

# MAKING THE EU GREENER - STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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EUROPANOVA



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## About the project

The YouthEU project is supported by the European Commission through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) and aims to address the sources of Euroscepticism among youth (high school and first-time voters) in the most Eurosceptic societies in the EU and among the EU candidate countries.<sup>1</sup> The project also provides an opportunity for experts and policymakers to gain insight into the attitudes of young people towards the EU and European integration while creating a platform through which the youth can discuss and exchange their views of the EU and learn about the European project.

The YouthEU incorporates both top-down and bottom-up approaches to educating and empowering youth on the EU and their role as European citizens through webinars, workshops and engagement with EU stakeholders in Brussels. The project delivered 40 webinars in 4 countries, which engaged more than 800 participants. Out of those, 15 participants were chosen to take part in each of the national rounds. During the national rounds, students discussed what they consider as priorities for the EU and ultimately, 24 students from 4 participating countries were selected to travel to Brussels for a three-day study trip. Each country brought the outcomes from the national rounds that took place earlier in their capital cities respectively. After the first discussion, they set the main priorities that were formed into 4 pillars (climate, society, democracy, and the future of the EU). These were later on introduced during the general session and presented to MEP and EU delegates. During all of the abovementioned activities, students discussed how they perceive the EU and what they consider the biggest challenges to its prosperous future.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometer (2019). <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2255>

## Issues raised by the students during the Brussels round of the project

This Policy paper presents proposals made by students about the fight against climate change, including Renewable energy, Pollution and Transport. The second part presents concrete recommendations for policymakers. It presents students' input, followed by expert assessments. The result of debates between students is not only to give youth sentiments on problems in an environment such as climate change and pollution but also to highlight crucial questions of the future. In this sense, recommendations from youth can serve as an inspiration to build a better European future.

During the meeting and discussions organised with French, Greek, Serbian and Czech students, Issues regarding climate change, pollution, transportation and energy consumption have been raised.

The first concerned nuclear energy, and the debate surrounding its role in different territories of the European Union. They wondered whether this source of energy should continue to be developed, or if investments in nuclear power should be brought to a halt.

They mentioned the risk involved in the construction of power plants, whilst also raising a question of democratic significance surrounding this issue: which countries are willing to take on the risk of having multiple nuclear power plants on their territory when they know the potentiality of a nuclear incident? The economy of nuclear power is again under debate since the energy crises due to the war in Ukraine. In several EU countries, such as France, it was an important topic during the presidential elections and several right-wing parties are in favour of the development of nuclear power plants.

Another issue evoked by the students was that of immigration. Questions were raised surrounding financial expenditures in this domain: instead of spending considerable financial resources to deport migrants, why is this spending not

being redirected towards the development of reception infrastructures to help refugees, in so doing demonstrating the European continent's humanity and solidarity? In this sense integration policies for refugees and asylum seekers with associated investments should be more focused to help their employability and integration in EU member countries' societies.

Finally, the environmental issue was also discussed. On this topic, the debate

**„Concerning hydroelectric, even if hydroelectric power does not generate pollution, they use fossil fuels to pump water.“**

focused on energy and the question of increasing investment in renewable energies. The main interest point was the manner such investments are to be made. Renewable energy has been expanding in EU member countries during the last two decades, more specifically solar and wind energy,

but there is still a need to continue efforts in their development and implementation. It is also important to take into consideration some limitations such as transportation via transition lines of wind energy from wind farms, which also generate noise. Concerning hydroelectric, even if hydroelectric power does not generate pollution, they use fossil fuels to pump water. In recent years they were also sources of environmental conflicts. Concerning other sources of renewable energy, such as ocean energy, biomass, hydrogen and geothermal energy there are also benefits and limitations. Students are aware of both aspects. When it comes to climate change issues, the causes of global warming have also been discussed.

## Proposals suggested by the students during the Brussels round of the project

The Proposals made by the students cover three main issues: **renewable energy** (A), **pollution** (B), and **transportation** (C).

## A) Renewable energy

Students developed a reflection about future methods of functioning for the European energy system.

First, students made a proposition about revising the role of member states in designing a trajectory for the energy system. They believe that the EU should subsidise publicly owned syndicates, and develop policies and aid instruments in addition to an existing focus on urban and rural areas, all the while also granting said subsidies to small companies which produce renewable energy. Funding schemes should be at two levels, the EU and Member States (MS) levels. In this sense, there is a need for improvement of coordination between MS in order to develop more coherent funding instruments.

Secondly, they discussed the European Union's energy, including electricity and gas energy-sharing mechanisms. Their proposition is as follows: in addition to the established grid, energy should be shared within the EU through a common transportation system. The electricity grid could be better integrated. The connection of this system to non-member states – aspiring or not to join the EU - in situations of need should also be considered. For instance, if there is an overproduction of electricity in a European country, said country should be able to send it to other member states, which find themselves lacking in energy. This would serve as a symbol of the EU's values of solidarity on the question of energy, which is currently a source of many challenges.

Finally, students questioned the balance between the different types of energy sources: the national energy mix. According to them, renewable energies should be prioritised with nuclear energy only acting as a backup. They argue that the EU should not support the building of large nuclear power plants as these are costly and time-consuming. Subventions should instead be used to build smaller reactors. However, they were opposed to an entire shutdown of nuclear energy as implemented by Germany.

## B) Pollution

With regard to pollution, the students' propositions focussed on the issues of control and regulation. First, they made propositions in favour of penalising environmentally damaging behaviours. They believe that the European Union should design sanctions for those releasing CO<sub>2</sub> when emissions cross a threshold defined by the EU. Sanctions should also be implemented for those releasing toxic substances in water, air and land via industrial production. Moreover, they specified their proposals relating to fishing: according to them, the European Union needs to ensure compliance with the fishing quotas assessed for each member country of the Union. Then, they worked on the topic of meat production and consumption, given that this sector bears a large responsibility for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. They are in favour of limiting the number of animals kept in slaughterhouses and instating a limit on the production of meat.

## C) Transport

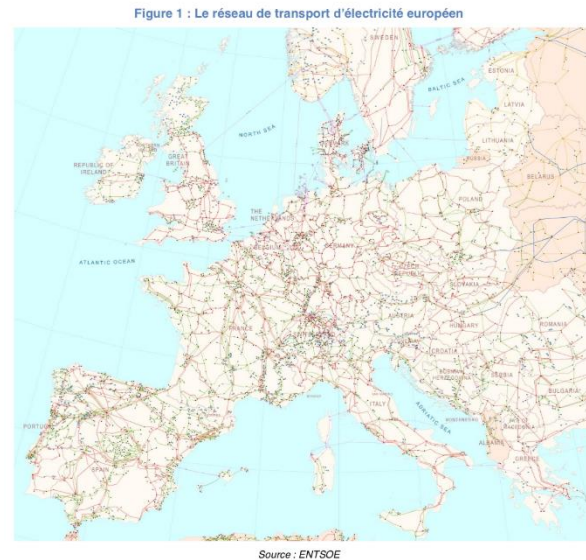
Finally, students focused their attention on the issue of transport, which is the leading cause of carbon emissions. According to them, the EU should heavily subsidise public transport throughout the EU, thus granting alternatives to driving for people to perform their daily work commutes. Beyond such subsidies, the students believe that the EU should set a common policy, which would penalise the purchase of fossil-fuelled cars, thus incentivising the use of electric cars. The EU should also encourage riding bikes with a program that gives money to people who opt to use this mode of transport, replicating the system put in place in the Czech Republic.

## Student exchanges with an expert: future challenges for the environment

### A) Energy

On the topic of energy, we will focus first on the students' proposition to create a sharing mechanism throughout the European Union.

It must of course be reminded that EU member states already share their energy through a common European market for energy. There are currently 305,000 kilometres of connections throughout the continent and more than 400 interconnections, which link approximately 600 million European citizens.



For instance, a project for a new interconnection between France and Spain is ongoing, and the line is supposed to enter in operation in 2026. Following the same line of thinking, France (RTE) and Italy (TERNA) will lead a renovation of the Savoie-Piémont electrical line, and a new subsea Powerlink 'Celtic Interconnector' will be built between France (RTE) and Ireland (EirGrid) and supported by the European Commission's Connecting Europe Facility Energy Programme.

As we can see, efforts have already been made by the European Union to reinforce exchanges and to renovate the equipment connecting EU member states.

The students' proposition is thus particularly relevant: the European Union could allocate a bigger part of its budget to the creation of new lines, or to the improvement of the energy transportation capacities of older lines.

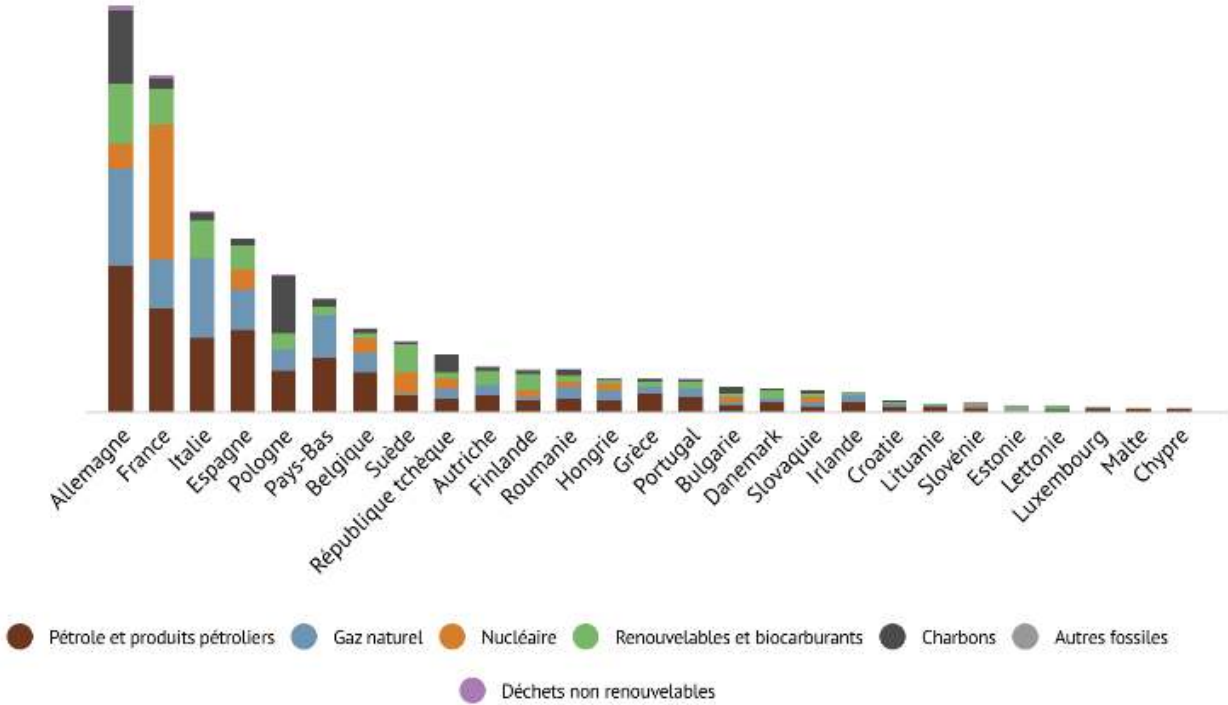


Because the creation of these lines is time-consuming, and because we want the EU to achieve energy independence as soon as possible, the EU should continue its efforts in this direction in the following years.

Moreover, there is a huge heterogeneity in terms of energy production between European countries. As we can see in the figure below, the leading producer of electricity is Germany, followed by France, Italy, Spain and Poland.

Therefore, if we want to reinforce the links between countries, we need to take into consideration these disparities, thus allowing support to be focused on the states which do not have the same capacity for independent energy production.

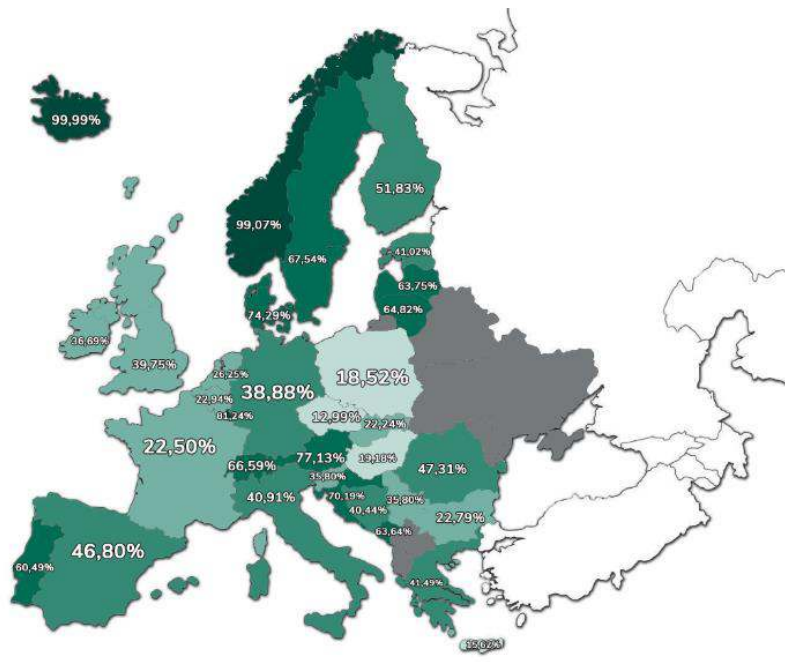
**Energie brute disponible des Etats membres de l'UE (2019)**



Energie brute disponible selon les Etats membres de l'UE en 2019, en kilotonnes équivalent pétrole (Ktoe). Données : Eurostat

Gross energy available from EU member states  
 Source: *Toute l'Europe*, data from Eurostat

European electricity consumption ranking (in %)  
 Source: Quiestvert



Part d'électricité d'origine renouvelable dans le mix de production (2021)



We are now going to focus on the students' idea to prioritise renewable energy development over nuclear energy.

All the European countries do not have a comparable quantity of renewable energies in their energetic mix. As we can see on the map above, Northern countries are far more advanced in the use of renewable energies than Central and Eastern European countries.

As such, if the EU is to subsidise renewable energy on the European continent, it should prioritise granting subsidies to countries where renewable energy has not yet been developed. The lack of investments is not de facto due to lack of funding, but often lack of political will and protection of vested interests amongst influential stakeholders. It is uncertain at best that subsidies would change this without a political will. In this sense, the EU could invest in the promotion of renewable energy and support more strongly civil society organisations involved in environmental issues in order to influence local political actors. Another question

is linked to how subsidies could be granted and the timeframe for potential phase-out in order to promote a stable environment for investments.

However, other subventions need to be implemented for countries whose economies are based on the production of high-carbon emitting energy because a transformation of their energy model could have negative consequences on employment and on the economy as a whole.

Thus, there is considerable heterogeneity between all member states, and this aspect needs to be considered by the European Union in order to adapt the distribution of subventions and support where it is most necessary.

There is also a need to mention the project of the European Green Taxonomy, which is part of the European Green Deal voted by the European Parliament. This taxonomy considers gas and nuclear energy as green and positive energies for the ecological *transition*, which means that they could benefit from subventions even though the green dimension is questionable - albeit 'only' as transitory energy sources. The thought process behind this taxonomy was to invest in energies that are better than coal, for instance; however, in the student's opinion, the European Union could have been more ambitious. This decision was reached after intense lobbying from the Czech Republic, Hungary and France, whose energy models include a large proportion of nuclear energy.

## B) Pollution

The students' proposition will first focus on environmental criminality, and then on the production and consumption of meat in the European Union.

First, environmental criminality is a huge threat to citizens of the EU as they could find themselves directly impacted by the dissemination of toxic substances, which represents an important sanitary risk. Additionally, classifying environmentally harmful behaviours as a crime could encourage awareness about environmental issues more widely.

The European Commission adopted in 2008 a directive (2008/99/EC) about environmental protection through criminal law, which represents a significant first step in the fight against environmental crime. However, there is a lack of harmonisation of sanctions between EU member states on this question.

Moreover, because the text adopted is a directive, states have a certain degree of freedom in its application in their national legislation. Consequently, national texts resulting from the directive are not ambitious enough, and there is currently a deficit in the application of the said directive.

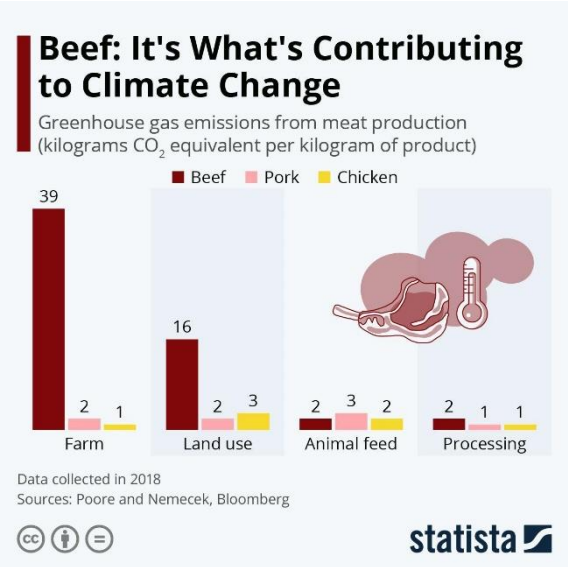
In this regard, the students believe that reinforcing environmental sanctions in situations of non-environmental-friendly behaviour is relevant in addressing the aforementioned challenges.

Furthermore, on the specific question of fishing quotas, enhancing controls could provide financial resources to the European Union, while guaranteeing the respect of marine biodiversity. As an illustration, illegal fishing alone, according to reports by Interpol and the UN Environment Programme of 2016, was a more important source of income than small arms trafficking.

Secondly, it is well known that the meat production sector is highly polluting, because of the methane expelled by cows and the carbon footprint of livestock feed. It must also be highlighted that this pollution is due to this industry's massive need for water.

For instance, all types of livestock combined emit approximately 7,000 million tons of CO2 equivalent.

Moreover, the EU is highly dependent on vegetable protein imports to feed its livestock, like soybean, coming mostly from deforestation projects in Brazil, therefore deepening Europe's imported deforestation problem.



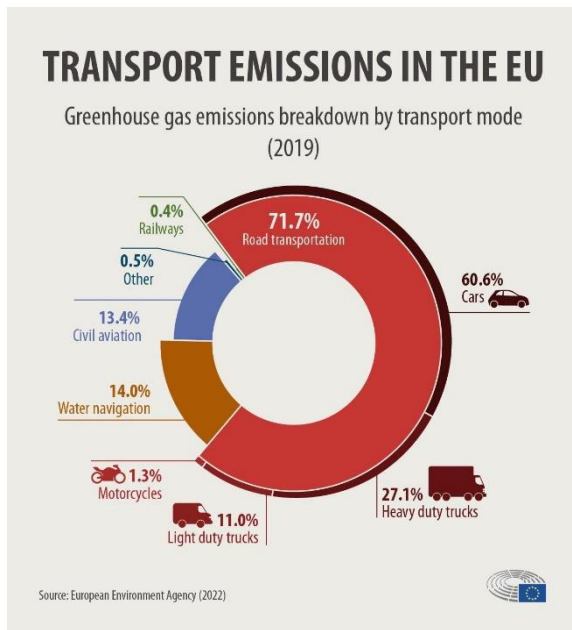
Thus, the students' proposition is to limit the production of meat. Nevertheless, a limitation of production necessarily implies negative consequences on the concerned sector, namely in terms of employment. As such, producers' interests must also be taken into consideration.

In addition, limiting the production of European producers will not reduce our imported carbon emissions as consumption of meat produced by non-European countries will continue.

Concerning the carbon impact of meat, the first area on which we could act is European citizens themselves. We should first start by creating a European awareness campaign on the negative impacts of meat overconsumption.

As livestock benefits from the support of the CAP, we could decrease the subventions granted to meat production little by little, in doing so encouraging farmers and herders to move their production towards produce which emits less CO2.

## C) Transportation



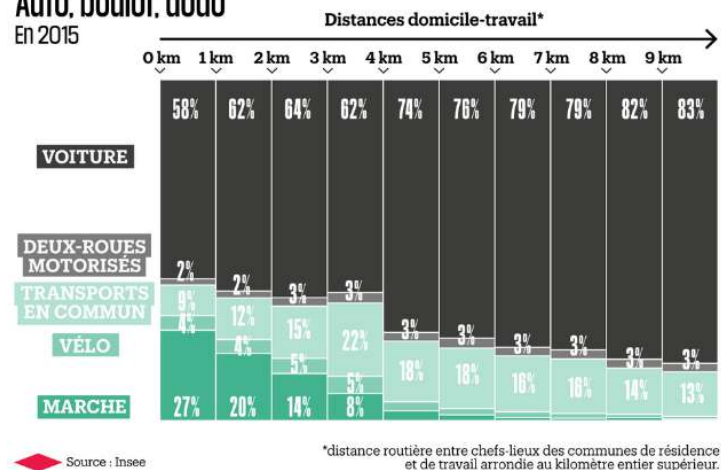
With regards to transport, the focus will be on the penalization of fossil-fuelled cars purchase as well as the development of a European program to encourage European citizens to buy and ride more bikes.

The penalization of fossil-fuelled cars purchase is particularly relevant because the main factor of air pollution in transport is cars, a mode of transport

which represents 60% of greenhouse gas emissions, as described in this chart from the European Environment Agency.

However, this 'tax' or 'tariffs' could take several forms given that different modes of penalization could be implemented. The penalization could be financial with penalties for those who choose to purchase fossil-fuelled cars,

### Auto, boulot, dodo En 2015

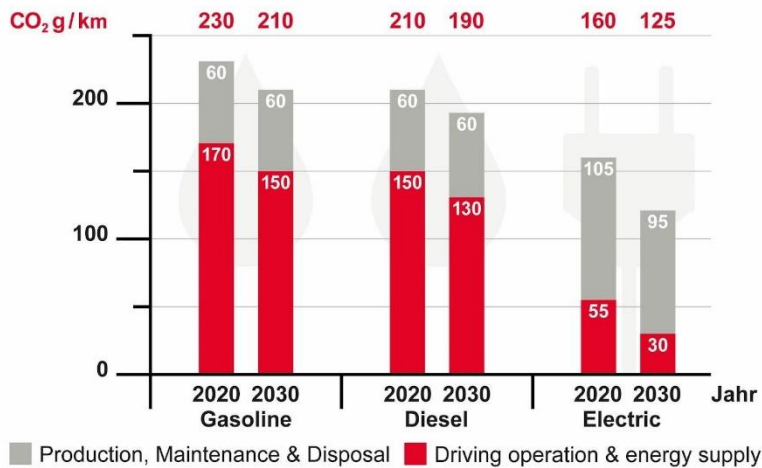


as is the case in France. Thus, this system could be put in place on an EU scale, and the tax could be added to national ones, in order to minimise impacts on the EU member states' established systems.

According to environmental economists, the taxation system is very useful to orient behaviours. In the case of transport, people need to assure their

movements for personal and professional reasons and, as such, this right to move cannot be infringed upon without obstructing fundamental values. That is why an EU tax on fossil-fuelled cars could be relevant.

**Carbon dioxide emissions over the entire life cycle using the example of a compact-class passenger car.**



Source: Lanxess 1

preparation pre-empting this strict prohibition.

On the other hand, the idea of privileging electric cars is relevant because even if the process of production of electric vehicles is not environmentally neutral, carbon dioxide emissions are much lower with electric cars than with alternatively fuelled cars, as we can see on the diagram that compares carbon dioxide emissions over the entire life cycle for the passenger cars.

Finally, the students suggested that European subventions be put in place to help people with bike purchases so that they can more easily use this mode of transport in their daily lives. This idea could also further future civic cooperation with European policymaking, as such a measure would illustrate that EU legislation can have a concrete impact on the lives of European citizens. Bike infrastructure could be developed. Several initiatives have been developed during the last decade, such as Eurovelo, but urban bike infrastructures could be developed in

It must also be mentioned that the European Parliament backed the Commission's proposal that would prohibit the selling of combustion vehicles by 2035. Considering this, this proposed taxation system could function as a sort of

European cities. The graph shows the mode of transportation from residence to the workplace in 2015 in France with a clear conclusion that distance is a key factor in adopting a transportation mode between car, public transport, bike and walking.

This idea could lead to a reduction in the use of cars for short-distance trips. As we can see from this diagram, in France, people use their car 58% of the time they have to travel a distance of less than 1 kilometre. Measures that would support using different types of transport for short-distance travelling (financial incentives to buy a bike, car-free zones) could help with reducing carbon emissions.

Nevertheless, all these proposals would need to be completed by robust public transport systems, as argued by the students, because public transport allows for a reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by pooling the need to move.

Finally, the students highlighted that a discussion is to be had on urbanisation as it is at the root of a major pollution issue: the energy consumption and the carbon footprint of cities in their globalisation are extremely high, and these emissions are incompressible. Therefore the students believe that there is a need to create a new green model for cities in light of the increased carbon footprint of urban citizens.

## Recommendations for policymakers

Drawn from the discussions with the students, we would like to offer the following policy recommendations.

### A) Energy

Concerning energy, we would argue that European action should be mostly financial, expressed through the subsidising of renewable energies for countries where such systems remain undeveloped. The EU should help countries' economies that are based on the commercialization of fossil energies in their transition towards more environmentally conscientious economic models.



Moreover, we would advocate for heavy investment in the development of infrastructure for the transportation of energy, thus creating new lines connecting countries.

Finally, the last part of the financial activities of the EU on the topic of energy could be the financing of research and development in addition to existing programs such as Horizon Europe, to make the EU a pioneer in the innovations of the energy system of tomorrow.

## B) Pollution

With regards to the criminalization of environmentally unfriendly behaviours, we should look towards the creation of an agency to fight against such behaviours. It could include investigation services, scientific entities, a procurer, and judges at a local and regional level.

In addition, this agency could coordinate the actions of national actors, who are implicated in the preservation of the environment, all the while also creating public-private partnerships to fight against environmental criminality. The agency can also be a way to force openings into the national/local political environments. The agency can also contribute to legislative changes.

This idea is inspired by the proposal of the Council of the European Union in 2016. Some agencies have already been put in place, such as EnviCrimeNet or Ambitus, but the fight against environmental crimes is fragmented across several agencies, including CEPOL, FRONTEX, Eurojust, the European Agency for the Environment and OLAF. As such, these agencies need more financial resources to act on this mission.

Our proposal, inspired by the students, would be to reorganise these entities, in so doing enhancing their financial capacities and ultimately reinforcing their efficiency.

### C) Transport

We believe that to encourage a change in European citizens' behaviour towards the purchase of electric cars instead of fossil-fuelled cars, the policies should not be entirely financial as the current state of economic inequality could provoke a rise in social conflict. For this reason, the European Union should propose a system for parking spots, where certain places are reserved for electric cars, and where fossil-fuelled cars are prohibited. This discrimination does not have a direct economic dimension and does not, therefore, create nor reinforce social inequalities. This will prevent the ecological transition from becoming synonymous with social discrimination.

Another essential dimension to consider is the funding dedicated to research and development in the field of transport. Cooperation at the European level could allow us to find other technological alternatives or at least improve the carbon balance of the existing ones. Thus, under the umbrella of the Horizon Europe program, a research program should be put in place by establishing relations between researchers from all over the European Union, in so doing aggregating the efforts and the capacities of European research. New modalities, such as the fast-tracked research cooperation mechanisms that were deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic (which had Horizon amongst others as the umbrella) should be developed. Those could be both fit for the purpose of preventing climate breakdown. Moreover, by finding future methods of "green transport", the European Union could benefit from the economic resources gained thanks to the commercialization of these innovations.

For more information about the YouthEU project and organisations involved in its implementation, please visit [youtheu.eu](http://youtheu.eu).



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