

Greenpeace Sustainability Barometer 2021 – We are ready and finally want a sustainable future!



We don't want to take the blame for your mistakes!



„We're scared. We don't want to have to pay for your mistakes.“ Young people feel left alone with the knowledge of the major problems, such as the climate crisis. This leads to resignation if we, as the adult generation, do not create opportunities to influence and to learn about positive, sustainable scenarios for the future in school and education. There is a lack of positive scenarios and transition pathways, which are already being developed and practiced in some schools and companies. This is why we urgently need more sustainability research alongside climate research. Young people feel abandoned by politics when it comes to the environment and sustainability. They trust NGOs and the sciences rather than the parties to do something for sustainable development. At school, sustainability is a topic once a term, but school education as a whole is not sufficiently prepared for the challenges of the future. Therefore, the curricula now urgently need to be changed in the direction of „education for sustainable development“. These are some key findings and demands expressed from the majority of young people on the topic of sustainability and future issues. For this purpose, 1508 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were surveyed by telephone by Aris Umfrageforschung GmbH in July 2021 in cooperation with Leuphana University Lüneburg and principal investigator Prof. Matthias Barth from the Faculty of Sustainability, in a representative survey for Germany.

Summary of the study

The „Greenpeace Sustainability Barometer 2021“ provides the next comprehensive inventory of how the younger generation in Germany feels about sustainable development. The young people's fear of environmental destruction, species extinction and climate change is a cause for concern.

Compared to the previous studies, sustainability awareness has increased again. In general, there is a tendency that alternatives related to strong sustainability are considered more important than alternatives related to weak sustainability.¹ Compared to the results of 2012 and 2015 in relation to strong sustainability, the values are much higher among young people in 2021. Sustainable development moves the younger generation. There is broad support for the principles behind it. More than two-thirds want to prioritize ecosystem protection over human use. They do not want to deplete natural resources and 80% agree that our current behaviour must also leave opportunities and resources for future generations.

The protection of the environment, social aspects and future-oriented economic activity are hardly perceived as separate competing areas. And what is more: the younger generation demands much more commitment and redirection than the older ones and are willing to participate in this themselves. The young generation has the most confidence in NGOs, for example from the environmental sector, to be able to do something for sustainable

¹ Weak sustainability postulates the full substitutability of natural capital whereas the strong conception demonstrates that this substitutability should be severely seriously limited due to the existence of critical elements that natural capital provides for human existence and well-being. (Brief for GSDR 2015: Weak Sustainability versus Strong Sustainability, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/6569122-Pelenc-Weak%20Sustainability%20versus%20Strong%20Sustainability.pdf>)

future development. This is closely followed by trust in science and in citizens' initiatives such as Fridays For Future. The lowest trust scores are given to politicians, political parties and religious communities to do something for sustainability.

In detail

Most young people feel abandoned by politics when it comes to the environment

The finding that so many young people develop fears on the subject of the environment and feel let down by politics must be a wake-up call.

- The majority of young people (68%) are rather or very afraid of changes in the environment, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and new animal-borne diseases. Likewise, 68% have the feeling that they - the young people - have to pay for the mistakes of their elders in dealing with the environment.
- 71% feel rather to very much let down by politics when it comes to „dealing with the environment“.

Young people lack the possibilities of influence and the perspectives to be able to seriously implement the demanded restructuring of the economic system, the protection of natural resources and a good education. This leads to avoidance strategies.

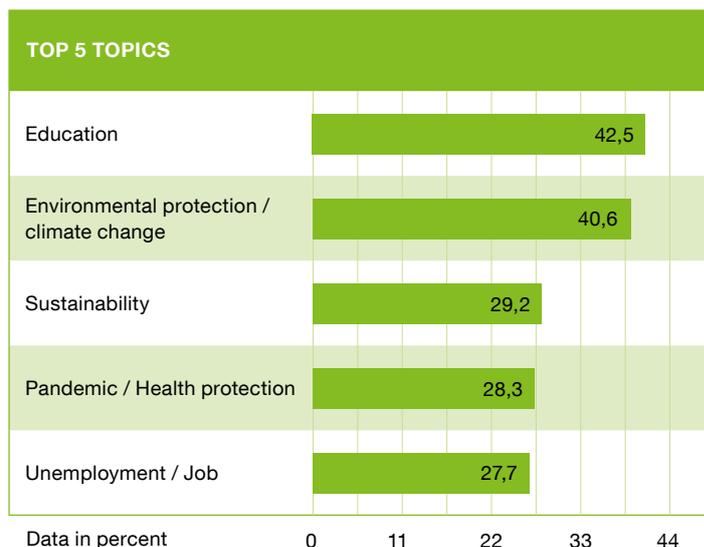
„I can't do anything anyway,“ is the resigned response to a lack of self-efficacy experiences.

Significant increase in the direction of strong sustainability

- In general, there is a tendency that alternatives related to strong sustainability are considered more important than alternatives related to weak sustainability. Compared to the mean values of 2012 and 2015, the values of 2021 are significantly higher.
- 80% agree that our current behaviour must leave opportunities and resources for future generations, only 9% think that future generations will find a way to make up for the lack of resources.
- 73% think that the protection of ecosystems must take precedence over human use, while 13% think that too much nature conservation unnecessarily restricts the scope for human action.
- 71.5% agree that many natural assets cannot be replaced when they are depleted, whereas 18% expect that technological developments can make new / different natural assets usable.
- A small majority (59%) agree that there should rather be a renunciation of new roads, 31% see it as no problem to build new roads. This means that opinions diverge the most on this question of personal mobility.
- However, overall there is a significant increase in responses towards strong sustainability compared to 2015.

Education and the environment preoccupy young people the most

The issues that concern young people most, apart from concerns about their own educational path, revolve particularly around the



issues of the environment and climate change. It must give us pause for thought that concerns about education come first. The fact that the topic naming (2 choices each from 12 specifications) also places environmental and health issues so high suggests that the Corona experience is coming through. There seems to be no lack of knowledge and concern about the problems of the environment, climate and the depletion of nature.

Human rights find most support in the social dimension of sustainability

- 98% of young people think it is worthwhile working for the preservation of human rights, of which 76% consider it very important. This makes it the issue with the highest priority.
- 94% find the commitment to fair working conditions in production rather important to very important.
- 92% find fulfilling work rather important to very important.
- 82% of young people think it is rather important to very important to work for intergenerational justice; about 16% think it is rather unimportant.

Responsible consumption is important, the debt brake not so much

- In the economic dimension of sustainability, 58% of young people consider it less important or unimportant that the state should not incur debts.
- Responsible consumption and companies are also rated as rather important to very important by a large majority (78%) of young people.
- At the same time, 80% of young people feel that it is rather to very worthwhile to work towards financial security for future generations.
- 73% find working for responsible companies somewhat to very rewarding.



Climate change and species conservation are the top issues in the environmental dimension

- The prevention of climate change (92 % rather to very important), the preservation of biodiversity (95 % rather to very important) and the careful use of resources (91 %) are particularly important. This is followed by the protection of air/ water / soil (88 %), which is worth campaigning for.

Waste avoidance and product boycotts are part of the behavioural repertoire

- The most frequently mentioned environmentally friendly activity (78%) is the avoidance of waste. This is followed by the economical use of energy in the household with 67 %. The topic of „waste“ has thus once again captured the TOP 1 position of its own attractive activities.
- The majority (82%) of young people can imagine boycotting certain unfair, environmentally harmful products, 40% of whom have already done so.
- 41% have already demonstrated or would like to do so at some point (36%).

Local activities are high on the agenda, deliberate conflicts rather not

- „Advocating for interests in the region“ is most often mentioned as an activity young people would like to do at some point, at 60%, with 16% already doing so.
- Most young people feel that changes will be particularly visible in their immediate environment. There is a perception of direct concern and affirms the local work of organisations such as Greenpeace.
- Opinions differ on the possibility of becoming involved in a citizens’ initiative, with around 40 % of respondents saying they would like to do so at some point and 40 % saying they would rather not, 10 % are already involved in a citizens’ initiative.
- The digital reception of environmental issues has prevailed. Visiting and reading websites of environmental or human rights organisations was done twice as often by young people in 2021 compared to 2015.

- Activities involving a deliberate conflict with the law, such as sit-in blockades, continue to be equally little carried out and sought.

The economy must change, politics must steer

Young people see themselves and politics as the centre for change. It can be deduced that changes in the economy should be supported by new innovations and political framework conditions. Young people do not blame „the others“ for changes, but want to be part of them. The desire to steer policy for a sustainable future is inversely related to trust in policy. Young people want a Policies that enforce laws to conserve livelihoods, enabling the framework for conservation of natural assets.

- The majority (89%) of young people believe that changes in the economy are particularly needed in order to learn from the Corona crisis and to enable sustainable development.
- In second place is the change of one’s own behaviour, e.g. through a change in consumer behaviour, which 82% of young people consider necessary or very necessary in order to make a fairer, more environmentally compatible and sustainable future possible.

You feel responsible for yourself first

Here, too, it is evident that young people are ready to participate. They do not push away their responsibility and in principle see the political actors and the parties as important partners in responsibility. Associations, NGOs, citizens’ initiatives and science cannot completely fill this vacuum in the opinion of young people Sustainability has a lot to do with trust

As great as the attribution of responsibility to politics is, trust in it is low. Trust is the currency that stabilises and strengthens young people. When more and more trust is lost, charlatans and extremists have it easier. The great trust in NGOs, science and citizens’ initiatives when it comes to the environment and the future contrasts with the low trust in politicians and political parties. Even the formerly meaningful large organizations of the churches do not fare much better.

THE LARGEST PAIRS OF CHANGES IN RESPONSIBILITY ATTRIBUTION ARE:	
Everyone individually, including me	778
Politicians & Parties	771
Business & Economy	505
Associations & NGOs	222
The younger generation	214

Number of mentions from 1508 respondents

NGOs, the sciences and citizens' initiatives enjoy the greatest trust

Have the most confidence:

- NGOs such as Greenpeace and associations (80 %)
- Science and research institutions (79 %)
- Citizens' initiatives e.g. Fridays For Future (76 %)
- The younger generation (58 %)

Have low confidence:

- Business and economy (45 %)
- Church and religious communities (37 %)
- Politicians and political parties (28 %)

With these findings, it would be necessary for jointly developed transformation steps between educational institutions, sustainable enterprises, citizens' initiatives and NGOs to be supported and developed much more by educational policy and educational institutions.

The Greens are most trusted when it comes to questions about the future

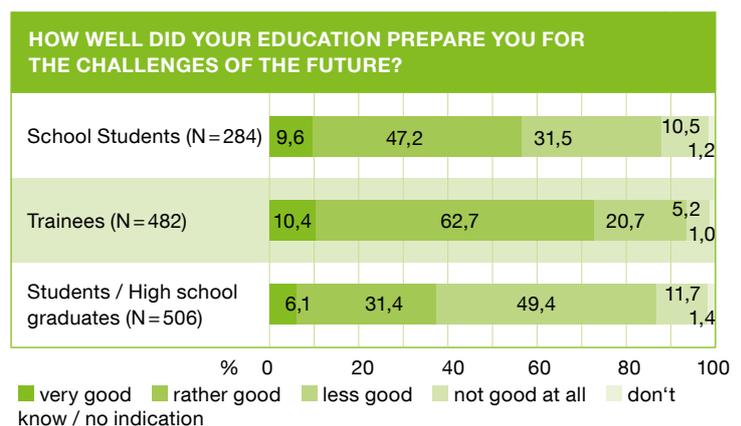
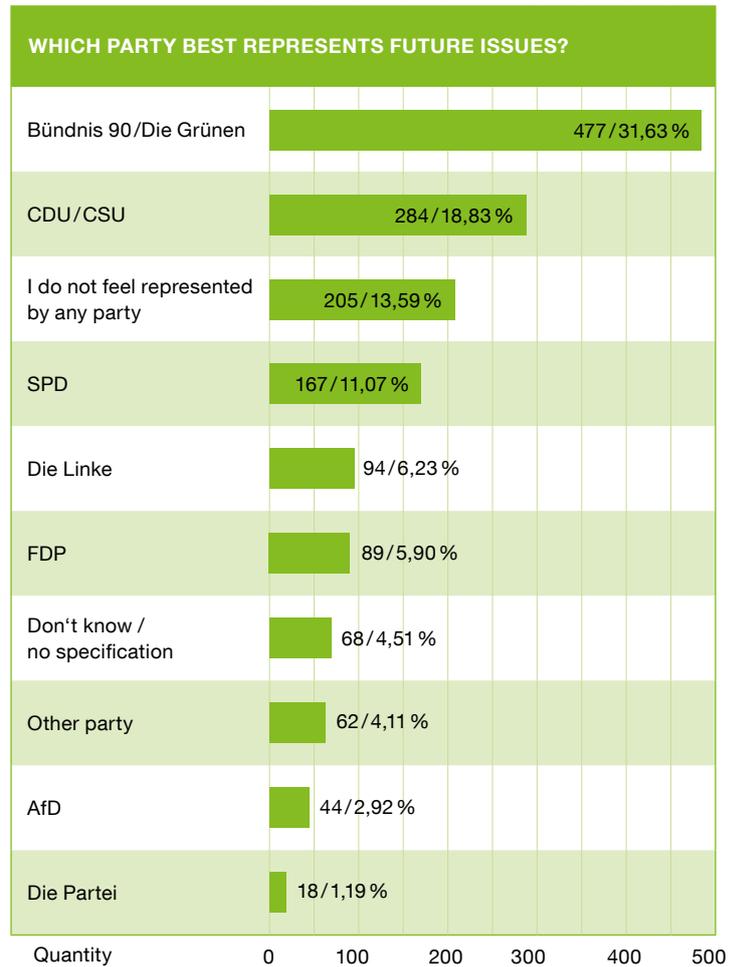
- The majority, 68 % of the young people, are rather dissatisfied with the policy of the federal government in general, only about 6 % are very satisfied. The majority (56 %) of respondents are also dissatisfied with the way politics has dealt with the Corona crisis.
- The federal government's environmental and climate policies trigger the most dissatisfaction among young people, with 73% responding as „somewhat dissatisfied“ or „dissatisfied.“

The curricula must be changed

- In comparison, trainees tend to feel well to very well prepared for the future.
- Among students, the group shares the slight tendency that slightly more than half feel rather well prepared for the future.
- The majority of students, on the other hand, feel less or not at all well prepared for the challenges of the future. nächsten Generationen einzusetzen.

Sustainability has arrived among young people in Germany. However, more than 60% of the young people surveyed said that schools do not prepare them well for the future. This is confirmed by a large number of people from educational research and school practice: That sustainability or sustainable developments are not reflected in curricula and teaching and learning in educational settings. It is still the case that text-based learning without any practical implementation in the present is the everyday school life. There is an urgent need for action. We must use new curricula and action-oriented forms of learning to teach ways out of the major earth problems and seize opportunities to change course already in school education. After all, education is there for young people so that they have the ability to shape their future.

Many schools have already set out on their own paths to establish more sustainability or sustainable developments in school operations. There are many good examples of this. However, this



is not enough and an implementation of the holistic approach („Whole Institution Approach“) is still dependent on the commitment of individual school communities or only individual teachers.

In this context, education („climate education“) is one of the six Social Tipping Elements (STEs), along with settlement issues, fossil-free financial markets, the changing system of norms and values, energy supply and storage, and information transmission,

that can still improve the global system of climate crisis and social structures (cf. I. M. Otto et al: Social tipping dynamics for stabilizing Earth's climate by 2050. In: PNAS 2020). The fact that curricula are not quickly changed and equipped with the basic

principles of „Education for Sustainable Development“ is no longer acceptable. All crises that are not addressed because of a lack of willingness to change are perceived as policy failures, drain trust, lead to resignation, and ultimately damage democracy.



➔ No money from companies or governments

Greenpeace is an international environmental organization which uses non-violent direct action to protect the capacity of our planet Earth to nurture life in all its diversity. Our goal is to prevent environmental destruction, change behavioural patterns and advance solutions. Greenpeace is above party lines and completely independent of governments, political parties and industry. Over 630.000 people in Germany support Greenpeace financially, thereby ensuring that we can continue our daily work to protect the environment, and promote peace and international understanding.

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