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PART 2/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

2. Youth engagement in society

A key objective of the new youth strategy is to encourage young people to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change for communities across Europe, inspired by EU values and a European identity ([1]). In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to promote young people's participation in elections, to encourage their social and civic engagement, including their involvement in youth organisations and online activism, and to explore innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation.

Young people's lower turnout in elections and level of engagement with political parties does not necessarily mean that they lack interest in politics or are disconnected from the civic life of their communities. They usually perceive voting as a very important channel of democratic participation and are actively involved in many other forms of civic and political participation, especially through civil society organisations and social movements ([2]). Compared to older adults, young people may be less likely to participate in institutionalised politics but engage more often in non-institutionalised forms of participation like political consumerism, demonstrations and internet activism ([3]). As this chapter will show, the youngest generations are also particularly supportive of the democratic system and political institutions.

The first section of the chapter analyses young voter turnout in local, national and European elections according to Eurobarometer and European Parliament surveys. The second section looks at young people's involvement in political parties, youth and student organisations, and informal forms of participation, such as campaigns, strikes, street protests and social media activism. The third section examines young people's digital participation, in online consultations, votes and websites, over recent years. The final section examines young people's satisfaction with democracy and their degree of trust in the national government and in the European Union, in particular during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

2.1. Voting in political elections

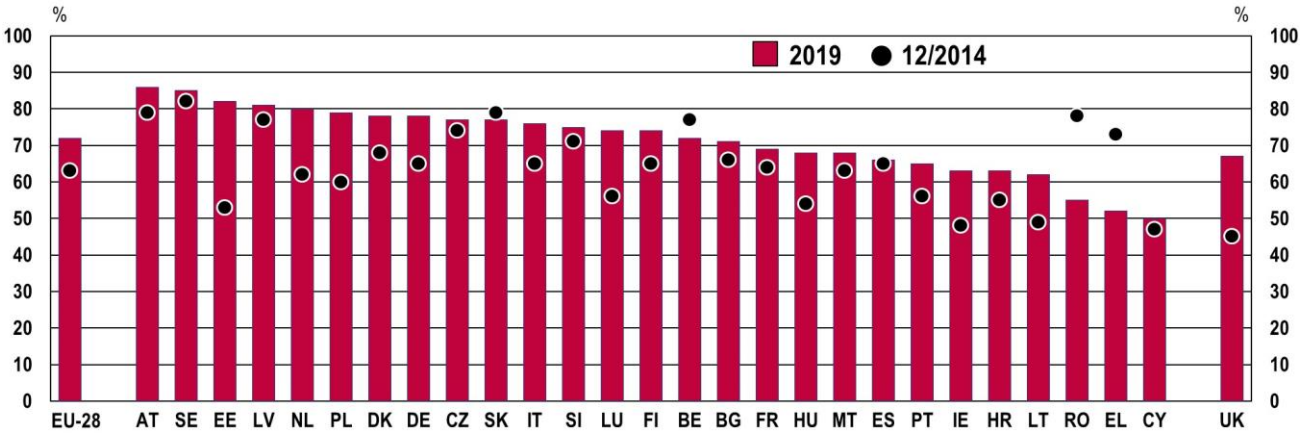
Young people have traditionally been less likely to turn out at the polls than older adults ([4]). Between 2011 and 2017, young voter turnout declined in most European countries ([5]). Although the proportion of those with a strong or moderate interest in politics increased more during this time among young people than the other age groups – probably as the result of young people's use of social media – their interest in politics was still lower ([6]). In 2019, 52 % of people aged 15–24 years showed a strong or moderate interest in politics, compared with 63 % of people aged 25–39, 69 % of people aged 40–54, and 62 % of people aged 55 or older.

According to the Eurobarometer youth survey carried out in March 2019, an average of 72 % of young people aged 15–30 had voted at least once at local, national or European level (Figure 2.1). The voting age was generally 18, with the exception of Austria and Malta, where it was 16, and Greece, where it was 17. Voting is compulsory in Belgium and Luxembourg for registered citizens. In Greece, mandatory voting is not enforced.

([1]) European Commission, 2018a.
([2]) Cammaerts et al., 2014.
([3]) Marien et al., 2010; Norris et al., 2005.
([4]) Wattemberg 2002; Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Gallego, 2009; Melo and Stockemer, 2014.
([5]) European Commission, 2018c, p. 86.
([6]) European Commission, 2018c, p. 83.

In Austria, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and the Netherlands, at least 80 % of young people declared having voted. The proportion of young people who had ever voted was also over the EU-28 average (72 %) in Poland, Denmark, Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, Italy, Slovenia, Luxembourg and Finland. By contrast, in Cyprus, Greece and Romania almost one in two respondents had never gone to the polls.

Figure 2.1: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who had voted at least once (2019) and who had voted in the previous 3 years (December 2014) by country



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478 (2019). Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities? Voting in local, national or European elections'. Flash Eurobarometer 408 (December 2014). Volume A. Question Q2: 'During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional, national or EU level?'.

Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents who had voted in local, national or European elections in the 2019 survey.

In the Eurobarometer youth survey conducted in December 2014, around half of the young people in Cyprus declared that they had not voted in a local, regional, national or European election in the previous 3 years. Ireland, Lithuania and the United Kingdom also had a participation rate below 50 % at that time.

By contrast, in Greece and Romania, more than 70 % of young people reported having voted in the 3 years before the December 2014 survey. This was also the case in Belgium, Czechia, Latvia, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden.

Figure 2.2 provides a breakdown of the data on participation from the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey by gender, age, age at end of education, degree of urbanisation, opinion on the EU, participation in a learning experience abroad and involvement in voluntary activities.

The average participation in elections of young women and men was very similar. Nor were there large differences by degree of urbanisation, although average participation was slightly higher among young people living in the city. The differences were more evident between age groups and education levels.

The relation between likelihood to vote, on the one hand, and age and education level, on the other, is well documented ([7]). Older people tend to be more likely to vote than the younger population because they usually are more mature, are more settled in life and have a stronger sense of civic duty ([8]). People with a higher level of education are more likely to vote than those with a lower level of education because they are usually more interested in following politics, and better equipped to do so, and have more resources that enable them to be politically engaged ([9]). However, the digital revolution could be attenuating the effect of age and education on

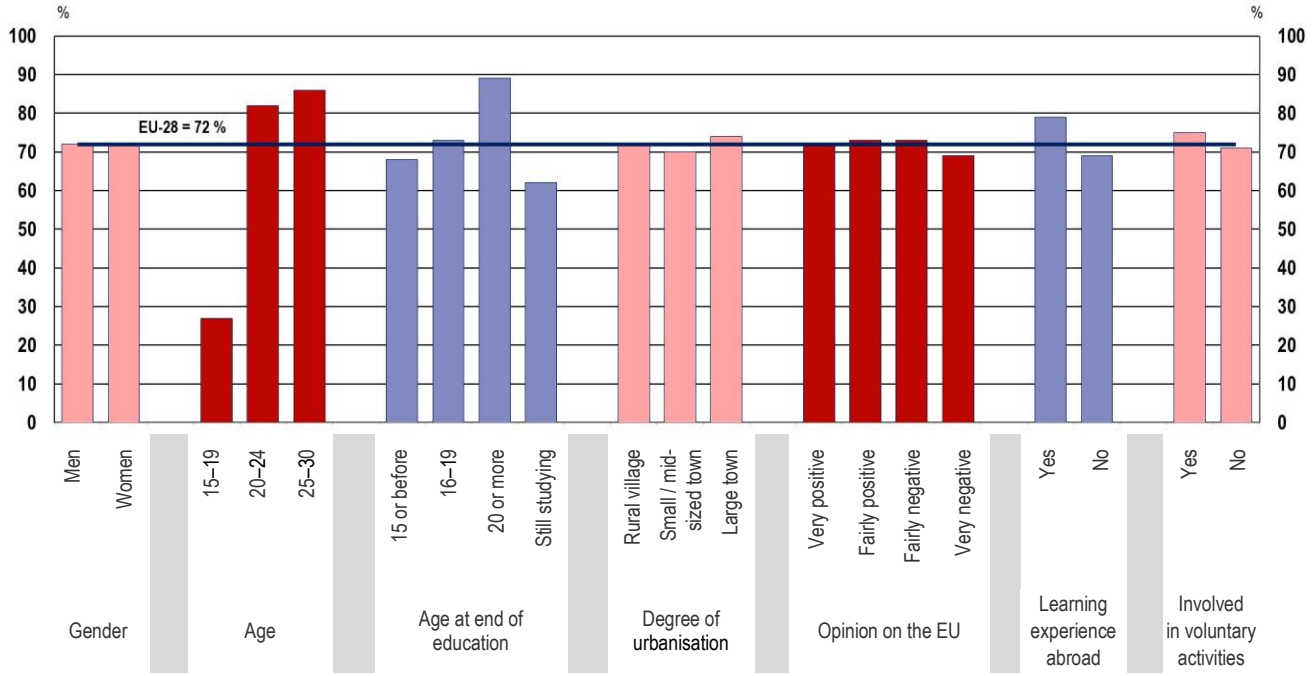
([7]) Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Blais, 2000.

([8]) Wattenberg, 2002; Melo and Stockemer, 2014.

([9]) Gallego, 2019; Stockemer, 2017.

voter turnout, as attested to by the growing interest of the youngest in politics and the increasing capacity of certain political parties to mobilise voters who have a low level of education.

Figure 2.2: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who had voted at least once in a local, national or European election by characteristic, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities? Voting in local, national or European elections'.

According to the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey, the proportion of young voters increased with age group (Figure 2.2). While only 27 % of young people aged under 20 years had ever voted, the percentage reached 82 % for those aged 20–24, and 86 % for those aged 25–30. Even if most of the respondents in the youngest age cohort had just not been eligible to vote, data on European Parliament elections suggest that they are less likely to vote even when they have reached voting age (see Figure 2.3).

The proportion of young voters also increased with the duration of their formal education. While 89 % of young people who had studied until (at least) the age of 20 reported having voted, the percentage decreased to 73 % for respondents with a shorter education and fell to 68 % for early leavers. Only 62 % of those still studying – which would include a large proportion of the youngest people – had ever voted.

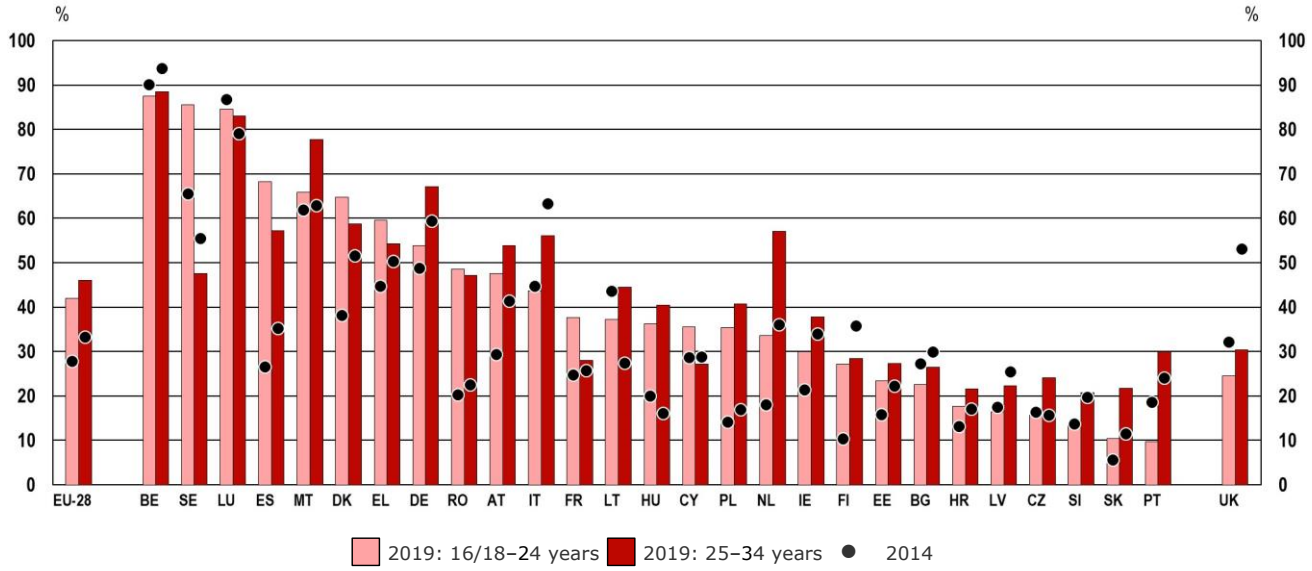
The tendency to vote was similar among young people having a positive and those having a negative view of the EU. However, a positive opinion on the EU may be more determinant in motivating young people to vote in the European elections, as data from the European Parliament post-election surveys show (see Figure 2.4).

Other factors, such as going abroad for learning and participation in volunteering, also appeared to be related to youth voter turnout. The proportion of young people who had ever voted in local, national or European elections was above average among those who had taken part in a learning experience abroad or had participated in voluntary activities. In fact, as illustrated in Chapter 4, youth mobility is particularly high in countries with a large proportion of young voters, such as Sweden, Estonia and Latvia. In other countries with a high youth turnout, such as Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, young people are not only likely to go abroad for learning but particularly involved in voluntary activities (see Section 2.3).

Data from the European Parliament post-election surveys point to a growing mobilisation of young voters and show that their participation tends to increase with age (Figure 2.3). Turnout among voters aged under 25 years increased from 28 % in 2014 to 42 % in 2019, and among voters aged 25–34 years from 33 % to 46 %. The higher young voter turnout had a positive effect on the overall turnout, which went from around 43 % in 2014 to almost 51 % in 2019.

The increase in young people's participation in the European elections was particularly evident in Denmark, Spain, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and Romania. In Finland and Sweden, participation increased significantly among the youngest voters, but it decreased among those aged 25–34. Youth turnout also decreased in Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia and the United Kingdom, and in Lithuania and Portugal among those aged under 25 years.

Figure 2.3: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who declared having voted in the 2014 and 2019 elections to the European Parliament by country and age group



Source: European Parliament, 2019 and 2014 post-electoral surveys. Volume C. Questions QG1 and QP1: 'European Parliament elections were held on [date]. For one reason or another, some people in [country] did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?'.

Notes: In Malta and Austria, the youngest voter age group was 16–24 years; in Greece, it was 17–24 years. EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents aged 16/18–24 who reported having voted in the 2019 European elections.

Despite the increase in youth participation, young voter turnout in the European 2019 elections was lower than the overall turnout in all countries except in Greece, Spain and Sweden ([10]). Among young people, the oldest usually went to vote in larger proportions. Turnout among people aged 25–34 was on average 4 percentage points (p.p.) higher than that among those aged under 25. In Germany, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovakia, it was more than 10 p.p. higher. However, in a few countries, the youngest voters turned out at the polls in larger proportions. This was particularly evident in Sweden, where more than 80 % of young people aged under 25 years declared having voted – compared with less than half of those aged 25–34. To a lesser extent, the same pattern could be seen in other countries, such as Spain, Denmark, Greece, France and Cyprus.

As shown in Figure 2.3, in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament more than 80 % of young people voted in Belgium and Luxembourg, where voting is compulsory for registered citizens. The percentage was

([10]) European Parliament, 2019, p. 39.

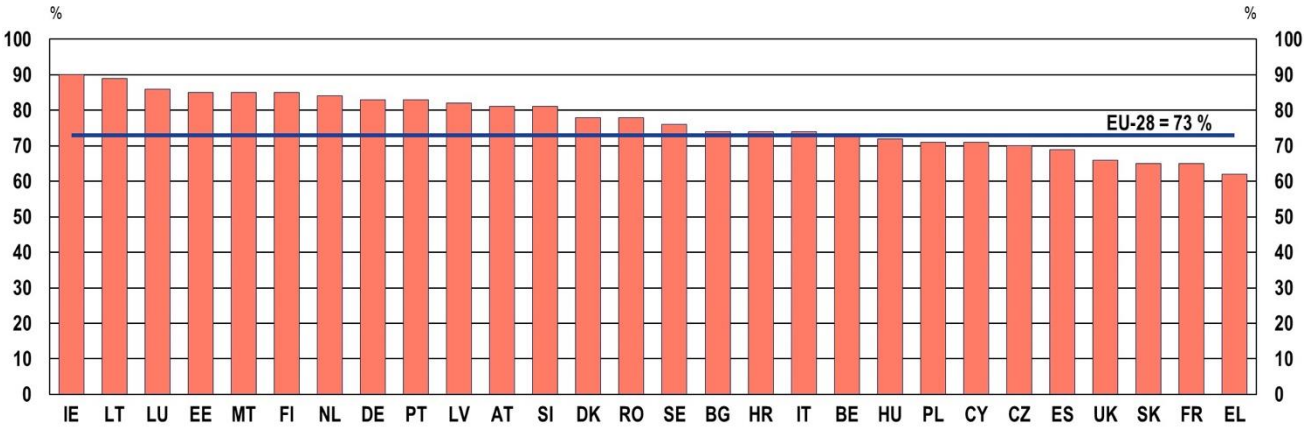
similarly high for the youngest cohort (aged under 25 years) in Sweden, and for young people aged 25–34 in Malta. In Spain, Denmark and Germany, the participation rate was in the region of 60 %. In Greece, where voting is also compulsory but no sanctions are in force, more than half of young people reported having voted. A similar proportion of young voters turned out at the polls in Romania, Austria and Italy, and in the Netherlands in the case of voters aged 25–34 years.

Recent research has studied the positive relation between the decision to participate in the European elections and one's engagement with European politics and opinion on the EU. Citizens who turn out at the polls for local or national elections out of a sense of duty will also participate in European elections when they feel that their vote can change things and when they know about and value positively the work of the EU ([11]). Generally, turnout in European elections is lower than in national elections ([12]).

Figure 2.4 shows that, in most countries with a high young voter turnout in the 2019 European elections, young people tend to have a positive opinion on the EU. In Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Romania, Sweden and Italy the proportion of young people with a positive view of the EU was above the average (73 %). In Belgium, the percentage was exactly 73 %.

Greece and Spain were the only exceptions. In these two countries, youth turnout in the 2019 European elections was particularly high – even higher than the overall turnout. However, Greece had the lowest percentage of young people with a positive opinion on the EU, and the second lowest percentage of young people having voted at least once in any election (see Figure 2.1). These two percentages were also below the EU-28 average in Spain, where young people's participation in the 2014 European Elections had been particularly low. This would speak for the success of political parties in connecting with the young electorate in the 2019 European elections, which would be worth further investigation.

Figure 2.4: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) with a (very or fairly) positive view of the EU by country, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question DX2: 'In general, please tell me if you have a very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative view of the European Union?'.

Notes: Countries are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents with a very or fairly positive view of the EU.

In the other countries where the proportion of young people with a positive view of the EU was below average (i.e. Hungary, Poland, Cyprus, Czechia, the United Kingdom, Slovakia and France), so was the youth voter turnout in the European elections.

([11]) Clark, 2014; Stockemer and Blais, 2019.

([12]) European Parliament, 2019, p. 34.

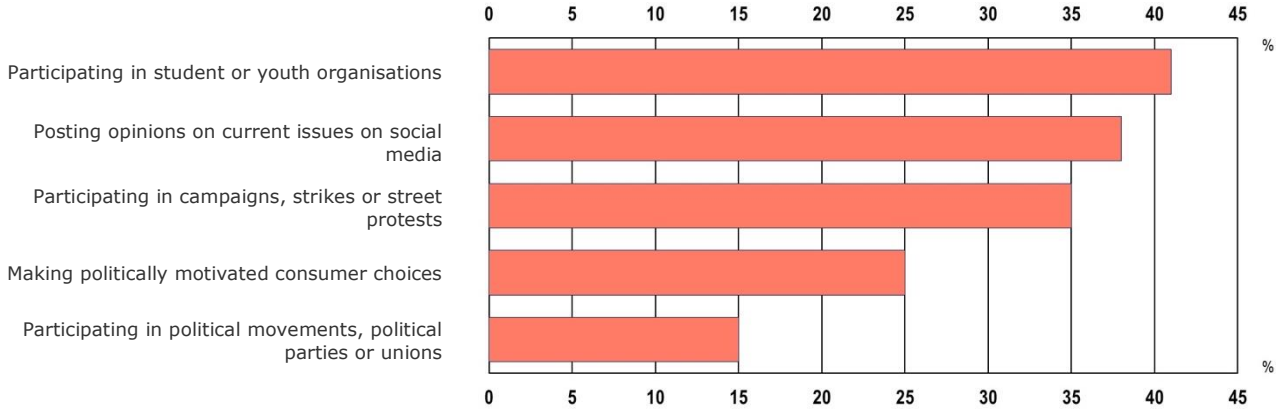
In Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Portugal, Latvia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Croatia, the percentage of young people with a positive view of the EU was above the EU-28 average but their participation in the 2019 European elections was particularly low (see Figure 2.3). In most of these countries, the overall turnout was also among the lowest in the EU ([13]). In Ireland, youth participation was lower than the EU-28 average, and much lower than the national average (50 %), despite having the largest proportion of young people with a positive view of the EU.

2.2. Other forms of participation

This section provides further insight in young people's participation in institutionalised politics by looking at their engagement in political parties and movements. It also examines their participation in youth and student organisations and other non-institutionalised forms of social and political activism.

According to the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey, more than 40 % of young people had participated in student or youth organisations, 38 % had posted opinions on current issues on social media, and 35 % had taken part in campaigns, strikes or street protests (Figure 2.5). One quarter of respondents had made politically motivated consumer choices.

Figure 2.5: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who reported having participated in certain activities, EU-28, 2019



Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who reported having participated in the following activities by age group, EU-28, 2019

Age group	Participating in student or youth organisations	Posting opinions on current issues on social media	Participating in campaigns, strikes or street protests	Making politically motivated consumer choices	Participating in political movements, political parties or unions
15–19	38 %	35 %	36 %	20 %	12 %
20–24	44 %	37 %	34 %	26 %	14 %
25–30	40 %	40 %	37 %	27 %	18 %

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities?'.

By contrast, the participation of young people in political movements, political parties or unions was very modest (15 % on average). Research has shown that young people may not feel represented by the existing political parties, find it difficult to participate in such hierarchical and rigid structures, or prefer to be involved in promoting more specific objectives with shorter term results ([14]). Among other explanatory factors, political

([13]) European Parliament, 2019, p. 34.

([14]) Bouza, 2014; Cammaerts et al., 2014.

parties may have failed to engage with young people's preferred forms of participation (e.g. demonstrations, social media and civil society organisations), to address the issues important to young people in their political manifestos or to include young candidates in their lists ([15]).

Youth participation in political movements, political parties or unions is low but increases with age. While only 12 % of young people aged 15–19 years reported having been engaged in this way, the percentage increased to 14 % for those aged 20–24 and reached 18 % for those aged 25–30.

The proportion of young people posting opinions on current issues on social media and making politically motivated consumer choices also increased with age (from 35 % to 40 %, and from 20 % to 27 %, respectively). Young people aged 25–30 were also the most active in campaigns, strikes and street protests. By contrast, young people aged 20–25 were the most engaged in student and youth organisations.

Figure 2.6 shows the two most common forms of civic and political participation in each country, excluding voting in elections (see Section 2.1) and volunteering (see Section 2.3).

Taking part in a student or youth organisation was the most common form of participation in 18 countries and the second most common in another seven. More than 60 % of respondents declared having participated in a student or youth organisation in Ireland, 54 % in Sweden, and around half in Belgium, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Finland and the United Kingdom. The percentage was 40 % or more in Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal.

In Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus and Slovakia, the preferred form of participation was taking part in campaigns, strikes or street protests. This was also the second most common response in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Luxembourg and Austria. More than half of respondents had taken part in such an activity in Spain and Italy, and almost that proportion had done so in Germany, Ireland and Luxembourg.

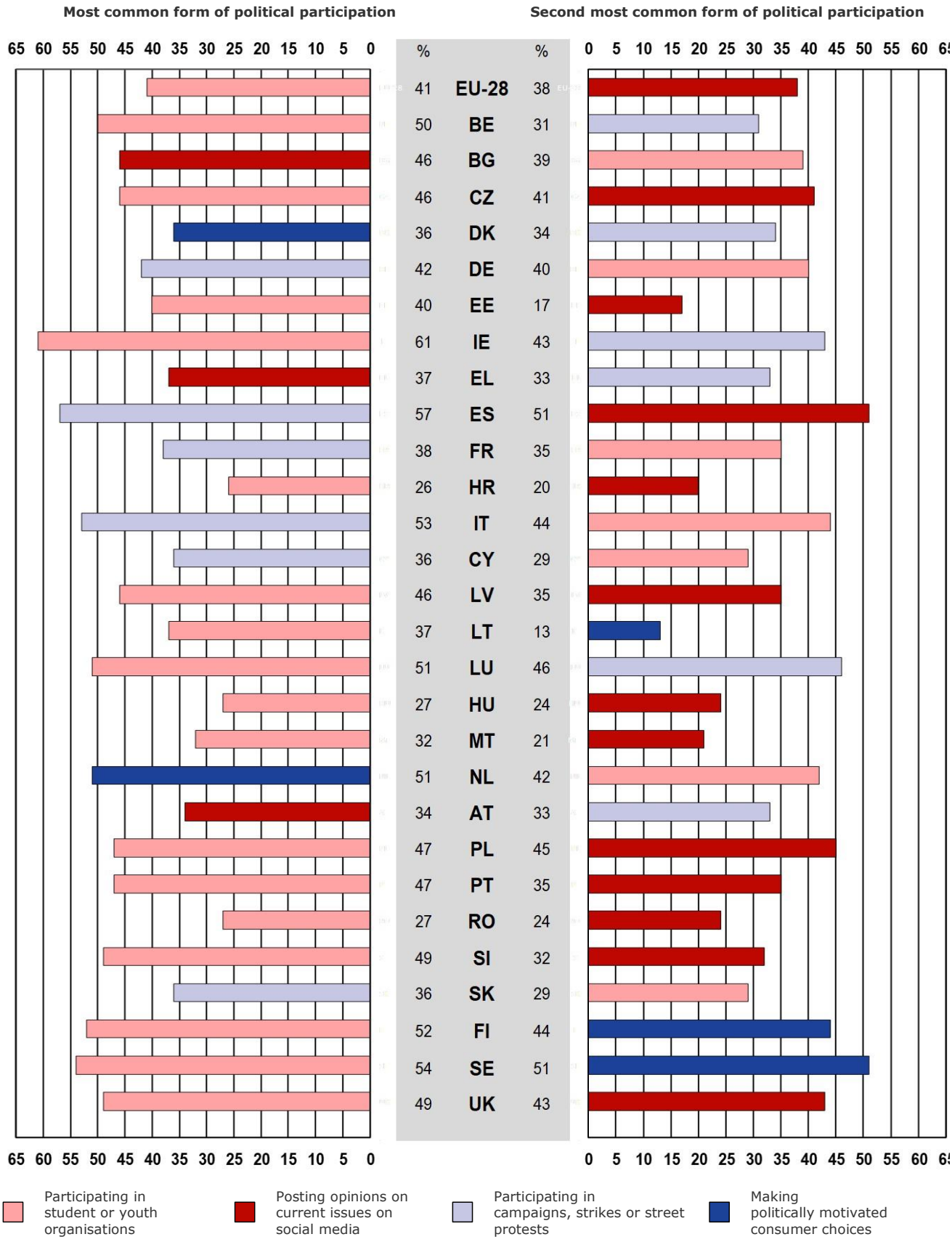
In Bulgaria, Greece and Austria, the most common form of participation was posting opinions on current issues on social media. This was the second preferred option in another 12 countries. In Czechia, Spain, Poland and the United Kingdom, more than 40 % of respondents declared having used social media to express their opinion. In Latvia and Portugal, the percentage was almost as high. Chapter 5 examines the role of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, both as a source of information for young people and a means to make their voices heard.

Making politically motivated consumer choices was a form of participation particularly popular among young people in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden).

Countries with a low young voter turnout, such as Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Romania (see Figure 2.1) also had some of the lowest proportions of engagement of young people in these other forms of participation. Conversely, in Ireland, Spain and Portugal, the high degree of involvement of young people in youth or student organisations, campaigns, strikes or protests, and social media contrasts with their low turnout at the polls.

([15]) Bouza, 2014.

Figure 2.6: Most common forms of participation among young people (%) by country (excluding voting and volunteering), 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities?'.

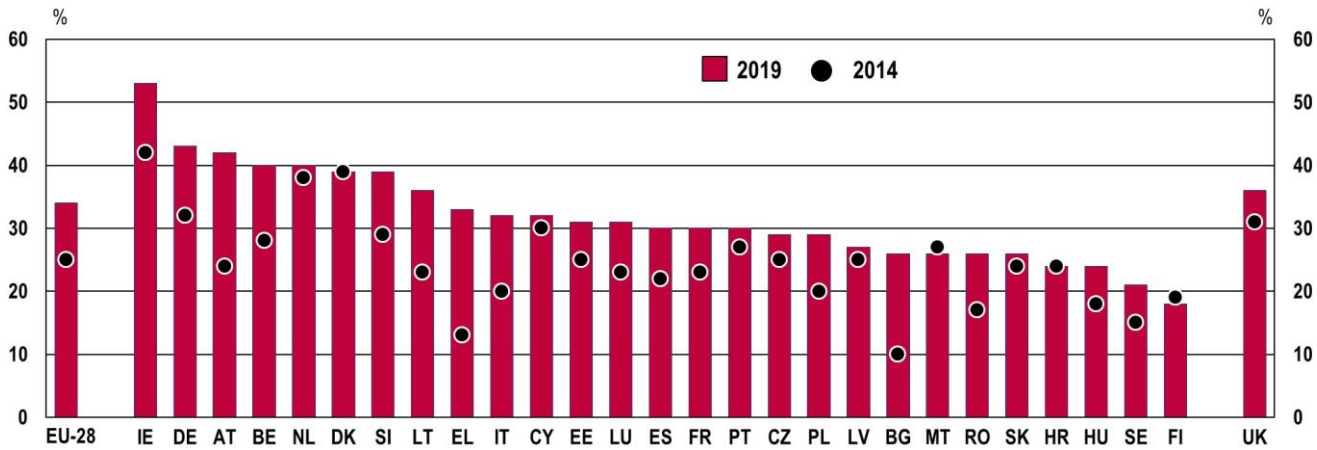
2.3. Volunteering

Not only do young people participate in youth organisations and informal forms of civic and political participation such as internet and street activism, they are also involved in voluntary activities in their local communities and beyond.

According to the Eurobarometer youth survey, around one in three young people were involved in organised voluntary activities in 2019 (Figure 2.7). In Ireland, this was the case for more than one in two of the respondents. In Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Slovenia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom, more than one in three had participated in organised voluntary activities. A similar or higher proportion of young people had participated in student or youth organisations in all these countries (see Figure 2.6).

By contrast, less than one in four of the respondents reported having participated in organised voluntary activities in Croatia, Hungary, Sweden and Finland. Participation in student or youth organisations was similarly low in Croatia and Hungary, but in Sweden and Finland it was higher.

Figure 2.7: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) involved in organised voluntary activities by country, 2019 and 2014



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478, Volume A, Q8, and Flash Eurobarometer 408, Volume A, Q3: 'In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any organised voluntary activities?'.

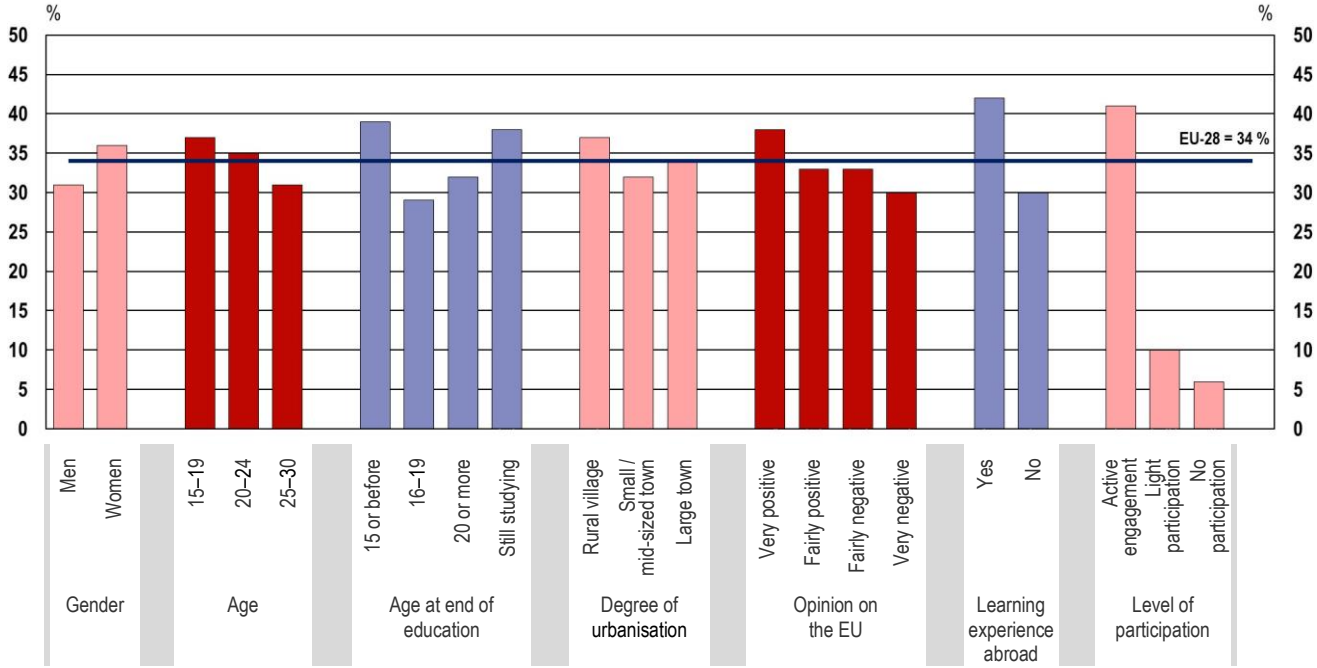
Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents involved in organised voluntary activities in 2019.

In 2014, 25 % of young people declared having been involved in organised voluntary activities in the previous 12 months, 9 p.p. fewer than in 2019. With the exceptions of Denmark, Malta, Croatia and Finland, the proportion of young volunteers increased in all the countries over these 5 years. The increase was 20 p.p. in Greece, 18 p.p. in Austria, 16 p.p. in Bulgaria, and at least 10 p.p. in Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Slovenia, Lithuania and Italy.

Figure 2.8 shows the positive relation between volunteering on the one hand, and civic and political participation and mobility on the other. Young people actively engaged in other forms of civic and political participation and those that had taken part in a learning experience abroad were involved in organised voluntary activities in larger proportions.

However, the profiles of the typical young volunteer and the typical young voter are slightly different. While the participation of young men and women at the polls is similar (see Figure 2.2), young women tend to be more active in volunteering than their male fellows. While the tendency to vote increases with age and education level, the propensity to participate in voluntary activities is higher the younger the age group. Young people with a post-secondary education are more engaged in voluntary activities than those with only a secondary education, but early school leavers and young students are the most engaged. Young people living in towns or suburbs are the least involved in voluntary activities, as they are in voting. However, those living in rural areas (not in cities) are the most active in volunteering. Finally, the typical young volunteer has a positive opinion on the EU, while this was not a distinctive characteristic of the typical young voter.

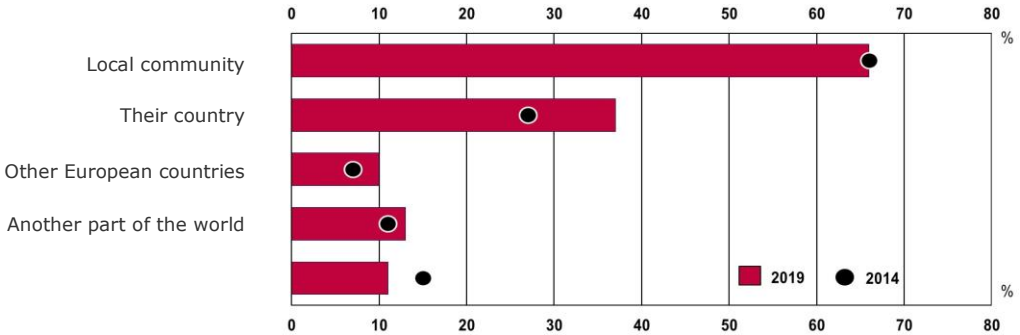
Figure 2.8: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) involved in organised voluntary activities by characteristic, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Question Q8: 'In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any organised voluntary activities?'.

As shown in Figure 2.9, two out of three young volunteers were involved in activities aiming to change something in their local communities, while for more than one in three the aim was to change something in their country. Of young volunteers in Ireland, Croatia, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, 70 % or more volunteered at local level. Participation in voluntary activities aiming to change something at national level was particularly high in Bulgaria, Czechia, Ireland, Cyprus and Portugal, where more than half of young volunteers were engaged in such an activity.

Figure 2.9: Geographical scope of the voluntary activities (%), EU-28, 2019 and 2014



Do not know / not applicable

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 408. Volume A. Question Q4: 'Were these voluntary activities aimed at changing something in ...?'.

In contrast, their participation in voluntary activities with an international focus was more modest. Only 10 % of young volunteers had contributed to projects aiming to change something in other European countries, and 13 % in another part of the world. Young volunteers from Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Luxembourg and Sweden were the most active in volunteering abroad or in projects with an external dimension.

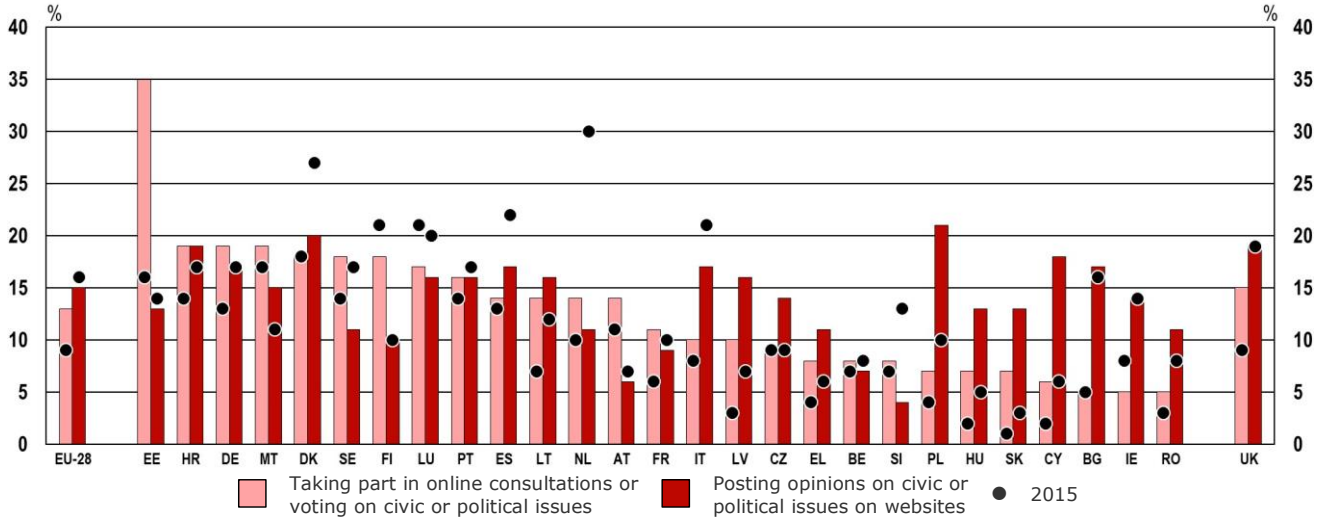
While youth volunteering in local communities remained stable between 2014 and 2019, the percentage of young volunteers involved in projects with a national or an international focus increased over these 5 years. In 2019, an increased number reported having been involved in activities aiming to change something in their country in Bulgaria, Czechia, France and Romania, and outside their country in Germany, Spain and Portugal. In Denmark, Ireland, Latvia and Slovakia, an increased number of young volunteers were involved in projects with a national or an international impact.

2.4. Digital participation

Section 2.2 showed young people's activism on social media to discuss current affairs – as reported in the Eurobarometer Youth survey. This section will examine Eurostat data on youth participation in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic and political issues, and its evolution over recent years.

According to 2019 Eurostat data (Figure 2.10), an average of 13 % of young people in the EU-28 had taken part (in the previous year) in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues (e.g. commenting on urban planning consultations, signing a petition), and 15 % had posted their opinions on civic or political issues on websites (e.g. blogs, social networks, etc.). The average for the total population was 3 p.p. lower in both cases (see Figure 2.11).

Figure 2.10: Proportions of young people (aged 16-29) who participated in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic or political issues in the past year by country, 2019 and 2015



Source: Eurostat, Internet use and activities [ISOC_BDE15CUA]. Data extracted on 02/02/2021.

Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents who had taken part in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues in 2019.

The country with the largest proportion of young people voting or participating in consultations online was Estonia (35 %). This was also the country with the largest increase between 2015 and 2019 (19 p.p.). It is worth noting that, in Estonia, where it is possible to vote using the internet, there were parliamentary elections in 2019. By contrast, the percentage of young people who had posted opinions on civic or political issues online in this country was below the EU-28 average. This was also a common feature in Finland and Sweden, where the relatively high participation of young people in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues (18 %) contrasted with their modest contribution to social or political discussions on websites (around 10 %).

In other countries, such as Croatia, Germany, Malta, Denmark, Luxembourg, Portugal and the United Kingdom, young people were quite active in both regards. At least 15 % of respondents had posted opinions on civic or political issues on blogs, social networks or other websites in these countries. The percentage reached 20 % in Denmark. Between 15 % and 19 %, depending on the country, had voted or participated in online consultations.

In Spain and Lithuania, young people participated in online consultations or votes on civic or political issues and expressed their opinion on websites more than average. In the Netherlands and Austria, they were particularly active in online consultations and votes, while in Italy, Latvia, Poland, Cyprus and Bulgaria they were more active in posting their opinion on blogs, social networks and other websites.

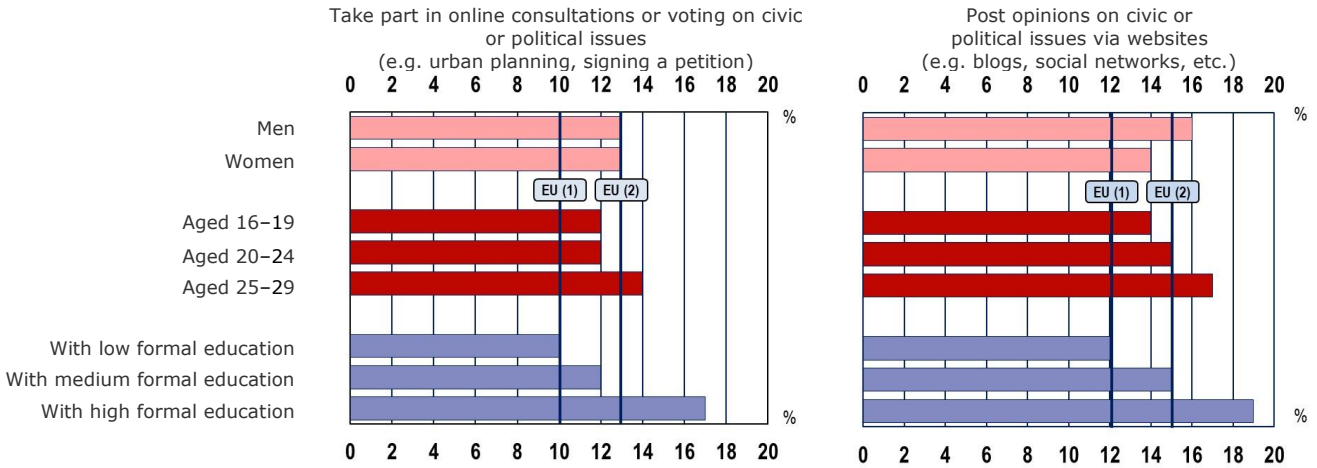
Romania, Ireland, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland had the lowest rates of youth participation in online consultations and votes, while Slovenia, Austria, Belgium and France had the lowest rates in posting opinions on websites. In all these countries, the average participation of the total population was similarly low.

Compared with 2015, the largest increase in youth digital participation in online consultations and voting took place in the Baltic states. Regarding young people's contribution to blogs, social networks or other websites on civic or political issues, Cyprus, Poland, Slovakia, Latvia and Hungary registered the largest increases over these 5 years.

Figure 2.11 provides a breakdown of youth digital participation by gender, age group and level of education, comparing the averages for the general population (EU-1) and for young people (EU-2).

Young men posted opinions on civic or political issues on websites more than their female fellows, but there was no difference between them regarding their participation in online voting or consultations.

Figure 2.11: Proportions of young people (aged 16-29) who participated in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic or political issues in the past year by characteristic, 2019



EU (1) = EU-28, all respondents EU (2) = EU-28, young people (aged 16–29)

Source: Eurostat, Internet use and activities [ISOC_BDE15CUA]. Data extracted on 02/02/2021.

Young people aged 25–29 years old took part in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues and posted their opinions on blogs, social networks or other websites in larger proportions than their younger fellows (aged under 25 years). Nevertheless, all of them were more engaged in these activities than the average citizen.

It is worth noting that the level of formal education completed by the youngest age group is generally lower, and education also appears to have a role in digital participation, as was the case for voting. While only 10 % of young people with a low level of formal education reported having participated in online consultations or voting on political or civic issues in the previous year, the percentage was 12 % for those with a medium level of formal education, and reached 17 % for those with a high level of formal education. Similarly, only 12 % of young people with a low level of formal education reported having contributed to discussions on political or civic issues on websites, compared with 15 % of those with a medium level of formal education and 19 % of young people with a high level of formal education. Chapter 5 examines in detail the relation between education and use of the internet, and Chapter 6 analyses the digital divide in education.

2.5. Support for and trust in national and EU institutions

Previous sections have shown that the participation of young people in elections, political parties and digital platforms (i.e. posting their opinions on social media, blogs or other websites, or taking part in online consultations or votes on civic and political issues) increases with age. However, as this section will show, this does not indicate a lack of support among the youngest people for political institutions and the democratic system.

Figure 2.12 shows the average citizen's and young people's trust in their country's government and in the EU, their satisfaction with how democracy works at national and EU levels, and their views on the EU.

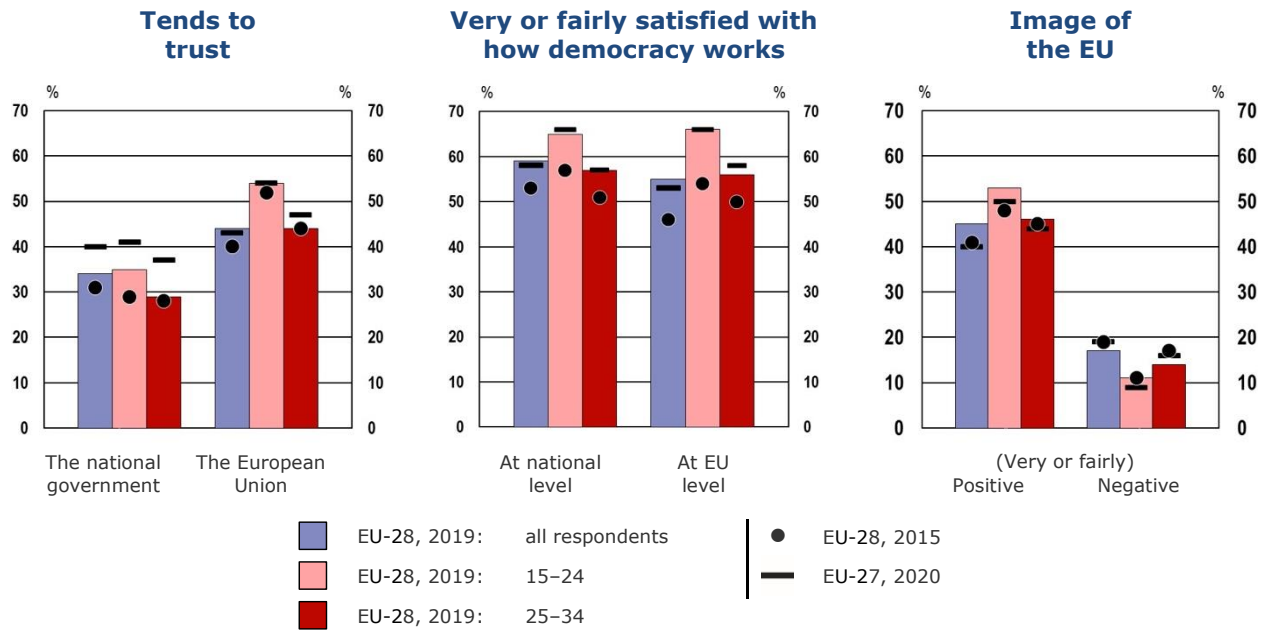
Regarding trust in political institutions, citizens tend to trust the European Union more than the government of their country. This is also the case for young people.

They might be less fond of polling stations, but young people aged under 25 years tend to trust the national government more than adults, and, particularly, more than their older young fellows. According to the standard Eurobarometer survey, in the EU-28 in 2019, an average of 35 % of young people aged 15–24 trusted the national government, compared with 29 % of those aged 25–34.

Trust in the national government among the youngest people (15–24 years old) increased by 6 p.p. between 2015 and 2019. In the EU-27 in 2020, it increased by another 6 p.p. Among older groups of young people, trust in their country's government did not vary between 2015 and 2019, but it also increased in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in Chapter 5, national governments were among the most trusted sources of information on COVID-19.

The level of trust in the European Union is also higher among the youngest age group. In the EU-28 in 2019, an average of 54 % of young people aged 15–24 trusted the European Union, compared with 44 % of those aged 25–34. However, trust in the European Union increased among the latter group in the EU-27 in 2020.

Figure 2.12: Young people's trust in their country's government and in the EU, satisfaction with democracy and image of the EU (%), 2019, 2015 and 2020



Source: Standard Eurobarometers 83.3, 91.5 and 93.3. Questions:

'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain (media and) institutions. For each of the following (media and) institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it'.

'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (your country, the EU)?'.

'In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?'.

Even though most citizens do not trust their government, they are generally satisfied with how democracy works. This also applies to young people, in particular to the youngest.

In 2019, around 55 % of young people aged 25–34 declared being (very or fairly) satisfied with democracy in their country and in the European Union. The percentage was even higher among their younger fellows: around 65 % of young people aged under 25 years said that they were satisfied.

Satisfaction with democracy increased between 2015 and 2019 for both age groups. In 2020, the proportion of young people aged under 25 years who said they were satisfied with how democracy worked in their country was slightly larger than the year before. The proportion of young people aged over 25 who declared that they were satisfied with how democracy worked in the European Union was also slightly higher.

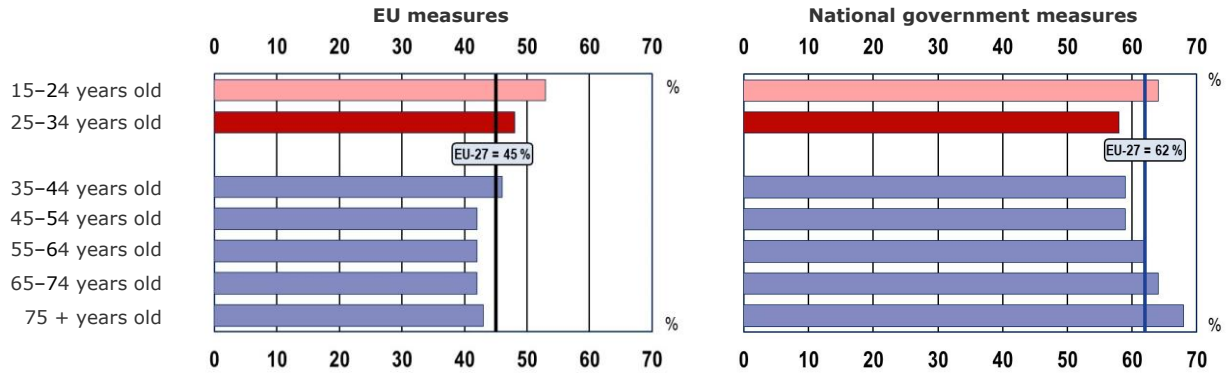
Finally, the European Union generally conjures up a more positive image for young people than for the older population.

In 2019, the difference between the proportion of citizens having a positive and a negative opinion on the European Union was 28 p.p., compared with 32 p.p. for those aged 25–34 and 42 p.p. for those aged under 25. The European Union conjured up a positive image for 53 % of young people aged under 25 and a negative image for only 11 % of them.

The percentage of young people in the EU-28 for whom the European Union conjured up a positive image increased between 2015 and 2019, but declined slightly in the EU-27 in 2020.

Satisfaction with measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic was also higher among young people aged under 25 years than older adults (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: Proportions of people (very or fairly) satisfied with measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 93.1. Volume B weighted. Question QA21a.2: 'In general, how satisfied are you with the measures taken to fight the coronavirus outbreak by the national government and the EU?'.

Satisfaction with the measures taken by the EU decreased with age, with the lowest levels of satisfaction found among adults aged 45 years or older. On average, 45 % of citizens declared that they were satisfied with the measures taken by the EU to tackle the pandemic, compared with 48 % of those aged 25–34 and 53 % of young people aged under 25 years.

Citizens were generally more satisfied with the measures taken by their governments. On average, 62 % of all respondents declared that they were satisfied with the measures taken by their government to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Support was higher among the youngest and the oldest generations: 68 % of those older than 75 and 64 % of those younger than 25 reported being very or fairly satisfied. By contrast, young people between 25 and 34 years old showed the lowest level of satisfaction with the measures taken by their governments.

Chapter 5 examines in further detail young people's views on the information received about the pandemic and the use of apps on mobile phones to implement certain measures.

Conclusions

Despite being less eager to vote than older adults, European young people appear to take part in elections in a larger proportion than in other forms of civic and political participation, according to Eurobarometer youth surveys. On average, more than two thirds of young people in the EU have voted at least once in local, national or European elections. Their growing interest in voting was particularly evident in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament. Public opinion surveys show that age and education continue to play a role in youth voter turnout.

According to the Eurobarometer youth survey, more than one third of young people have participated in student or youth organisations, have taken part in campaigns, strikes or street protests, and have posted opinions on current issues on social media at least once in their lives.

In addition, one third of young people were involved in organised voluntary activities in 2019, compared with only one quarter in 2014. Most of these activities were aimed at making a change at local level, but the

number of young volunteers contributing to projects with a national or an international focus increased over these 5 years. Young people who left education at the age of 15 or before and those still studying are the most likely to volunteer.

On average, almost three quarters of young people have a very or fairly positive view of the European Union. The EU conjures up a positive image for the youngest people in particular. Young people aged under 25 years also tend to trust the EU more and are more satisfied with how democracy works (at national and European levels) than older adults.

Although young people tend to trust the EU more than the government of their country, they were more supportive of the measures taken to fight the COVID-19 pandemic at national level than at EU level, and trust in national governments increased among young people during this time.