

New study reveals most Europeans support basic income after COVID-19

May 6 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

The COVID-19 pandemic is inspiring Europeans to think the previously

unthinkable, according to a ground-breaking survey out today from a team led by Professor Timothy Garton Ash, the leading Oxford academic.

Public policy and economic ideas which were hitherto seen as radical, even utopian, have become mainstream thinking during the crisis, the Europe's Stories survey of people throughout the European Union and the UK suggests. One particularly striking finding, according to Professor Garton Ash, is the overwhelming support among all age groups for a universal basic income (UBI). More than 70% of respondents backed the idea, which has often been dismissed as "wildly unrealistic."

A UBI, whereby all citizens would be entitled to a basic income paid by the government irrespective of their employment status, has been suggested by some economists and political thinkers as a way of responding to challenges such as inequality and automation—in the face of widespread scepticism. But the survey shows strong support for such a move, both in the UK (where more than two thirds of those asked support it), and across the EU.

The survey also finds that 84% of Europeans back a mandatory minimum wage—something that was only introduced in the UK in 1999.

In a report co-authored with Antonia Zimmermann, a member of the Oxford research team, Professor Garton Ash warns, "These results obviously need to be read against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic bringing outside life almost to a halt in the month of March 2020....plainly, the survey was conducted at a time of heightened economic and social insecurity."

The professor adds, "It is clearly too soon to say what kind of moment the Coronavirus pandemic will turn out to be for Europe, but it will surely be an important one."

The survey of more than 12,000 respondents was conducted between 5 and 25 March in the 27 EU member states and the UK. The questions were designed by the research team of Europe's Stories, a research project of the Dahrendorf Programme for the Study of Freedom at the European Studies Centre, St Antony's College, University of Oxford, in consultation with the experts of the Bertelsmann foundation's eupinions survey project.

It explores in greater depth the priorities of Europeans revealed in a November 2019 survey. This showed that [climate change](#), jobs and [social security](#) are major concerns for Europeans across the continent and in Britain.

Reflecting the current concerns and uncertainty felt by people across Europe, the respondents were starkly divided over the future—with half saying they are confident and half saying they are not confident about their future standard of living. The pandemic has not muted the optimism of the young, though, despite the impact on the 'gig economy.'" The survey found that, on average, two thirds of younger respondents are 'very' or 'somewhat' confident of their future job security—contrasted with just 35% of older people surveyed.

And Brexit appears not to have dulled British confidence in this respect, with respondents in the UK proving more optimistic about job security than the average across the 27 EU member states.

The main threat to jobs is seen by respondents across the continent as the state of the economy, with the level of fear being especially high in southern Europe. But among young people, inequality is also seen as a major contributing factor, while older people identify immigration as a particular concern.

Young people also take a strikingly different view of authoritarian

regimes. As part of the survey, the team looked at attitudes towards climate change and found some surprising results. While most Europeans believe climate change requires imminent action, they are divided over who best can deliver this and what action they, personally, are prepared to take.

The survey found that no fewer than 53% of young Europeans believe that authoritarian regimes, rather than democracies, are better placed to handle climate change. Unlike older Europeans, who still remember communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe and authoritarian regimes in Spain, Portugal and Greece, most younger EU citizens have no personal memory of dictatorship.

Professor Garton Ash notes a potential conflict, however, with Europeans reluctant to accept restrictions on consumer freedoms of the kind that are probably necessary to combat global warming. For example, less than a third of [young people](#) surveyed said they would be willing to give up non-essential flying, while most older respondents did not want to give up their petrol or diesel vehicles.

The Europe's Stories project presents these results on its website, europeanmoments.com, where it also has more than 100 interviews with Europeans.

Calling for people to join the debate, Professor Garton Ash says, "Since we cannot continue our programme of face-to-face interviewing during the lockdown, we have created an [easy-to-use facility](#) where anyone can do a short self-interview, sharing their own formative, best and worst European moments, and hopes for Europe in 2030. We cordially invite all readers to take a few minutes to tell us theirs."

Provided by University of Oxford

Citation: New study reveals most Europeans support basic income after COVID-19 (2020, May 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2020-05-reveals-europeans-basic-income-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.