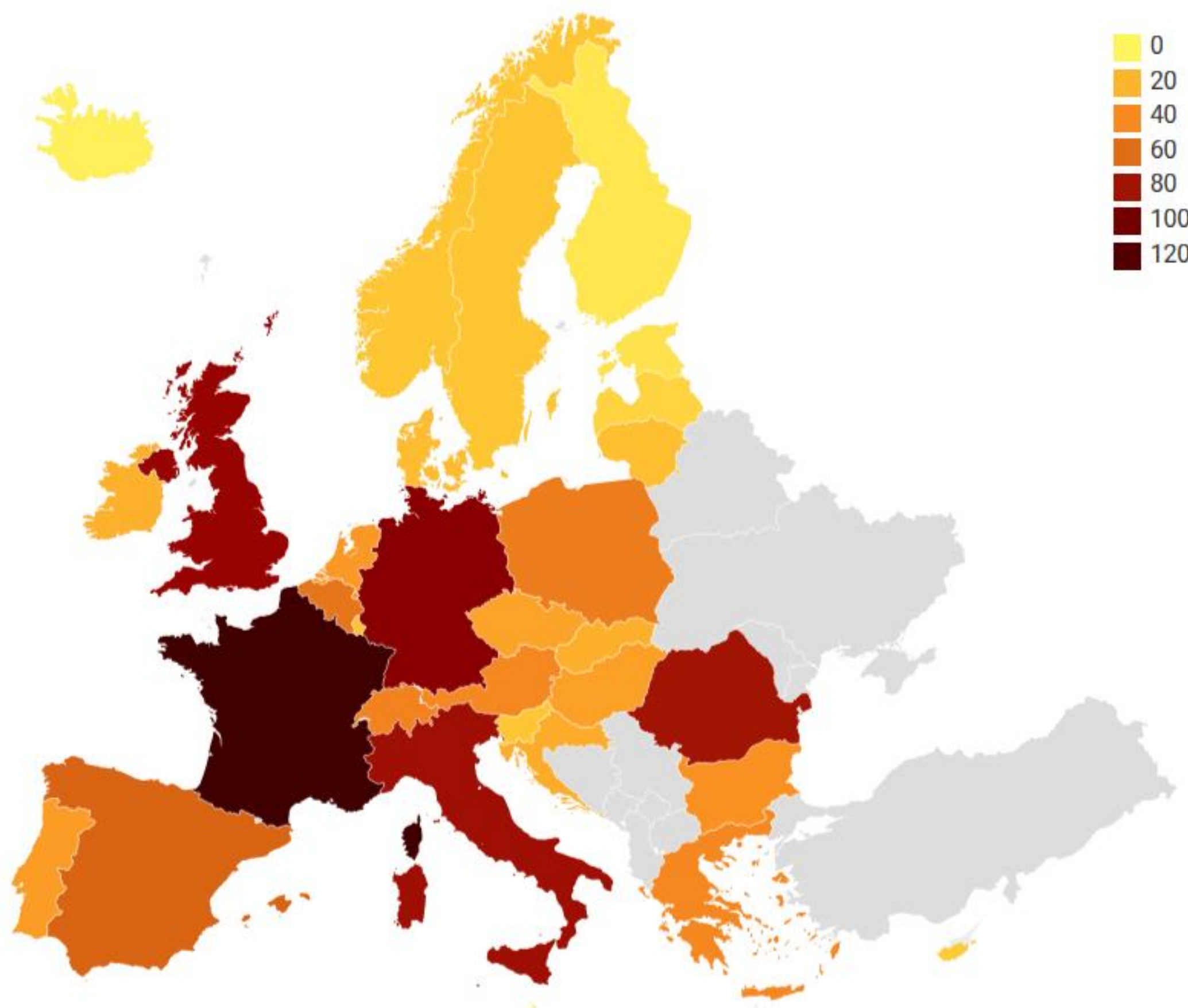
This Topic Overview encourages the reader to reflect on the **humanitarian issues** related to these challenges and to focus on the **human rights of climate-displaced persons**.

Introduction

The ever-increasing frequency of environmental crises due to climate change is often perceived as a problem faced predominantly by the [Global South](#). However, with the worsening environmental crisis in Europe – such as the [2023 floods in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region](#) which **displaced 36,000 people** — the short-term consequences of climate change remain relatively unmitigated.

Climate-displaced people are not recognised by the legal definition of "refugee" nor included in the [New Pact on Asylum and Migration](#). This **lack of legal framework**, and the resulting uncertainty over the rights of climate refugees, leads to overlapping crises in the application of **human rights of climate refugees**.





“A map showing the number of extreme events in Europe since 1960”, GreenMatch, 2024

Key Terms

- **Climate change** refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns that define Earth's local, regional and global climates.
- **Climate Displacement** is the involuntary movement of people in response to sudden or developing changes in climate or the occurrence of a natural disaster.
- **Climate Migration** is the movement of people who leave their homes due to climate change, either temporarily or permanently, within a country or across borders.
- **Refugees** are people who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Traditional refugees' fundamental rights are **protected by international law**.



- **Climate/Environmental refugees** are people forced to leave their homes and communities due to significant environmental disruption that jeopardise their existence and/or seriously affect their quality of life. This is not a legally recognised definition, and their fundamental rights are **not protected by international law**.
- **Asylum seekers** are people who have left their country of origin as political refugees and are seeking asylum in another country. The average length of the asylum procedure is **10 months** within the EU.
- **Internally Displaced People (IDPs)** are people who are forced to leave their homes but remain within their country's borders. They are often referred to as 'refugees' but do not fall within any legal definition.

Key Actors & Stakeholders

- The EU **Member States** are the 27 nations that comprise the EU each is obligated by collective EU framework, such as the **New Pact on Asylum and Migration**, however, they maintain autonomy over their nations own migration policy.
- The **European Commission** is the EU's politically independent executive arm, which is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation and the implementation of decisions. This body was responsible for developing the EU's new Migration and Asylum Framework.
- **The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)** serves as a resource for Member States in the field of international protection. They provide practical, legal, technical, advisory and operational assistance, but they do not replace the national asylum or reception authorities.
- The **European Environment Agency (EEA)** supports policy developments by providing the data needed to achieve sustainability and meet climate goals in Europe. Although not a body specifically based on climate migration, the EEA provides case studies on the effects of natural disasters which are relevant to this topic.
- The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** is an intergovernmental organisation in the field of migration dedicated to ensuring the orderly and humane management of migration. It has been responsible for **1,000 projects since 1998** such as the **Nansen Initiative** (2012-2015) and Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy (**MECLEP**).
- **Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD)** is a state-led initiative following on from the work of the Nansen Initiative. Through transatlantic cooperation and partnerships, the PDD works for better protection for people at risk of or being displaced by climate disasters by **filling in data gaps**, integrating the issue into **global policy processes** and generally **bringing awareness** to the issue.



Key Conflicts

Defining 'Climate Refugee'

Despite being discussed at several international negotiations since the 2012 [Nansen Initiative](#), there remains a **severe lack of legal framework** and recognition of the status of climate refugees. Unprotected by the [1951 Refugee Convention](#), the legal void surrounding climate-displaced people [complicates efforts to legislate](#) and understand the depth of this issue, therefore making it one of the largest barriers to protecting climate-displaced people.

There is criticism over using the term 'refugee' in this context. When considering the UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention's definition of 'refugee', there are concerns that including 'Climate refugees' may [weaken the original definition](#). Unlike those defined as refugees under the 1951 Geneva Convention, climate-displaced people may be able to rely on support and **aid provided by their countries**, especially considering a majority of **migration after a crisis is internal** rather than external. However, there are often difficulties in recovering from environmental threats with climate-related events estimated to have caused [EUR 145 billion](#) in economic losses in the EU in the last decade alone. Environmental threats frequently **overlap with pre-existing structural problems**, which only exacerbates this issue.

But what do we know?

Considering there's to be an expected **1.2 billion people to be displaced by climate-related threats by 2050**, there is a severe [lack of accurate data](#) available to Member States surrounding climate-displaced people. This is [largely due to the absence of legal status](#) and is a significant inhibitor to the establishment of a larger international framework to address the issue.

The main problem Member States face is whether this issue should be subject to a **new treaty or international agreement** or should run on a regional-based system, such as the [Kampala Convention](#) in Africa.

Refocusing the conversation about climate change

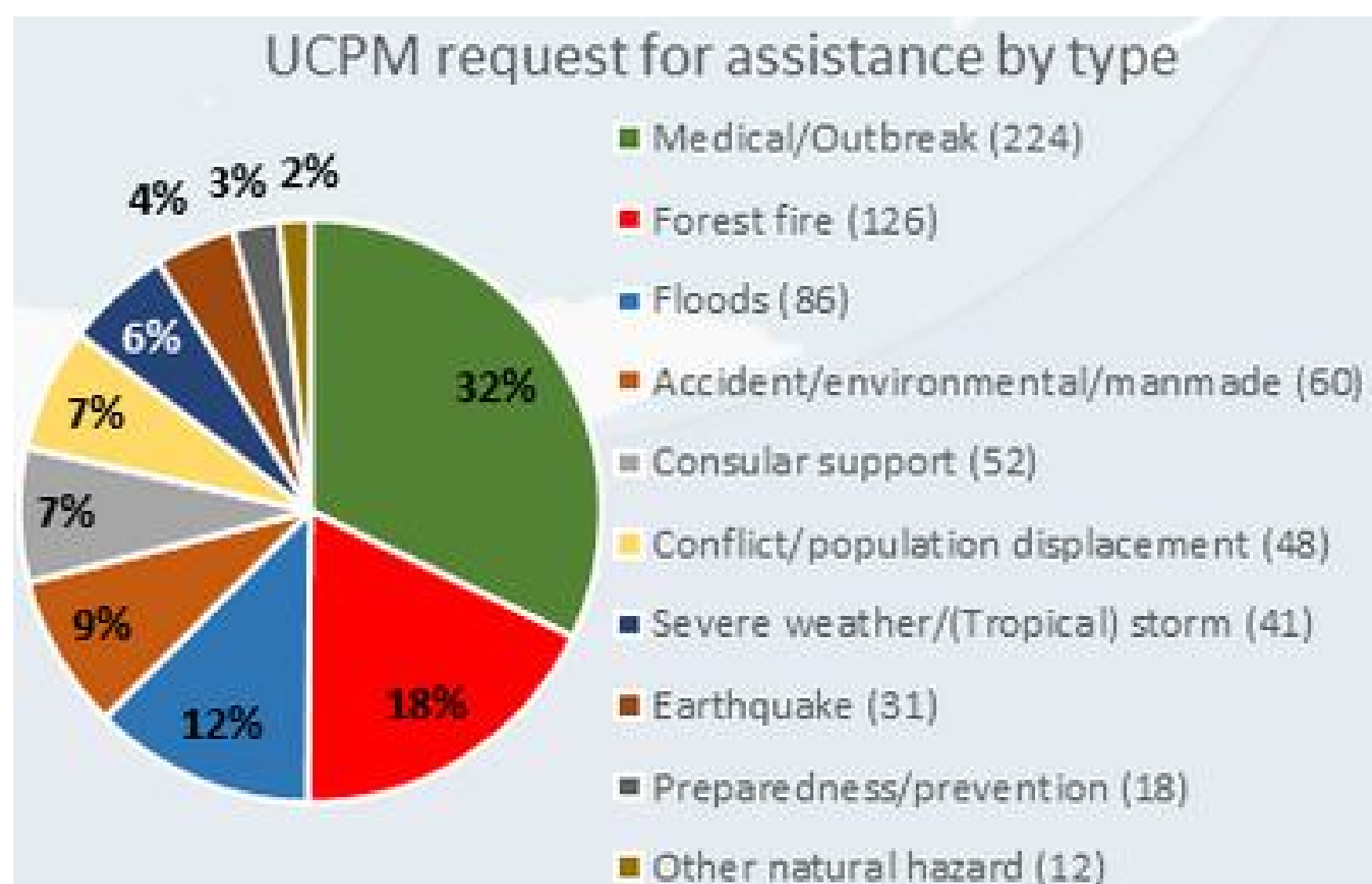
Although the EU is a driving force in climate change legislation, the focus on solving climate change at '**the root**' [fails to recognise the short-term](#) issues caused by climate change the EU is currently facing. The [immediate effects](#) of climate-related crises such as reduction in water availability, decrease in crop yield, and negative overall impact on health are some of the main reasons for climate displacement. These issues have received a **comparatively minimalist immediate response from the EU**. The idea of addressing climate displacement also falls victim to the EU's [focus on](#) 'fixing it at the root' policy.

It's important to also note, that there are criticisms from organisations such as [Carbon Brief](#) that current legislation, such as that put in by [COP26](#), **failed to provide adequate resources to undo or address the impacts of climate change**. With the frequency of climate-related disasters increasing, and inadequate legislation put in place by Member States, this is a problem that will only be exacerbated in the coming years without proper consideration of both the long and short-term impacts of climate change.

Measures in Place

European Level Measures/Frameworks

The EU's response to natural disasters, including through mechanism the [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#) tend to focus on **prevention and reduction of disaster risks**¹ through increasing resistance in infrastructure. However, the **Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)** responds to crises by focusing on the immediate support needed such as providing supplies and specialised teams like firefighters. Additionally, the **Humanitarian Aid Operations Department (ECHO)** offers **humanitarian aid** after crises. While both of these mechanisms directly help **during the initial stages of a crisis**, they lack a focus on long-term recovery for those affected.



[“Types of crisis UCPM responds to proportionality”](#), European Commission, 2023

¹ [Disaster risk](#) is the consequence of the interaction between a hazard and the characteristics that make people and places vulnerable and exposed.



International Initiatives

The conversation surrounding climate-displaced people has been addressed in initiatives like the [Nansen initiative](#) (2012–2015), which established a **Non-binding agenda for the protection of climate-displaced persons** and paved the way for the conversation in [COP21](#). Although the Nansen initiative has concluded, the Platform on Disaster Displacement ([PDD](#)) continues its work, partnering directly with organisations like the International Organisation for Migration ([IOM](#)). Notably, the PDD and IOM collaborate on projects such as the [baseline analysis report](#) under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration ([GCM](#)), which is part of the United Nations Migration Network Workplan ([UNMN](#)). Similarly, organisations such as the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**, and **End Climate Change, Start Climate Of Change**, produce annual reports on climate change and ecological threats. While these efforts have sparked discourse on climate-displaced persons, a significant information void remains, and **Member States need to get more actively involved** in creating solutions to problems facing climate-displaced persons.

Food for thought

- **Considering the legal definition of ‘refugee’**, should climate displaced people be included in the original definition with an amendment without changing the core meaning of ‘refugee’?
- Although climate change displays itself combined with different factors such as economic issues, how can the EU determine individuals as climate migrants under a common criteria?
- With the lack of accurate data available, how should Member States ensure they are putting forward the best Human Rights protection for climate displaced people?
- What can Member States do to ensure they are supporting climate displaced persons whilst considering both the long-term and short-term effects of climate change?

Further Research

1. “[Know How: UNHCR expert on climate change and forced displacement](#)”: A short video discussing some of the ways climate change displaces people, and the challenges that come with displacement.
2. “[The concept of ‘climate refugee’](#)”: A Briefing considering the problems facing climate refugees holistically.
3. “[Climate change and displacement: The myths and the Facts](#)”: An explanation on some of the main misunderstandings surrounding climate displacement.
4. “[Why We Won’t Reach a ‘Climate Migrant’ Protection Category – And What We Can Do Instead](#)”: A blog outlining the reasons why a ‘climate migrant’ protection category is unlikely or even undesirable.





Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)

Equal voices, stronger peace: Despite the growing recognition of women's contributions to peacekeeping, only 60 out of 193 countries have a woman serving as foreign affairs minister. Given the significant underrepresentation of women in politics, especially in foreign policy and international security, how can the EU expand and enhance non-gendered approaches to peace and security?

By: **Anjelica Foley (IE)**

Abstract

The Topic Overview discusses how the **underrepresentation of women** in foreign affairs and international security **poses significant challenges to achieving sustainable peace and security globally**. It aims to emphasise women's critical role in peacebuilding, while only **11** out of 40 [Council of Europe](#) Member States have women serving as foreign affairs ministers, highlighting the persistent gender gap. The Topic Overview highlights key issues including the lack of women's representation in politics, systemic gender-based **discrimination**, and the **lack of gender parity** in the diplomatic hierarchy. Furthermore, the Topic Overview addresses these issues, while showing the required support of Member States and the EU Bodies for a meaningful change.

Introduction

The topic of women in foreign affairs and international security has gained increasing relevance in the context of crises such as the **humanitarian crisis** in [Gaza](#), the **war** in [Ukraine](#), and the [Taliban occupation](#) of [Afghanistan](#). As in broader politics, the **gender gap** or imbalance in foreign affairs has **always existed**. Research from the [1980s](#) identified this gap in foreign affairs and established the theory that **increasing** women's participation would bring **changes in foreign affairs**, particularly within **peace and security**. Forty years on, the debate on the impact and influence of greater female participation in foreign affairs **continues**, partially due to the **ongoing underrepresentation of women**.





Key Terms

- **Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs)** are administrative bodies responsible for managing a country's external relations and diplomacy.
- **Gender mainstreaming** is the process of **assessing the implications of planned action**—such as legislation and policies—on girls, boys, women, and men. It ensures that their concerns and experiences are integrated into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives promoting equality and preventing the perpetuation of inequality.
- **Gender parity** is a **numerical concept concerning relative equality** in terms of numbers and proportions of men and women, as well as girls and boys. It addresses the ratio of female-to-male values of a given indicator.
- **The Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS Agenda)** recognises that women **must be critical actors** in all efforts to achieve sustainable international peace and security. The WPS **promotes a gendered perspective and women's equal and meaningful participation** in peace processes and security. It originated with the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution (**UNSCR**) 1325 in 2000.
- **Intersectionality** is the concept of **multiple intersecting forms of discrimination**. This means that a person might experience several forms of discrimination, such as **sexism, racism, and ableism, simultaneously**.
- **Gender Equality** is the concept that **women and men have equal opportunities** to realise their potential and contribute to all areas of life, including economic, social, cultural, and political development.

Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **The European Commission** is a body within the EU which addresses the underrepresentation of women in diplomacy and foreign affairs. Through its focus on gender equality and initiatives to increase women's leadership in international roles, the European Commission works to tackle barriers such as societal stereotypes and intersectional discrimination. By **promoting gender mainstreaming and setting targets for progress**, it aims to enhance women's representation in leadership positions and foster a more inclusive, equitable diplomatic landscape across the EU and globally.
- **The United Nations** is the world's largest multilateral organisation with 193 Member States, it is uniquely positioned to address and resolve global issues, particularly global peace and security. The UN promotes gender equality in foreign policy and peacebuilding through frameworks such as **UNSCR 1325**, which emphasises women's inclusion in decision-making and peace processes.





- **Women In International Security (WIIS)** is a global network with a chapter in Brussels that focuses on advancing women's influence in the fields of international security, peacekeeping, and diplomacy within Europe. It offers networking opportunities, career development programs, and advocacy for greater female representation in these fields.
- **The European External Action Service (EEAS)** is the EU's diplomatic service, responsible for carrying out the **EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy**, including policies addressing gender equality. The EEAS also oversees the integration of gender perspectives in EU missions and operations, making it a key player in the promotion of women's representation in international security.
- **The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** is the world's largest regional security organisation, bringing comprehensive and cooperative security. It assists in integrating gender equality measures into security and peacekeeping practices. It also supports initiatives focused on increasing women's participation in European security decision-making processes.
- **EU Member States**, such as the **Czech Republic**, have exclusive competence over the direction of their foreign policy and can promote gender equality in peace and security by implementing gender quotas or international and EU policies such as EU Gender Action Plan III.

Key Conflicts

Representation of Women in Top-Level Diplomacy

Research has proven that meaningful participation of women **results in** greater economic growth, decreases in human rights abuses, **and** more sustainable peace. From 1992 to 2019, women made up 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in key peace processes globally. **In 2023 women occupied an average of just 29%** of ambassador roles across Member States. **These figures demonstrate the underrepresentation** of women in top-level diplomatic posts, which can be attributed to societal barriers and the stereotype of ambassadors as male.

Representation of Women in Foreign Affairs Politics

Women face numerous **barriers** to their **equal participation in politics**. Political parties are often reluctant to select them as candidates, and a lack of female role models discourages women from running for office. Foreign Affairs Ministers are typically **appointed from within** national political systems, usually from **among parliamentarians**. Without women in the leadership pipeline, increasing their representation at a national level is **virtually impossible**. However, when women do become ministers they are more likely to be assigned **socio-cultural portfolios** such as health, education, or social affairs, while more high-profile portfolios like foreign affairs go to men. Leaders within international organisations are often sourced from national governments, making the lack of elected women a key issue. In the European Parliament women currently chair 9 of the 24 standing committees and subcommittees.





Intersectionality

Women in diplomacy continue to face **outright discrimination and biases**. Intersectionality highlights how race, ethnicity, sexuality, and other factors **shape the experiences of minority women**, exacerbating the **barriers** they face in foreign affairs. Despite some progress, ensuring **meaningful inclusion** of all marginalised groups, including women from minority and LGBTQIA+ backgrounds, remains a critical yet **under-researched challenge**. LGBTQIA+ women, in particular, experience **heightened levels of discrimination**. While diplomatic immunity offers some **legal protection**, it does not safeguard LGBTQIA+ diplomats from **cultural homophobia and transphobia**. Even though regions like the EU have **progressive policies**, only four countries have dedicated diplomats for LGBTQIA+ issues. Actions must go **beyond gender** to address the **full spectrum of intersecting identities**, ensuring that **all marginalised voices are heard and represented**.

Gendered Institutions and Gender-Based Discrimination

With few exceptions, formal diplomacy has traditionally been **male-dominated**, and Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) themselves are **gendered**. Perceptions of gender can limit women's ability to **exercise influence**, with men seen as **natural leaders**. In negotiations, gender roles often position **men as core negotiators**, while women are relegated to roles as observers, public consultants, or in purely administrative and supportive roles. Diplomatic jobs remain divided along gender lines, with many women working on specific **'soft' portfolios**, such as development or women's issues. Over half of the professionals in UN Women and UNICEF are women, while **less than 30%** hold such positions in agencies like the World Meteorological Organisation and the International Atomic Energy Agency. There has been overall gender parity in the Swedish MFA for over two decades, yet women are **overrepresented in support staff**. Furthermore, careers in diplomacy do not naturally accommodate families, **disproportionately affecting women** as they have more caregiving responsibilities than men.

Measures in Place

National Level Initiatives

National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security (NAPS)

NAPs are **national-level** strategy documents that **outline** a government's approach and **course of action** for **localising action** on the WPS agenda. Since 2005, 100 countries have developed NAPs, although 30% have expired without renewal. Action plans vary greatly in content but generally include links to **national development agendas, gender equality policies, and other related policies**.



Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) Agenda

In 2014, [Sweden](#) launched the world's first FFP agenda. The three pillars of the Swedish Policy were; Rights, by **promoting women's rights** and **combating gender-based violence**; Representation, by **increasing women's participation in decision-making**; Resources, by **allocating resources for gender equality**. Following Sweden's lead, Member States like [France](#) and [Germany](#) have **adopted similar policies**.

European Level Frameworks

EU [Action Plan](#) on Women, Peace and Security 2019–2024

Through this plan, the EU aims to implement the [EU Strategic Approach to Women Peace and Security](#). In line with **UNSCR 1325**, its objectives include key priority areas of **prevention, protection, relief and recovery**, and overarching principles of **participation, gender mainstreaming and leading by example**.

EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 ([GAP III](#))

GAP III aims to **integrate** gender equality across **all EU external actions**. It focuses on **reducing** gender-based violence, **promoting** women's economic empowerment, and **increasing women's participation in leadership** and decision-making. It requires EU institutions and Member States to track progress, set specific targets, and ensure transparency in the pursuit of gender equality.

International Level

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) [1325](#)

Adopted in 2000, the **UNSCR 1325** and [subsequent resolutions](#) established the WPS agenda, **highlighting women's essential roles** in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacekeeping. It calls for **increased participation** of women in **decision-making** at all levels and the **integration of gender perspectives** into peace and security efforts, aiming to promote lasting peace.





Food for thought

- What innovative measures can be implemented to increase women's representation in high-level diplomatic roles and positions?
- In what ways can Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) and organisations like the European External Action Service (EEAS) promote and achieve gender parity within their ranks?
- How can we effectively confront and dismantle the challenges women from minority backgrounds face and be effectively addressed?
- What insights can be gained from countries like Sweden that have successfully implemented feminist foreign policy frameworks to enhance gender equality initiatives?
- How can men play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality within the realms of diplomacy and foreign policy?

Further Research

1. ["Role of Women in Shaping Foreign Policy"](#): A thought-provoking article advocating for integrating gender perspectives in decision-making processes to address global challenges more effectively.
2. ["Hillary Clinton: How Far Have Women Come?"](#): An easy-to-read article discussing Hillary Clinton's impact on global discussions surrounding gender equality, and the challenges faced in advancing these issues in a male-dominated political landscape.
3. ["Von der Leyen set to miss gender-balance target for EU top jobs"](#): A highly relevant recent article highlighting ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality in leadership within the European Union.
4. ["Women in foreign affairs and international security"](#): An in-depth, European Parliament briefing outlining the current status of gender equality in EU foreign policy.
5. ["What is feminist foreign policy?"](#): Examining how FFP works in practice, Andrew Mueller speaks to Sweden's former foreign minister, Margot Wallström, Slovenia's minister for foreign affairs, Tanja Fajon, politics professor Jennifer Piscopo and peace-mediation expert Johanna Poutanen.





Subcommittee on Tax Matters (FISC)

Fuelling Change: *Despite the significant role carbon taxes play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, they remain a divisive issue politically. With this in mind, what stance should the EU take regarding a possible worldwide fossil fuel tax?*

By: **Karel Hynek (CZ)**

Abstract

This Topic Overview concerns one of the most internationally discussed topics nowadays – **Carbon Pricing** as the executive tool to achieve **net zero emissions by 2050**. Apart from the great advantages it carries, not just in the environmental field, it also deals with **potential hazards and cons** of this policy, especially economic burdens on companies and households. Furthermore, it describes measures which are already in place and their **effectiveness**. Last but not least, it dives into **political difficulties** faced when implementing these policies on a **global scale**.

The main purpose of the Topic Overview is to point out the **complexity of this subject**; trying to achieve Carbon neutrality while not compromising the living standards of citizens.

Introduction

Carbon taxes, introduced in 1990 in Finland, are meant to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a simple logic – the more a company emits the more it pays. This gives producers the option of either **reducing** their emissions to avoid paying a high price or continuing to emit but **having to pay** for these emissions.

On the other hand, this strategy might create financial burdens for large companies, which would eventually affect common households. In order for the carbon pricing system to become an efficient emission reducer, the taxation ought to be higher than it is today. How should we proceed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while **maintaining economic sustainability**?





Key Terms

- **Greenhouse gases (GHG)** are gases in the Earth's atmosphere that trap heat, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. As a result, they 'thicken the Earth's atmospheric blanket', causing a long-term increase in global warming.
- **Carbon Pricing** is an instrument that captures the external costs of GHG emissions. It imposes a price on each emission of GHGs. The two main types currently used are Carbon Tax and the Emission Trading System.
- **Carbon Tax** is a price set by the government that emitters must pay for each ton of greenhouse gas emissions they emit.
- **Emission Trading System (ETS)** is a system based on a "cap and trade" principle which sets a limit on the amount of GHGs that can be emitted by companies.

Key Actors & Stakeholders

- **The European Commission** is the executive body of the EU which proposes new laws and policies, ensures that they are correctly applied across Member States, and negotiates international agreements on behalf of the EU. It also dedicates resources to the vast majority of research and the act of data gathering in order to shed light on the current circumstances. Besides others, there are specific departments of the European Commission (Directorates-General) responsible for Environmental policies, Climate Action or Economy and Finance in the EU.
- **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** is the United Nations (UN) entity tasked with supporting the global response to the threat of climate change. It facilitates intergovernmental climate change negotiations.
- **The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** is an international organisation working closely with policymakers, stakeholders and citizens to establish evidence-based international standards to find solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges.
- **Member States** are responsible for implementing their laws and policies. Furthermore, they discuss on the EU or UN level about international steps and cooperations.
- **NGOs** such as Greenpeace, Climate Action Network (CAN) and Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition (CPLC) are organisations that encourage citizens, companies and governments to implement eco-friendly policies into their practices. Besides other things, they try to instigate action towards successful global implementation of Carbon Pricing.
- **Companies** are organisations that sell goods or services in order to make money. They themselves produce certain amounts of GHGs during their fabrication process. Out of hundreds of thousands of companies worldwide, only 100 companies are responsible for 71% of the global GHG emissions since 1998.





Key Conflicts

The actual impact of Carbon Pricing

Carbon pricing has been helping with reducing greenhouse gases (GHGs) for several decades since its introduction by giving incentives to GHGs producers to **switch to more environmentally friendly practices**. Furthermore, Carbon Pricing is producing a huge financial revenue which may be used in research and development of green technology as seen in some countries.

However, a side of the public opinion is arguing that Carbon Pricing is not efficient enough. In order for Carbon Pricing to achieve a more significant GHG reduction, the tax rates ought to be way higher than they are now. Furthermore, some claim that applying Carbon Pricing will just disadvantage European companies in worldwide competition. These opinions suggest that there are **more efficient ways** to achieve carbon neutrality such as increased funding in eco-friendly sectors.

The effects on households

While the **environment benefits** from Carbon Pricing, there are many concerns about it worsening the GDP as it moderately lowers consumption and investment. What is more, it might worsen the quality of life of lower income households. As Carbon Tax increases, it will increase companies' expenses, they will be forced to raise their prices which will affect consumers eventually. Low-income households would be economically **affected the most**, as they spend a larger share of their income on energy than the higher-income households.

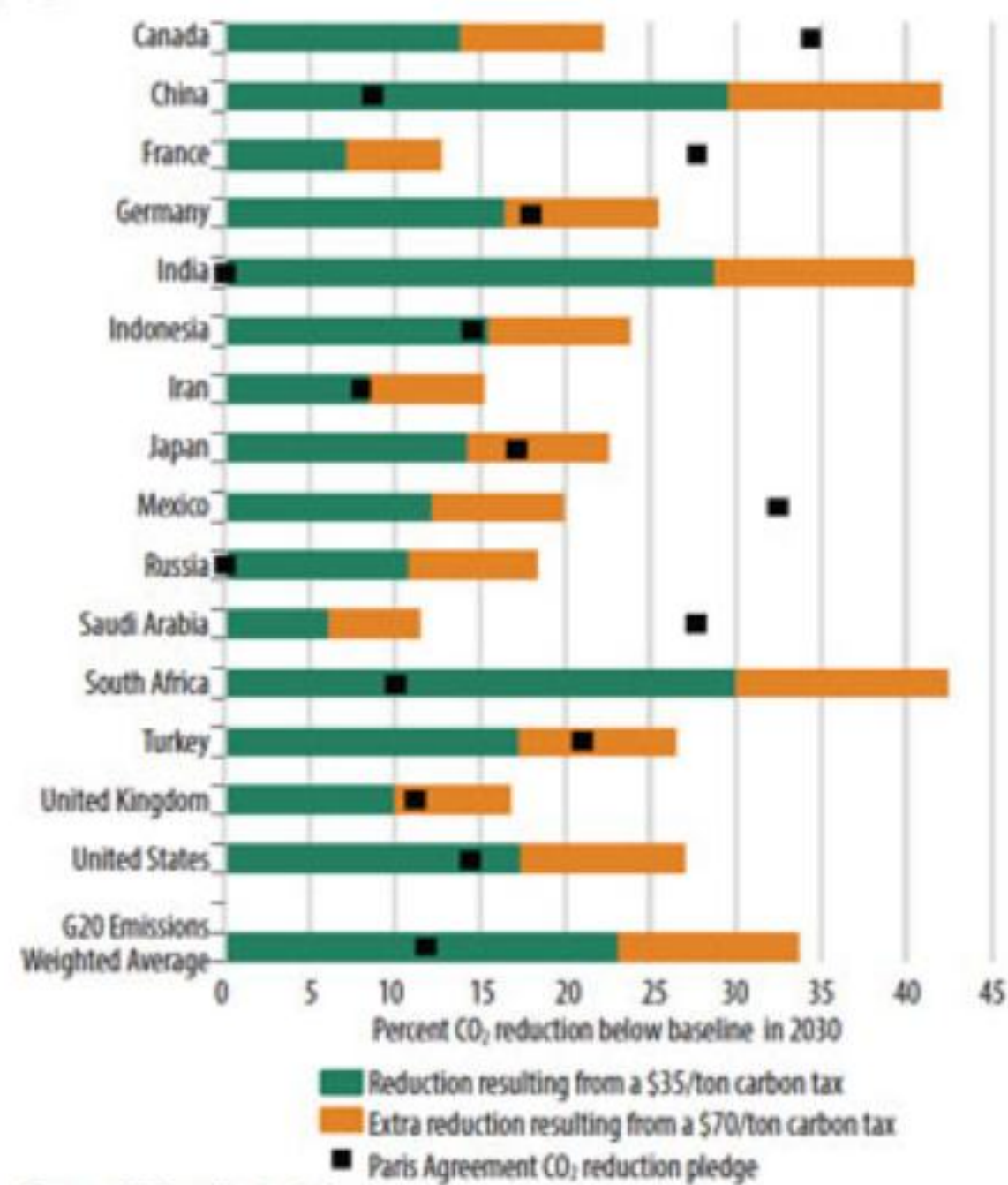
On the other hand, the aforementioned revenues acquired from Carbon Taxes may be also used to reimburse people in need or partially disburden citizens from income tax, thus encouraging consumption. Having this in mind, **compensation systems** are complex and difficult to develop, and it might be difficult to identify those at a disadvantage and ensure funds benefit them.

International implementation and Carbon Leakage

Another important topic to discuss is the potential achievement of a **global concordance** on Carbon Pricing, as it will make GHG reduction more efficient. There is an ongoing international debate regarding which form of **Carbon Pricing** to adopt and how **large** the Carbon Tax rates should be. At the same time, developing countries and small island nations that have contributed the least to climate change and are more dependent on fossil fuels for growth, would have lower Carbon Taxes than other developed countries, in order to meet the requirements of the Paris Agreement.

Tracking reductions

Countries such as Canada, France, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia made ambitious CO₂ reduction pledges under the Paris Agreement. Even with a \$70 a ton carbon tax, these countries will fall short in achieving their pledged CO₂ reductions.



“Reduction of GHGs by Carbon Tax model”, International Monetary Fund, 2019

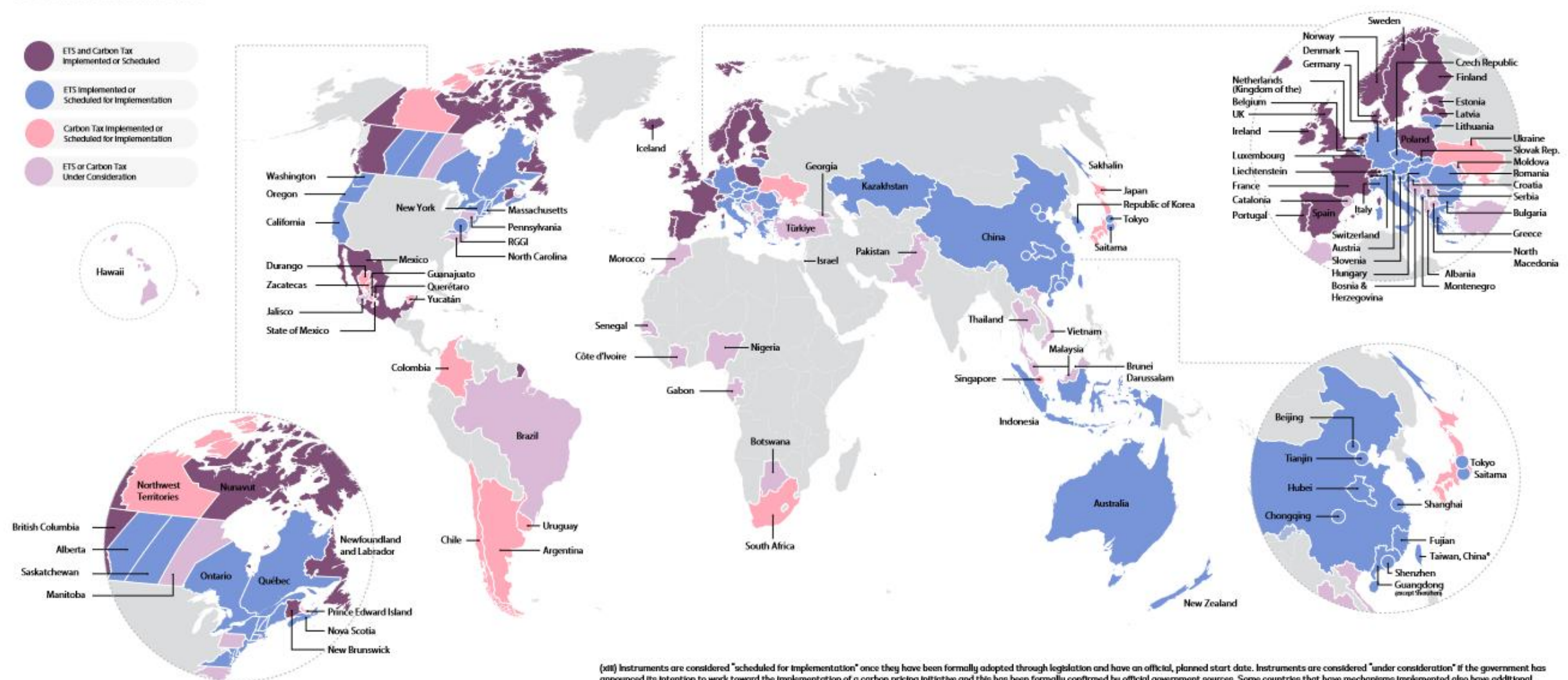
Politically, there are many difficulties with implementing these policies as the increase of taxes is usually not a popular proposal for the general public, hence governments may lose voters. Meanwhile, the restructuring of state economies to become greener takes **a lot of time**. During the transition, resources can be unemployed for long periods of time. The larger the immediate price increase is, the larger the potential disruption in the short term.

Moreover, due to Carbon Pricing **not being global yet**, some companies move their energy-intensive production abroad to **avoid carbon taxation**. This is known as Carbon leakage and it is undermining the EU’s climate objectives and shifting pollution to other countries.

Measures in Place

Carbon Pricing is divided into two main strategies being currently used – **Carbon Taxes** and **Emission Trading System (ETS)**.

FIGURE 5
MAP OF CARBON TAXES AND ETSs^(a)



“[Map of Carbon Taxes and ETSs](#)”, World Bank, 2023

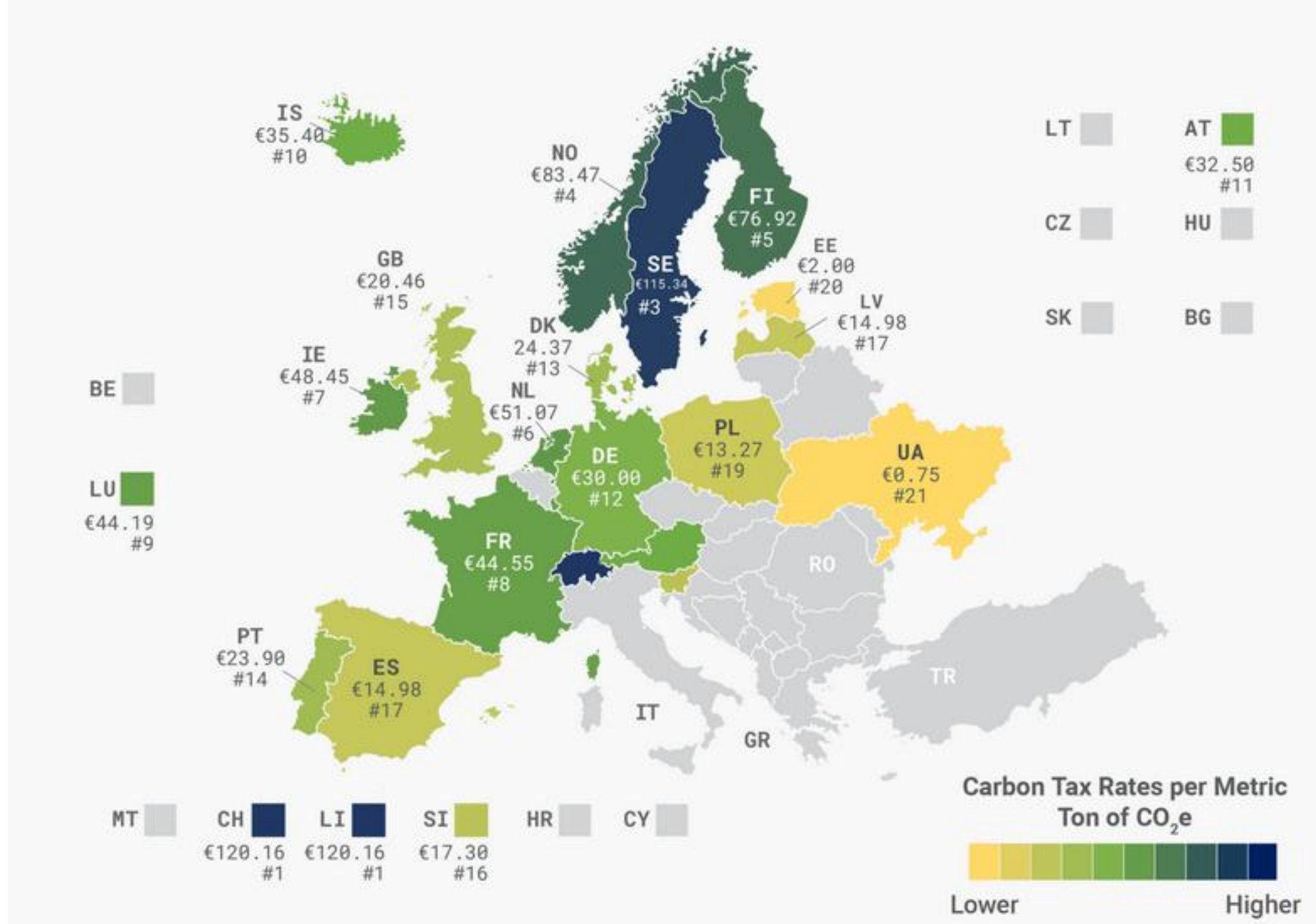
Carbon Tax

Under a **Carbon Tax**, the emitters have to pay for each ton of GHG emissions they emit. They are derived from **direct emissions a company produces** and from **goods or services that are overall GHG intensive** such as gasoline. As of today, **40 national and 25 sub-national jurisdictions** have put a price on carbon, altogether covering **8 gigatonnes of CO₂** which is equal to 15% of global GHG emissions. The upside of Carbon Taxes is that they provide a stable income for a state as the rate is set by the **government**. On the other hand, there is no limit on emissions if the company is able to pay for them. Furthermore, different countries have various **Carbon Tax rates and scopes**¹, establishing the **percentage** of a country's total GHGs covered by taxes. For example, Lichtenstein's tax applies to various GHGs, altogether covering 81% of them. In contrast, Spain taxes only fluorinated gases, leading up to just 2% of their GHGs covered.

¹ The **Scope** of a Carbon Tax tells us which substances are covered by it (e. g. CO₂ content of fossil fuels).

Carbon Taxes in Europe

Carbon Tax Rates per Metric Ton of CO₂e, as of March 31, 2023



“[Map of Carbon Taxes and ETSs](#)”, World Bank, 2023

Emissions trading system

The **EU ETS** is based on a ‘**cap and trade**’ principle. It means that the total amount of GHGs that can be emitted by businesses has a **limit**. When this ‘cap’ is exceeded the company has to **buy an allowance** from another company which is **below** the limit. This limit is **annually reduced** in order to stay in line with the **EU’s climate target**. As the limit decreases, it also reduces the **amount of allowances sold at the EU carbon market**, increasing their **scarcity**. The advantage of ETS is the **limit set by the government** helping reduce GHG emissions. Unlike Carbon Taxes, the ETS **does not provide the advantage** of a stable income for the state. The income from the ETS **will vary**, depending on the scarcity/oversupply of allowances.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

The **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)** is the EU’s tool to **tax GHGs emitted during production of all imported goods**. It is designed to ensure that the carbon price of imports is equivalent to the carbon price of domestic production. This scheme **discourages companies** from **moving** their carbon-intensive production abroad to **countries with more benevolent climate policies**.



Food for thought

Now you may think about these questions and shape your own opinion on the matter using the information you have learnt:

- Is the reduction of GHGs achieved thanks to Carbon Pricing worth the economic risks?
- Should the EU promote worldwide Carbon Pricing with the same standards? How can it be achieved?
- How should Member States and the EU use the revenue gained from Carbon Pricing?
- What steps should be taken in order to reduce GHGs while maintaining a prosperous economy?

Further Research

1. “[Why don't we just tax carbon emissions?](#)”: A video nicely describing pros and cons of Carbon Pricing and evaluating today’s situation.
2. “[About Carbon Pricing](#)”: A simple overview of Carbon Pricing made by UNFCCC.
3. “[How will higher carbon prices affect growth and inflation?](#)”: A short article from the European Central Bank describing the economic effects of Carbon Pricing.
4. “[Does carbon pricing reduce emissions? A review of ex-post analyses](#)”: A rather advanced article evaluating the impacts of Carbon Pricing and studies which have been made.
5. “[The Distributional Burden of a Carbon Tax: Evidence and implications for policy](#)”: Another rather advanced article discussing the burdens of Carbon Pricing on Companies and households.

Spotlight on the Czech Republic

The **Czech Republic** has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by **43% over the past three decades**, by decreasing the share of coal in the energy mix, shifting to less polluting technologies in the industrial sectors and, improving the energy efficiency of buildings. In the Czech Republic, explicit Carbon Pricing consists of **ETS only**.

However, in order to reach its climate commitments, the Czech Republic will have to **phase out coal and implement more ambitious policies** as coal still makes up a **large share of electricity and heat generation**. About **300,000 households** use **coal boilers** to heat their homes, and roughly a third of these are **non-compliant with environmental regulations**. Furthermore, carbon is **inconsistently priced and tax exemptions** are applied to various fuel uses, for instance in residential heating and agriculture.





Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN)

Railways for Future: Recognising the potential of railways as a sustainable alternative for cross-border travel, what further steps can the EU take to promote carbon-neutral transport options, and improve the high-speed trains network across the continent?

By: **Emily Reynolds (UK)**

Abstract

This Topic Overview explores the role of High-Speed Rail ([HSR](#)) in **decarbonising¹ the transport sector** and providing a sustainable alternative for cross-border travel within Europe. In doing so, it discusses important rail-related projects and legislation, namely **railway liberalisation², integration of HSR, and the expansion of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)**. It explores each of these in-depth, detailing the **benefits, drawbacks, and current measures** being taken by both Member States and the European Commission.

Overall, it aims to **consider the issues** the European rail network is facing from **all perspectives** and provide relevant information on the topic.

Introduction

The introduction of HSR in [1964](#) represented the beginning of a **new age for rail travel**. The [boom](#) in HSR resulted in [many benefits](#), namely a **major reduction in travel times** and, [more recently](#), a **sustainable alternative to fossil fuel-based transportation**.

Nowadays, there are over **56,000 km** of [HSR lines worldwide](#); **8,000 km** of which are [in Europe](#). That being said, the continual expansion of HSR [hasn't been without its issues](#).

Construction of HSR lines requires [considerable time and money](#), leading to many [European HSR projects](#) being **delayed or under-delivered**.

Considering the **cost and resource limitations**, is it feasible for Europe to continue expanding its HSR and commercial passenger rail networks in the same way as they currently are?

¹ [Decarbonisation](#) is a term used to describe the reduction of carbon output into the atmosphere.

² Railway [Liberalisation](#) is an economic term referring to the **opening up of the rail market**. [In practical terms](#), this allows Member States to have **more than one company** functioning within a particular economic or geographic rail area.

Key Terms

- **High-speed rail (HSR)** is a term used to describe trains that travel above 200 km/h. Since its introduction in the 1970s, HSR in Europe has been **rapidly developing**. As of 2022, there are 8110 km of railway lines dedicated to HSR; a 51% growth from 2010.
- **The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)**, connects 424 major cities in Europe via their ports, airports, and railway lines. While the management of the TEN-T's nine corridors and two horizontal priorities³ is mainly the responsibility of individual European Coordinators, its funding predominantly relies upon Member States.
- The **Single European Rail Area (SERA)** is the concept of an **EU-wide** network of railways which would **improve cross-border transport** and provide a **more efficient, safe railway industry** in Europe. The idea of a SERA was first introduced in 2012 and has since been a common aim of many European rail projects, namely the TEN-T.
- The **European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS)** is a project implemented by the EU. It comprises three systems and includes onboard and trackside technologies, aiming to create a **safer and more competitive** rail industry. It is one of the biggest rail projects in European history and is estimated to cost **€24 billion** in implementation costs.



“Map of the TEN-T”, European Commission, 2021

³Horizontal priorities is a financial term referring to the **horizontal integration of projects with similar goals** into the same EU spending budget. The two horizontal priorities of the TEN-T are the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and European Maritime Space.



Key Actors & Stakeholders

- The **European Commission** is the **executive body of the EU**. Its responsibilities include forming the general strategy of the EU and proposing, reviewing, and implementing important policies and legislation. It is also responsible for managing the EU budget. **Transport and the TEN-T** are both **shared competences**, meaning **both the EU and Member States** are able to propose and adopt relevant legislation, however, it should be noted that Member States are only able to propose legislation when the EU hasn't already done so.
- The EU **Directorate General on Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE)**, as part of the **European Commission**, is responsible for overseeing the creation and implementation of policies relating to the European transport industry. Some important DG MOVE policies include **a pledge** to further develop the TEN-T, and **the Directorate on Rail Safety & Interoperability**, which looks at the possible integration of a SERA and similar initiatives.
- The **European Union Agency for Railways (ERA)** is another key player in the journey to establishing a SERA. Additionally, with **help from the European Commission** and **EU budget funding**, it aims to help improve the **safety, sustainability, and accessibility** of the EU's rail network.
- **Train Operating Companies (TOCs)** are responsible for running commercial rail services in Europe. There are **over 100 TOCs across Europe**, and the **management and operation** of each one varies. Some TOCs are **entirely publicly owned** such as **RENFE** in Spain & France and **SBB/CFF/FFS** in Switzerland, while others are partially or fully **privatised** such as **Westbahn** in Austria. As a result, the cost and efficiency can **drastically change** depending on which TOC a passenger is travelling with.
- The **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)** is an **EU funding agency**. It has three sub-sectors: Transport, Energy & Digital. With a total budget of **€25.81 billion** allocated to transport, it is a key stakeholder in the implementation and expansion of the TEN-T.
- **Horizon Europe** is the EU's **research and innovation** programme, running from **2021 to 2027**. With a budget of over €95.5 billion, it is currently involved in funding and overseeing **over 650,000 projects** across Europe, including **Europe's Rail**. Additionally, it **funds** the **Clean Hydrogen Partnership** which supports the research and implementation of Fuel Cell and Hydrogen⁴ (FCH) technologies across Europe.
- **Europe's Rail** is a body of the European Union working towards a more expansive and better-supported **research and development** strategy within the transport sector. It has **six flagship projects**, all looking at ways the EU can provide a **safer, more efficient and integrated** rail network.

⁴ **FCH** is the combination of hydrogen as a fuel and fuel cells as a store for the hydrogen fuel to power electrical processes.





Key Conflicts

Railway Liberalisation

The Fourth Railway Package, proposed by the European Commission in 2016, set the **14th December 2020** as the date for passenger railway liberalisation in the EU. The process by which a country may liberalise their passenger railways can be done in one of two ways. The first, and most popular, is **competitive tendering**. This involves specific contractors and TOCs being **invited to submit bids** to supply a particular service or area within the passenger rail system. Competitive tendering allows a country to **reduce overall costs and provide a better overall service** to customers. However, depending on the degree of tendering implemented, there can be issues with **staff shortages and system capacity**.

The second way a country can liberalise their railways is via an **open-access** system. This is where bidding is **open to any company** who wishes to submit a proposal. Italy became the **first EU country** to adopt the open access system in 2012. Following this, there was a substantial boost to its rail economy. That being said, some studies have shown links between open access competition and an **increase in railway accidents** due to the larger number of TOCs competing within the market. As such, many other European countries are yet to follow suit.

Considering the **differences and complexities** of individual country rail systems, there is **no one-size-fits-all plan** to ensure passenger rail and HSR can succeed across Europe.

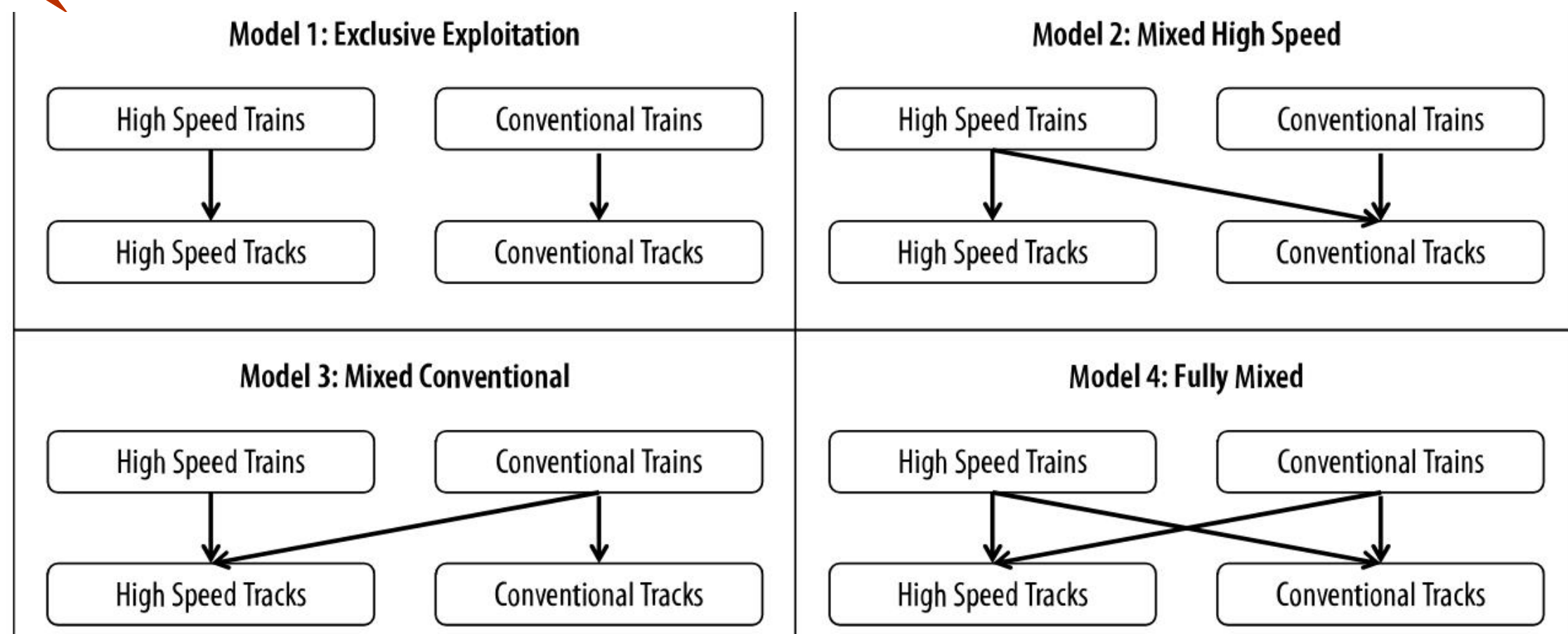
Integration of HSR and commercial passenger rail networks

Spain is an example of a country with a **very well-integrated** and expansive HSR network. “Alta Velocidad Española” (AVE) launched its first high-speed train in 1992 between Madrid and Seville. With more reliable scheduling, increasingly modernised trains, and cruising speeds now averaging **222 km/h**, Spain has been able to develop one of the **most advanced HSR networks** in Europe. As of today, Spain has the second-biggest high-speed network in the world, and the **biggest in Europe**.

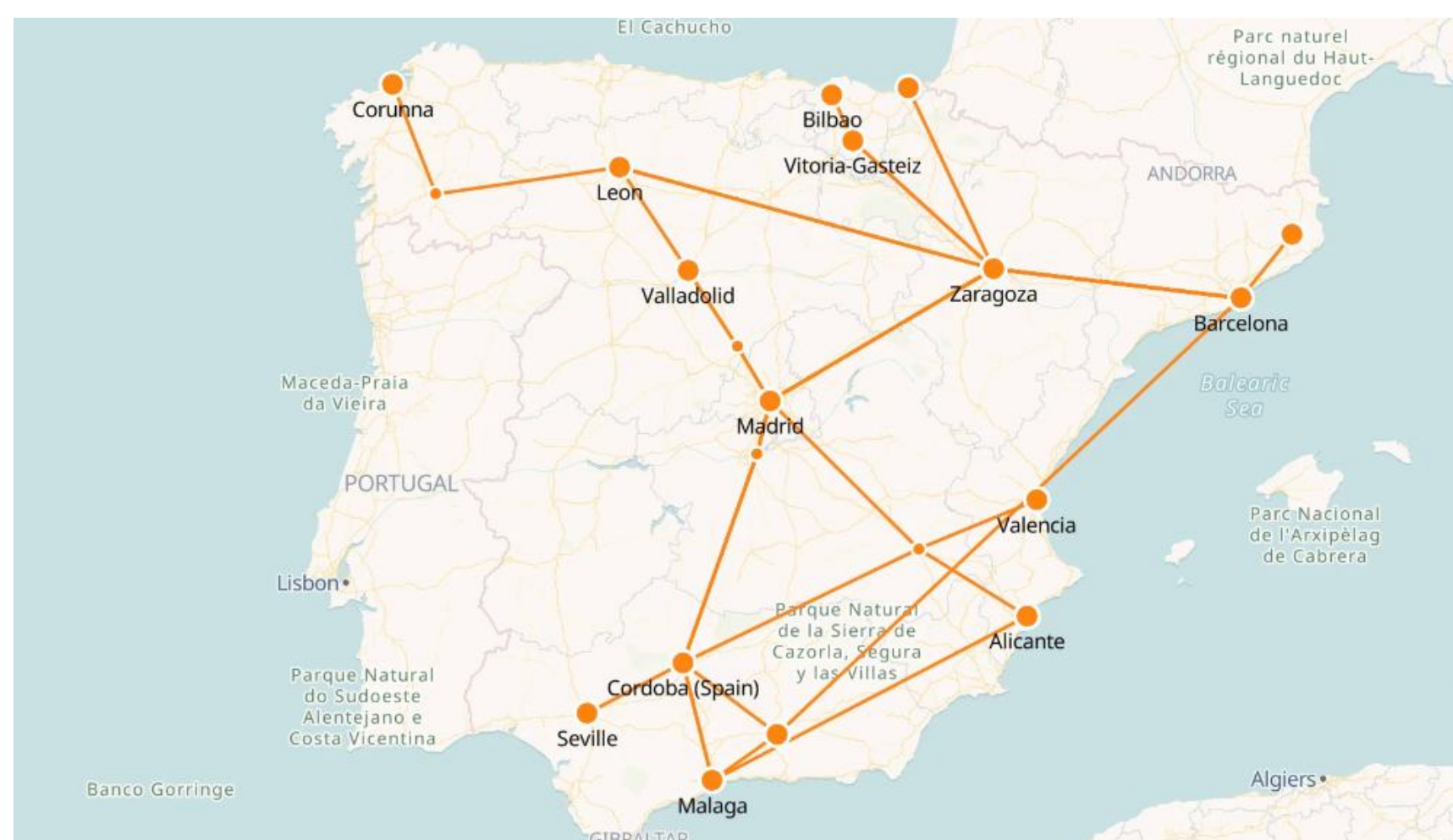
As there is **no singular high-speed network** in Europe, Member States have the option of multiple HSR operational models. The model adopted by Spain is a **mixed high-speed**, where high-speed trains are able to run on both conventional and high-speed⁵ tracks but commercial trains are only able to run on commercial tracks. While this does **reduce the track options** for commercial rail, potentially **limiting its expansion**, it has not hindered the growth of Spain’s rail industry.

⁵HSR tracks require a more precise manufacturing process than conventional rail tracks. As such, **not all conventional trains can run on HSR tracks** and vice versa.





“Methods of HSR and Conventional Rail Tracks integration”, European Court of Auditors, 2018



“Map of HSR in Spain”, Spanish Trains, 2024

Carbon-neutral alternatives

One frontrunner in the fight against carbon emissions is **hydrogen fuel**. The main attraction is its **high energy density** compared to **battery-powered trains**. Additionally, hydrogen fuel provides trains with an **extended range**. There have been some **successful pilot schemes** so far, but given the **relative naivety** of these projects, they are yet to be implemented on a larger scale.

While hydrogen is an alternative to fossil fuels, there are **limitations** in its rollout. **The storage of hydrogen** can be difficult as it **takes up more space** than the equivalent volume of fossil fuels. Additionally, the production of entirely Green hydrogen⁶, as opposed to its less carbon efficient counterpart; Grey hydrogen⁷, is significantly more **costly**, posing barriers to Member States and TOCs with less income.

⁶**Green hydrogen** is a term used to describe hydrogen fuel that produces no greenhouse gas emissions during its manufacturing or use.

⁷**Grey hydrogen** is a term used to describe hydrogen fuel that is generated using natural gas. As this process involves using **fossil fuels**, it is not 100% sustainable.



Measures in Place

Combatting the expense of travelling by rail

One of the biggest barriers to rail travel is the high ticket prices. One successful European rail scheme, Interrail, offers a variety of pass options with **travel to 30,000+ destinations** in 33 countries. In 2018, the European Commission and Erasmus+ piloted DiscoverEU, a scheme that offers free Interrail passes to 18-year-olds living in the EU. With more than 35,000 free rail passes on offer, both DiscoverEU and Interrail are continuing to make rail travel **more financially accessible** to young people living in Europe.

Some countries in Europe, namely Germany and Spain, have also successfully trialled free and reduced train fares. Between June and August 2022, Germany brought in the EUR **9 rail pass** for local and regional journeys. Shortly after that, in September 2022, Spain introduced free rail travel. Run by RENFE, the scheme was originally introduced to **reduce** the effects of inflation, however, as hoped, there was also a noticeable increase in usage of public transport. As a result, RENFE extended the scheme until December 2023.

Funding in the Transport Sector

The main funding stream for transport in Europe is the **CEF**, which focuses on **improving rail infrastructure**. With nearly 80% of its grants going to rail projects specifically, it is a major contributor to the expansion and interoperability⁸ of the European rail sector. Crucially, CEF Transport⁹ supports the completion of the **core TEN-T network by 2030** and the completion of the **comprehensive TEN-T network by 2050**, by funding a variety of projects related to this. The CEF also funds the Transport & Mobility sector of the **Horizon Project**, an important funding body in the rail sector.

Food for thought

- Given the success of Germany and Spain's introduction of subsidised train travel schemes, how do we **encourage others** to follow suit? What did these countries do to make the schemes so successful?
- What can the EU do to **better support** the creation and implementation of a SERA? Additionally, how does this apply to the idea of establishing one singular HSR network in Europe?
- Considering both the advantages and disadvantages of this rapid expansion, how can the EU best support **further expansion** of the TEN-T?
- What can be done to mitigate production and storage related issues and **promote the production and use** of hydrogen fuel on an EU-wide scale?

⁸The term interoperability refers to the ability of systems to work together.

⁹CEF Transport is the **transport branch** of the CEF. Its main aim is to provide funding to rail-related projects in order to **support the expansion** of EU railway infrastructure.





Further Research

1. “[Single European Railway Area](#)”: A video by the ERA on the benefits of a SERA.
2. “[Horizon Europe: The Research & Innovation Programme 2021-2027](#)”: A presentation by the Horizon Project detailing what it is and its objectives.
3. “[Explaining the world’s most famous Hydrogen fuel cell train’s working function](#)”: A video by Let’s Grow Up about how hydrogen fuel cells work.
4. “[Safe, smart, and green: Boosting European passenger rail’s modal share](#)”: An article by McKinsey & Company discussing rail travel in Europe.
5. “[How do you make Europe's rail network faster?](#)”: An article by Euronews discussing the EU’s current rail plans and its benefits and limitations.

Spotlight on the Czech Republic

In 2021, Správa železnic¹⁰ ([SŽ](#)) proposed plans to build its **first HSR**, with **construction expected to start in 2025**. In later plans, SŽ, [confirmed](#) the opening of lines across the Czech Republic. This was accompanied by plans to integrate these lines with **current and future HSR rail lines** in neighbouring EU countries. Additionally, trains were expected to be able to travel to speeds of up to **320 km/hr** and were to use the ERTMS to ensure safety and efficiency. Just a few months later, [the Czech Railway Administration](#) announced that construction of the HSR **would be delayed**. This was mainly due to the European Train Control System¹¹ ([ETCS](#)) **being insufficiently developed**, without which there is a **risk to public safety**. While it is not a reality yet, **the future of HSR** in the Czech Republic is **certainly promising**.

¹⁰[Správa železnic](#) is the **owner and predominant operator of railways** in the Czech Republic.

¹¹ETCS is a train control system used to **supervise and control train movements**.





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