



Securing Our Future

100 African and European Voices on
Climate Change, Conflict and Security





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Foreword

It goes without saying that public institutions are engaged in the pursuit of what they believe to be the public good.

In the case of the EIB Group, active in more than 160 countries around the world, that means financing projects to improve people's lives, through supporting sustainable infrastructure and enterprise. It means supporting ambitious climate action, affordable energy, clean transport, as well as investment in good healthcare, vaccines and education.

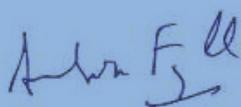
As the EU bank, the European Investment Bank is accountable to the European Union. But true accountability also means dialogue beyond this political sphere. And I believe we must also take the opportunity when we can, to listen more directly to what the public, especially young people, perceive as their priorities in this insecure world we are living in.

This is why I welcome the opportunity that supporting the *Securing Our Future: 100 African and European Voices on Climate Change, Conflict and Security* report has given us. 100 young people from countries in Africa and Europe participated in a series of focus groups earlier this year, organised by our partners Debating Europe and its sister organisation Debating Africa, to reflect on what they perceived as the great threats to their security. These discussions, their concerns and some of their proposed solutions are reflected and summarised in this report. I hope these conversations and the debate that grows from it will promote greater understanding across continents and across generations on the challenges that are affecting us all in different ways: climate change, conflict, access to affordable energy, food security and health.

As you will read, some of the findings are not straightforward - they are nuanced and reflect the nature of the multiple and interlinked challenges young people are facing, on both continents. For one educator living in Nigeria, the sense of threat to her physical security from kidnapping is acute. A journalism student in Slovakia told us that energy shortages in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have left him fearing for his grandparents in the winter. For a young man in Ivory Coast, unyielding lands and poor rainfall contribute to a sense of insecurity in his agriculturally dependent village.

But what emerged from these conversations is that most of these young people identified climate change or its consequences as the biggest threat facing their security. It's very clear that getting to grips with climate change will need a radical transformation in the way we live and work - how we travel, how we run our economies.

The EIB is in the business of helping to get the projects off the ground for this green transition to happen, in partnership with local authorities, businesses, government and other financial institutions. But we need to be sure that when we listen we also learn, and ensure that these discussions actively inform our decision making and our policies. Exercises like this and the insights they provide in the context of an increasingly polarised and fragmented world will help to ensure that. Happy reading!



Ambroise Fayolle, EIB Vice President for Climate Action and Development

At a Glance

In the run-up to COP27 in November 2022, Debating Africa, together with its sister platform Debating Europe, invited over 100 young people across both continents to participate in a series of online focus group discussions on how the COVID pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine have

affected their perception of threat, and the role they think governments and financial institutions should play in the solution. This report outlines the fears and concerns of participants, as well as potential solutions they identified to face current challenges.

An Introduction to the Project

What do young Africans and Europeans see as the greatest threats to global security? How do they think governments and international institutions should work together to tackle these challenges and help secure our common future?

With wildfires, flooding and deadly heatwaves linked to climate change impacting countries globally, and with the war in Ukraine hitting food and energy prices even as the world continues to grapple with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no shortage of threats to pick from.

To hear what young people think, Debating Africa and Debating Europe, in partnership with the European Investment Bank, ran a focus group project to ask them directly.

We spoke to over 100 young people (aged 18-35) from both continents about their concerns. In a series of online focus groups, we explored what should and could be done in response to these concerns, particularly by International Financial Institutions (IFIs). Participants were divided into three groups: English-speaking European, English-speaking African, and French-speaking African.

The focus groups were conducted virtually via Zoom and lasted for one hour. Participants were compensated for their involvement. Focus groups were led by an experienced moderator and ranged from 4 to 10 participants each. We have only used first names to protect the anonymity of participants, but several participants (particularly African participants) chose pseudonyms.

European participants came from Germany, Italy, France, Greece, Slovakia, Portugal, Spain, Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Ireland, Estonia, Slovenia, Latvia, Belgium, and Finland; English-speaking African participants came from Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, and Malawi; French-speaking African participants came from Cameroon, Chad, Benin, Senegal, Algeria, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Tunisia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali.

Each focus group kicked off by asking participants to sum up in a sentence what they thought was the biggest threat facing the world right now and why. Participants from both sides of the Mediterranean painted a bleak overall picture, with nuances based on their specific location.

They were then asked to rank five different issues in order of perceived threat, namely: public health, energy access, food security, climate change, and conflict, and to explain their ranking. Both groups were asked to consider whether they would have answered differently before the COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine war. Finally, participants were probed on the role international organisations could play to make them feel safer, with most sessions ending with a question on how they would allocate a fictional budget towards their most pressing security concerns.

Would young people from Africa and Europe have vastly different priorities? And would these differences be reflected among participants from different parts of the same continent?

Threats and Solutions

What Young People Told Us

Climate Change the Number One Threat in Africa and Europe

Key Takeaways

1

Climate change is considered the biggest overarching threat facing Europe and Africa at present

2

Climate change is seen as a driver for other threats, such as food insecurity and could lead to mass migration

3

Participants felt that Europe has been dragging its feet because, until recently, Europeans had not suffered the effects of climate change



Climate change was the number one threat overall, cited by more focus group participants than any other issue. But there were key differences in the degree to which Africans and Europeans perceived the threat to them personally from climate change.

Every single European and most Africans cited climate change as a major concern. However, digging deeper into discussions, even those Africans who did not view climate change as the most immediate challenge often raised other threats that were driven by it, such as food insecurity or

severe weather events. Participants from agriculture-dependent countries, such as Ghana, Chad and Mauritania drew a closer link between the problems they faced and climate change.

Europeans saw climate change as the biggest global risk that affected them personally. Sara Maria from Italy saw it as the “overarching problem we are completely ignoring” because “if that’s not solved, nothing can be solved!” Myriam from France pointed out that, “other risks are big, but if our planet is uninhabitable in 30 years none of that is going to matter.”

Chloe from Finland said that her concern about climate change had grown since 2019. “Of course, I knew [about] climate change... but I think it’s only recently that this has become a really pressing concern for me, and I kind of see it as climate change [being] the umbrella,” she said.

Daniela from Germany thought climate change was “very concerning” and “a very pressing topic” that was already having an impact close to home. “I don’t have to tell you that, last year, in Germany, we had some very big floods and many people were affected,” Daniela said and that the impacted communities were still grappling with the aftermath. She underlined that, despite other urgent global issues, climate change remained the overriding threat facing the world, with long-term implications. “We can’t really see what it’s going to be in like 20 or 30 years and still we are putting more CO2 in the atmosphere, which is not going to end well,” she warned.

Climate Inaction

Several Europeans complained about inaction on climate change, with some suggesting this was because people perceived it as a distant

threat. “Climate change is inevitable but the severity of it we can still control,” commented Tomás from Portugal. “People aren’t reacting to that because it’s a long-term thing, or in their minds at least,” he said.

Myriam from France described incidents of droughts, fires, and floods in Europe, “but these threats have been there for decades ... scientists have been warning us about climate change for decades.” Like many Europeans, Myriam acknowledged that people had ignored the problem when the impact was felt elsewhere, which “comes from a position of privilege.” They had only started to act upon it when Europeans felt the consequences.

“Sometimes we try to ring the bell,” Milan from Slovakia said, commenting on the apathy surrounding the climate crisis. Despite attempts to warn others, he said that “people just don’t care unless they start dying or something.” Milan compared inaction on climate change with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when little was done until deaths started to happen in Europe, specifically in Bergamo, Italy. Only then did European countries proceed with a lockdown, he said. “When we see, sorry for the expression, that s**t gets real and

“ Other risks are big, but if our planet is uninhabitable in 30 years none of that is going to matter

— Myriam, France



that people are dying, it's a real problem," he said and that survival instincts from previous continental crises rapidly kicked in. "We just start to cooperate... suddenly we had vaccines in a year, like, wow!"

Alvaro from Spain pointed to disparities in the impact of climate change in Europe and Africa, acknowledging that "we are affected, obviously," but that "people in Africa are much more affected by climate change, than we are."

Among French-speaking Africans, Arthur was frustrated at people ignoring climate change, saying "we Africans and Cameroonians don't take climate change seriously. It concerns Westerners a lot, but it also concerns us in Africa. People are not always interested in climate change."

Knock-on Effects

Participants in all the focus groups drew links between climate change and other knock-on effects, notably that it impacts the availability of land for agriculture, creating food insecurity and adverse economic conditions. William from Ivory Coast drew clear parallels between the climate crisis and his country's economic woes, saying "climate change has an effect on agriculture, and it also affects our economy here in Ivory Coast, because our economy is based on agriculture..."

Ana from Romania also linked climate change to food security but noted that the impact was not felt equally across Europe. Ana said that this was the case "especially this year, with so much increase in the temperatures. My parents [and I] come from a village, and we can actually see the impact on the ground, [but] maybe not all of these issues are relatable to all parts of Europe, [and] there are some who are suffering or more impacted than others."

Several African participants worried about the impact of climate change on African conflicts, such as in clashes over resources in Nigeria's north, as David pointed out. "Climate change in Nigeria has led to seasons of drought and

excess flood, which affected agricultural activities and caused a loss of shelter," he said, adding that "the impact of climate change on Nigeria's environmental and socio-economic systems is compounding the country's fragility risks."

Migration

One issue raised in both African and European focus groups was migration as climate change made land uninhabitable and food and water scarce, leading to conflicts over diminishing resources.

"It's going to have ridiculous consequences," warned Tomás from Portugal. "If people don't have water, that's not only war... It also [means] huge migration, violence in countries where they come from, and the solution is obviously not 'close the borders - we'll be fine'. I mean, we have to deal with the water crisis and accept, and hopefully work with the people that are coming in. But a lot of people don't even want that. They just want to, you know, close their eyes and think 'oh, no, no, no, that's their problem.' It's going to be our problem really soon, and I don't think people are taking that seriously enough," he said.

Aminetou from Mauritania said that the Sahel region was already "very, very much affected by climate change," which had created tensions between herders and farmers over water. She said lakes, such as Lake Chad, were drying up and the quantity of water in them had decreased in a "very spectacular" way.

The same thing had happened with Lake Mahmûd in Mauritania, "which means that there is also the displacement of people from Mali to Mauritania and they are obliged to share this water resource."

By contrast in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, where Aminetou was based, it had been raining profusely, she said. "I assure you that there are huge floods and there have been human losses, human and material losses."

What Should be Done?

Invest in Renewable Energy

In general, both Africans and Europeans saw funding and measures to fight climate change as crucial and investment in renewable sources of energy as a key intervention to prevent future warming as well as counter energy insecurity.

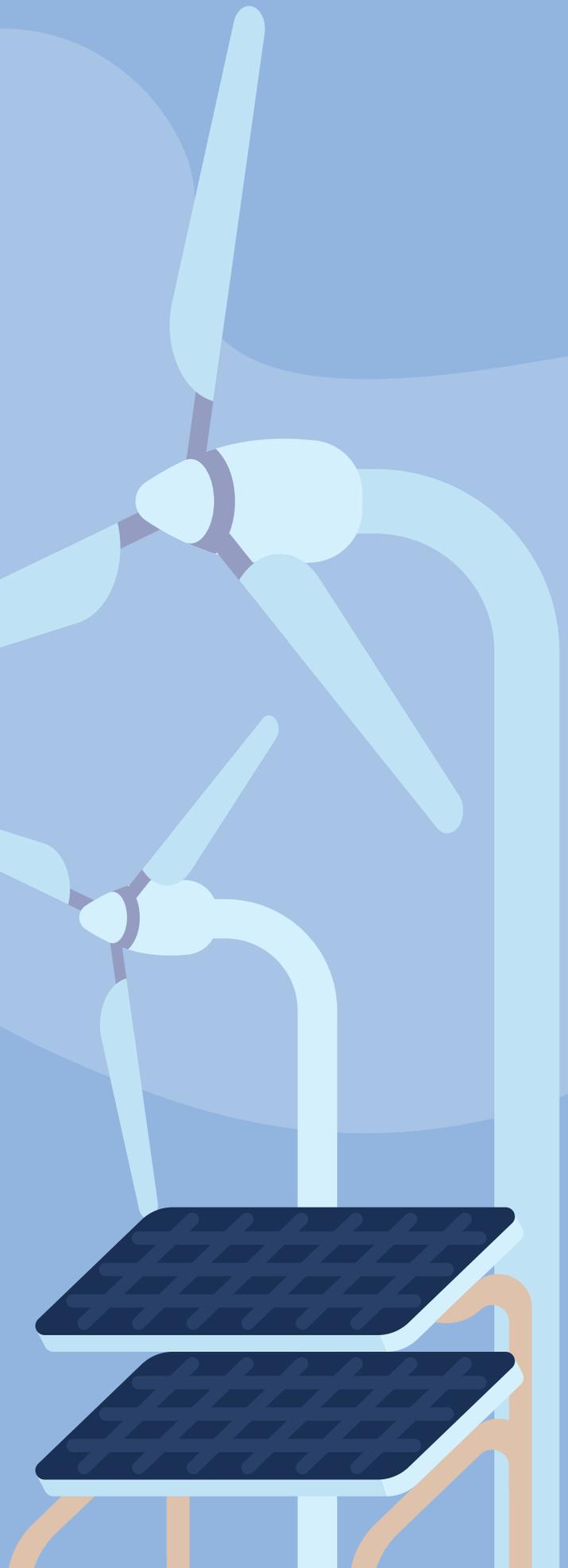
Tomáš, a Czech participant based in Austria, argued that “if we acted on climate change and really did something to mitigate it, we [would have] no energy crisis, because we would be building more and more renewable sources of energy, which we are doing, but not enough at all.”

Intricately linked to their support for renewables, Europeans in our focus groups wanted to see countries cut out gas, oil and coal and any subsidies these sources of energy received. Instead, they felt there should be more funding for alternative sources of energy, particularly renewables. As Cristina from Spain argued, “governments should stop subsidising fossil fuels” and invest in renewable and alternative sources of energy, as “a very big first step that could really tackle this issue.”

This strong interest in renewables was evident on both continents with some Africans pointing to the abundance of sun in their countries, which could power solar energy.

“What causes global warming?” asked Dave from Cameroon, who went on to answer: “It is the use of certain types of energy that are unsuitable for the environment, which I think governments and organisations should already be thinking about together: How to find safer, cleaner access to energy?”

Dave wanted to see governments and institutions working in partnership on renewable energy projects and welcomed joint European Union – African Union action in this area that was already



off the ground, “and that’s why I salute the European Union developing, in partnership with the African Union, to produce clean energy. Here come the Greens!”

Egan from Kenya called for government funded renewable energy so that he could replace his noisy generator. He was particularly interested in having the government adopt more renewable energy, particularly solar power, at subsidised prices “so we can all afford it.”

Many of the focus group sessions, especially in Europe, concluded by asking participants what they would do if they had a billion euros to spend in their communities. A lot of Europeans wanted to give at least part of their billion to fund renewable energy projects and tackle climate change.

Elena from Italy for example would spend half on “the building of renewable energy infrastructure,” as would another Italian, Michele: “It’s definitely renewable energies.” Meanwhile, Cristina from Spain allocated the same portion to “invest in renewable energies and decarbonise the economy.”

Others echoed similar sentiments. “I would be interested more in tackling climate change and having more [investment] in renewable [energy] in order to tackle the climate issue that we are going to face in the coming decades,” said Yordan from Bulgaria.

“I think renewable energy or something,” Ana from Romania answered, while Hannah from Belgium allocated her budget towards, “climate change, and more specifically the biggest or closest [climate-related] threats.”

“

The business model needs to be challenged. In fact, we cannot continue to produce as before since resources are limited and this logic of profit will not necessarily last in the long term

— Imtinen, Tunisia



Mitigation and Adaptation

Other proposed solutions focused on mitigating or adapting to the effects of climate change. These varied widely in line with the diverse ways participants were experiencing climate change in their countries and how immediately they perceived the threat. While flooding, wildfires and heatwaves that had hit Europe in recent years had helped to put climate change at the forefront of European minds, the effects were still not as far reaching as those felt in Africa. English-speaking Africans wanted climate change interventions to focus less on the global threat and more on the current impact on Africa, notably the effects on food and energy security.

Sara Maria from Italy wanted more focus on interventions to protect high-risk cities and regions from adverse climate events in the future. “I live in a flatland, and that might be completely overflowed by water, let’s adapt [come up with a plan to adapt to the increased likelihood of floods] to that,” she demanded.

While many shared the view that everybody should do their bit, Imtinen from Tunisia was sceptical about how much individuals could even do. She acknowledged that raising awareness of things like saving energy among individuals was important, “but it’s not enough” because “the biggest polluters are still businesses” and argued that this is where the focus for reducing emissions should be.

“No matter how much I turn off the light, I’m going to say it’s not going to make a huge difference. We must first concentrate efforts on the major polluters before asking citizens to do so. It’s good to do both, but we mustn’t lose sight of the objective, which is to reduce [emissions].”

Imtinen added that, “the business model needs to be challenged. In fact, we cannot continue to produce as before since resources are limited and this logic of profit will not necessarily last in the long term.”

Anne from the Netherlands wanted to see subsidies to help people install solar panels or purchase an electric vehicle, “because there are a lot of people who regard climate change as a real threat but just don’t have the means to get an electric vehicle or install solar panels on the roof.” She felt that if there was government funding for these things, “the industry is going to follow because they only care about the money.”

Africans whose countries were experiencing severe weather and other climate-related events wanted to see less talk and more action on climate change, which is already hitting their countries hard. They saw a need to raise awareness among the public and to find solutions for adaptation and mitigation for the very real threat it posed. Aminetou from Mauritania said people were not prepared for climate change, adding that “we talk all the time about climate change, but I don’t think we have yet found solutions, real solutions for adaptation and above all for mitigation.”

Joseph from the Democratic Republic of Congo was among the few Africans to express concern about loss of tropical rainforests that could absorb carbon and the consequent impact on climate change. He complained about the polluting countries failing to step up and pay compensation for forest loss and called for “a strategy that can allow the polluting countries to also intervene to compensate for the destruction of the environment at the global level” as well as international solidarity.

Gwendoline from France stressed the need for everybody to work together at local, national, and international level as well as the importance of every country pulling together on climate change. “Every country needs to do something, because if we are doing something in Europe, but in the US they’re not following what we are doing, I don’t know if it would work,” she said.

Ukraine War, Insecurity and Cybersecurity



Key Takeaways

1

The Ukraine war is pushing up prices of goods on both continents

2

However, the Ukraine war is one of many conflicts affecting Africa

3

Insurgency, terrorism and insecurity are a very real threat for some participants

4

African governments are not perceived to be doing enough to tackle conflict, but the EU is seen as doing a good job

5

Cybersecurity risk is not getting the attention it should

Having the Ukraine war on their doorstep created a more immediate sense of threat for a lot of Europeans in our focus groups. Meanwhile, for many African participants, the conflict felt more distant, not just geographically but also in terms of impact. As noted by Chris from Kenya, “the Ukraine war is far away,” compared to Muriel, a participant from Germany, who felt that with the resultant refugee crisis, “the war was much nearer than in the news.”

Some European participants had been caught off guard by the war, having assumed that major conflicts on the continent were a thing of the past. “It became more clear to me that those [conflicts] are actually very real. It’s not only about what we read in the history books about World War II,” said Joanna from Poland. “I thought [the era of wars] was over for the

Polish, in that part of the world, or Europe. That we had kind of learned from our mistakes,” she continued, “but we clearly didn’t”

Gwendoline from France echoed similar sentiments when she admitted that she had not been affected by conflict before the Russian invasion of Ukraine as those were “not so near to me.” “There are lots of wars,” she said, “if you had asked this two years before [whether conflicts posed a major threat] we maybe would have said ‘okay, we are not so impacted’ or something.” But now, she added, “because [we are] in Europe, it’s impacting us more.”

“We’re used to seeing these things happening but in other parts of the world,” said Manon, also from France, adding that, “this is a reminder that we are not spared by this kind of risk.”

Meanwhile, for Romanian Ana, there was a deeply felt sense of threat in her region with the conflict being so close. “I’m coming from my region in Romania, which is close to Ukraine and Moldova, and when it comes to conflict now in the area, it’s such a [scary] situation that you can feel it. So, even though [Romania is] part of NATO, people around the region and mostly from villages are basically scared to go to sleep.”

She wasn’t the only one to point to the psychologic impact of the war. Latvian Artjoms, a volunteer who has been close to the front lines, spoke of his distress and that of others whose lives had been upended, seemingly, overnight. “I’ve been speaking to people. I’ve seen this mess that’s going on there, I can tell you for sure that they were living a normal life. They were going to work, having dreams... this basically changed in a couple of hours, not even a day, not even a week, it changed in a couple of hours.”

He explained that “it actually changed my perception, because, you know, it’s like a psychological phenomenon. When you see something terrible happening, the first thought you have is like, ‘it’s not going to happen to

me. No, no, no, it’s not. It will happen to them, to them, to him, maybe to my friends, but not to me.’.”

However, other participants had anticipated a conflict involving Russia, including Simina from Romania “I kind of expected it. I mean, I look at Putin and what he does, and he warned us in a way, but I didn’t expect it to be Ukraine and I didn’t expect it to affect Europe so much.”

For some, like Chloe from Finland, Russia’s invasion was the final straw after two years of COVID, adding to an overall sense of gloom that had not been there a few years prior. “I look back at myself how I was in 2019 and I was just happy, I guess, or not anxious, not worried,” Chloe said when asked whether the pandemic and Ukraine war had changed her perceptions of the main threats, or her priorities compared to 2019. “Now it’s starting to affect me personally. Here in Finland now they’re talking about the rolling blackouts this winter, possibly if we don’t have enough power to feed the electricity grid and, obviously, Finland is not food secure because we can’t grow that much of our own food and, obviously, we have a certain neighbour here as well. So, in terms of global conflict, it’s a little bit edgy at the moment as well,” she admitted.”

“ We’re used to seeing these things happening but in other parts of the world
— Manon, France



Not the Only War

In contrast, for many African participants, Ukraine was just one of many conflicts and not necessarily the most threatening to them personally. Kings, a participant from Nigeria, dismissed the Russian invasion as “Europe’s war.”

African participants flagged other conflicts nearer to home that were more pressing. Several Cameroonians spoke about the conflict between English and French-speaking people in their country. They criticised the French-speaking leaders for their treatment of the minority English-speaking population.

Some African participants acknowledged that the Ukraine conflict had affected their countries, it had certainly impacted the supply and cost of commodities, but no more than other recent conflicts in the region. “Long before that, there were other conflicts that affected us or our countries,” said Younous, from Chad, pointing to the Arab Spring and Libyan civil war, “which created consequences on the entire African continent at the level of Central Africa, West Africa” and more recent conflicts in West Africa, especially in Burkina Faso.

Nevertheless, Timothé from Ivory Coast warned about the risk of the Ukraine war spilling over into Africa in the conflict between Ivory Coast and Mali. He alluded to a possible “mirror effect” that would see Mali backing Russia and classifying Ivory Coast as an enemy state due to its close ties to the Western world and support of Ukraine. He noted that Mali’s close relationship with Russia had led to international sanctions that Ivory Coast had supported, a viewpoint that received broad support from other participants in the focus group he was in.

Even in the European focus groups there were some who referred to conflicts other than Ukraine. Fotios from Greece acknowledged that “when it comes to conflict, yes, we see how hard it is to have a war next door” but

that as a Greek it was something he had experienced before in the Western Balkans and along Europe’s borders with North Africa and the Middle East.

Another Greek, Eleni, also pointed out “I’m coming from the south-eastern border of Europe, so it has been a little bit more turbulent there, I think, without wanting to eliminate everybody else’s experience of course. We are obviously all a bit Eurocentric in our opinions, because we’re all from Europe and it’s good to acknowledge that as well...”

The economic effects of the Ukraine war, notably hikes on food and energy prices, were felt by participants from both continents, which was reflected in the concerns of both Europeans and Africans.

In one instance, food price inflation had become so bad that a conspiracy was thought to be at play. Timothé suggested that political leaders were exploiting the Ukraine war “to somehow increase food prices, the price of energy and also to mismanage the resources at our disposal, while saying that the crisis in Ukraine has brought such challenges, such difficulties.”

Insecurity, Insurgency and Terrorism

Insecurity, and the linked threats to personal safety, were key issues with Africans, particularly with participants from Nigeria, where people did not feel safe going about their day-to-day business due to a range of immediate threats, from terror attacks to kidnappings.

Nigerians gave a shocking portrayal of the pervasive threats of violence, whether at the hands of extremist groups such as Boko Haram, or criminal networks that abducted people for ransom. Jennifer noted that the average price of a ransom was now 150,000 (Naira or about €350) and that kidnapping was “literally everywhere,” and that it was “very risky travelling on the road right now.”

David, another Nigerian participant, explained that “economic factors such as unemployment, high inflation and poverty also drive insecurity through the country, as some youths join criminal gangs and militant groups in a bid for economic survival.”

He was far from the only participant to hold that the catastrophic economic situation in the country was leading people to crime. “When people are hungry, they tend not to know what to do,” said Jayden.

Daniel was one of several Nigerians that blamed these problems on disputes between the many religious groups in the country, particularly the Muslims in the North, and “different ethnic groups that fear each other” - Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups with the most politically influential being the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and Ijaw.

“Unity would have made Nigeria the greatest country in the world,” Daniel said, while Joseph

regretted that there was so much religious and ethnic strife now when, “we used to co-exist peacefully.”

Nigerians felt there was no political will to tackle these problems and that leaders were possibly involved in the insurgencies. Daniel cited the case of a mass murder in a church where none of the killers had been brought to justice. “I feel most officials in our government are actually sponsoring these people, that is why they don’t do anything about it,” he said.

Though it posed far less a threat than it did for their African counterparts, terrorism was not completely absent among European participants’ concerns. Sarah, a Slovakian living in Vienna, said the possibility of a terror attack was foremost in her mind due to a recent incident in the city. “There have been terror attacks, but never in my city. I was like ‘oh, but [it] will never come to Vienna and then we saw it, I think, two years ago we had a terrorist attack here.”



“ Long before that, there were other conflicts that affected us or our countries

—Younous, Chad

Cybersecurity

While Africans spoke of tangible terror threats, some Europeans flagged cyber-attacks as major concerns, especially the possibility of cybersecurity breaches linked to criminals, acts of war or state-sponsored terrorism. Tomáš from Czechia said, “I think that’s an issue no one’s thinking about, cybersecurity, but one day there will be half or a third of the world turned off the Internet, and we will be so f****d up, and we will again be like, ‘yeah everyone’s been talking about it, but we did nothing.’”

Italian Elena worried that the implications of cyber breaches were being underestimated.

“We don’t realise how much reliant on space and satellite technology we are, and we don’t realise how hackers could, you know, impact on the basic needs of our society,” she said, emphasising that it was not only the internet itself that could be impacted, but things like hospitals, electricity and heating systems that were reliant on satellites for their basic functions.

Rather ominously, Angelos from Greece forecast that cybersecurity, “could be the next pandemic, cybersecurity could be the next failure.”

What Should be Done?

When it came to the Ukraine war and its lingering effects, solutions were far thinner on the ground than with other topics. “What could individuals do for example with the Ukraine war?” asked Fabienne from Germany, prompting Tomás from Portugal to respond, “I don’t think we can solve a war at an individual level.”

But Tomás did think that individuals could influence a desired outcome through punitive measures such as boycotting companies still dealing with Russia.” That pressure from below hopefully has an impression on those at the top,” he said.

Debora from Italy called for unity at EU level to make the bloc “capable” of facing the crisis in Ukraine. Since individual member states “are little and without important power in the global equilibrium,” she explained that it was important for the European Union to have a single voice on foreign policy. “To make the European Union and the European leaders really able to talk with Russia, with USA, with China, we have to be more united at the European level, because

if we are only Italian or only Polish leaders, we don’t have power enough to talk and to make [others listen] in the global arena.”

Latvian Artjoms saw NATO as a body with a real ability to act because of its collective defence principle under Article 5. “The European Union is a good example as well. I mean, the European Union takes actions, it stands together with other countries, it helps someone in need. While NATO performs physical security, [the] European Union performs economically, and then the political support,” Artjoms commented.

In the African focus groups, there were even fewer proposed solutions for the Ukraine war, though there were concerns among West African participants of the conflict potentially spilling over into Africa via Mali’s support for Russia. Younous from Chad, for example, noted, “since Mali is very entrenched in its position of somehow driving out all those who are pro-Western, that means that it can create conflicts here.”

Insecurity, Insurgency and Terrorism

Africans wanted accountability from their leaders, whom they felt contributed to the spate of criminality on the ground. They believed that the issues of insecurity trickled down from the top and that all those complicit in bending or breaking the rules, including corrupt officials, needed to be brought to book.

“The international bodies should set up a body where they can actually hold our leaders accountable for most of the crimes they’re committing,” said Joseph from Nigeria but cautioned against handing over power wholesale. She emphasised that these bodies shouldn’t be allowed to arrest presidents based on accusations and rumours.

Later in the session, Joseph felt angry that many Nigerian citizens had become complacent, deferring the power to hold leaders accountable to external bodies. “We the citizens can hold these leaders accountable as individuals. We know these people... it’s not ghosts on those seats [of power], those are our uncles and aunties in power...”

Many, such as Winey from Cameroon, called for aid from international organisations in “the fight against terrorists and insecurity.” Notably, none of the solutions proposed by English-speaking African participants included the involvement of their governments. In fact, when asked to allocate their €1 billion security budget to their most urgent threats, they spent it on local, and sometimes radical, interventions. “Security is not something that we should leave to the government alone,” said Nigerian Shannon “because obviously we’ve seen that the government isn’t doing anything to help us so we should help ourselves.”

Alarmingly, some participants, particularly in Nigeria, felt so insecure and had such low trust in the state to provide security that they

proposed setting up local security committees (i.e. vigilante groups), others suggested training local security, investing in surveillance cameras and even the public bounties or rewards for the capture of criminals. Helen from South Africa proposed having a “bounty on any individual who is a threat to the community. I think a bounty would go a long way to scouting out criminals.”

Cybersecurity

To avoid critical infrastructure being affected by criminal hackers, or even an enemy state, both Elena from Italy and Angelos from Greece stressed the need to pay attention to cybersecurity and increase the resilience of critical infrastructure to decrease vulnerability to this threat.

“It’s something that we overlook because it’s not in front of us. The more we enter cyberspace, the more it will become very crowded and difficult to manage. So that’s something we have to look at in the future,” Elena warned.



Energy Security

Key Takeaways

1

The Ukraine war is bringing energy insecurity to Europe

3

Young people want to see a switch to renewable energy

2

Africans already face challenges accessing a reliable power supply

“

When I talk about energy access, I come from the perspective that in the world we live in, everybody is supposed to have a constant power supply. We barely have that in Africa

— Amir, Kenya



As the effects of the Ukraine war push energy prices up across Europe, threatening supplies, Europeans face the real risk of power cuts and limited access. However, this is already a daily reality for most Africans, as Amir from Kenya pointed out after picking ‘energy access’ as a major issue that was affecting him. “When I talk about energy access, I come from the perspective that in the world we live in, where everybody is supposed to have a constant power supply. We barely have that in Africa,” he said.

Other Africans also spoke of daily power cuts, including what Younous described as a “colossal” energy crisis in Chad, noting that “in

some neighbourhoods, we don’t have electricity 24 hours a day.”

Matt from Ghana reported that “we are unable to run our business due to challenges in the energy supply” and he was not the only one. Thuy from Nigeria also found that the challenges in accessing energy were hampering his business and explained he had gotten a generator just to ensure constant electricity supply.

Europeans spoke of similar woes. Daniela said, “the energy crisis is something that is affecting us right now,” noting that Germany hadn’t been prepared for Russia to reduce its energy supplies “to the bare minimum.” “So, right



I do find it a bit problematic, for example, that everyone is asked to save energy, when there are some people in some organisations and some companies that are way more responsible for emissions than most of the world

— Alvaro, Spain



now, Germany needs to find alternative ways of getting gas, but I think there are already many talks going on, and they will find a solution for that. I think they are talking to Qatar and the Emirates, as well as the USA to get fracking gas, although obviously that's not a very clean form of getting gas, but it's better than nothing. That's the mentality right now."

Milan was "really worried" about his parents and grandparents suffering from energy shortages since Slovakia "is dependent on gas and imports from Russia and Azerbaijan."

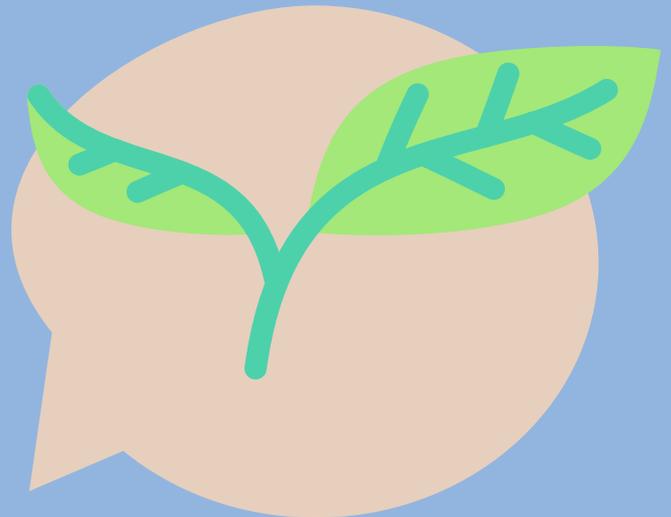
Despite this, some acknowledged the "privileged" position Europeans were in. Jakob from Germany said "yes, prices are rising in Germany, especially, but we still have energy. In other parts of the world, it's a question of do I have any energy whatsoever... So, it's a little bit of a luxury debate still from where I come from."

Lorenzo from Italy lamented the lack of education around energy production and nuclear energy in particular, decrying "the difficulties of communicating science to people." He was unhappy that the public had rejected nuclear energy for Italy in two referendums, when "it

could be a good answer to [the] energy [crisis] in Europe now," particularly with gas having such huge implications on climate change.

Alvaro from Spain lashed out at the "incredible profits" being made by energy companies out the current supply issues. "I do find it a bit problematic, for example, that everyone is asked to save energy, when there are some people in some organisations and some companies that are way more responsible for emissions than most of the world."

Angelos from Greece warned about the impact the energy crisis could have on financial systems, telling his group that "we have not seen how our financial systems can cope or cannot cope with a 10% energy decrease in a year. So, I'm really worried that if we have to cut our total energy consumption by 10% in a year that could cause extreme financial events."



What Should Be Done?

There was massive support for alternative sources of energy, particularly renewables, not just to mitigate the effects of climate change but to address the gas shortages and price increases caused by the Ukraine war. With such high stakes, Europeans were happy to allocate a portion of their speculative budget to this issue specifically. Lorenzo wanted to see “investments in energy, self-energy production” and was one of a handful of Europeans to back nuclear energy, alongside Italian Debora and Tomás from Portugal.

Milan from Slovakia “would try to distribute the money and invest it in companies, even buy them for the state or for the Union. Companies that would deal with waste management, with renewable sources.”

There was support for subsidised public transport to encourage a shift away from private car use. Lea backed moves to make public transport free in her country Germany but noted that this had brought criticism internally within the government about people taking advantage. Yet, she complained, nobody had criticised tax breaks benefitting car owners. “Our neoliberal

Minister of Finance was saying that if you make public transport free for everyone, then you have kind of this freeloader mentality. On the other hand, [despite] my tax money funding cars and company cars, I have never owned a car, I don't drive a car, so I feel like there is some discrepancy.”

Far more Europeans wanted to see an expansion of renewables, although the consensus was on carbon free. Whatever the source, the general feeling was that urgent action is required for future energy security. “In all this debate the answer is always ‘later’. ‘Later we will think, later we will see’,” Lorenzo argued, backed by Cameroonian Dave from our African focus group, who predicted the worst was yet to come. “We are about to experience difficult times if nothing is done. What is the solution? Because I assure you, currently, there are industries that are preparing to close ... There are industries that are trying to relocate. You will see that pressure... So, in my opinion, governments, young people and everyone should be much more interested in the energy issue now...”

COVID-19 and Public Health

Key Takeaways

1

The proximity and scale of COVID-19 pandemic shocked Europeans

2

Covid was one of several pandemics in Africa which have high fatalities

3

The economic effects of COVID keenly felt in Africa

4

Public health infrastructure in Africa needs to be improved

COVID-19, unprecedented?

The COVID-19 pandemic felt unprecedented to most European participants, while many African participants pointed out they had already felt very vulnerable to epidemics and endemic diseases. With the onset of the virus, Europeans saw their lives turned upside down, with the virus taking a profound toll. “It made us feel powerless, as powerless as they must feel in Ukraine with the war,” said Alba from Spain. Sibiu from Poland said that COVID had changed her perspective on life, acknowledging that before that “as a 23-year-old, I never had to face death and sickness” but that it became a reality for her after losing people she knew.

Many Europeans admitted to being surprised at the severity of pandemic, with Erik from Hungary acknowledging that initially he had perceived it as “far away in China.”

“I was semi-aware that a pandemic was coming, within the century,” said Tomás from Portugal “But definitely not too soon, and not this widespread.”

Simina, a Romanian living in Belgium, told a similar tale: “I didn’t envision what happened, I knew that there will be a health crisis, because if you look at global trends, you have to expect something like HIV, malaria... but not so big, I think, and not on the scale that it’s at.”

And the enormity was certainly felt. “In the town where I grew up, it was a slaughter,” said Jules from France.

Equally unforeseeable was the impact the pandemic would have on everyday life. Simina had been “amazed” to see empty supermarket shelves in Belgium. Even though she had expected a health crisis and potential supply problems, “I thought, we will figure out something and then I went into the supermarket, and there was just nothing. That’s something that has shocked me, even though I was aware that this could be a possibility. It was just until I saw it. It was like we’re living in the apocalypse, basically.”

For many Europeans, life came to a standstill, including plans for the immediate future. Lea from Germany described plans to take a trip around the world after graduating in 2020, which had to be cancelled. “[I couldn’t believe] that it’s actually possible that you have to stay at home, that you can’t go anywhere you want to...”

For many Africans, by contrast, it was not an unprecedented crisis. Many participants pointed out that their regions had been hit by other pandemics, some of them even worse. “Malaria kills thousands more people than this COVID crisis. There is cancer killing more people in the world,” said Hamid from Chad.

Aminetou from Mauritania pointed to malaria, and other “neglected tropical diseases” as more pressing issues, especially the challenge they posed in countries where not everybody had access to healthcare.

Though COVID did not emerge as a key health threat among Africans, its effect on economies and society did not go unnoticed. “COVID-19 really affected my country and a lot of things changed,” said Benita from Mali. “People couldn’t go to work, students couldn’t go to school, the whole country was in lockdown and we got used to staying indoors. It was hard to get food. Life was a bit hard for people on low incomes. We got addicted to the internet, people were bored, and young people were doing a lot of social media challenges just for fun. It was a disaster,” she said, adding that it had led to hunger, economic recession and a rise in the youth unemployment rate.

In some quarters, these effects were still felt. “COVID has impacted me before and after,” said Tapiwa from Malawi, adding that “COVID is gone, but the prices of goods and services, for example, fuel or cooking oil are going up.”



“ I didn’t envision what happened, I knew that there will be a health crisis, because if you look at global trends, you have to expect something like HIV, malaria... but not so big, I think, and not on the scale that it’s at

— Simina, Romania

Arthur from Cameroon said that “before the arrival of COVID, the economic situation was very good and stable” but this was no longer the case after the pandemic.

If anything, African participants said, the pandemic had highlighted Africa’s overreliance on imports to supply equipment such as masks. It also exposed the continent’s lacking healthcare infrastructure. Lauren from Nigeria said despite medical students graduating each year, health services were lacking on the ground. “You go to hospital and nobody is there.”

For Europeans, COVID-19 meant that for the first time they had to grapple with healthcare access issues that had become the norm for

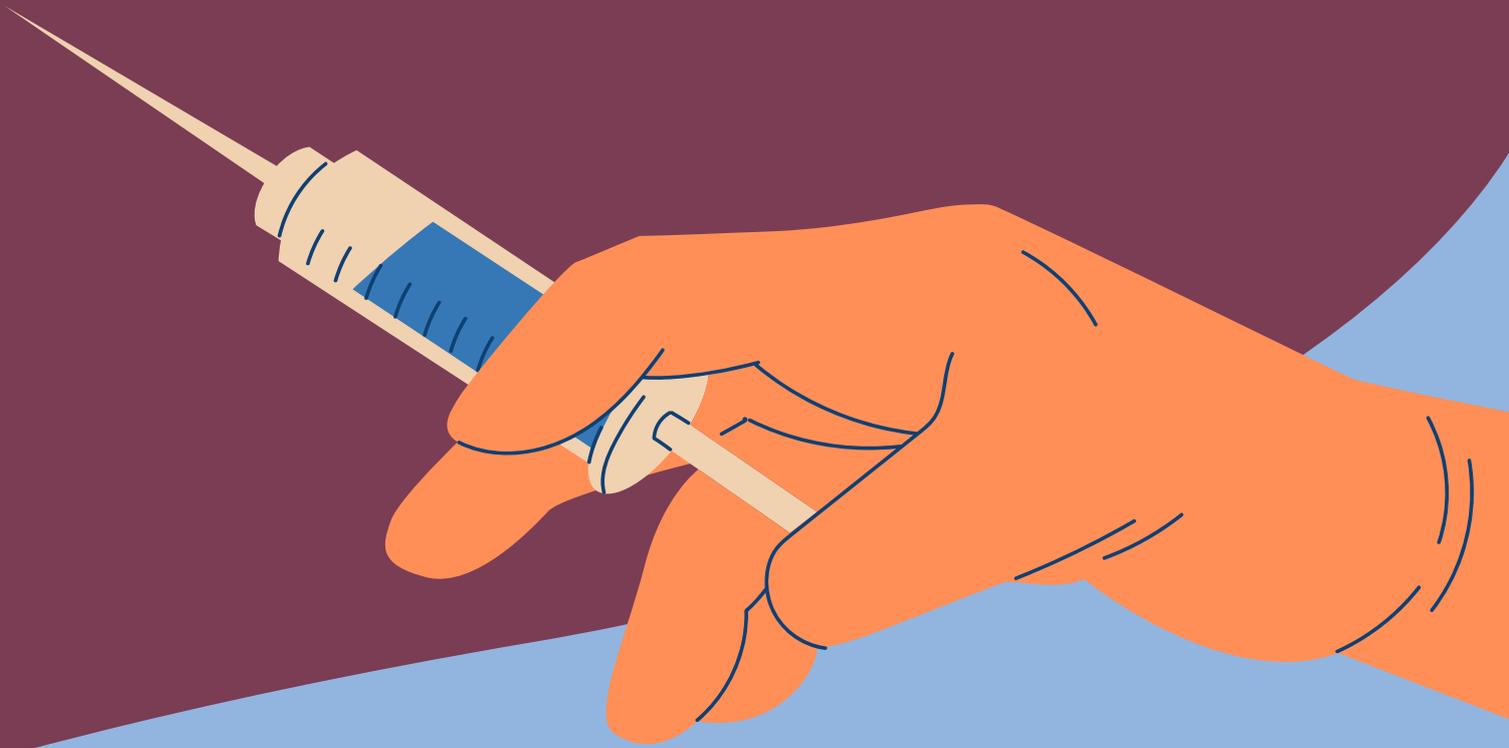
their African counterparts. Artjoms from Latvia said during the worst of the pandemic, it was difficult to call for an ambulance in an emergency. “I know about our medical situation in Latvia that even if you call the ambulance, there was a waiting period before they would arrive. If you’re older than sixty-five years, they would choose who to save first.”

“They would say ‘sorry, we won’t go to you. There are patients that we have more chances of saving because they’re just younger.’ It’s the twenty first century. We are going to Mars. In a couple of years, we will have self-driving cars... And I’m calling an ambulance and they say that they’re not going to come. That’s just changed my mind completely.”

“**COVID is gone, but the prices of goods and services, for example, fuel or cooking oil are going up**

— Tapiwa, Malawi





What Should Be Done?

There was a feeling on both continents that governments hadn't learned lessons from COVID and were still not prepared for future pandemics.

Some participants feared that people wrongly thought the pandemic was over and wanted more done to raise awareness that this was not the case. "The population is not taking this seriously," said Matt from Chad, "they think that COVID-19 is over."

Czech Tomáš was particularly concerned about the slow roll-out of the vaccine for monkeypox where he lived in Austria. "We can be lucky that there is already a vaccine. I mean if there was really the will to roll out these vaccines to make them available quickly and easily, it would be possible, but it's not the case. In Austria, where I live, there are 4,000 vaccine doses that are now available. That's half of the doses for Berlin. I mean, it's kind of ridiculous."

Aminetou thought more needed to be done to combat malaria and wanted donor nations to

keep their promises of funding to eradicate the disease. Aminetou stressed that "to eradicate malaria by 2030, the states that have committed themselves to funding these must be more committed and above all fulfil their obligations, their promises."

Africans wanted to see local production and distribution facilities for medical supplies since COVID had shown that supply chains can be disrupted by logistical issues.

There was also recognition of the need for greater access to healthcare in Africa from both groups of participants. Eleni from Greece criticised the distribution of vaccines during COVID, noting that "the US got three times their population number of vaccines as Africa and India." Eleni saw this as evidence of inequality entrenched in the economic and political system. "And I think that's the number one point that I wanted to make... the pandemic showed me that, yes indeed, the problem with the system is quite serious and we need to fix it one way or another, otherwise we're doomed."

Corruption, Disinformation, Democracy

Key Takeaways

1

People have little faith in politicians, Africans because they view them as corrupt and self-serving, Europeans because they're too focused on the short-term

2

Corruption, tribalism and nepotism is seen as widespread in African countries

3

Far-right extremism and populism are growing, linked to fake news

4

Democracy, human rights and civil liberties under threat

Governance issues and threats to democracy were a major problem for both Africans and Europeans with both conveying scepticism about their governments' ability to enact change. Africans were particularly worried about corruption while Europeans were resounding in their concern about online threats such as disinformation and cybersecurity. Several Europeans hit out at the short-termism of politicians. Michele from Italy explained, "when I say that short-termism is one of the challenges, [I mean], at the political level, you have mandates that last only a few years, three to four years. Basically, the goal is that politicians have an expiration date that is four years max." Elena, from Italy as well, agreed. "Politicians cannot think in the long term because they are re-elected in the short term," she said but conceded that though it was a problem for long-termism, "it's a good thing for politics." "If

politicians would not strive to be re-elected, you would say that there is a higher chance they give in to corruption."

Jakob from Germany suggested that political terms were too long and politicians, safe in their seats, sat on their laurels in between elections, with little accountability to the electorate. "You get comfortable, you get lazy, or you may not feel the pressure to act upon pressing issues," he said, "so this whole point is that, even though elections are, let's say, in four years, within those four years, apparently, I can rest upon the success."

Africans said nepotism and tribalism affected daily life and governance in their countries. Several participants said it was impossible to get a job without a connection and that citizens were still voting along tribal lines. Amina said this was

the norm in Kenyan politics. “They don’t look at the traits of a leader, they choose by tribe, which always ends up in bad governance.” Another Kenyan, Corad, said playing the “tribal card” appeals to a majority of people in the country.

“Our African leaders are corrupt, selfish, and less concerned about the citizens’ well-being,” said Joseph, from Nigeria.

She was supported by another Nigerian, Kelly, who accused African leaders of self-aggrandizement and mismanagement of aid funds, “insecurity, unemployment, lack of electricity, what have you, is caused by African leaders... they are more interested in themselves than citizens.”

As participants lobbied accusation after accusation, Corad asked the group if their leaders weren’t simply a reflection of their societies. “If we have corrupt leaders, if we have tribalistic leaders, isn’t that a reflection on who we are?”

Fake News

Erik from Hungary explained how fake news and conspiracy theories about vaccines have hampered efforts to combat COVID. “It was

quite evident that it can kill your grandma, it can kill your neighbour, it can kill even you. And then these anti-vaccination conspiracy theories and Bill Gates stories and everything we’re just distributing and spreading - it was so shocking to see.” He blamed disinformation for the low vaccination rate in some parts of Europe and noted that even now with people talking about the new wave and the importance of vaccination, “people are still spreading these misconceptions, which is terrible to see.”

Populism and Homegrown Terrorism

Both African and European participants raised concerns about the rise in populism and the far right and the threat of terrorism from extremists.

Hamid from Chad said his major concern was “the rise of populism everywhere. It started a bit in Europe, in the United States and around the world with the beautiful talk that is seducing young people.” He worried that the rise in populist rhetoric could only lead to one conclusion – terrorism. “And now terrorism too has evolved. It’s an asymmetrical war and so that’s why people will now choose other methods to thwart populism or thwart governments.”



“ People, I think, are losing trust in political leaders and scientists as well, because they put everyone in the same package

— Philippine, France



Corruption is the major problem because corruption gives birth to poverty, gives birth to insecurity

— Daniel, Nigeria



Philippine from France told her group that “we did not talk yet about the rise of far-right movements, and that’s something I’m very worried about because we’ve talked about terrorism, but it could come from far-right extremists, and this is something happening in France as well.”

João from Portugal argued that “the far right is growing because there’s a feeling that governments and the Union are not doing enough.” He also linked the rise in far-right extremism to the pandemic. “I mean, I think the pandemic was a very complicated trial for humanity as a whole,” João said. “At one point, there was clapping for healthcare workers, which was amazing, but at the same time, the anti-science movements grew and with them the far-right. So, I think society got a bit lost in the middle of the pandemic. I worry a lot with the far-right movements, right now, and the way they connect with anti-science.”

Eleni thought far-right radicalisation happened mainly among people from lower socio-economic groups who were not well educated, “but again from the Greek experience it’s not just them. It’s mostly when there is absolutely no representation available for you to

express yourself.” She argued that political representation was lacking and explained that “now that I live in the Netherlands, everything leans right-wing, there are absolutely no left-wing parties for people here. And that is also because there is no availability for left-wing parties to exist because there is a big amount of money involved to create a party.”

Picking up the discussion, Philippine agreed, adding that “everything you said basically made me think of another thing that worries me, which would be the lack of anticipation of our political leaders. Everything is short term. And I feel like this is linked to what you’ve just said, Eleni. It’s all about the representation crisis, which is also linked to the trust crisis in political leaders because you do not feel represented.”

Philippine flagged another related problem. “People, I think, are losing trust in political leaders and scientists as well, because they put everyone in the same package,” and that this lack of representation led people to go “in that extreme part of the political landscape. But also, the bourgeoisie [are drawn to extremism] because they feel threatened by losing their privileges.”

Corruption

Corruption was the issue that came up time and again in the African focus groups, vying with insecurity and poverty as the main concerns. When asked about the biggest threat facing them personally, English-speaking Africans in particular, cited corruption and insecurity more than any other issues.

Crucially, African participants recognised that corruption is linked to other major problems affecting their countries. Daniel from Nigeria explained that “corruption is the major problem because corruption gives birth to poverty, gives birth to insecurity. So, I think when I say every one of these other issues - security and poverty - is actually a bit of corruption.”

And he did not see this as only an issue in his own country, but worldwide. “The root cause of most of the problems found in the world is corruption,” he went on. “Poverty is the order of the day, because of corruption,” Jazzy from Nigeria agreed.

Africans were scathing about corrupt leaders siphoning off the country’s wealth, for their own ends and leaving people destitute. “They don’t give a f**k about what happens to us,” Joseph from Nigeria said, noting that politicians were failing to take the lived realities of citizens seriously, resulting in what he described as an “almost feudal economy.”

Inequality and Poverty

Inequality between the Global North and South and the have and have-nots in society came up more among Europeans, conscious of their privileged position in the world, than Africans. When Africans broached the subject, they often made a link between inequality and lingering effects of colonialism.

Many Europeans saw inequality as both the cause and exacerbating factor in the main global risks. As Eleni from Greece noted

“economic disparities are one of the major problems in the world right now.” Alvaro from Spain agreed, saying “I basically agree, I mean the structures that we have in place both politically and economically are, I think, in some ways, reinforcing all these elements.” Jayden from Nigeria criticised colonialism and the ongoing effects it had on Africa, blaming it for the conflicts and inequality on the continent. He noted that some former French colonies still paid fees to France.

Another Nigerian, Helen, attacked the greed of companies providing arms to African conflicts and extracting resources, “most raw materials in the world are collected from Africa.”

European participants noted the state of global inequality and their relative privilege compared to other regions. Many criticised the selfishness they saw as prevalent in society. “For me it comes down to a crisis of empathy,” said Julia from Germany, “we have a real lack of compassion for people in other countries and other regions of the world, and that makes me really concerned moving forward about any challenge that we’re facing globally, about any type of threat or risk, because we don’t have that capacity [to understand] anymore.”

Gea from Slovenia reiterated Julia’s point, “I think it’s that horrible we don’t even have empathy for people that we actually do know.”

But it was not only Europeans that decried this selfishness. “It’s everybody for themselves,” complained Aminetou from Mauritania.

Civil Liberties

Imtinen, from Tunisia, was concerned about the rollback of civil liberties, mainly linked to controls that governments had brought in to manage the COVID-19 crisis. “Political rights were flouted and in any case the excuse of COVID was often used, even if that is understandable. But suddenly we no longer know where to draw the

line in trusting the people who govern us. Did they ban a demonstration because it's really in relation to COVID or is it because, I have the impression, that we are still in a permanent state of emergency?" Imtinen said this was not only an issue in France and Tunisia, "it's a dynamic that can be observed in many countries, whether in Europe, in Africa, even in Asia."

Philippine from France too noted that "some threats can be invisible in the way that, for instance, the state of emergency is not something that's very tangible but it's also something that scares me because it's supposed to be exceptional. Yet it's lasting in time. So, what can you do against it? Basically, it's not very clear."

What Should Be Done?

Alternative Democracy

Participants from Europe were eager to explore alternatives to their current governance structures to give the public more say on the issues that were affecting them. Forms of direct democracy were particularly popular.

Julia from Germany highlighted the Conference on the Future of Europe, a citizen-led series of debates that allowed people from across Europe to share their ideas, as a successful model. "It was a really good and innovative initiative to have direct citizen impact on specific challenges," she said. "I think that's amazing to have more direct democracy on issues that are pressing." She urged policy-makers everywhere to consider "these alternative ways of getting citizen input and also making those voices count on issues that concern them most."

Philippine welcomed a rise in local activism which she put down to a lack of trust in national politicians. "I'm not sure if it's true for all countries in Europe, but at least in France there's a rise in the number of people who are in volunteering and associations, and I think that's very good... it means that people want to take action in the political landscape, but they do not have this base, maybe, or they do not trust their leaders, so they take action at their level in their cities," she said.

Many of the proposed remedies by European participants sought to address short-termism, or what they perceived to be a single-minded focus, by politicians, on the next election. Zsofia from Hungary highlighted the role of local organisations in combatting it. "To be able to think not in just four-year terms or your lifetime term but longer than that, you need local organisations who speak the language, who people know, who are there," she said.

Michele from Italy added "we have challenges that are so much bigger than us. You can't really solve them in a four-year span, and you need to plan fifty years ahead. It's just that nobody has the incentive to do so, because you are not going to be in charge for fifty years as a politician." Jakob from Germany just wanted politicians to be accountable to their electorates, no matter their term in office, "accountability should be taking place stronger and throughout the whole time."

There were other ideas too. Czech Tomáš painted the picture of his ideal federalised world as one with "no elites" playing at democracy. He suggested "Ancient Greek methods; like we are not actually voting for someone we know, we are just trying to build a Parliament out of pre-selected castes of the world's population" to prevent corruption because these representatives, who can't be re-elected, wouldn't be susceptible to bribes.

Crackdown on Corruption

Africans wanted strong measures against corruption. In fact, when crafting solutions for Africa, such as development aid, they suggested IFIs by-pass their governments completely and deal directly with local community groups or even run the projects themselves.

Benita from Mali said they “should not give the funds to the governments because they would misuse the funds. Instead, they should go to the grassroots, go to the community, the particular countries that would like to develop, do it themselves.” Shannon from Nigeria had a similar message. “African countries get these funds and don’t spend them properly.”

Helen from South Africa suggested IFIs set up committees to monitor the funds and check whether the money had been spent for the intended purpose.

Some Africans suggested that politicians should be compelled to use the same public services as citizens. “Let their children go to school here in Nigeria, let them use public health care, don’t give them privileges to access their own private facilities ... they should be able to use the same things as we do,” said Joseph, arguing that if these “privileges” were removed and officials experienced the same problems as ordinary Nigerians, they would do something about them.

Education

Education was seen as key to tackling the spread of far-right extremism particularly if people were taught how to use the internet and recognise fake news. Sibiu from Poland wanted to see funding for education to stop the propagation of false information. “I feel like at the end of the day, we need to tackle the problem from the root, from the base. That means that no matter how much money we invest in technology and everything else, if we don’t start educating

people on the long-term effects of us not doing anything about it, then we’re going to continue having this problem for the rest of our lives.”

Jayden called for former French colonies to stop paying France so that the money could be spent elsewhere. He also wanted to see European countries pay reparations to their former colonies, for the stolen artifacts and the slave trade. “If they could pay for what they did, those monies could be channelled to something else. I mean to help build the continent and make it brighter,” he said.

While German Julia didn’t know the reasons behind the lack of empathy and selfishness in society, she was sure of the consequences, “if we don’t have that capacity for empathy for walking in somebody else’s shoes, we will not be able to act on any of these challenges effectively.”



Food Security

Key Takeaways

1

Food insecurity a major problem in Africa, but not a key concern for Europeans

2

Ukraine war worsened food insecurity and highlighted Africa's dependency on food imports

3

Africans question why a continent with so much land is unable to feed itself and want to see an end to dependency

Perhaps the most striking differences between the continents could be seen on food security. While this issue was not keeping Europeans awake at night, it was cited as a major threat by most African participants, whether French- or English-speaking. William from Ivory Coast said that “people are struggling to feed themselves,” laying the blame on a government that “doesn’t spend a lot on food security.” Lauren from Nigeria noted that “prices of food are increasing like crazy.”

“With global food prices spiking, and supplies of wheat, oils and other items disrupted due to the Ukraine war, Nigeria faces a number of threats to its already precarious food security,” said David from Nigeria. “Since over 50% of the foods consumed by Nigerian households comes from purchased sources, food price inflation threatens to place many people in a worsening food insecurity situation.”

Dependence on Imports

Some Africans questioned how it was possible that their countries had so much land and natural resources but could not feed their populations. Younous from Chad contrasted the “vast” amount of agricultural land in his country with the country’s reliance on imports, pointing out that “we have 70% of our population living off agriculture, but we can’t manage to feed ourselves properly without imports.” While the Ukrainian crisis had highlighted the problem with wheat or flour, Chad is also dependent on rice imports from Asia.

Similarly, Dave from Cameroon said that “in Africa, particularly in Central Africa, eating habits have changed drastically over the past 30 years compared to our parents or grandparents. We were addicted to a highly imported product: wheat.”

Amira from Algeria also observed that over recent decades food had “changed a lot and it has been much more converted towards everything that is fast food, junk food” because people were busy working, leaving their homes early. “There’s no time for good food and when there isn’t, food security matters,” she said, showing her concern about the potential for chronic non-communicable diseases due to poor diet.

Though less affected, Europeans were concerned about food security issues elsewhere in the world. Polish Joanna made the link between the Ukraine war and a potential hunger crisis in Africa. “Russian and Ukrainian crops are increasingly important for preventing famine

in developing countries, including Africa, so it’s not only about Europe. As their food crisis deepens, the threat of another refugee influx is also growing,” she said.

Several participants across the African and European focus groups pointed out that the Ukraine war had starkly shown that Africa is not self-sufficient in terms of the supply of key food commodities. “A single country that manages to feed an entire continent was really a utopia. Now, the Ukrainian crisis has allowed our leaders to realize that it depended on them, on one man, on one nation, and this seriously affects food security in our countries,” Younous from Chad said.

“**Russian and Ukrainian crops are increasingly important for preventing famine in developing countries, including Africa, so it’s not only about Europe. As their food crisis deepens, the threat of another refugee influx is also growing**

— **Joanna, Poland**



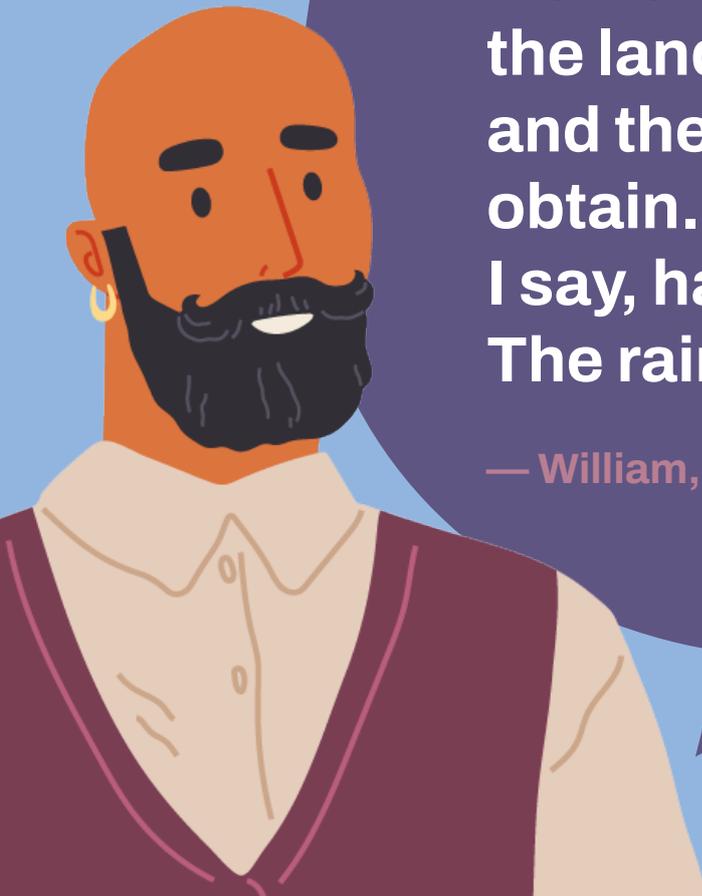
David, who also placed the blame for Nigeria's food security woes on its reliance on wheat imports, saw a potential silver lining, "Nigeria's capacity to produce other key items, in particular, fertilizer and natural gas, may allow it to take advantage of global market disruptions from the crisis."

Climate and food security

The Ukraine war was not the only factor contributing to food insecurity. The implications of climate on global food supplies were not lost on some Africans and Europeans. William from Ivory Coast said "this has always been my concern and I was very worried because in my village, the women were complaining that

the land was difficult to cultivate and the food was also difficult to obtain. Because climate change, I say, has affected conditions. The rain does not fall."

Milan from Slovakia raised similar concerns, asking "what's going to happen when we run out of land? That's a problem for our generation, because eventually we're going to probably be the first ones to experience empty shops again and then there might be a problem, because the ground, the soil, the water, it might be too polluted to grow anything. So, the only possible solution would be to move to, I don't know, Siberia, or Greenland, or Canada, or, you know, somewhere with a fresh soil."



“ This has always been my concern and I was very worried because in my village, the women were complaining that the land was difficult to cultivate and the food was also difficult to obtain. Because climate change, I say, has affected conditions. The rain does not fall

— William, Ivory Coast

What Should Be Done?

As interventions against climate and food insecurity, a portion of the fictitious security budget was allocated towards funding more sustainable ways of food production by both Europeans and Africans.

Philippine from France said she “would end conventional agriculture and focus on the development of agro-ecology.”

Dave questioned why in Cameroon, “a country that is rich, sufficiently rich in arable land” with over two million plots of arable land and five agricultural areas, “capable of producing all kinds of products, farms, fields and everything ... we still find ourselves with more than half of the population languishing in food insecurity.” He called for a shift from food dependence to local products made in Cameroon.

Younous from Chad called for help to correct structural issues with the continent’s food systems and policies to ensure self-sufficiency and a departure from dependence on foreign imports.

“According to the statistics, at the world level, more than 70 to 80% of our populations are peasants, that is to say farmers, with an area of

more than 40 million hectares... we have a fairly large area, such a large and varied workforce. But in my opinion, it is the technique that is lacking,” he said, and that Africa needed someone to reorganise its agricultural systems so that it did not again reach a state of dependency on other regions.

Joseph from the Democratic Republic of Congo called for “international solidarity” to help provide the right seeds, equipment and knowledge to allow this shift to self-sufficiency. “In fact, the land is there. The places are there for sure, but some don’t have access to machines. Some don’t have that much seed because at some point, there are seeds that are not suited to the soil. And in developed countries, there are mechanisms in place to remedy this. But in some countries, like the case of the DRC, in some areas, there’s a problem of food dependency when we have all the necessary assets. We have all the necessary resources to develop agriculture and even provide food to several countries in the region.”

Where Do International Organisations Come In?

Key Takeaways

1

European Union seen as having real power, other organisations talking shops

2

Tight controls are needed on funding given to Africa to prevent fraud and corruption

3

Aid should come without high interest rates and strings free

4

Deal with local groups not governments

To respond to the challenges facing the world today, both Africans and Europeans looked to international organisations rather than national governments, but for different reasons.

Africans had no faith in governments they saw as corrupt and inefficient, whereas for Europeans the challenges, particularly climate change, were global and not likely to be fixed at the national level. International organisations by contrast could act globally and in the long-term. Anne from the Netherlands argued that “the big changes need to come from the big players,” adding: “When the Paris climate agreement came about, it did show that if we really want to do something, we can altogether.”

Nevertheless, many Europeans were sceptical about the ability of some international organisations, particularly the United Nations, to act rather than being just talking shops. Latvian Artjoms summed up a common feeling about international organisations stating, “for me, the United Nations and the Red Cross and the other ones are completely useless. They have shown that they can do absolutely

nothing at all,” particularly when it came to COVID. This prompted a clarification off Milan from Slovakia that international organisations “are mostly not useless, but powerless in many situations.”

David from Germany commented that “international organisations are only as strong as the countries supporting them,” continuing that “international cooperation took a huge blow with Russia attacking Ukraine.” He was not the only participant to point out that Russia was able to block UN action on the crisis it had caused by attacking Ukraine because it is a permanent member of the Security Council.

The EU’s response to the Ukraine war drew praise by comparison. “I’m really happy the way Europe has approached the conflict. I think we have done as much as we could. We can, of course, do more, but I really like how we came together, and I felt affected by the conflict. I didn’t expect the response of our region to be so proactive when you think about the fact that Ukraine is not a part of [the European Union],” Romanian Simina said.

Sibu from Poland said that “from a development perspective, the larger organisations don’t really have that much power, that much impact we think they have ... it all comes down to bureaucracy and so you can talk, talk, talk but at the end of the day there won’t be a lot of action.” Comparing the 60% of the UN budget that she believed was wasted on administration to the low running costs of local grassroots organisations, Sibu said that “grassroots organisations understand issues better and can make better change.”

But Myriam of France countered that “there’s a difference between these two types of organisations which is that grassroots organisations are rather treating the consequences, whereas international organisations, like the United Nations, should be treating the actual causes, and that’s what they are failing at doing.”

EU Best Placed

Participants were more positive about the European Union, pointing out that it has real legal powers rather than being a talking shop. Francisco from Italy argued that the EU was best placed to act to make the world a safer place because “it’s the one that has the most experience with international negotiations and decision-making at the international level.”

Another Italian Sara Maria stressed that the UN only had soft powers, adding that “I really believe that some international organisations, like the European Union, can do something through hard law, which can either be in the treaties or in the directives and regulations.”

Others were more critical of the EU. João from Portugal hit out at the European Commission and member states for not implementing policies. He said that “the Commission publishes these Green Papers, for example, on aging, on the environment and whatnot, but at the end of the day, you don’t see it being implemented or you see 10% of it being implemented.”

“**When the Paris climate agreement came about, it did show that if we really want to do something, we can altogether**

— Anne, The Netherlands



Aid Criticised

Not living in the European Union, Africans saw the bloc with a different, sometimes more critical eye, than European participants. They were particularly disapproving of the way ‘aid’ was offered by international organisations.

Ayoub from Morocco was one of several Africans to complain about the terms under which funding was often given to developing countries, saying that most of the time “we can only borrow the money with interest,” which created debt and dependency.

Moreover, as Ayoub noted, the IFIs often impose restrictive conditions on the recipient, such as forcing them to privatise a sector, a move he felt was unsustainable for the countries involved. He compared loans unfavourably with the no-strings aid that the United Nations offered to projects designed to help meet the global 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “without the risk that the loan becomes a considerable public debt.”

Ayoub said that “after COVID Morocco had maintained a huge public debt” but did not have an exchangeable currency, and so was unable to trade its way out of the crisis.

Jayden from Nigeria similarly complained that “a lot of people tend to give out loans with very stringent rules on how to get back these loans” warning that this could lead to economic crisis in those countries., “When you take up a lot of loans, you tend to be in debt to the person, and you tend to dance to the tune of whatsoever,” he said.



What Do Young People Want International Institutions to Do?

Given participants' low trust in national governments, there was considerable backing for a more global action rather than individual countries going at it alone. There was also a feeling that in a connected world countries should act together.

Alvaro from Spain argued that there was a need "to try to understand that what happens in the Philippines is related to what happens in Spain and what happens in Africa," which called for coordination in the way issues were addressed. "Just put the example of tax. It doesn't really matter if you change the tax system in one

country because companies can move to a different one. You need to coordinate globally on putting a threshold on taxes, so that companies are unable to avoid them or something like that. The same thing applies with climate change or other things."

Milan from Slovakia said that "in the end, ultimately, I believe that if we all come together, we can solve any disaster."

Sibu from Poland thought international organisations "should push governments to take action."



The flow of investments that comes to us from Europe to Africa, the minimum or half must stay in Africa, because the European Union finances European companies that are going to do things in Africa, so tell yourself that you give there, and you take back there

— Hamid, Chad



European Unity

Several Europeans wanted to see the EU speak with one voice on foreign policy, though most were already quite positive about the capacity of the bloc to act domestically given its law-making powers.

However, Fabienne from Germany pointed out that the EU had 27 member states, “each one of them kind has to agree to do something, and it’s going to be different opinions.”

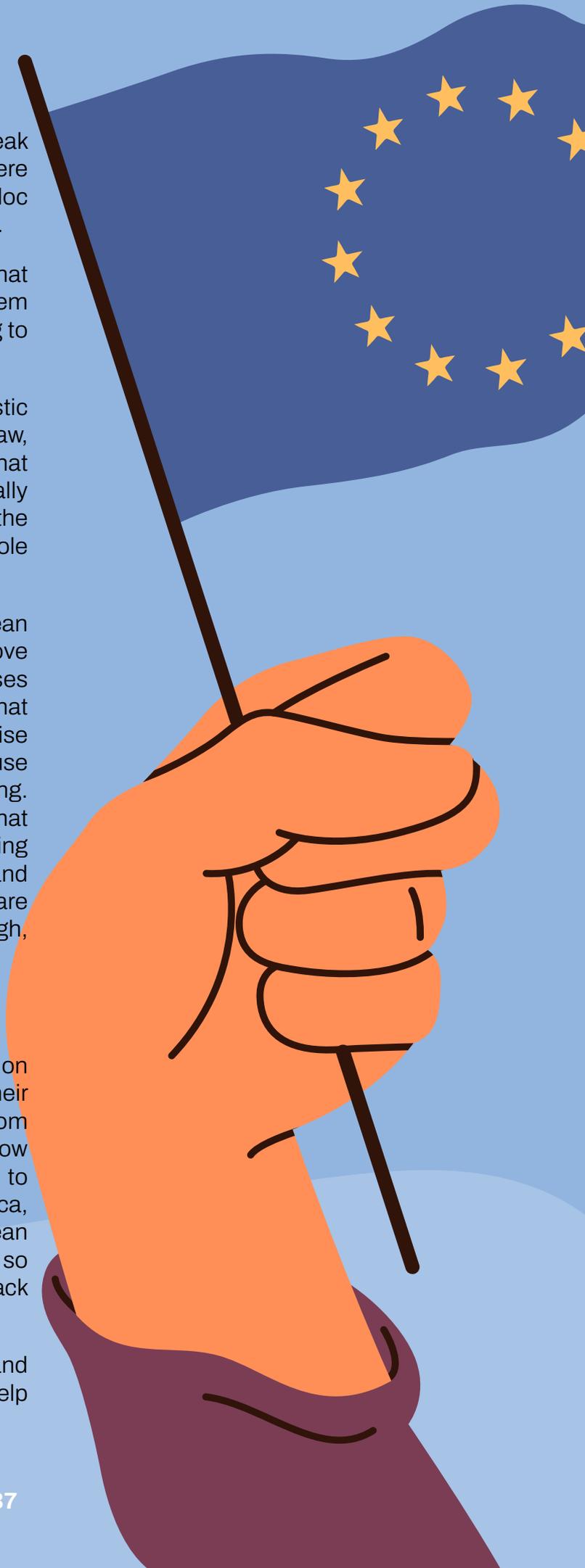
Sara Maria from Italy suggested a “holistic approach,” using both soft powers and hard law, “you cannot just tackle one problem, and think that it is done, because, of course, everything is really interconnected. So, my short answer is, tackle the problem through hard law and looking at the whole picture.”

João from Portugal wanted the European Commission and member states to improve implementation of EU laws and follow up promises with action. “I think we need to change the way that we follow through with the things that we promise and the things that we think we should do, because I mean implementing 10% of something is nothing. And there’s an urgency right now with the way that things are going. I think the far-right also is growing because there’s a feeling that the governments and the Union are not doing enough. I know they are trying to do as much as they can but it’s not enough, it really isn’t,” João said.

Change Aid

After complaining about the European Union or others coming into Africa and helping their own companies to make money, Hamid from Chad called for change to the system, “the flow of investments that comes to us from Europe to Africa, the minimum or half must stay in Africa, because the European Union finances European companies that are going to do things in Africa, so tell yourself that you give there, and you take back there.”

Hamid wanted the EU and others to reorganise and review this kind of ‘aid’ and instead provide “help that will help us to do without help.”



Tatiana from Benin suggested reconsidering the definition of 'aid'. She argued that the way aid is given now does more harm than good in the long term as to repay the debt governments have to put up taxes which creates even more debt through a "crescendo effect."

Prevent Corruption

The number one recommendation from African participants to IFIs looking to fund projects in their countries was to combat fraud and corruption through proper controls. They stressed that IFIs should check that the money actually got where it was supposed to and that projects were carried out correctly.

"There needs to be some follow-up," said Tatiana from Benin, after noting that a funding agency might give €10 million for a project but in reality only €6 million is spent on the ground. "Funds must be spent properly," she insisted.

Overwhelmingly the advice was not to hand over funding directly to government bodies in Africa but for IFIs to manage the projects themselves on the ground. Thuy from Nigeria said that "they should stop funding the African governments, and then maybe come to Africa themselves."

Capacity Building and Education

Linked to their concerns about corrupt local and national officials using project funding to line their own pockets, Africans felt that international institutions should work on capacity building and education as a tool to overcome corruption and misuse of funds.

Many of the African participants wanted to see IFI funding used to push countries towards democracy, equality and respect for human rights. Daniel suggested that international organisations should press Nigeria on democracy and to hold "free and fair elections."

Both Africans and Europeans wanted to see more funding for education. Africans wanted this education both to increase awareness

about issues such as climate change and for capacity building so that people would gain the know-how to tackle the problems facing them now and in the future.

Joseph from the DRC said education should raise awareness of environmental issues such as climate change. "We should educate children from a young age how to protect nature, protect trees," he said.

João from Portugal was among the Europeans who saw education as critical to solving the world's current and future problems, answering the billion-euro question with "I would invest in education, just that I think that's the best way to solve a new global risk that we can think of."

Lea from Germany too would spend her billion on education, "creating multipliers and hoping that passes on and educating future generations [through] the current generation."

Mark from Ireland wanted to fund the non-profit sector and "education through non-profits" while Michele from Italy would fund "public education starting from early childhood education and heading towards a very good technical education in the upper grades."

Consult Local Groups

Whatever projects they wanted to see funded, most participants on both continents were adamant about the need to work hand in hand with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as the best way to deliver results. They saw these organisations as being more aware of local needs and how best to help the community.

Mistrust for politicians and officials in Africa meant that they did not want IFIs to consult either local or national governments on the projects that need funding but rather to speak to the people directly through grassroots organisations. They wanted local people to be consulted rather than having projects imposed on them. Tatiana from Benin said that IFIs

should “ensure that the projects have a concrete impact in the community” before funding them.

Africans overall had a higher level of trust in ultra-local community institutions, such as churches, and wanted to see IFIs working with groups at that level.

A similar suggestion was made by many Europeans, including Joanna from Poland, who, having been involved in providing humanitarian aid for Ukraine, reiterated the value of working with organisations that were already on the ground. “What we didn’t know was how to pass it on, how to not waste the money, because it was a huge amount, and we wanted it to be used very well. So, what we did, we reached out to the organisation that was closely working within that particular community because they do understand the problems that the community is facing,” she said.

Joanna also underlined that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work when it comes to delivering aid in very different countries and situations, telling the focus group “from my perspective, the growing number of crises is also boosting deglobalization in terms of responses. We cannot look at the problem from one perspective, because it does not apply in every case. Humanitarian problems perhaps in Ukraine are completely different compared to Afghanistan, and their response should be different.”

Joseph from the Democratic Republic of Congo echoed a similar point, saying that the IFIs should use local, specialised NGOs for environmental protection projects because by an approach of “copy and paste, there is something that can work in Mauritania, but it can’t work in the DRC because we don’t have the same context.”

Philippine from France wanted civil society to play a greater role in the UN, pointing as an example to the International Union for Conservation of Nature which was “integrating civil society, even indigenous people in the voting of their motions. I think that if the UN did that in their general assembly, maybe there will be hope because I feel like there are much more synergies within associations, for instance, all around the world, than with governments who are really in a tragic mindset of a fight for resources, fight for power, soft power and that kind of stuff.”

Both groups of participants agreed focus groups like the one they were in were a good way to consult people on the ground and pass ideas on to government.

Conclusions

Young people from both Africa and Europe are very concerned about the future in a world threatened by climate change and conflict, and not just the Ukraine war.

While Europeans viewed climate change as their main concern, for Africans, it was among many other major threats, such as food insecurity. Both camps admitted to a lack of urgency on climate, attributing it to apathy among ordinary people and lack of foresight on the part of their leaders. English-speaking Africans cited more immediate threats such as corruption, violence, and crime, with Nigerian participants, in particular, describing feeling unsafe as a daily reality. They shared with their fellow Africans concerns about the price and availability of food, exacerbated in some cases, by severe weather events and unyielding agricultural lands. Among Europeans, awareness of food insecurity in the developing world elicited concerns about famine and migration. Many among them acknowledged their relative privilege and placed the blame for many of the prevalent international threats on global inequality.

Similarly, two of the biggest recent global events, the COVID pandemic and Ukraine war, affected both continents differently. Overwhelmingly, Europeans reported feeling shock at the impact of the pandemic on daily life, whether the emptying of stores and shut down of critical healthcare services or the extent of fatalities that occurred. In contrast, Africans responded to it as a health crisis among many others to have hit the continent and viewed it as not even among the most devastating. Prior to COVID and after, Africa's healthcare systems had proven inadequate. African participants wanted to see local production and distribution facilities for medical supplies to create autonomy and better preparedness for future pandemics.

Both Europeans and Africans shared terror as a threat, whether in their immediate realities or futures. The Ukraine war, which had caught many Europeans unawares, had added to the despair and loss of COVID, resulting in psychological effects many participants admitted to. With the conflict so near, continental alliances (EU/NATO) either added to or alleviated the sense of threat. In the aftermath of COVID and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many Europeans felt an increase in populism and right-wing extremists. With disinformation and cyber-attacks as a weapon, terrorism had become a real concern.

Africans were already grappling with the consequences of extremism. In particular, Nigerian participants recounted their country's kidnapping problem and the terror wrought by groups such as Boko Haram. Cameroonians spoke about the conflict between English- and French-speaking people in their country. When probed on Ukraine, one Nigerian participant dismissed it as "Europe's war."

Though the threat posed by the Ukraine war was not equally felt, its impact on the price and availability of commodities was felt by all. Energy prices shot up across Europe, with many regions facing energy shortages and the real risk of power cuts. In Africa, the supply of commodities such as oil, fertilizer and wheat came to a halt, leading to food price inflation and the threat of hunger. With Africans already energy insecure, they joined their European counterparts in calling for alternative sources of energy, particularly renewables.

European and African focus groups expressed low levels of trust in governments to address these challenges effectively. For Africans, corruption and mismanagement of aid funds was a concern, while Europeans perceived

national governments as bad at long-term planning. Given the global nature of the challenges, participants felt that international institutions would be more effective at coordinating a response.

Europeans worried that international organisations could be ineffective “talking shops” and wanted to see them empowered to enact real change. African participants, on the other hand, wanted them to focus on capacity building and education at a grassroots level, having a higher level of trust in ultra-local community institutions than governments.

Africans emphasised funding to tackle corruption and joined Europeans in wanting education and capacity building prioritised. All interventions by interested groups should be done in partnership with community groups to tailor solutions to local realities.

A stylized illustration of a brown hand holding a large pink circle. Inside the pink circle, the words "NO WAR" are written in a bold, dark blue, hand-drawn font. The background consists of light blue wavy shapes.

NO WAR

About Debating Europe & Debating Africa

The platforms that let you discuss YOUR ideas with leaders.

We want to encourage a genuine conversation between politicians and the citizens they serve – and that means taking YOUR questions, comments and ideas directly to policymakers for them to respond.

[Debating Europe](#) was launched in 2011, and has taken a bottom-up approach from the beginning, with citizens very much in the driving seat of the debate, asking the questions they want answered and putting forward their opinions for politicians and thought-leaders from across the EU to react to.

Since launch, we've interviewed more than 3,000 policymakers and experts from across the political spectrum. Each has agreed to answer some of the 200,000 comments sent in to us from citizens online, including from over 271,000 followers on Facebook and Twitter.

In 2021, we launched [Debating Africa](#), adopting the same approach and encouraging a pan-African debate on shared challenges such as climate change, security, trade and development. We believe international challenges require international dialogue, which is why both Debating Europe and Debating Africa frequently co-operate on joint projects to bring voices from both continents to the table with politicians and experts.



Debating Europe is an initiative of Friends of Europe, the Brussels-based think tank for a more sustainable, inclusive and forward-looking Europe.

Debating Africa's work is rooted within the Africa-Europe Foundation, established by Friends of Europe, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, in partnership with the African Climate Foundation and ONE Campaign, to empower a narrative shift about the relations between Africa and Europe.

