

# #WHATDOYOU CARE ABOUT

STORIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE





**“Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.”**

**Kofi Annan**

**“SURELY WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO LEAVE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS A PLANET THAT IS HEALTHY AND HABITABLE BY ALL SPECIES.”**

**SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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European Footprints Initiative

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”**

**Margaret Mead**

**“WHAT WE ARE DOING TO THE FORESTS OF THE WORLD IS BUT A MIRROR REFLECTION OF WHAT WE ARE DOING TO OURSELVES AND TO ONE ANOTHER.”**

**MAHATMA GANDHI**

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# The background of European Footprints

## WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

You might have heard the term **sustainable development** quite often nowadays: on TV, social media and in newspapers, used by politicians, intellectuals and sometimes even by famous singers or Hollywood actors. But what exactly is this “sustainable development” that everyone is talking about?

It has been defined in many ways, but the most common definition describes sustainable development as “**development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.**”<sup>1</sup>

When aiming at social, economic and technological advancement, we should always consider the possible implications that our actions or lifestyles might have on the status of the others. Have you ever thought of the huge difference between travelling by plane and using other means of public transport? Or buying local products instead of shopping online? It is undeniable that we all leave traces behind, but we have the power to choose to leave a **responsible footprint**, one that takes into consideration the world we live in, and one that perhaps others can follow!

## HOW DID THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS COME ABOUT?

It all started about 50 years ago! In 1972, the **United Nations Conference on the Human Environment** was held in Stockholm. It was the first UN major conference on environmental issues, and marked a turning point in the development of international environmental politics. In 1987, the UN welcomed the establishment of a special commission tasked with creating a report on the environment in a global perspective up to the year 2000 and beyond, including proposed strategies for sustainable development. The commission later adopted the name **World Commission on Environment and Development**.

Since 1990, the international community led by the United Nations convened several major conferences which committed governments to urgently address some of the most pressing problems the world faces. The leaders of countries across the world started to acknowledge the growing complexity of our most critical issues, and developed a common strategy to tackle them.

The **United Nations (UN)** is the largest intergovernmental organization in the world. Established in 1945 at the end of World War II, its original main aim was to prevent future wars.

As of 2019, the UN counts 193 member states. Its headquarters are in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. It actively works towards the establishment and maintenance of international peace, justice, and human rights, while also promoting sustainable development, education, and social equality.

<sup>1</sup> “Our Common Future. Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development” (1987)

**1972**  
First UN conference on environmental issues

The first concrete action towards a common strategy for sustainable development was adopted in 2000 at the Millennium Summit, a meeting which gathered many world leaders. It resulted in the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**. The UN and its - at the time - 191 member states committed to actively work towards specific targets, perceived as the most pressing issues.

**1987**  
The first UN Commission on environment is established

The Millennium Development Goals were meant to raise awareness of the world's biggest problems, such as battling extreme poverty, hunger, child mortality and the spread of HIV/AIDS, while increasing education levels, women's empowerment, maternal health, and environmental sustainability. They functioned as a framework in which richer countries were asked to help the poorer ones to develop, and as such, the MDGs were mostly aimed at bettering living conditions in developing countries.

**2000**  
The Millennium Development Goals are here!

By 2015, several major world issues were increasingly coming to the forefront. For example, many richer countries have high levels of poverty and inequality, and world leaders realized that we should not only target these issues in poorer countries. Moreover, climate change had become an increasingly pressing global issue. Therefore a different set of objectives needed to be chosen to be more comprehensive, inclusive and participatory, as well as applicable to every country.

**2015**  
The UN Sustainable Development Summit takes place

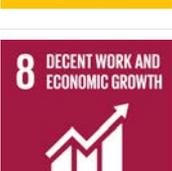
That is why in September 2015, the biggest public consultation in history on the most critical problems worldwide took place during the UN General Assembly at the **United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York**. Here, the now 193 countries of the UN formally adopted an ambitious Agenda for Sustainable Development, to be fulfilled by 2030: **the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals, or simply the SDGs**.

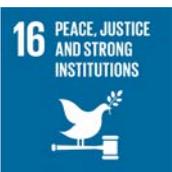
### WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ABOUT?

The Goals can be seen as a **compass** or a **road map** towards sustainable development. They embrace the concept of sustainable development in three main areas: **economy** (an end to extreme poverty), **society** (the fight against inequality and injustice) and **environment** (the battle against climate change). More numerous and detailed than the MDGs, the SDGs are an ambitious to-do-list made up of 17 tasks, broken down into more **specific targets - 169 in total!**

Each of the Goals has a number from 1 to 17. Does this mean that Goal 1 is more relevant than Goal 7? No, their order does not signify any priority: all the goals are critical and interlinked with one another, and each one of them is fundamental in achieving a sustainable future for us all.



 <p>1 NO POVERTY</p>	<p><b>No poverty</b> End poverty in all its forms everywhere</p>
 <p>2 ZERO HUNGER</p>	<p><b>Zero hunger</b> End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</p>
 <p>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>	<p><b>Good health and well-being</b> Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</p>
 <p>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</p>	<p><b>Quality education</b> Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</p>
 <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY</p>	<p><b>Gender equality</b> Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</p>
 <p>6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p>	<p><b>Clean water and sanitation</b> Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</p>
 <p>7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY</p>	<p><b>Affordable and clean energy</b> Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all</p>
 <p>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	<p><b>Decent work and economic growth</b> Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</p>
 <p>9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	<p><b>Industry, innovation and infrastructure</b> Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation</p>

 <p>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>	<p><b>Reduced inequalities</b> Reduce inequality within and among countries</p>
 <p>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	<p><b>Sustainable cities and communities</b> Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</p>
 <p>12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p>	<p><b>Responsible consumption and production</b> Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns</p>
 <p>13 CLIMATE ACTION</p>	<p><b>Climate action</b> Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact</p>
 <p>14 LIFE BELOW WATER</p>	<p><b>Life below water</b> Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development</p>
 <p>15 LIFE ON LAND</p>	<p><b>Life on land</b> Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</p>
 <p>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</p>	<p><b>Peace, justice and strong institutions</b> Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</p>
 <p>17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</p>	<p><b>Partnerships for the goals</b> Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development</p>

## HOW DO WE REACH THE GOALS?

The Goals were discussed and adopted by the 193 UN member states, and went into effect on 1 January 2016. Like all other member states that subscribed to the Sustainable Development Goals, the countries of Europe in general, and of the European Union in particular, have committed to the successful realization of the Goals. If we have a look at the **European Institutions** (e.g. European Commission, European Parliament, European Council), the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals has been [an important part of the agenda of the European Commission](#) since 2015.

However, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals is not legally binding. The SDG framework is more of a promise by countries to work together towards achieving the Goals, but no-one can enforce this. This means that **committing to reaching the Goals comes down to each country's political leaders, and of course, citizens.**

Being a very ambitious agreement that involves countries worldwide, the monitoring of the SDGs is not an easy task. That is why, alongside the Goals and their targets, in 2015, a total of **232 indicators** have been set to keep track of the Goals' implementation and reviews. We do not know exactly how much it would cost to fulfill the Goals, but economist Jeffrey Sachs calculated that the total cost to eliminate extreme poverty would be \$175 billion per year: this seems like a lot of money, but it's only 1% of the combined income of the richest countries in the world.

As a follow-up to the monitoring process, the UN is developing **annual reports**. The European Union is also monitoring the progress made by European countries with specific reports, as well as data kits on the Goals. This information is released by [Eurostat](#), the European Union's own statistics platform. Moreover, there are also independent free, open-access resources where users can track and explore global and country-level progress towards the fulfillment of the Goals, such as the [SDGs tracker](#). Do you want to know what the world's progress is on the SDGs? Check the 2019 [SDGs Progress Report by the UN](#). As of 2019, no country is on track to fulfill the Goals by 2030.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP ACHIEVE THE SDGS?

The Goals aspire to unite richer and poorer countries, governments, communities and individuals around the world in order to achieve their targets. Their realization is endorsed not only by the international community and by national governments, but also by many NGOs and smaller scale organizations that operate at more regional or local levels. **Individuals can contribute too!** Here are some ideas:

- ☀ Set up grass-roots initiatives, adopt a daily sustainable lifestyle, or organize clean-up campaigns to promote sustainable development. Spread the word about the Global Goals, so that more people can take action and contribute to meeting the Goals.
- ☀ Join an organization that actively contributes to reaching the Goals.
- ☀ Reduce your general waste and your environmental footprint. Avoid plastics, take the train instead of the airplane, or your bike instead of a car.
- ☀ Make conscious choices in your consumption. Buy local and try to make sure what you buy is produced in fair and sustainable ways.
- ☀ Show compassion and stand up against racism, exclusion, discrimination and injustice.
- ☀ Use your imagination. The future depends on our ability to imagine it.

## THE EUROPEAN FOOTPRINTS PROJECT

The project's title "European Footprints" summarizes it all: it is undeniable that we all leave some traces behind us, but we have the power to choose to leave a responsible footprint, one that takes into consideration the world we live in, and one that perhaps others can follow!

In October 2018, a group of trainees from the European Commission's Blue Book Programme produced a short educational video to raise awareness on the SDGs, under the mentorship of Director General of EAC, Themis Christophidou and in collaboration with the [World's Largest Lesson](#) - an NGO introducing the Sustainable Development Goals to children of different school ages. They launched an open call to involve other participants and the outcome was unexpected: there were so many young Europeans out there caring about many different things concerning their future and sustainability. A short video simply wouldn't have been enough to collect all their personal stories, amazing projects, and grassroots initiatives connected to the Goals. That is how the European Footprints project came to life.

This multimedia project involves 31 former European Commission trainees covering perspectives from all 28 EU member states, who have come to **share their stories** both on camera and on paper. European Footprints consists of three videos disseminated through a dedicated Facebook page and YouTube channel, and a storybook. The stories are thematically grouped in videos on **nature, climate and environment**, **society**, and **education and wellbeing**. These videos are freely available on our YouTube channel.

## THIS STORYBOOK

With this storybook we want to contribute to the wealth of teaching resources that are already available to bring the Sustainable Development Goals across to new generations. We want to inspire school children across Europe and beyond to take the future into their own hands, by means of varied, lively, and passionate accounts of young Europeans. By including voices and stories from all the Member States of the European Union, and by covering larger and smaller themes of the Goals, we hope that other young Europeans will recognize themselves in these stories, and will embark upon their own pursuit of the Goals. This storybook is a teaching tool that can be used in classrooms or educational workshops for students of around 13 years old and onwards. Here are some ideas for teachers to discuss the Goals in educational settings:

- ☀ Read the stories and use them, along with connected questions and *did you know*-facts to fire up a discussion in the classroom.
- ☀ Pick a story from your country and do research on the examples provided. Has there been any change in the situation?
- ☀ Use the storybook to talk about Europe, the European Union and citizen's initiatives, or to introduce EU programs like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.
- ☀ Inspire students to write their own stories (within English or creative writing classes), or to make their own videos about sustainability.
- ☀ Inspire students to create their own small initiatives, for example for International Volunteer Day, Earth Day, World Water Day, etc.

**And now it's up to you! #WhatDoYouCareAbout?**

## THEME 1: NATURE, CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

# Oceans and Earth

#EuropeanFootprints #WhatDoYouCareAbout

Planet Earth is our home and features incredible biodiversity, both on land and in water. We rely on natural resources for food, energy and water, but our disregardful exploitation of them is causing severe damage to the world's ecosystem, in the form of deforestation, floods, desertification and global warming. It is crucial to reverse these negative effects, and we must act quickly by promoting education, innovation and common efforts towards a sustainable and respectful use of our natural resources. Failing that, not only the planet, but also our economy and everyday life will be increasingly affected.



### Mirjana, Croatia

Croatia, the land of a thousand islands, is the third richest country in Europe in terms of natural water resources, and boasts a well-preserved ecological environment, with hundreds of endemic plant and animal species. National and nature parks cover a total surface area of 5,151 km<sup>2</sup>, corresponding to 9.1% of the country. A total of 11 nature parks, 8 national parks and 2 strict nature reserves are protected natural areas, showing that Croatia is a country of exceptional and diverse natural beauty.

In 2017, Croatia was faced with coast fires and floods that seriously impacted Croatian tourism and the country's economy. These natural disasters were caused by the inefficient and unsustainable maintenance of river flows, forest areas, and sea coasts.

According to future projections, Croatia is threatened by dramatic climate changes. By 2070, the air temperature would rise by 2.2 degrees Celsius, and sea levels will rise by 40 centimeters. There will be more natural disasters like hail, storms, high winds, and even tornados. Climate change will also lead to shifts in the tourist season. Due to warmer summer months, the season will not be so enjoyable. The worse climate will also significantly affect agriculture, which is considered to be an important branch of the Croatian economy.

The crucial thing is that the prevention of, and adaptation to climate change needs to happen right now. It is possible, but only with political will and efforts to integrate climate action measures into national strategies. Furthermore, collective action is required. People need to act and react, and drive changes themselves. This is achievable in many ways, but certainly, the main one is adopting an eco-friendly attitude!

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**Collective action on climate change is required. People need to act and react, and drive changes themselves.**

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## Radek, Czech Republic

I believe that re-foresting our landscape is the way to achieve a sustainable society, and to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Natural forests are the best way to absorb CO<sup>2</sup> from the atmosphere. Trees use sunlight to transform CO<sup>2</sup> and water into wood, which is a valuable natural resource. Each kilogram of dry wood was made from about 1,5 kilograms of CO<sup>2</sup>.

In forests but also in other natural environments, biodiverse ecosystems are more stable than monocultures. When the different elements of a natural system become interconnected, the system as a whole becomes more resistant to changes, such as climate change. Diverse, robust ecosystems will dampen the negative consequences we are facing in the decades to come. When one species is weakened, another one takes its

place in the habitat. Such ecosystems are not only able to sustain themselves, but their positive effects also extend beyond their boundaries. Forests clean air and water, elements that are essential for our health and wellbeing. They also diminish soil erosion. Leafs and branches slow down rain and wind that would carry bare ground away, while deep roots join layers of soil together and keep it stable, which can prevent deadly landslides. Forests are also of significant economic importance as a source of wood, a traditional building material.

**Forests clean air and water, elements that are essential for our health and wellbeing.**

Growing a forest is no quick task. It's a procedure that requires many years, even centuries to complete. That's why we cannot wait any longer, and must act now. In the **European Commission Trainees Forest Project**, we sponsor planting part of a forest in Belgium, one of the world's most prosperous nations, which has, however, a limited range of forested areas. Our project is a signal to the world that we can take our initiatives from words to actions.





## Kief, Luxembourg

Climate change is a fact, not a myth. I will tell you a very short story about this problem and how I witnessed it in Luxembourg. When I was a child, snowfall indicated that winter was coming. Snow was our playground, and was a synonym for Christmas. It beautified the dark days, and made the cold feel more comfortable. Snow was majestic. I remember that I played outside with my sisters and cousins building igloos or enjoying legendary snowball fights.

When I look out of the window today, I miss this feeling. In winter months, it is often raining, and much warmer than snow temperatures. In over more than ten years now, I have not seen snow at Christmas. No noble face of the winter anymore, no excited feeling when getting up in the morning and leaving the house, no need to stay at home because snowfalls forced you to do so. Since the beginning of systematic measurements of Luxembourg temperatures

**Climate change is a fact, not a myth.**

in 1947, the highest summer temperatures have been measured in the last 5 years, going up to 37,9 °C, whereas the lowest temperatures were measured in the 1950s, reaching -20,2 °C. Just by looking at the highest and lowest measured temperatures, you can observe global warming. So you don't have to look for extreme natural disasters such as inundations, earthquakes, droughts or the frequency of hurricanes to understand that the climate is changing. You just have to look out of the window at Christmas, sitting together with your family.



## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that **Natura 2000** is a network of land and marine areas in Europe, created to protect the most valuable and threatened natural resources, habitats and species? It currently includes 18% of Europe's land area, and almost 10% of its marine territory.
- ☀ 71% of the Earth's surface is covered by water, and 96,5% of this are oceans. Every year, we celebrate **World Ocean's Day** on 8 June. Each year **Earth Day** - 22 April - marks the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970. 2020 is the 50th anniversary!
- ☀ **Climate change** refers to global warming and its associated effects, such as rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity, and increases in the frequency of natural disasters. These processes also directly impact the wellbeing of humans, such as through food scarcity and the loss of coastal living environments. Together we can counteract climate change by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, for example by using public transport, making responsible food consumption choices, re-using goods, and reducing our waste.



## Francesca, Cyprus

My country Cyprus is an island, with shimmering blue waters encircling it, sparkling in the presence of the sunlight. The sea is the mother that unites us all, both humans and sea organisms.

As a child, my parents would take me and my brother to see green (*Chelonia mydas*) and loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) sea turtles—both endangered species — during the summer months in their nesting sites. However, as the years went by, less and less turtles would come back to the island, due to the polluted waters, high levels of micro plastics, emissions by commercial ships anchored close to the beach site, and drainage systems releasing waste into the sea.

In order to prevent and combat this pollution, the seaside communities started organising "Blue Campaigns" nearly every year. These campaigns include cleaning the sea from plastics, but also daily auditing of data on waste emission submitted by ships,

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**Our economy and diet are highly dependent and based on fish, and therefore a threat to the quality of the ecosystem is a threat we also feel.**

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the inspection of ships at the anchorage, and coordinated patrolling to monitor harmful consequences of marine traffic. This has resulted in the turtles returning to our island—ours and theirs equally—every year. And I get to introduce my sea-friends to the babies in my family, 20 years after I was first introduced to them.



Life in this sacred water is very important for us islanders, not only in terms of protecting the endangered sea turtles. We strive to keep the water clean, as a large proportion of our economic and leisure activities take place in the same waters shared with the sea-creatures living there. The recent gas exploration through drilling activities taking place around the Mediterranean Sea is suspected to have damaging effects on the marine environment and the fisheries, as both industries interact by sharing the same waters. Our economy and diet are highly dependent and based on fish, and therefore a threat to the quality of their ecosystem is a threat we also feel.

Our goal as a leading Mediterranean island is to maintain the record of the number one European country with the most blue-flag awarded beaches based on country-size, and why not also to increase the number of well-deserved blue-flag beaches across Europe?





## Roberto, Malta

Malta is the smallest member state in the European Union, endowed with a rich history of being captured by imperialists. What makes Malta so great is its high number of sunny days in a year, and the magnificent beaches, which span the whole island. It is well known that Malta is one of the most unspoiled destinations for a summer escape, with all the crystal clear waters that surround the Maltese islands. I love the sea to the extent that I am an avid aquatic sportsman in open water diving and rowing. It is our common human duty to safeguard our seas.

One of the most profound sustainability problems Malta is facing, is the amount of plastic that is used in packaging and general waste that ends up in our waters. It is detrimental to witness this at arm's length and to not act. Armed with the knowledge of how damaging plastic and general waste is for the environment, we need to share our

**It is our common human duty to safeguard our seas.**

concerns with the public of how harmful these materials can be to our waters and environmental ecosystems. Reducing our own use of disposable plastic is the smallest effort that each and every one of us can make. This way, we can safeguard our children's future environment, by aiming for a waste-free world where each material or product is recycled.

I wish that single-use plastic would be completely eradicated across Europe, and that more sustainable materials would be used instead. The European Commission has confirmed that, by 2030, all plastic packaging will be reusable or recyclable. I believe that where there is a will, there is a way, and I trust that if society is equipped with the right mindset, we could reach the stars and beyond.



1

Have you ever participated in a climate march? Are you engaged in other kinds of initiatives against global warming?

2

Do you notice any differences in the weather conditions in your region over the past few years?

3

Can you name three species of animals and three species of plants that are characteristic of your region? Are they endangered?

## THEME 1: NATURE, CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

# Waste

#EuropeanFootprints #WhatDoYouCareAbout

There are more than 7 billion people in the world and each one of these is producing waste every single day. This waste is polluting the water in rivers, seas and lakes faster than nature can recycle and purify, and it is affecting terrestrial and marine ecosystems and the animals inhabiting them, for example due to the proliferation of plastic. Wrong disposal practices, such as burning waste, are also polluting the air we breathe, and therefore have an impact on our health. We're treating our resources and the planet as if they were infinite, but we often do not realise to what extent waste has an impact on our life, and that it affects every single person in the world. That is why addressing waste management is crucial to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.



### Paolo, Italy

A few years ago I travelled to Argentina, and worked for one year in the biggest shantytown of Mendoza, El Borbollón. I will never forget the first time I arrived there. The air was unbreathable, children were playing barefoot with horses or with some rag balls, the walls of the houses were made of cardboard, and a family was sharing its house with pigs. I could not stay there for more than 30 minutes.

During that year, I got to know the reality of the villa, which is what Argentinians call a shantytown. The trucks of the municipality of Mendoza were collecting the garbage in the city and, either legally or illegally, were unloading the garbage in the shantytown. The work of the inhabitants of El Borbollón was to select the recyclable garbage, collect

it and burn the rest. Children started to work there when they were only ten years old. The situation was getting worse in winter: the temperature could go below zero degrees Celsius, and the most effective way to face the cold was to sleep next to a dog. On top of that, households did not have access to basic services such as water, electricity and a sewer system.

In Argentina, I realized that poverty has many faces, and I felt powerless being confronted with that situation. Today, I believe that a very effective way to improve human living conditions is by acting at a macro-level. I strongly believe that the Sustainable Development Goals should guide our policymaking in the following years. We need to act within this framework in order to reduce inequalities, create sustainable human settlements, and defeat poverty. I'm telling my story to highlight that the European Union has the potential to be a worldwide leader in making the Sustainable Development Goals a reality.

**We need to act to  
reduce inequalities,  
create sustainable  
human settlements,  
and defeat poverty.**





## Marii, Estonia

Like many of us, I have been mortified and heartbroken over stories and images of whales washing ashore with 60 pounds of plastic in their gut, or the heinous amounts of trash hanging from trees on tropical beaches that look so different in our imagination. 10 years ago, a movement called **Let's do it!** was born in Estonia – an ambitious civic initiative that invited Estonians to go out and clean their entire country of illegally dumped waste in one day. The success and simple brilliance of the action inspired people across the globe, and in 2018 the initiators of this Estonian movement coordinated **World Cleanup Day** – a huge 'green wave' that started in New Zealand and ended 36 hours later in Hawaii, with 158 countries and 17 million volunteers coming together to clean up their beaches, forests, and streets.

I joined the organizing team in Tallinn as mapping coordinator for Africa. It was my job to support waste mapping prior to World Cleanup Day: through an app-based marking of trash points, we helped analyze mismanaged waste, plan clean-ups, and combat trash-blindness, which happens when people simply ignore the presence of trash in

**My experience will always remind me of the beauty and power of working together.**

their surroundings. I will always remember the emotion and goose bumps that hit me when calling all the country teams in francophone Africa the night before the big day to gather their final estimates for volunteer numbers and clean-ups – I got to hear their enthusiasm, share in their excitement, and sense the true magnitude of the undertaking.

I will definitely continue to be involved in the movement. The experience of something so special will always remind me of the beauty and power of working together. Through my friends at Let's do it! I also learned about a rather brilliant workout called plogging – picking up litter while jogging. Try it, it's fun! :-)



## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that according to the UN, approximately one third of the world's food production ends up in the trash every year? This amounts to about 1.3 billion tons of food worth about \$ 1 trillion.
- ☀ **Plastic Free July** is a global movement that helps millions of people be part of the solution to plastic pollution, providing resources and ideas to help reduce single-use plastic waste in our daily life.
- ☀ According to the World Economic Forum, 32% of the 78 million tons of plastic packaging that are produced every year, ends up in our oceans. This corresponds to one truck load of plastic each minute. If we don't take sustainable action, this will increase to two trucks of plastic in 2030, and four trucks per minute by 2050.



## Rosaleen, Ireland

Having lived in Spain, France and Ireland, I realise how much less waste is recycled in these countries, compared to Belgium. After I moved to Brussels, I was surprised to see how seriously everyone takes recycling there. Every household has different coloured bags for various types of waste. This is also carried through at work, where every office has separate bins for sorting trash. These might be small things but it makes such a difference.

I believe countries in the European Union could learn from each other in terms of recycling strategies. Walking down the street in Dublin, especially in the morning, you will see a lot of

people holding a coffee in a takeaway cup, which will probably never be

recycled. People are so unaware of how bad it is for the environment that in a regular coffee shop you will see them holding takeaway cups, even if they have no intention of bringing the coffee out with them. The staff themselves prefer giving you a takeaway cup, as it's easier for them to clean afterwards. An Irish study on recycling found that up to 200 million single-use coffee cups are thrown away every year in Ireland. This corresponds to 528,000 cups every day, which works out 22,000 an hour, or 366 every minute. This is shocking.

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**I believe countries can learn from each other in terms of recycling strategies.**

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I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to live in different European countries, and to have my eyes opened to the differences in waste management that occur between Member States. We must find ways to exchange information on recycling between countries. I believe recycling is something that should be taught all the way from primary school. The European Union can fulfill an important role in coordinating and supporting collaborative practices for waste management. It shouldn't be seen as an optional habit you can choose to partake in, but as a duty we all have.

1

Have you ever thought of organizing a clean up day in your own region?

2

Do you know which countries are generating the most waste worldwide?

3

Waste can be classified into five types: liquid waste, solid rubbish, organic waste, recyclable rubbish and hazardous waste. Are you sorting into these categories to ensure proper waste removal at home?

## THEME 1: NATURE, CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

# Energy

#EuropeanFootprints #WhatDoYouCareAbout

In the Western world, we often take for granted that we can heat up our homes, use electric appliances, and move around using any method of transportation we choose. For billions of people, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, these resources are not self-evident. Many people lack access to clean, affordable and reliable energy, which has implications for their opportunities to study, have competitive businesses and even for their health and access to healthcare. Our long-term goal should be to gain this energy from renewable sources as much as possible, including solar, wind, and geothermal energy. This will ensure that across the world, we do not only have reliable energy at our disposal, but that it will also respect the carrying capacity of the environment.



### Giulia, Italy

I am proud of having lived in Scotland for many years, a country that is striving to gain 100% of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2020. Although I studied in Aberdeen, the Oil and Gas Capital of Europe, I realized shortly after my graduation that renewable energy was the way forward. Community energy projects, where communities fund the assets to produce renewable energy by themselves, are getting popular in Scotland. My two favourite ones are the **Aberdeen Community Hydro Projects** and the **Levenmouth Energy Project**, to which I personally contributed. The latter is a unique circular economy project which produces green energy to power one of Europe's largest hydrogen vehicles fleets.

However, due to the current electricity regulatory framework, it is still hard to fully become "prosumers", and to be involved in both production and consumption of energy at the same time. Therefore, I developed a business idea to bring together small producers of renewable energy (i.e. families

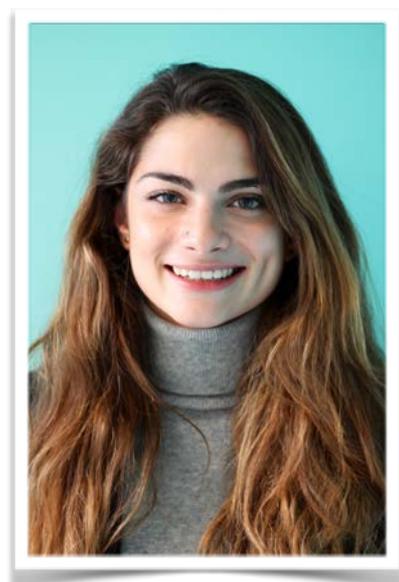


### **Renewable energy is the way forward.**

with solar panels on the roof of their houses) so that they can sell their surplus electricity. I did this through developing a platform which uses blockchain - the technology through which the tracking of electricity and payments from energy producers to the final consumers can be done safely and securely. With this, even small producers can enter the electricity market and ultimately contribute to achieving affordable and clean energy for all.

\*\*\*

\*\*\* I presented this business idea to the UN Innovation Lab for Sustainable Development Goals, the first of its kind. A year later, I presented my idea at Microsoft Italia through a contest where I became a finalist. Inspired by the energy of like-minded young Italians, I co-created **YOUNG - Youth Organisation for United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**, the first Italian NGO dedicated to the SDGs. I presented our organisation at the 24<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In 2018, I also participated as a youth speaker to G-STIC, the Global Sustainability Technology and Innovation Conference, with the UN Major Group of Children and Youth where I talked about energy positive communities like the Scottish green hydrogen project I helped commission. Getting involved in these networks is an important step in establishing successful partnerships to realise the Sustainable Development Goals



## Lylah, United Kingdom

Energy access is something that we often take for granted in our lives. We use it without thinking when we turn on a light switch, cook our food, or travel to school. But this is not the case for everyone: just under a billion people around the world do not have access to affordable, reliable and clean electricity, and 2.7 billion people do not have access to clean cooking. This means that they must make food over open fires or wood cook stoves. This creates household air pollution, which is one of the world's leading causes of premature death. The world's population is growing faster than electrification efforts, and with current policy levels the **International Energy Agency (IAE)** estimates that by 2030, 2.3 billion people will still be without clean cooking access, and 670 million without access to electricity in general. \*\*\*

## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that almost 3 billion people worldwide still need to rely on wood, coal or animal waste for cooking and heating their homes? As of 2019, 13% of the world's population also does not have access to modern electricity.
- ☀ On the other hand, 17,5% of the world's final energy currently already comes from renewable energy sources! In order to increase this percentage, the Sustainable Development Goals state that our worldwide investment in renewable energy should triple to \$ 1.25 trillion by 2030.
- ☀ Do you know what a **community-owned energy project** is? It's a project where renewable energy is produced by communities themselves! Denmark and Germany are the European leading countries in community energy generation, focusing on solar energy and power plants.

\*\*\* This clearly has consequences for human health and for the climate, but increasing access to modern energy services is also an opportunity to stimulate jobs and new businesses, to empower women, to improve safety and education, and to help communities become more resilient to shocks and disasters. This means we have two main challenges: the first is to give everyone access to electricity and the second is to avoid increasing our carbon emission to a level of irreversible global warming.

**We have to be smart about how we design every new project and think about it as part of an integrated solution.**

However, sometimes it is difficult to balance these two goals. Fossil fuels, which are coal, oil, and gas, are some of the cheapest and most accessible energy sources, but they are also the most polluting. So while measures to reduce the use of fossil fuels such as carbon taxes are beneficial for the environment, they can also make energy more expensive for the people who need it most, bringing energy access just out of their reach. This means that

alongside reducing the use of fossil fuels, we also need to invest in, and develop clean and sustainable energy sources that are affordable and accessible for all.

To do this we need to rethink the way we design energy systems and use all the tools we have available. This means making energy sources less polluting, whether this is through renewable energy, cleaner fossil fuels such as gas, or other sources such as nuclear energy. It also means investing in infrastructure to bring electricity to where it is needed, or to create decentralised systems or micro grids which work independently off the main electricity grid. This also requires increasing efficiency so that less electricity can go a lot further, creating smarter cities which can use intelligent solutions such as using the city's own waste to provide heating, using electric vehicles and fast speed trains.

Increasing access to cleaner fuels or biogas in rural areas for clean cooking can also save billions of lives. Most importantly, today we have to be smart about how we design every new project and think about it as part of an integrated solution, so that all of the interlinking parts of an energy system can work together to provide modern, sustainable, reliable and affordable energy for all.



**1**

Ways to reduce your energy consumption and carbon emissions include using public transport and switching off appliances that are not in use. Can you think of other strategies?

**2**

Can you name three examples of green energy?

**3**

Who do you think are the leading European countries in green energy? Who could improve their commitment?

## THEME 1: NATURE, CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

# Responsible life choices

#EuropeanFootprints #WhatDoYouCareAbout

Every day, we make a lot of choices about our buying behaviour and our consumption habits. Often, we don't thoroughly think about these choices, and revert to routines. However, many of the things we buy, use, and throw away carry a large environmental footprint, such as pollution during transport to their destination, or unethical conditions for workers in countries where the goods are manufactured. From how we shop and travel to the clothes we wear and the foods we eat, there is often much room for improvement in making more sustainable and responsible choices in order to take better care of our planet.



### Pavol, Slovakia

In our everyday lives, we use many disposable plastic items such as straws, different containers, or plastic bags. Most of the time people are not even conscious about its impact on the Earth's environment. We often see images of sea creatures being entangled in different kinds of plastic and waste, or even perishing after swallowing them. One of the most common single-use plastics are the bags that you can take from many stores. Even though some countries have already abolished these, we can still see people walking around with them.

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**Starting to think about it just now is not enough. We need to change people's mindset for good.**

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I always have at least two fabric bags in my backpack. They are not heavy to be carried around, and I always use them when I need to do shopping and my backpack does not provide enough room. I never take disposable plastic bags in a store. I am glad to see that people in my country, Slovakia, start to think about the impact of plastic pollution, and that they try to limit their use of plastic bags. But starting to think about it just now is not enough. We need to change people's mindset for good.

An effective way to do this, is to ban disposable plastic bags and other single-use plastic items such as tableware, and to replace them with organically decomposable plastic materials, or with multiple-use alternatives in other materials, such as glass food containers. People may need some time to adjust, but this will pass. Eventually, they will accept such new ways of shopping, without the need to use disposable plastic bags. I am deeply convinced that even with these small and simple steps, we can easily and free of charge fight against pollution and climate change. As long as single-use plastics are not banned, it remains a matter of choice. Which way do you choose?





## Stefanie, Austria

According to a World Wide Fund for Nature report from 2011, Austria has the highest meat consumption within the European Union. On average, each Austrian consumes over 100 kilograms of meat per year. Imagine a world in which every person on the planet would like to consume this amount of meat. This would not be possible, because we have limited resources of land and water on earth. Furthermore, it would be a catastrophe for our environment.

After my first week at university, I started rethinking my eating behaviour. I never ate a lot of meat, but I did not actually care about it either. Today I know that animal agriculture is a leading cause of

climate change, deforestation, pollution, loss of biodiversity, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Therefore, my first attempt was to stop eating any meat from

Monday to Friday. Later on, I only seldom ate meat or fish, and only from organic small-scale farmers. My next step was to switch from dairy products to plant-based alternatives. I am not 100 % vegan and I will never be, but I try to consume as responsibly as possible.

**Consumers have a lot of power to steer industries in a certain direction.**

Consumers have a lot of power to steer industries in a certain direction. We have to state clearly that we care for our environment and refuse unsustainable choices. I hope that officials and politicians will take more action to promote sustainable food choices. Possible initiatives include introducing meat-free days or offering vegan options in public canteens, and educating people on sustainable agriculture and the importance of seasonal and local products.



## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that the EU made new rules regarding single-use plastics, in order to reduce marine litter? This move happened in 2018 and is part of the new EU's plastic strategy. These rules involve a lot of day-to-day products, so take a look at [this fact sheet](#) to find out more.
- ☀ Many NGOs and institutions offer advice on how to make changes in your lifestyle in order to help the environment. One of the methods is to calculate your carbon footprint. Check out [this website](#), calculate your footprint and find out what you can do to make it smaller!
- ☀ A typical pig factory generates the same amount of raw waste as a city of 12,000 people, and producing just one hamburger uses enough fossil fuel to drive a small car 20 miles. Read different opinions on how the meat industry affects the environment on [UN Environment pages](#).





### Anna, Finland

The past years have been overshadowed by worsening environmental problems and climate change. As these problems have become more evident and severe, a lot of people are now overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness. While it is true that solving the climate crisis requires determined and radical action from governments and policy makers around the world, it is equally true that over 70% of carbon emission originates from households' everyday activities. Keeping in mind that we, Europeans, have one of the highest carbon footprints per capita, it is not negligible what and how much we consume in our everyday lives.

A lot of this consumption is unnecessary and useless. Even the most conservative calculations show that people could save around € 3,000 per household every year by cutting back on goods such as alcohol, cigarettes and junk food, and by making environmentally friendly choices such as reducing private car mobility and air travel. Hence, my fellow researchers and I wanted to tackle the commonly held misconceptions that

#### Europeans have one of the highest carbon footprints per capita.

citizen-consumers' choices do not have any impact and role in stopping climate change, and that climate action is expensive and requires very advanced technology. In fact, stopping climate change would only cost € 3 per person per day, if we were to start

investing immediately. This amount is based on the Stern report of how much needs to be invested in climate change mitigation measures, such as renewable energy, to stop climate change at 2°C. The €3 is calculated according to GDP, accounting for Europeans' share in the effort.

Nevertheless, making environmentally conscious decisions at all times may sometimes feel exhausting and discouraging. Doing something for the environment should be just as easy, fast, fun and convenient, as shopping is today. Hence, we came up with the idea of **Useless**, which aims to encourage and empower citizens for anti-consumption through a mobile application. Save your money, and save the environment! Furthermore, when the saved money is invested in sustainable projects, such as renewable energy or regenerative food production, citizens can leave a double impact on the climate: by avoiding CO<sup>2</sup> emission from deterred consumption, and by decreasing CO<sup>2</sup> emission through making sustainable investments. Thus, Useless combines micro-saving with impact-investing. While waiting for the application to come on the market, don't be useless, just use less! :-)



1

Do you know where your clothes are made? Many companies resort to inhumane working conditions or child labour in third world countries in order to reduce the cost of manufacturing. Next time you shop, take a look at what the labels say.

2

Try an experiment! Track how much waste you produce in one month. Do you separate waste and recycle? Does everything need to be thrown out, or can you perhaps reuse some things?

3

How often do you buy new things? To help the environment, you could check second hand shops or swap items with friends and family.

## THEME II: SOCIETY

# Urban spaces and connections

#EuropeanFootprints #WhatDoYouCareAbout

By 2030, it is expected that 5 billion people will live in cities worldwide. However, this increasing trend towards urbanization brings about several issues. Among these urban challenges are traffic congestion, the disappearance of green spaces, waste management, pollution, and the need to provide enough job opportunities, adequate housing, and resources such as transport and energy. At the same time, cities can be hubs of innovation, economic progress, creativity and social connections with other inhabitants. One of our big challenges for the future will be to balance out environmental and social sustainability with urban prosperity for all.



### David, Slovenia

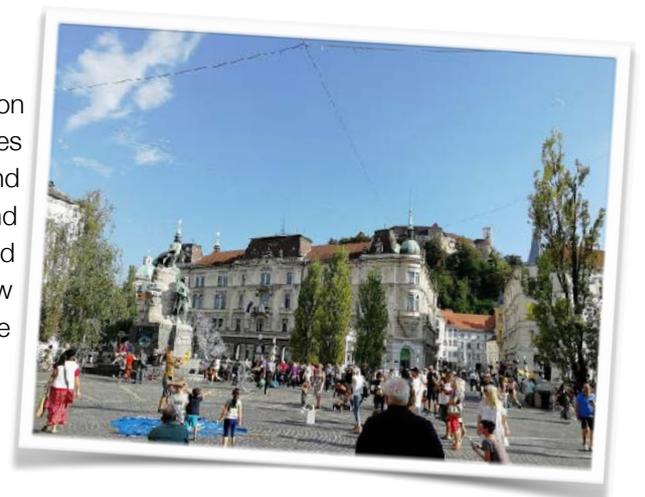
Coming from a small village in Slovenia with less than a hundred people, I was always fascinated by cities: how they bring together so many people of various backgrounds and beliefs, how they function, and how they solve the problems of offering to their inhabitants not only the necessities for life, but also the conditions to socialize, educate, innovate and generally prosper. I am therefore passionate about making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

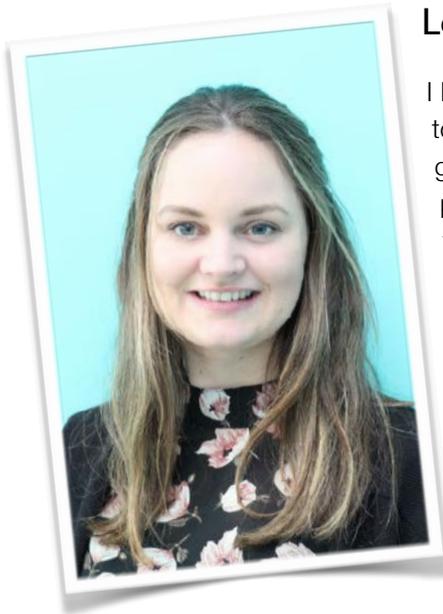
**I envision a future in which our cities will have a positive impact on people, the economy, nature and the climate.**

Slovenia has received praise for its high standards in nature protection and sustainability. It is the first country awarded the Green Tourist Destination award, it ranks among the most sustainable countries in the world, has the highest share of its area under the European Union's

Natura 2000 programme (37,9 %), and is one of Europe's biodiversity hotspots. Slovenian cities provide many good examples of sustainable and smart small and mid-sized communities. Nine municipalities (17% of the entire population of Slovenia) are included in the Zero Waste network, the capital Ljubljana was named **European Green Capital** 2016, and many efforts are made for comprehensive urban renovations. Many cities in Slovenia are closing their centres for traffic to open up space for pedestrians and cyclists, are offering bike sharing systems (including electric bikes), and are enabling the economic redevelopment of city centres.

I envision a future in which our cities will have a positive impact on people, the economy, nature and the climate. One of the main principles in achieving this is a better use and diversification of urban space and resources. To do so, we must build upon a sustainable and diverse land use, responsible construction and maintenance, and the reuse and repurposing of all resources. At the same time, we must implement new technologies for smart governing, monitoring, and managing of the urban environment.





## Lea, Denmark

I love travelling, and I think we are very fortunate in Europe that we have the opportunity to travel across open borders within the European Union. This is made possible by good infrastructure. As a young student, I was very dependent on good, affordable public transport. I studied in Sweden while living in Denmark, and travelling everyday by train really reminded me that with high quality infrastructure, we all have the opportunity to travel more environmentally friendly.

**With high quality infrastructure, we all have the opportunity to travel more environmentally friendly.**

Good infrastructure also enables us to discover other countries during holidays. European countries encompass a vast amount of our shared cultural heritage which in part has shaped the societies we live in today. I think it is very important for young people to be able to experience our common European history and culture, and to meet young people from across the continent. For me this has brought me many invaluable insights, but also great friendships.

In recent years, choosing to travel more by train and bus has also been a deliberate choice to try and limit my carbon footprint. For the future I hope public transport will be more accessible and affordable for everyone across Europe!



## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that half of the current world's population lives in cities, but that these urban spaces only occupy 3% of the Earth's land surface? Because of this population density, cities are responsible for around 70% of the world's energy consumption, and 75% of carbon emissions.
- ☀ The **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** works with national governments and civil society organizations to ensure sustainability in rapidly urbanizing environments. In addition to this, **Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)** is active in more than 100 countries and encourages local action for sustainable development in cities, towns and communities of all sizes.
- ☀ Your **carbon footprint** is a way to measure the impact of your lifestyle on the environment. It is the sum of CO<sup>2</sup> (carbon dioxide) emissions that are produced directly or indirectly by all your activities in a year. You can try to estimate your carbon footprint using this online app by [The Nature Conservancy](#).



## Virág, Hungary

Although all the Sustainable Development Goals are interconnected and are equally important, I am particularly passionate about sustainable cities and communities, as I have the most experience in this field. Through my activities in research and volunteering, I believe that the creation of close-knit, grassroots communities can contribute to the birth of a more sustainable and kinder world for all of us.

During my studies in conflict resolution and governance, I wrote my master's thesis on how opening up public spaces and being more active as citizens in them can support the enhancement of both democracy and responsible citizenship. I interviewed and followed activists, artists and community workers in my home country of Hungary and abroad, who shared their practices

and wisdom regarding this issue. In Hungary, I observed how simple initiatives such as guerrilla gardening, pavement painting or trash collection can generate a sense of community, belonging and awareness among local people. I found that opening up public spaces in an ex-Soviet bloc country can contribute to healing the socio-political trauma that has rarely been addressed before.

**I believe that the creation of close-knit, grassroots communities can contribute to a more sustainable, kinder world for us all.**

What really struck me was that through the participation in these events, people - including myself - started reflecting on their role in society and began to feel shared responsibility towards one another as well as towards the environment. I truly believe that if we all learn to trust and work together with each other in our respective communities, understanding the importance of the other Sustainable Development Goals will become self-evident - and even a necessity for all of us.



**1**

Do you think your city has a good infrastructure for public transport? Do you use public transport yourself?

**2**

If you could redesign the layout of your city with an unlimited budget, what would you include or change? Think about green zones, social meet-up spaces, traffic flows, etc.

**3**

Virág's story is about creating cultural meet-up spaces in the city. Can you think of a similar initiative in your city? You can also set up a project yourself!

## THEME II: SOCIETY

# Justice and institutions

#EuropeanFootprints #WhatDoYouCareAbout

For individuals and societies to flourish, it is important that they can live in peace, have access to justice, and are supported by reliable and efficient institutions. This means that everybody has the right to be protected from violence, corruption and discrimination, and that we should strive towards freedom of speech, safety, equality and inclusion for all. Strong institutions can also be catalysts for quality education and healthcare, economic progress, and rules and regulations to protect our world. To realize this goal, we need initiatives and plans such as universal and accurate birth registration, the development of centres for human rights, and transparent government operations.



### Oļegs, Latvia

Journalists are the ones who provide us with essential information on the state of our lives, economics, politics and world affairs. Thanks to them, we know so much about different things happening in our societies. However, some journalists have to work in difficult conditions: they have to engage with dangerous individuals, or have to be in places of armed conflicts. Sometimes, danger awaits them even back in their home countries. Just try to imagine how awful it is to be imprisoned for your search for truth, or to be under severe pressure from corrupt politicians who are afraid to be publicly exposed. These are just some of the things that happen in journalists' lives.

**Each of us can contribute to freedom of speech and each of us can make this world better.**

That is why we must ensure journalists are protected from unjustified intervention in their work. Their sources of information need to be protected; otherwise we would never know about recent cases of corruption and even assassinations. We can never take journalists imprisonments lightly, especially in times when some misuse the profession of journalism, manipulate information, and bring fake news to the world.

Each and every one of us can help fight untrue information and protect journalists from suppression in different ways: we can draft legislation to protect them, we can help them to obtain digital skills, and we can raise awareness of their work. Each of us can contribute to freedom of speech and each of us can make this world better – we just need to take action now!





## Niya, Bulgaria

Bulgaria's population is among the fastest shrinking in the world. Therefore, it is crucial to talk about young people's employment perspectives, income inequality, and unequal opportunities. We also need to combat the stigma and misconceptions attached to poverty. This often implies that we need to enter into a dialogue with those who have different ideas than us, and who might disagree. We should try to understand the past and present conditions that have shaped the current realities in this country. Why should some people and regions be a priority for our government and prosper, while others are not? We should start this conversation with discussing subjects such as remote living locations, and the importance of education.

**More equal societies promote a better life - they recycle more, spend more on foreign aid, score higher on the Global Peace Index, and their members often live happier lives.**

Is this goal of significantly reducing inequality and poverty ambitious, especially in the short term? Yes. But it can be achieved. More equal societies promote a better life – they recycle more, spend more on foreign aid, score higher on the **Global Peace Index**, and their members often live happier lives.

According to 2017 data from Eurostat, Bulgarian income inequality is among the highest in the whole European Union. A number of simple, feasible measures can be put into practice to increase equality alongside economic democracy. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promotes the idea of constant change and improvement. This improvement depends as much on individual motivation as on the collective will to achieve these goals. It's about every me and every you, and how we relate to others in our daily lives.

## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** sets a universal standard to ensure that fundamental rights are respected for people of all cultures and nations? The Declaration was adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and has been translated into hundreds of different languages and dialects.
- ☀ The **Global Peace Index** is a global ranking that assesses the levels of peacefulness of countries worldwide. The index is updated every year by the [Institute for Economics and Peace](#) (IEP) according to indicators such as relations with neighbouring countries, crime rates, and access to weapons.
- ☀ The **European Citizens' Initiative** is a participatory democracy instrument that enables citizens to influence the EU's policy making. To launch an initiative, it takes 7 EU citizens living in 7 different Member States who are old enough to vote.



### Katarzyna, Poland

I believe that it is of great importance for every European society to understand that the stability of our countries must be based on institutions, and the institutions should be built to stand the test of time. Unfortunately, recent trends show that the political scene can still get dominated by parties and personalities that are willing to put their personal and political interests above the duties of the state towards its citizens.

Public institutions should protect civil liberties, and safeguard principles of democracy. To achieve these goals, the institutions have to be independent from politics and political agendas; otherwise people's trust in the rule of law and justice can be broken. Countries where democracy is relatively new may be particularly vulnerable to such problems, as the shift in political culture and mentality may require a generational change. As a representative of the new generation, I feel most obliged to raise discussion on this subject and contribute to strengthening our public institutions.

**Public institutions should protect civil liberties, and safeguard principles of democracy.**

1

What is the minimum age for voting in your country? How do you think your vote could make a difference in how your country is run?

2

As a citizen, what do you expect from public institutions, such as government departments, to ensure transparency towards the people in a country regarding how their taxes are spent?

3

If you were to launch a citizens' initiative, for which issue would you like to influence EU policy-making?



## THEME II: SOCIETY

# Social inclusion

#EuropeanFootprints #WhatDoYouCareAbout

One of the main ideas of the Sustainable Development Goals is that nobody should be left behind. Ethnicity, age, disability, gender and migrant status are some of the main factors causing people to be excluded from many domains of life, be they social, economic, political or spatial. This means they have less access to opportunities, health and education services, jobs, income, and participation in political and civil life. We should aim to create environments where all citizens can live their life fully and with dignity: cities and communities become accessible when all people can easily use public transport, go around the streets, enter public buildings, or get information that they can understand.



### Joseph, France

In my childhood, two particular events made me gain an interest in disability matters. First, I remember seeing a blind person who had difficulties navigating the streets of Paris, where no help was available for him to avoid obstacles. As a small child, I felt powerless seeing him getting hurt on the way. Second, I had a schoolmate who became a wheelchair user due to a car accident. The support given to him by the school board that moved the classroom from the first floor to the ground floor, as well as from our classmates, led me to believe in the inclusion of people with different abilities.

Many years later, I got the opportunity to conduct PhD research on employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Specifically, I studied how law could foster the inclusion of employees in private companies. I discovered how some legal

developments have broadened the concept of disability. People traditionally regarded as disabled, such as wheel-chair users and vision-impaired individuals,

are now part of a much larger group that is composed of numerous others, such as people having cancer or mental health disorders. In addition, I studied what employers should do to accommodate these people.

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**Law can foster the inclusion of people with disabilities.**

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Alongside my PhD, I became involved in several projects. Together with two other lawyers, I advised a wheel-chair user who had been expelled from a university in his home country because of a lack of academic results, while in fact he had trouble accessing the university's buildings. He sued his country before the **European Court of Human Rights**. By representing him, we strived to improve the case-law arguing that the country violated our client's right to education. My personal role consisted of collecting good practices on the accessibility of university buildings in Europe and drafting a report, which was submitted to the Court's judges. I built on this experience for two other projects in my university - a legal clinic and a diversity strategic plan (a plan to foster diversity in a workplace or social environment) - where I provided research-based legal advice to university authorities on the inclusion of staff and students with disabilities.



## Miriam, Germany

During my studies in Lille, France, I discovered what I first thought was a local solidarity project. The project was led by students of my university, and the aim was twofold: on the one hand, having a social grocery shop for students in complicated financial situations and, on the other hand, offering a social space for meetings, lunches, cooking opportunities and various workshops in order to fight social exclusion. The initiative is called **I'AGORAé**, an “Agora” (public space) for “étudiants” (students). I first got involved because I was struggling myself to build up my own social life, but the more time passed by, the more I witnessed the concrete impact of the project. After one year I was in charge of the initiative and had seats in all the social committees of the university.

**Global reforms are more than necessary.**

The functioning of the association relies upon the Fédération des Associations Générales Etudiantes – *la FAGE* – which has so far opened 15 AGORAés all over France. This network allowed us to have important partners like the French network of social grocery shops, *la banque alimentaire*, and even the French government! Through these partnerships we were able to collect unsold groceries and resell them for 80-90% under the market prices. The students we took care of are also anonymously advised by a social assistant. Every year two public services, sponsored by the French Government, help the students in charge of the project to develop it further.

In 2016, the project won a prize for civil society from the government. However, the main lesson I learned is that you can never do enough. Regardless of how many students you help in as many aspects of their life as possible, it will not be enough to face the structural challenges we all have to face. The main lesson I learned is that global reforms are more than necessary to make a social change.



## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that in 2017, women's gross hourly earnings were on average 16.0 % below those of men in the EU? You can read more about the subject and see more statistics on gender equality on the website of the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#).
- ☀ By 2020, the EU is expected to have 120 million people with disabilities, and the population is also ageing. Additionally, Europe is now essentially an urban society, with 4 out of 5 EU citizens living in towns and cities. That's why the EU started the **Access City Awards** initiative, an award recognizing cities that have worked to become more accessible for their citizens.
- ☀ Do you know what the term “**hidden disability**” means? Invisible or hidden disability is defined as a disability that is not immediately apparent. Some people with visual or auditory disabilities who do not wear glasses or hearing aids may not be obviously disabled. The same goes for many neurological or mental health issues, such as epilepsy, migraines, diabetes, and different mental illnesses.



## Ginevra, Italy

Prisoners are a section of the population often reviled and literally out of sight. Many of them come from poor and vulnerable communities, and do not receive letters or visits. With little or no contact with the outside world, prisoners often feel hopeless, and as though there is nothing and no-one for them. Most of us need someone to talk to - someone we can trust, who doesn't put labels on us, who talks straight, stays in touch and doesn't make promises they can't keep.

Because of the human dignity and health-related issues associated with incarceration and institutionalisation, I wanted to do something to help create a more just, humane and effective penal system. In 2013-14, I started volunteering for the UK-based, non-profit organisations **New Bridge** and **Human Writes**. I established supportive and uplifting relationships with several inmates through the simple, yet

powerful, act of letter writing and visiting.

Research shows that maintaining ties is crucial in successful resettlement, and that the risk of reoffending is lower for those who receive visits. Befriending is an effective and low-cost way to address isolation, loneliness, and reoffending from the ground up. It helps people to feel appreciated and boosts their self-esteem. It also provides the chance to look towards engaging positively in prison regimes and setting goals and aspirations.

I have learned that most offenders are ordinary people who made disastrous choices and that, as Sir Winston Churchill once said, "there is goodness in every man's heart, we just need to find the key to unlock it". I have also learned that our playing field in society is uneven, and that rehabilitation must be at the top of the agenda. Society needs to address the gap between the rich and the poor, and needs to remedy the social issues that contribute to crime.

Having personal contact with people who are incarcerated and reading about what their lives are like can help break down stereotypes and stigmas. In the future, I plan on starting a befriending service in my hometown in Italy.

**Most of us need someone to talk to - someone we can trust, who doesn't put labels on us, who talks straight, stays in touch and doesn't make promises they can't keep.**





## Monika, Lithuania

I care about gender equality because it concerns all of us, as we can all become subject to unjust treatment based on our gender. I also have personal experiences myself with attitudes of prejudice and stereotypes related to gender differences. These reasons motivate me to raise questions on what the ideas of gender equality and feminism mean to different groups, especially young people. I hope

that in the near future, we as a society will find a way to have a more diverse discussion, where not only those who are very outspoken on gender issues will take part.

**Through education and openly addressing issues, we will be able to overturn obsolete social constructs.**

This is a matter that should be important to everyone, and it must not be restricted to female rights only. Equality has to apply to all genders and, ultimately, no one should be favoured. However, due to long-standing social and historical circumstances, currently more focus still needs to be placed on female empowerment. This imbalance is evident in many settings, ranging from statistical data on wages and on women's representation in governments and corporations, to individual examples such as the story of Malala, the young Pakistani activist for female education, and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

There are still so many girls and women who are not heard, and who do not feel powerful enough. This should change, and I strongly believe that only through education and openly addressing these issues, we will be able to overturn obsolete social constructs. Therefore, I call for finding more accessible and approachable ways to speak about gender equality, and to make it everyone's business.

**1**

According to the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) everyone should have the same rights to access the labour market, and have equal treatment and social protection. Do you think your country is doing enough on the topic of social inclusion? Are there some areas the government or public administration bodies could do better?

**2**

Think about your surroundings - school, organisations or groups you take part in, friends - how diverse are they? Is there the same number of boys and girls? Do you all come from similar backgrounds and have the same opportunities? If not, is there something you could do to change the situation?

**3**

Miriam volunteered her time and energy in her organisation. In return she was happier, she learned a lot and made new friends. Is there an organisation in your city or town that might need your help?

Arts and culture are considered to be the mirror of human achievement in a certain society. They help us to reflect on our behaviour, problems and opportunities, and to express ourselves. Some forms of art have a huge impact on people, and their creators should be aware of the responsibility they hold when they are reaching out to people. We can use these creative media around us to spread tolerance, educate each other, and bring people together.



### Jara, Netherlands

Together with six other female staff members of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, I performed **the play Seven** on International Women's Day 2017. I, the only student, was joined by prominent female figures affiliated with the university, including the President of the Executive Board. Seven is an internationally known and critically acclaimed documentary play that tells the story of seven women's rights activists from all over the world, who have, among other things, fought for education for girls in Pakistan, for the protection of domestic abuse victims in Russia, and against sex trafficking of women in Cambodia. The play is based on the lives of real women, which is both terrifying and empowering at the same time. It is unbelievable that there

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**I strongly believe in the power of art to inspire and to shape thought.**

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are women living in these unbearable circumstances with no prospect of change or the possibility to escape their reality. Even worse is that the female activists who fight for their rights and dignity have faced insults and even death threats because of their ambition to make the world a better place. Taking part in the play was empowering, and it made me realize that change is possible if you're willing to fight for it.

Gender equality is something that has driven me for a long time, and I have studied it from an economic and philosophical perspective during my studies. Therefore, I immediately accepted the invitation to be part of the cast of the play – I strongly believe in the power of art to inspire and to shape thought. Moreover, it can greatly complement other discussion channels such as debate and activist writing.

The Netherlands is a rather progressive country, and I believe that the forms of gender discrimination that still take place there are generally more subtle but vivid. Therefore, the play serves both the goal of making sure that we don't forget how far we already have come, and realizing that there is still a long way to go. Gender equality is not just a women's issue; it's about human lives, and full equality can only be reached through cooperation between all genders. It's a shared responsibility between women and men.





## Diego, Spain

“Us” vs. “them”. When put in contrast, these two words summarize world history in less than one second. Tellingly, this simple dichotomy is at the root of the deadliest conflicts mankind has ever seen. Nowadays we are witnessing how this belligerent dichotomy pervades our societies threatening hard-won rights and freedoms. But here is where education and peace come into play. The concepts of education and peace are intertwined as one necessitates the other to exist. Education can only thrive if there is sustainable peace, and there can only be peace if it is sustained by education. Only if we teach people today how to embrace the “Other” as a fellow human being, will we have the chance to live in peace tomorrow.

**Only if we teach people today how to embrace the Other as a fellow human being, will we have the chance to live in peace tomorrow.**

In a world fraught with conflict, the **BCN World Music project** teaches its audience to embrace the “Other” through music. This initiative brings together musicians from different nationalities with the aim of conveying a strong message of peaceful coexistence. As its acronym (BCN) suggests, the project was born in the city of Barcelona. Our concerts are a mix of storytelling and music, where we interpret folk songs in several languages such as Macedonian, Judeo-Spanish, Turkish, Romani or Bengali – among others. This particular format enables us to explain the meaning of each song to the audience as well as to deconstruct static and dichotomic notions of identity.

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## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that the European Commission supports cultural and creative sectors through different funding programmes? One of them is **Creative Europe**, which funds cultural, audio-visual and cross-sectoral projects with an emphasis on collaboration between EU member states. This means films, theatre, music, literary translations and many other projects get to be created thanks to this support.
- ☀ Each year two cities within the European Union are selected to bear the name of the **European Capitals of Culture**. The idea came from Melina Mercouri, Greece’s minister of culture, in 1985, to bring European citizens together by highlighting the richness and diversity of European culture. So far, more than 40 cities have carried the title.
- ☀ The European Commission adopted a **New European Agenda for Culture** in 2018. EU citizens believe culture is the most important factor in creating a sense of community. But 36% do not currently participate in cultural activities, so increasing cultural participation would bring Europeans closer together. The New Agenda aims to put more emphasis on cultural participation of European citizens.

\*\*\* Music – as an expression of cultural identity - is not confined to the discursive borders of the nation. Music is universal: it permeates and ultimately transcends those borders. When I launched the project, my idea was to bring this worldview to the stage. However, the ultimate outcome is much more than a mere idea: it is a reality. It is exactly the example I want to see in the world. I can proudly say that we have managed to break the “us vs. them” dichotomy and hold humanity under the universal embrace of music.



1

When was the last time you went to the theatre? What did you see? Do you think everyone in your country has the same access to culture as you?

2

Have you ever expressed your thoughts or feelings through art? Think of a problem you would like to talk about and try to address it through writing, singing or acting!

3

Think of an example in your country, similar to Diego or Jara’s story. Do you know an artist, a band or a group that deals with serious social issues in their work?

In the pursuit of our happiness, both physical and mental wellbeing play a crucial role. To lead a happy and healthy life, everyone should be entitled to modern, efficient and affordable healthcare. But that is not enough. In order to improve our quality of life, it is also important to encourage scientific research and innovation, as well as to educate people on healthy lifestyles. This way, we can also promote social inclusion by breaking stigma's around health-related issues, and by making sure that physical or mental difficulties do not keep individuals or groups from fully participating in society.



### Vida, Sweden

My interest in promoting mental health originates from my own life experiences. A couple of years ago I was diagnosed with depression, general anxiety disorder (GAD) and social phobia. However, I suffered worst in my teenage years, from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). This condition eventually led to these other diagnoses, but luckily I am currently free from OCD most of the time. When it kicks in, I now have tools to process it, thanks to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

It took many years to get help, and consultations with many doctors before anyone believed that I was not well. I strongly believe that there is a need to change the perception of mental illness, as well as the perception of who can be affected by it. There was also no

preventive approach to my condition. If such an approach was in place, fewer individuals would start feeling worse before being taken seriously. It would also mean that the way to recovery would be quicker and the sickness easier to bear, and that the onset of some mental illnesses could

be foreseen. In Sweden, there are many great initiatives to create awareness about mental health issues and mental illness. I am forever grateful for this, and proud of that. However, there is still a long way to go before the stigma is broken.

I would not want anyone to go through the same hell I went through, but at the same time I am happy about the things I have learned, and about gaining more insight and awareness. I also made lifelong friendships and had many conversations with people who opened up about having gone through similar experiences. Especially in many of these conditions, it is important to remember: you are not alone.

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**I strongly believe that there is a need to change the perception of mental illness, as well as the perception of who can be affected by it.**

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## Rita, Portugal

I usually define myself as an engineer by training and a biologist by heart, passionate about education, public engagement and event planning. My curiosity and willingness to promote health and improve people's quality of life lead me to a PhD at the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology.

The cornea is our window to the world, and the maintenance of its transparency is essential for vision. The World Health Organization estimates that around 10 million people in the world are blinded by corneal disease, and 1.5 million new cases occur annually. For many conditions, transplantation of a donor cornea may restore vision for up to 5 years. However, there is a global shortage of suitable tissue, as well as a high risk of rejection. Stem cell therapies and tissue engineering approaches have the potential to address this significant unmet clinical need.

**Science is crucial for the development of our society.**

In my opinion, science is crucial for the development of our society. As a scientist, I feel empowered to drive change with discoveries that can feed into new policies in order to reach a better-informed world. At the same time, I feel the responsibility to take public and patients' views into account. My passion for science, communication and participatory approaches got me involved in a variety of projects, from scientific outreach to science diplomacy.

I am especially interested in projects that pilot innovative processes to take patients' views and concerns into account. The **Eating for Eye Health project**, for example, engaged patients suffering from dry age-related macular degeneration through a focus group and a community cookery day, where they exchanged insights with clinicians on how diet and nutrition can impact their eye health. I also took part in the **Liberating the Curriculum project** that aimed at sharing patient perspectives on sight loss with medical students. I am convinced that through projects such as these, we can contribute to individuals' wellbeing and their inclusion in society.

## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that more than half of the EU's adult population is overweight? Or that 7 % of the EU population in 2014 reported having chronic depression? You can read more about this in the [State of Health in the European Union](#).
- ☀ If you are travelling across Europe, you can have access to state-provided healthcare thanks to the **European Health Insurance Card** under the same conditions and at the same cost as in your own country. It is a card that you can get for free and use during a temporary stay in any of the 28 EU countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
- ☀ On 7 April we celebrate **World Health Day**. On this day in 1948 the World Health Organization was founded. It is the agency of the United Nations coordinating international health. Among others, they work to combat diseases like influenza, HIV, cancer and heart disease, they ensure the safety of the air people breathe, the food they eat and the water they drink, and they provide medicines and vaccines all over the world.



## Maria, Greece

About four years ago, I was working for the Greek Ministry of Education as an Environmental Education Officer. At that time, I set out on a mission with my colleagues to develop a public-funded national network on herbs in our everyday lives. The basic concept is to educate people on the medicinal and dietary use of herbs, to promote entrepreneurship in this field, and to raise awareness and appreciation of nature's various resources. As an environmental education officer in Greece, I noticed that people started using herbs more and more in their everyday lives. Was it a need for a healthier diet, budgetary restrictions, entrepreneurship, or the hope of treating an illness? All motives stand. Still, there was much confusion as to the business opportunities related to herbs, false hope as to the medicinal properties of herbs and, of course, misunderstanding as to the appropriate growth, selection and use of herbs in cooking for a balanced diet.

Every year the network enrolls and supports more than 3,000 students carrying out environmental projects on herbs and school gardens, trains more than 500 teachers, and organizes seminars and lectures for the

### **We raise awareness and appreciation of nature's various resources.**

general public. Its members also conduct research and publish books and articles, prepare educational materials such as posters, teaching guides and learning cards, and take interested groups of students and adults outdoors for an experiential workshop in nature's own lab.

As a vice-president of this network, I managed to increase its outreach and visibility throughout the years. Among others, the network's website I designed has won a national award for best educational website, and an eLearning course on school gardens I designed and implemented was short-listed on the top-5 in the Open Education Europa Contest, supported by the European Commission. Though I have moved abroad recently, the network continues to promote good health and well-being, quality education, responsible consumption and entrepreneurship.



**1**

Do you know what the average life expectancy is in your country? Do you think it is higher or lower than the rest of the world?

**2**

How do you think scientific research can help us improve our health and our overall quality of life?

**3**

How would you rate your own health on a scale of one to five? Can you also think of ways to improve your health?

Education provides us with knowledge to understand the world around us. This includes not only traditional school subjects, but also practical skills, international perspectives, and personal development. Education broadens our horizons, and equips us with the tools we need to shape our own destiny, and to make our own decisions. Without it, our world becomes smaller and poorer. Every individual should have access to quality education.

### Julia, Hungary

In many countries of the EU, a higher education scholarship is taken for granted, while in other parts of the world, students never hear about them. I strongly believe that they should be available for all. They promote not only lifelong learning, but also open up a world of opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a better future for Europe. It is mobility in particular that I think should be accessible for everyone, as it is instrumental for our future. It matters to me as my life has been greatly shaped by my own participation in the **Erasmus+ programme** and since then, I've been passionate about helping others get the same experience.

During a previous internship in the south of France, I supported various Erasmus projects in the field of education, training and youth. That is, I was involved in transnational partnerships that aimed to improve the experience of students

who were on an Erasmus+ exchange. I focused on Vocational Education and Training (VET), which enables young people to learn and specialize in a particular trade or craft, or work as a technician. I led training workshops for VET trainees to help their integration in a foreign work environment. This involved revisiting their civic education, such as focusing on intercultural differences and how to communicate in a cross-cultural environment, while also highlighting the soft skills necessary for the European labour market. In the future I would like to continue working on such projects, by providing opportunities for VET students in developing countries, and by demonstrating that VET can be a wise career choice as quality vocational skills are highly valued in today's labour market.

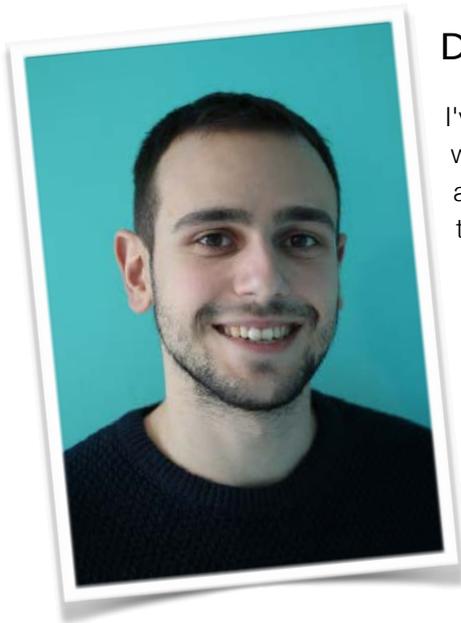
Mobility can be the most character building experience in our lives. We grow professionally, we learn from each other, but maybe most importantly, we learn a lot about ourselves. Providing more higher education scholarships for students in developing countries, as well as more options for international and interregional mobility could result in many more amazing stories and unique experiences, and more impact on individuals' lives.

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**Educational mobility can be the most character building experience in our lives.**

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## Denis, Belgium

I've always believed that education is the key to ensuring a fairer and more peaceful world. However, it is precisely where they are most needed that schools and teachers are often not present. In countries destroyed by war, many children do not only lose their homes and loved ones, but also their right to education.

I am currently working with a team dealing with the European funds for humanitarian assistance in Turkey, a country which hosts the largest number of refugees worldwide (around 4 million at the end of 2018). The great majority of these refugees are fleeing the ongoing war in Syria. Others come from countries where they were in constant danger, or could not

**Education is the key to ensuring a fairer and more peaceful world.**

imagine a future for themselves or their children. With many families forced to leave

their homes, about half of Syrian refugees – still living in Syria, or in Turkey and other host countries such as Jordan or Lebanon – are under 18. These children and teenagers had to drop out of school when they left their old lives behind and are now faced with specific problems such as abuse and exploitation, and a risk of exclusion in the new countries they live in. Many international organisations, NGOs and public and private donors are working hand in hand to support host countries welcoming refugee children under satisfactory conditions.

These young refugees represent the future for the new countries they settle in. For those who stayed or will hopefully be able to come back to Syria one day, they will be the generation in charge of reconstructing their country after the war. This is why I am convinced that enabling them to have access to an education is a priority.

## DID YOU KNOW...?

- ☀ ... that the European Union has an extensive programme for exchanges between higher education institutions? This means you can take part in [Erasmus+](#) too! The Erasmus+ programme also enables youth exchanges for adolescents and others who want to volunteer, and will send you on your way around the world with [Erasmus Mundus](#).
- ☀ In the field of education, practical skills such as crafts and technology are just as important as academic subjects. Vocational education puts more emphasis on hands-on training and gives you concrete skills for the field you want to work in. This doesn't mean that, once the training is finished, you can't further develop your skills and learn. On the contrary, vocational training often gives you an opportunity to run your own business and keep upgrading your skills.
- ☀ As Denis says, more than 15% of migrants are children under 18 years old. The journeys they take are extremely hard and they rarely spend a lot of time in one place, which means their education suffers. Sometimes they end up in schools that do not have the resources to teach children who have a traumatic background. However, there are many civil society organisations and international initiatives trying to tackle this issue. Check out the [No Lost Generation](#) website, or ask around if your town has any NGOs working with migrants.



## Bogdan, Romania

I would like to share with you my story on education, after I realised how it changed my mindset and helped me get where I am today. During the first years of school I was totally excited, motivated and eager to absorb everything that was coming towards me, and to prove myself by having the best results. Over the course of the second part of

my education – high school – I went to the other extreme, and let myself go with the flow even if that meant, at times, really watering down my motivation to perform and to make the best out of the education I was getting. The third part – my university degree – came after a long break that I took, during which I considered dropping education for good and seeing what I could do with my life without it. In the meantime, however, this period helped me

realise that one of my true passions was biology, and that I wanted to build upon it from that point onwards.

**I think the real quality of an education lies in helping individuals to explore themselves, to tap into their potential, and to bring out their uniqueness and personal gifts.**

I finished two degrees in biology and after graduating, I immediately started working in projects in this field. Later on I started becoming aware of all my progress, what went wrong and what went right. I think my previous doubts about my education, which

resulted in drastically different levels of motivation, actually helped me in taking time for myself, reflecting on what I really want to do, and getting to know myself better, in the end.

It's definitely a good thing to have an education in the first place, but I think the real quality of education lies in helping individuals to explore themselves, to tap into their potential, and to bring out their uniqueness and personal gifts. Of course it's a challenge to try and adapt to the standards of society when it comes to education, following the same pattern as everyone else and seeing where that takes you – for example, getting a diploma and a well-paid job. But I think the real challenge is to discover your true self, and offer that to the world.

1

In which country would you like to study abroad if you'd have the opportunity? And why would you choose that country?

2

What do you think the main challenges are that migrant children face when they arrive in a new school, in a new country?

3

Which extracurricular activities are you doing, and how do you think they can help you in your future life and career?

# Colophon

## STORYBOOK CONCEPT AND DEVELOPMENT

Elena Carloni, Maja Lay, Eveline Seghers, Marii Väljataga

## LAY-OUT

Eveline Seghers

## COVER DESIGN

Elena Carloni, Niccolò Marzi

## CONTRIBUTORS

Kief Albers, Joseph Damamme, Lylah Davies, Rosaleen Dillon Espinosa, Julia Erdelyi, Maria Gkountouma, Anna Kuokkanen, Virág Kemecei, David Klepej, Francesca Lampidoniti, Roberto Mangion, Giulia Marzetti, Lea Motzfeldt, Katarzyna Nowicka, Radek Oborný, Ginevra Papi, Miriam Peters, Ana Rita Gonçalves de Pinho, Diego Quintanilla Campos, Paolo Rizzo, Stefanie Roithmayr, Oļegs Sedjamins, Niya Shekerova, Pavol Škulavík, Bogdan Talianu, Vida Tenhunen Salehi, Marii Väljataga, Denis van de Kerckhove, Jara Verkleij, Mirjana Vila, Monika Zavistanavičiūtė

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Marian Polasek, Radek Oborný, Eoghain Ó Ríagáin, Niccolò Marzi

## LINKS

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<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX01f4s26mb0epXNJl6B8kA>

## CONTACT

european.footprints@gmail.com



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