

## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. VISIONS AND PERSPECTIVES**

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**Abstract:** *In today's society, young people's perception of the European Union is very important, especially in the context in which it faces various crises. In this context, the perception of young people and how they trust the European Union is a very important basis for the future of the EU. In this sense, the methods used to find out the young people's perception of the European Union were the online questionnaire and the focus group, finding out the young people's confidence in the EU, but also their visions and perceptions about the EU and its future. What is certain is that the way young people perceive the European Union is vital for its harmonious development and the perpetuation of European values by the young generation.*

**Keywords:** *European Union, young people, perception, visions, confidence, future, European citizen*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The European Union is probably the most important project that has taken place on the European continent. The moment of the appearance of this European project was not easy, and the vicissitudes did not stop appearing but the European Union "survived and adapted". We cannot fail to state that the existence of the European Union has many beneficial, positive aspects for the young people in our country, and this project "has influenced and deeply influences the current Romanian society". In this sense, the perception of young people on the European project is vital, especially if it has direct implications on them, if they know the possibilities offered by the European project involving "areas with great potential, opportunities" to be exploited by young people. There were many moments in history, when certain dates were significant for the achievement and achievement of the European Union, and "in many respects, 1945 can be called the year of Europe." History shows us that the European Union went through difficult times, and "the political history of Europe after 1945 began with the realization of this decline of the continent and the understanding that there was a need to" reinvent the future. " Thus, the European Union's mission is not an easy one, especially since it is constantly being tested, and in 1957 the six ECSC member states signed the Treaty of Rome, extending their mission to include the creation of a new European Economic Communities ". The European Union also places greater emphasis on the main issues of interest to European citizens, and "the new European agenda expands the idea of universal rights", which gives the European Union a great image. At the same time, for the proper functioning and perpetuation, in order to "prepare the future, the Union understood that it must relate to its achievements, to continue to promote fundamental values such as solidarity and justice". The European Union cannot function effectively without focusing on fundamental values. It is also true that although the European Union is undergoing new and increasingly

difficult changes and trials, it must constantly adapt, making an eloquent comparison, because "political institutions like the European Union are not static," they are constantly changing and adapting”.

At the same time, membership of the European Union is a privilege for most states, and "the convergence criteria for accession to the Euro-are set out in the Maastricht Treaty and will not be changed any time soon." That is why, for an optimal functioning, the European Union needs a coherence and constancy that will help to perpetuate this project, and “today it is an excuse that the European Union needs a strong leadership and endowed with an internal negotiation capacity and global”. The European project is not a simple one, but on the contrary, very complex and very difficult because it also involves the consultation part, and "the consultation process of the European groups has both advantages and disadvantages". Therefore, the need to perpetuate the European project is an absolutely necessary one, especially since "we cannot ensure the economic development of Europe without its political union". Due to certain reasoning, the project may need a change to a certain extent, in order to be able to adapt to the requirements of the future and "this important change of perspective is very clear" being a necessary one in the future. It is true that the European Union is not perfect, pursuing its goals, but "not only Member States but also regions, public institutions, European companies seek to achieve their interests", it being understood that the European project does not it is a perfect one, but it is intended to be a well-done project, regardless of interests and objectives. At the same time, "at European level, the criticism has multiplied", which should draw the attention of the representatives of the European Union on certain issues. But even so, even if the European project is not a perfect one, it still remains an absolutely necessary one because "the two world wars in the first half of the last century convinced European citizens and leaders to support a construction of Europe". At the same time, within the European Union, the economic part is of vital importance because "the Union has important means to allocate economic resources", and this makes the Union responsible for the economic establishment of the Member States. It is obvious that for a good cooperation and collaboration between the member states at the level of the European Union, a harmony and a political balance is needed, and “a series of politico-military and diplomatic events imposed, after a century of confrontations between the main states. Western, a new principle in European interstate relations - the principle of political balance”.

That is why, within the European Union, balance remains an essential factor for the good perpetuation of the European project. Throughout its existence, the European Union has faced many difficult situations that have called into question the resistance of the European Union, and "the consolidation of the Union takes into account precisely this fact, the possibilities to pose and solve problems of European magnitude." The Union's mission is not to keep the states within it united, but "Europe under the sign of 'unity in diversity' is a concept that assumes more and more valences and dilemmas". Therefore, the desire of states to continue the European project must be much stronger than the problems or vicissitudes that arise along the way because as a member of the European Union have also won the citizens of the Member States because "the notion of European citizenship is therefore a status granted to persons who are part of the "community". In this context, the perception of young people about the European Union, the advantages of being a European citizen, but also all the possibilities that young people have on the occasion of the existence

of the European project is essential. In this sense, everyone's opinion on the European Union is fundamental

Their opinion on the future of the European Union is vital because young people are the ones most affected by European Union decisions, especially if they want to study in Europe, work in the Member States of the European Union or benefit from all the projects put in place. available to it. In this sense, the perception of young people about the European Union is crucial, but also their ideas and visions regarding the European project. At the same time, a major role that influences the perception of young people on the European Union is education, and "the adequacy of educational programs to this major goal of European integration" is absolutely fundamental, education remaining one of the most important pillars to help young people shape the perception of the Union. European. In this sense, the European Union has a major role to play in the harmonious development of society, and the way in which young people perceive this very important project is of major importance, especially since the European Union, although started under the clear auspices of economic cooperation. , manifests itself today as a multidimensional, dynamic reality, with strong effects in political, social, cultural terms ", a fact that must bring among young people a higher degree of awareness of the importance of the European project.

Another important component is given by the European identity, which "in the last decades two concepts have been and are being conveyed, especially as the EU is in the process of expanding to the east of the continent: European values and European identity". which also highlights the importance of identifying how young people relate to European identity, and "European identity is rather an ongoing process, contextualised and with different dynamics depending on the reporting angle", in this context, European identity being very important for finding out how young people relate to the European Union.

## **INTERPRETATION OF DATA. QUESTIONNAIRE**

The main objective of this research is to highlight and identify how students perceive the European Union. The literature indicates that young people, for the most part, appreciate the European Union, only that the various challenges it has gone through have led young people to lose confidence in the future of the European Union, a fact confirmed by application of questionnaires. When asked about the direction in which the European Union is currently going, the respondents answered that the European Union is going in a "good" direction in the proportion of 36.3%, and in the proportion of 40.3% they answered that it is going in a "good" direction. direction "neither good nor bad". This fact highlights the way in which young people look in the direction of the European Union, which certifies us of the results of the questionnaire. The perception of the direction in which the European Union is heading is not very optimistic in their view, but it is still a realistic perspective.

Asked about how important in their opinion, the role that the European Union has in the future of young people in Romania, the respondents answered in a proportion of 37.8% as very important. 34.3% of the respondents answered that in their opinion, the decisions of the European Union greatly influence the daily life of young people. When asked if they consider themselves European citizens, 90.5% answered yes. Asked about the degree of trust they have in the European Union, 54.2% of the respondents chose the answer "a lot" of confidence. Ask if they consider it a beneficial thing that Romania is part of the European Union, in proportion of 88.1% they answered "yes". Ask how beneficial

they think it was that Romania joined the European Union, in proportion of 48.8% they answered "very much". Asked if they consider that Romania should leave the European Union, the respondents answered negatively in a proportion of 90.5%. Asked if they consider that the European funds are beneficial for Romania, in proportion of 91.5% they answered "yes". Asked if they consider that Romania has had more advantages since it is a member of the European Union, the respondents answered "yes" in proportion of 87.1%. Ask if they consider that young people in Romania have more advantages by the fact that Romania is a member of the European Union, in proportion of 92.5% have answer "yes". Asked if they consider that young people in Romania are aware of the advantages they have by the fact that Romania is a member of the European Union, 56.7% answered "no", 26.9% answered "no". Yes". When asked how often they watch news with the European Union as their main topic, respondents answered "every day" in a proportion of 8.9%, in a proportion of 21.4% they answered "several times a week", in 31.3% answered "several times a month", 12.9% answered "once a month", 15.4% answered "several times a year", In proportion of 8% answered "not at all". Asked how much they think their lives would change if Romania were no longer part of the European Union, 44.8% answered "a lot", 27.4% answered "a lot", And in proportion of 16.9% consider that it would not change much. Asked if they are interested in the future of the European Union, the respondents answered "yes" in the proportion of 87.6%. Asked to what extent they are interested in the future of the European Union, the respondents answered "a lot" in proportion of 45.3%, in proportion of 22.4% they answered "very much", and in proportion of 22.4% they answered answer "neither much nor little." Asked if they talk to family, friends about the European Union, respondents answered "yes" in the proportion of 59.7% and 35.8% answered "no". Ask how often he talks to friends, family about the European Union, 27.9% answered "quite often", 38.8% answered "rarely", and 19.9% answered "very rarely". When asked if they consider that the decisions of the European Union influence their life in a major way, 64.2% answered "yes". Asked if they think that in the future the European Union will face more problems, 72.1% answered "yes". When asked if they participated in European Union projects, 37.8% answered "yes". Asked if they read articles, magazines about the European Union, the respondents answered "yes" in a proportion of 62.7%. When asked about the evolution of the European Union in the next 5 years, 51.2% answered "good", 19.9% as "not very good" and 8.5% as, "very good". Asked where they get their information about the European Union, respondents said that from TV, internet, websites or radio. When asked how informed they are about the European Union, they answered 53.7% that they are "quite informed", 34.8% that they are "little informed". When asked what image they have of the European Union, 64.5% of the respondents answered that they have a good image.

Interpretation of data. Focus group The focus group was applied on 5 students, aged between 20-25 years, from bachelor and master level, from Babeş-Bolyai University. Following the application of this method, a much clearer image was created related to the perception of young people on the European Union, by identifying the answers that confirmed and the results obtained from the application of the online questionnaire. Asked what they think about the European Union, what they think about the European Union, the participants provided answers that offered similarities to the answers collected following the application of the online questionnaire. Following this question, the participants' perception proved to be a positive one, in that the answers have the variant "The European

Union is a functional mechanism of member countries", which surprised the functionality of the European project and also surprised the phrase "economic power of Europe" which also captures the economic aspects of the European project. Another answer emphasized the importance of the European Union as "the security of functional democracies", which also captures the element of democracy in question, and was also mentioned as "the guarantee of sustainable economic development". In this sense, a good image of the European Union was identified, "I have a good opinion about the European Union", a fact proved by the statement "Romania has many benefits as a member of the European Union".

Also another answer that highlights the advantages of the European Union is "I think it is a very good mechanism for international cooperation." At the same time, the importance of unity is given by the following answer "actor focusing on the common denominator of the Member States" and a first concern is mentioned, namely "in the coming years, the European Union will have to raise the issue of maintaining this Union. she set off. "

The next question was about the advantage of making pate in the European Union. The answers further strengthened the results obtained by applying the online questionnaire, the first participant saying "yes, of course, it is an advantage and the benefits are felt especially by us, as students, who have more developed educational programs", which confirms and the results of the application of the questionnaire, which highlight the positive perception of young people, especially in the area of education and youth benefit programs. Another answer that confirms this idea is "Romania, as part of the European Union, benefits from a series of financial aid in the form of European funds, which contribute to the development of Romania", which confirms the results obtained from the questionnaire. Also, the advantages that Romania has in their perception are given by the following answer "Romania has advantages, being in the European Union, we are talking about the European funds to which we have access and especially now with the Covid-19 pandemic we benefit from a aid mechanism ". It is noteworthy that the common element of the benefits is given by European funds, which is accentuated by the following answer, the first thing that comes to mind are European funds, which contribute a lot, although they are not accessed enough. There are benefits for young people, for students, which we do not necessarily notice ". The next participant answered "the major importance that the European Union has in consolidating democracy in Romania".

The next question was about their opinion on the advantages and disadvantages that young people have by the fact that Romania is a member of the European Union. In this sense, the answers are very similar to those resulting from the application of the questionnaire, as evidenced by the application of the focus group, the answer being "Romania manages to gradually capture this Western influence, and among young people this aspect is felt because it has succeeded in receiving this positive influence, both in the collective mentality of young people and through these programs for students. "Another answer underlines that "at the same time, a disadvantage and at the same time an advantage, would be the free movement of people, given the fact that, in Romania, most of the time, young people choose to go abroad, in aa better place ", which further highlights the importance of the financial component when it comes to the European Union. that "the Erasmus + program can be an advantage for students and of course economic benefits." Another answer that outlines the benefits for students is "the Erasmus + program, solidarity projects th rough which you can participate as an exchange of experience and support for

young people that the European Union provides to young people who want to open certain businesses, startups ". Another advantage is represented by "those internships that we find in the institutions of the European Union and disadvantages, depending on who is watching".

The next question is related to trust in European institutions and in Romanian institutions, and this fact shows that the degree of trust differs, in that a participant states that "at the level of trust, the perception of young people, students, is to have confidence in what other states offer us, but it is important to have confidence in the mechanisms in our country, trust is on both sides ". Another common element is given by the following answer, "national interests are very important, at the level of the European Union the interests of all states are taken into account". Another answer tells us that "at the moment I have more confidence in the European institutions than in Romania". Another answer is "I have more confidence in the European institutions than in Romania". "I could say that I have more confidence in the institutions of the European Union."

The next question concerned their opinion on how the lives of young Romanians would change if Romania were no longer part of the European Union. ,, we feel certain aspects, advantages or disadvantages, from the accession to the European Union, the life of young people is indirectly influenced by the European Union, and if Romania were no longer part of the EU many things would change, and if it is in good or bad, it depends on the mentality ". ,, beyond the economic benefits, the European Union can be considered a security structure, even if we had a functional and economic democracy we would be very well, the security issue arises, or the European Union is a guarantee including security, at least for Romania being the geopolitical and geostrategic position ". "Yes, I think young people would have a lot to lose, starting with free movement, access to jobs abroad" "would have lost benefits" "We, unlike the UK, which said it wants to leave the European Union, and we cannot compare ourselves from any point of view and such initiatives would have existed, so we would clearly have to lose ".

The next question was about their perception of the problems that the European Union will face in the future, and in this sense, we find out what would be in the view of the participants the most pressing problems that the European Union could face in the future. In this sense, a first answer is "I think that things in general will improve." ,, I think the main threat to the European Union is the hybrid war of the Russian Federation, which goes beyond what we know, the hybrid war comes on discursive narratives, including religion, which, at least in Romania are very dangerous and the rise of speeches populist ". "A problem could be Euroscepticism, which could increase at European level in the coming years", the rise of populist and Eurosceptic discourse or the desire of some states to leave the EU, terrorism "" Euroscepticism, the problem of climate change "

The next question is about how participants consider themselves European citizens, "personally, yes, I consider myself a European citizen, especially through my involvement, I am informed about the European Union" which highlights the significant role it plays. involvement and information of young people about the European Union. ,, yes ",, yes" ,, yes, by the fact that I participated in European projects, I follow on social media different EU institutions "" yes ". The last question was how they consider young people to be disinterested in what is happening in the European Union, as evidenced by the answer "unfortunately yes, we have this lack of interest" which highlights our critical tendency to addressing young people about their lack of information. However, the lack of interest is

seen through the prism of a participant as being present at the level of national information, but also information about the European Union, unfortunately, in my opinion, young people in Romania are not even interested in what is happening in their neighborhood, from their own impressions and discussions with colleagues, friends, young people in Romania live in a bubble and then nothing else matters, I do not think that young people in Romania are enough information about the EU "which certifies how the discussions with friends contribute to shaping this image of young Romanians who have a strong disinterest in information about the European Union. "I think young people are not aware that young people are aware of the importance of the EU" "I think the vast majority are not interested in what is happening in the European Union" "in their minds are very abstract notions".

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this research have shown how young people perceive the European Union and how they perceive its future. Following the application of the questionnaire, it was found the degree of trust that young people have in the European Union, which is quite high, but with some reluctance, due to the challenges faced by the European Union during its existence. However, despite all the challenges faced by the European Union, it is burdened with high confidence among Romanian students, which confirms their desire to perpetuate this European project. Also, following the application of the questionnaire, the way in which the students perceive the direction towards the European Union, as a good one, but the perspective being quite reserved in their vision, which confirms the confidence they have in The European Union, but this is at a medium level, due to uncertainties regarding the European Union. What is certain is that, despite all the challenges facing the European Union, students are aware of its importance and role in the daily lives of young people, while confirming the major role that the European Union has in their lives.

In this sense, young people are aware of the major influence of the European Union and how decisions taken at European level influence young people's lives. Another very important aspect that strengthens young people's confidence in the European Union is the fact that following the application of the questionnaire it was validated that young people consider themselves in a major proportion as European citizens, which increases the degree of trust in the European Union. The results of the research also highlight the way in which young people appreciate Romania's membership in the European Union as very beneficial, which proves that there is a positive perspective and perception among young people about the European Union and Romania's membership. to this European project. The positive trend regarding the existence of the European Union and Romania's membership in the European Union is materialized after the application of the questionnaire, which confirmed that students do not want and do not appreciate as positive that Romania leaves the European Union. Another very important aspect in the way of appreciation of young people regarding the European Union is also due to the existence of European funds, as being considered by young people as being beneficial for Romania. In this case, with this advantage of European funds for Romania's development, the degree of trust is high and the perception of young people about the European Union is very positive, these European funds contributing to shaping an optimistic perception among young Romanians

Another component of shaping a positive perception of students regarding the European Union and their high degree of trust is generated by the advantages that Romania

has had since joining the European Union in 2007. In this sense, the advantages of benefits Romania contributes to increasing the confidence of young people in the European Union and shaping a positive perception of it. Automatically and implicitly, by the fact that Romania benefits from different advantages, in the vision of young people, young people are the ones who benefit from different advantages, which contributes to developing a positive perception of the European Union and shaping a beneficial and positive image of the EU. In this context, in which respondents have a positive perception of the advantages that Romania has after joining the European Union, they consider in a high percentage that young people in general are not aware of the advantages they have by Romania's membership in European Union. It is very important to mention that the respondents appreciate and are aware of the advantages that young people have by the fact that Romania is part of the European Union, but following the answers, they consider that young people are not actually aware of the advantages they have by belonging to Romania. to the European Union. At the same time, if the respondents of the questionnaire read / watch news about the European Union, following the application of the questionnaire it was found that they watch / read once or several times a month, according to the answers, which indicates a trend of informing young people about news. related to the European Union, as they are not informed on a daily basis, but are connected to the realities and news and information about the European Union. At the same time, the respondents believe that their lives would change a lot if Romania were no longer part of the European Union, which shows their confidence and awareness of the major role that the European Union has but also of the advantages that Romania has. from joining the European Union, which strengthens their confidence and strengthens the positive image of the European Union.

Following the application of the questionnaire, it is highlighted that young people are interested in the future of the European Union, a fact attested by the fact that they are aware of the advantages that the European Union brings but also by the fact that they are informed about the European Union. a large proportion of respondents are interested in the future of the European Union. Also, following the application of the questionnaire, the respondents stated that they talk to friends or family about the European Union, but not in a very high percentage, which indicates a certain restraint on the discussions on this topic, which can often be sensitive or may request certain specialized information. At the same time, respondents believe that the European Union influences their lives in a major way, which highlights their awareness, but also a recognition that in their opinion, the European Union will face more problems in the future. . Also, another very important element in shaping the perception of young people about the European Union is given by their participation in conferences, projects whose main theme is the European Union because this active participation contributes to increasing young people's confidence in the European Union. At the same time, following the focus group, the results obtained confirmed the results obtained after applying the online questionnaire. It is identified that young people have a positive perception of the European Union and that they are aware of the advantages that Romania has by belonging to the European Union.

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## Anexă chestionar online

Formular fără titlu      [Trimiteți](#)

Întrebări [Răspunsuri](#) **201** Total puncte: 0

### 201 de răspunsuri

Nu se acceptă răspunsuri

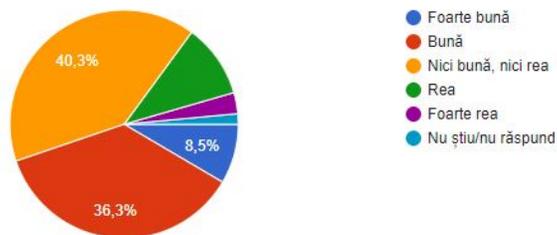
Mesaj pentru respondenți

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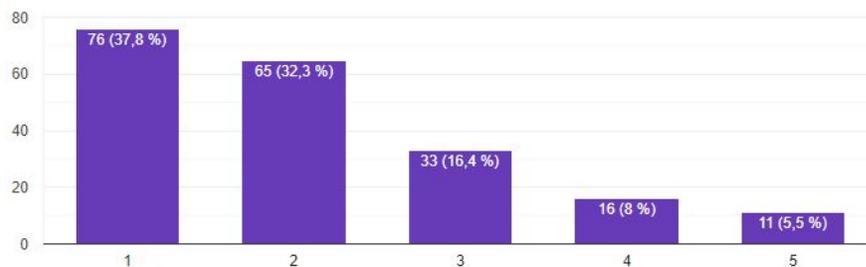
În ce direcție crezi că merge Uniunea Europeană în prezent?

201 de răspunsuri



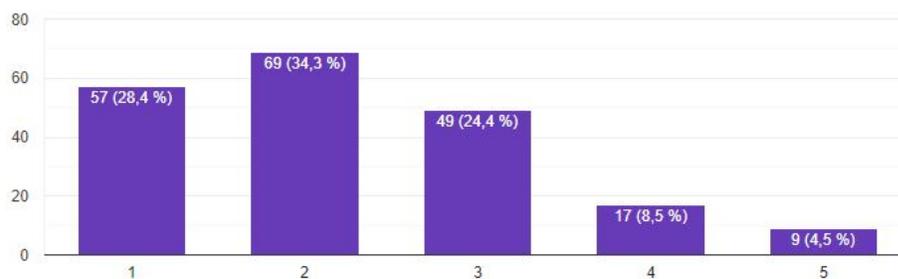
Pe o scară de la 1 la 5 (unde 1=foarte important, 2=important, 3=nu foarte important 4=puțin important, 5= deloc important) cât de important crezi că este rolul pe care îl are Uniunea Europeană în viitorul tinerilor din România?

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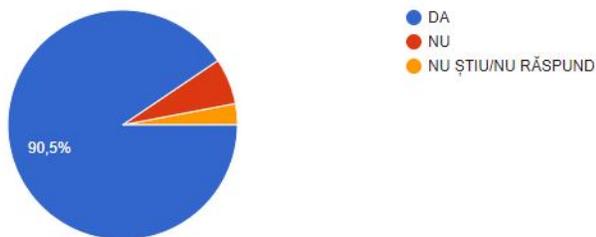
Pe o scară de la 1 la 5 (unde 1=foarte mult, 2=mult, 3=puțin, 4=foarte puțin, 5=deloc) cât de mult crezi că deciziile Uniunii Europene influențează viața de zi cu zi a tinerilor?

201 de răspunsuri



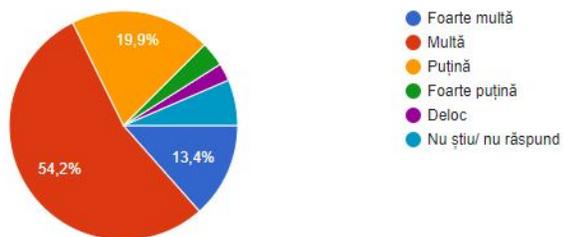
Te consideri un cetățean european?

201 de răspunsuri



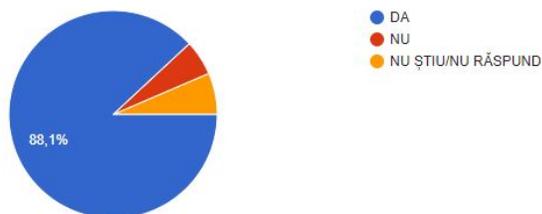
Câtă încredere ai în Uniunea Europeană?

201 de răspunsuri



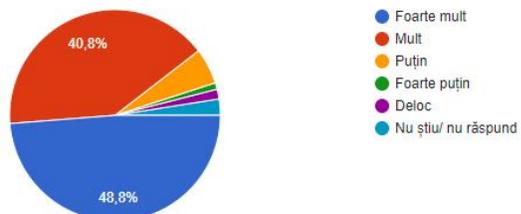
Crezi că este un lucru benefic faptul că România face parte din Uniunea Europeană?

201 de răspunsuri



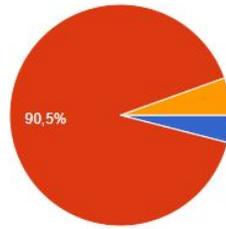
Cât de benefic crezi că a fost faptul că România a aderat la Uniunea Europeană?

201 de răspunsuri



Crezi că România ar trebui să părăsească Uniunea Europeană?

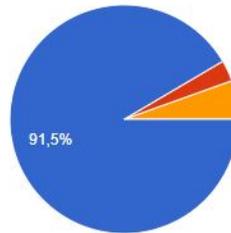
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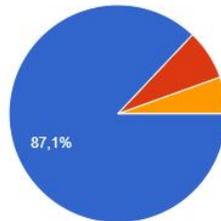
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Consideri că România a avut mai multe avantaje de când este membră UE?

201 de răspunsuri

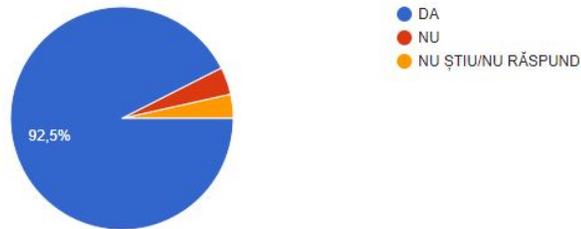


- DA
- NU
- NU ȘTIU/NU RĂSPUND

Consideri că tinerii din România au mai multe avantaje prin faptul că România este membră UE?



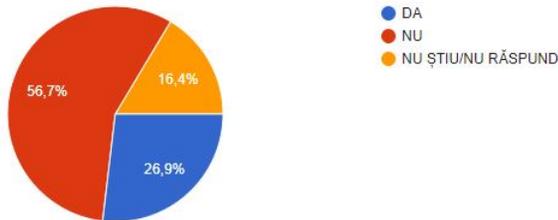
201 de răspunsuri



Consideri că tinerii din România sunt conștienți de avantajele pe care le au prin apartenența României la UE?



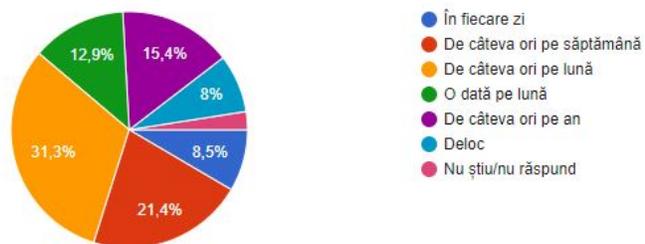
201 de răspunsuri



Cât de des citești/urmărești stiri care au ca temă principală UE?

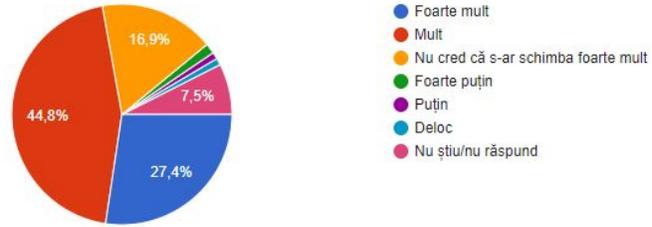


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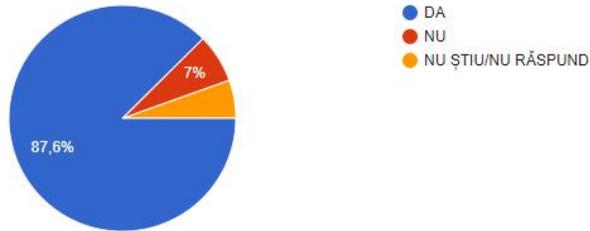
Cât de mult crezi că s-ar schimba viața ta dacă România nu ar mai face parte din UE?

201 de răspunsuri



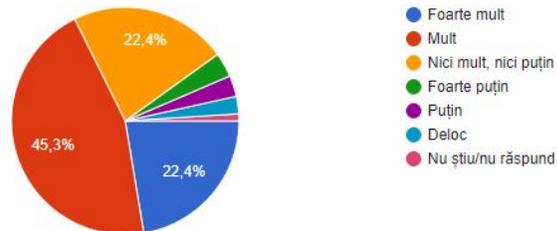
Ești interesat de viitorul Uniunii Europene?

201 de răspunsuri



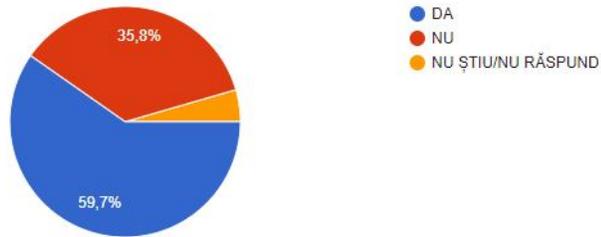
În ce măsură ești interesat/ă de viitorul Uniunii Europene?

201 de răspunsuri



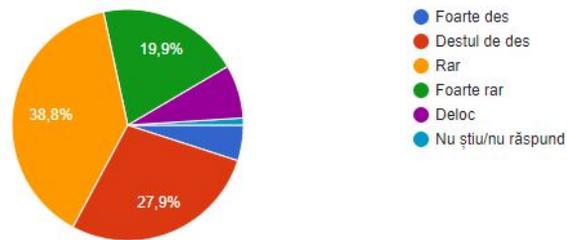
Discuți cu prietenii/familia/colegii despre Uniunea Europeană?

201 de răspunsuri



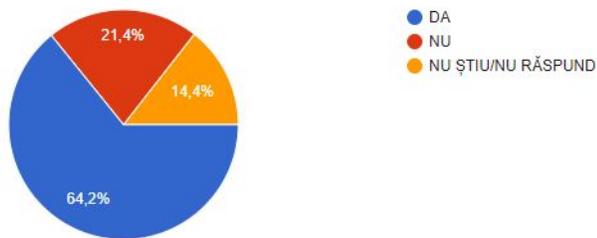
Cât de des discuți cu prietenii/familia/colegii despre Uniunea Europeană?

201 de răspunsuri



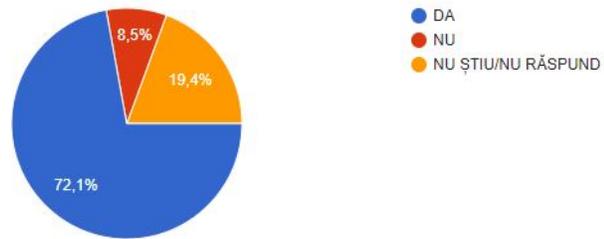
Consideri că deciziile UE îți influențează viața într-un mod major?

201 de răspunsuri



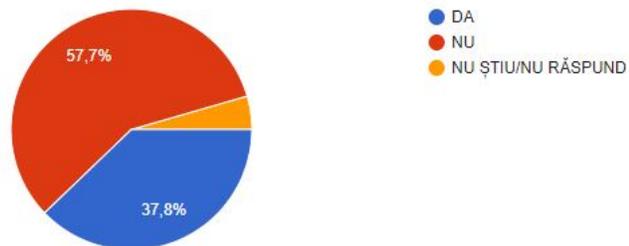
Consideri că pe viitor Uniunea Europeană o să se confrunte cu mai multe probleme?

201 de răspunsuri



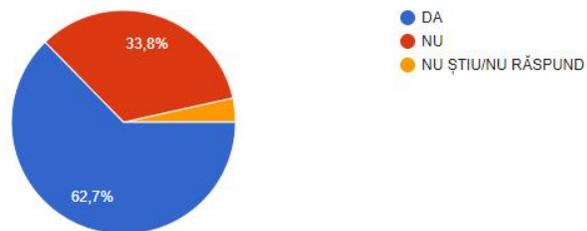
Ai participat la proiecte/conferințe/workshop-uri privind Uniunea Europeană?

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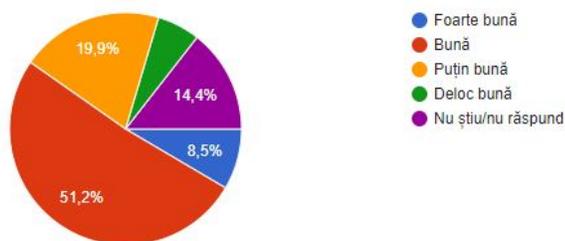
Citești articole/reviste/ziare/cărți privind Uniunea Europeană?

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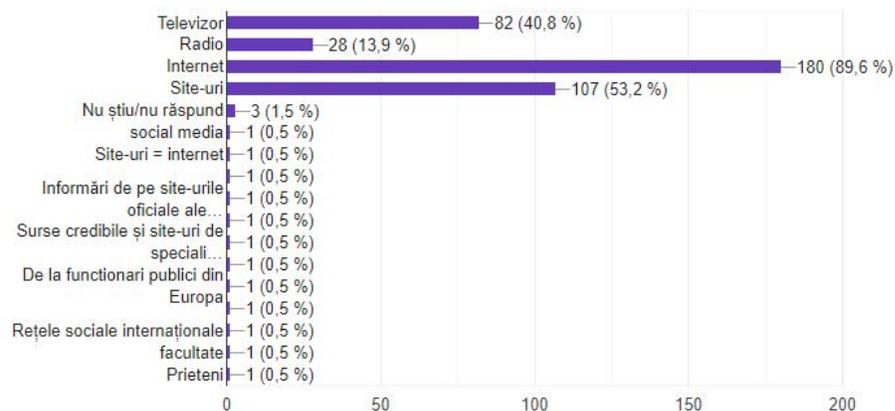
Cum vezi evoluția Uniunii Europene în următorii 5 ani?

201 de răspunsuri



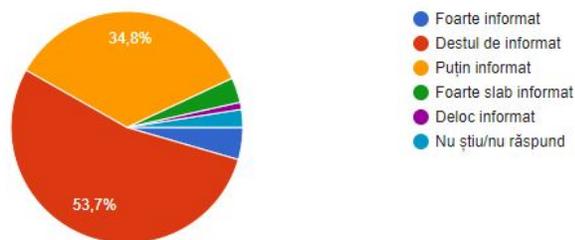
De unde îți iei informațiile cu privire la Uniunea Europeană?

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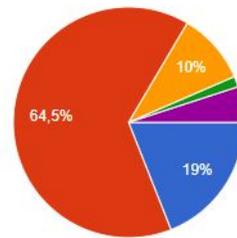
Cât de informat ești cu privire la Uniunea Europeană?

201 de răspunsuri



Ce imagine ai despre Uniunea Europeană?

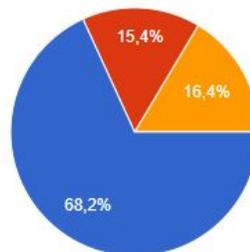
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- o imagine foarte bună
- o imagine bună
- o imagine nu tocmai bună
- o imagine deloc bună
- nu știu/nu răspund

Vârsta:

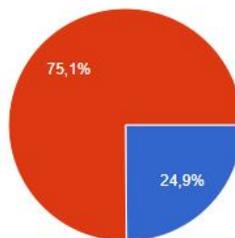
201 de răspunsuri



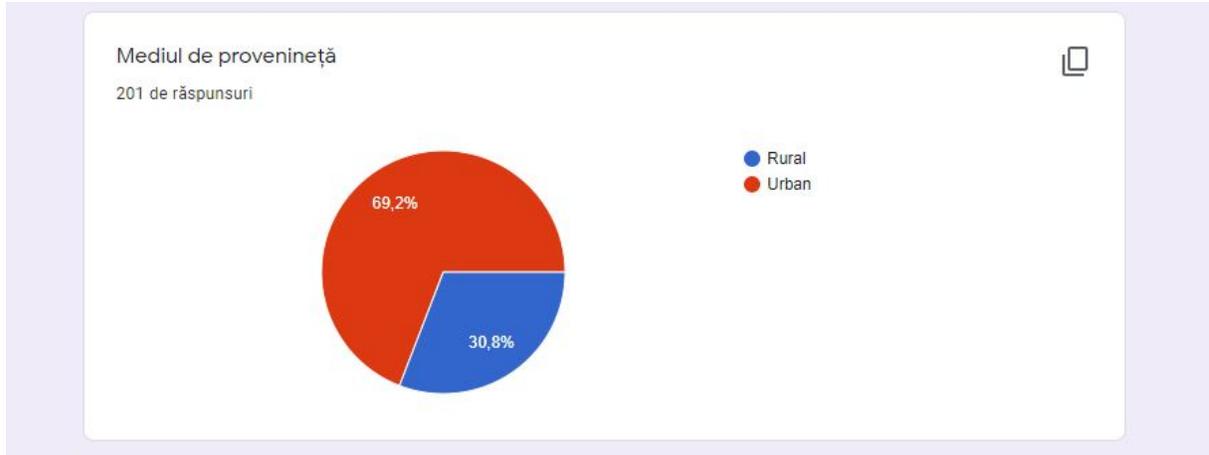
- 20-22
- 23-24
- 25-26

Genul

201 de răspunsuri



- Masculin
- Feminin



### Anexă. Întrebări focus-grup

*Ce credeți despre Uniunea Europeană? Ce părere aveți despre Uniunea Europeană? Considerați că e un avantaj faptul că facem parte din Uniunea Europeană? Dacă da, de ce. Dacă nu, de ce.*

*Ce avantaje și dezavantaje credeți că are România pentru tineri prin faptul că este membră a Uniunii Europene*

*Aveți mai multă încredere în instituțiile Uniunii Europene decât în instituțiile din România? Dacă da, de ce. Dacă nu, de ce.*

*Credeți că s-ar schimba viața tinerilor dacă România nu ar mai face parte din Uniunea Europeană?*

*Credeți că pe viitor Uniunea Europeană o să se confrunte cu mai multe probleme pe viitor? Care ar fi acestea?*

*Te consideri un cetățean european?*

*Credeți că, în general, tinerii români sunt neinteresați de ceea ce se întâmplă în Uniunea Europeană? Dacă da, de ce. Dacă nu, de ce.*



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