



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs

# Conference on the Future of Europe National Report of Ireland

July 2022





## Foreword by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney T.D.



The Conference on the Future of Europe has been an exciting departure for the European Union in the area of participative democracy and one in which Irish citizens participated actively.

Since 2020, when this open and inclusive reflection on Europe's future was originally conceived, the European Union has been uniquely tested. The EU has shown itself capable of extraordinary things. It has met the challenges posed by, amongst other things, the UK's departure from the EU, the COVID-19 pandemic and, most recently, Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine. It is important that we now take stock and consider how we can best prepare our Union to continue to meet the needs of its citizens.

I thank participants across Ireland for the open and lively conversations about Europe's future that the Conference has facilitated. I thank them particularly for their enthusiasm and insight. This is no surprise. Since Ireland joined the EU almost 50 years ago this year, Ireland's citizens have embraced all of the possibilities of our EU membership.

This report and the Conference's overall final report reflect many worthwhile ideas to help ensure the EU is well-positioned to meet the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities of the years ahead.

The EU institutions have begun the process of bringing these recommendations forward. Ireland is ready and willing to play its part.

Simon Coveney, T.D.,

Minister for Foreign Affairs

July 2022





## Foreword by the Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne T.D.

It has been my great pleasure over the past year to head up the Government's participation in the Conference on the Future of Europe, launched just one year ago in Strasbourg on 9 May 2021.

Ireland has a really strong tradition of citizen engagement. Indeed, our experience of Citizens' Assemblies and their pioneering role in advocating on such important social issues as Marriage Equality and Women's Rights can be cited as an inspiration for the Conference and Europe's own attempts to promote greater citizen engagement.

The Conference truly can be regarded as an innovation. The European Union had never attempted before such a large-scale exercise in participative democracy. Citizens engaged across all of Europe, with over 6,600 events held under the auspices of the Conference during the past year.

Just how vital this exercise has been is evident when we consider the degree of change on our continent over the past two years. Conceived and planned prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference has provided citizens across Europe with the opportunity to set out their concerns and hopes for the future of the European Union during a period of unprecedented and historic change.

Through this turbulent period, where we have sought to deal with the continuing challenges thrown up by the financial and migration crises, the UK's departure from the EU, the pandemic and now the unbelievable horrors and threats posed by Russia's completely unjustified aggression against Ukraine, the central role of the European Union in helping us to respond effectively to these crises has never been clearer.

This is also the message which has come through to me through the consultations, both virtual and in person, which I had the pleasure of undertaking over the course of the past year, both here in Ireland and also while visiting other EU Member States.

It is not just the EU's role in procuring life-saving vaccines or leading post-pandemic economic recovery which has been recognised and welcomed by citizens but just as importantly upholding and safeguarding those fundamental values and freedoms which underlie our Union.

Citizens, both here in Ireland and across Europe, have really engaged with the Conference. It is clear that citizens both want to be better informed about those decisions which impact all our lives and to be consulted and more systematically involved in shaping the future of our Continent.





I want to express my thanks and genuine appreciation to all those citizens who so freely gave of their time to take part in Conference events and whom I had the pleasure of meeting either virtually or in person, including the sixteen Irish citizens who participated in the four EU-wide Citizens' Panels. These Panels have been a real innovation and have produced an impressive and wide-ranging body of recommendations for all of the European institutions to now consider.

As Minister for European Affairs, I can state that Ireland, as a Council member, is absolutely committed to examining all the citizens' recommendations as a priority in the coming months, in order to determine how we can best go about implementing them and meeting the expectations of all those who took part in the Conference.

I believe there is now a real opportunity to re-shape Europe and fashion a better, more citizen-centred Union. Ireland will now work closely and constructively with all our Partners and with the other Institutions to ensure this opportunity is not spurned but rather realised.

In conclusion, I want to thank all those who worked to make the Conference in Ireland a success, and not least our Partners in European Movement Ireland who collaborated so closely and effectively with us in reaching out to all sectors of opinion on this island, notwithstanding the challenges posed by pandemic restrictions.

The journey to strengthen participative democracy within our Union over the past year has been a deeply rich and rewarding one and I look forward to continuing it.

Thomas Byrne, T.D.,

Minister for State for European Affairs

July 2022





## Introduction

An initiative of French President Macron and taken up by EU Commission President von der Leyen, the Conference on the Future of Europe represents an important initiative intended to promote greater citizen involvement and interest in the Union and its future direction.

Originally proposed in late 2019 and subsequently delayed owing to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference was finally launched on Europe Day (9 May 2021). A Joint Declaration governing the organisation of the Conference was agreed and signed by the three Presidents of the European Commission, European Parliament, and the Council.

The Joint Declaration set out the scope, structure, objectives and principles of the Conference. It set the scene for citizen-led events, to be co-organised with civil society and stakeholders at all levels, national and regional parliaments, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, social partners and academia throughout the European Union.

The Joint Declaration provided for the establishment of a Conference Plenary to debate recommendations from national and European citizens' panels. Ireland had 14 Members of the plenary and was represented in the Commission, Parliament, Council, Citizens, National Parliaments, Regions and Social Partners components. In terms of overall governance, the Joint Declaration also provided for an Executive Board, primarily comprising representatives of the three Institutions, to take the lead role in organising the Conference and preparing a final report.

The Joint Declaration noted that the Strategic Agenda of the European Council, the 2019-2024 Political Guidelines of the European Commission and the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic would help steer the topics to be covered by the Conference over the year. With these in mind, the Conference discussed nine topics. These were climate change and the environment; health; a stronger and fairer economy, social justice and jobs; EU in the world; values and rights, rule of law, security; digital transformation; European democracy; migration; education, culture, youth and sport.

Ireland fully supported the Conference from the outset, viewing it as consistent with our own strong tradition of citizen engagement, as exemplified by our Citizens' Assemblies. We welcomed citizens discussing issues that affected them and their daily lives as EU citizens. The importance of participation by a wide selection of parties and a cross-section of Irish society was key to ensuring that Ireland's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe was representative of Irish citizens. A special emphasis was placed on encouraging those who do not normally engage on EU issues to take part and have their voices heard. Over 70 events took place in Ireland over the course of the Conference.





## Events in Ireland

On 13 May 2021, the Minister for State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne T.D., launched the Irish programme of events as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe. He noted in his speech that an inclusive and open approach was needed for the Conference in Ireland, where all sectors of our society were heard.

The launch event was organised in collaboration with the EM Ireland which, together with the Department of Foreign Affairs, coordinated other events organised as part of the Conference. Owing to the public health restrictions in place at the time, the event was held online, streamed on YouTube and the EMI website and has been viewed over 1,500 times. Contributors to the launch event included An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney T.D., Minister of State for European Affairs Thomas Byrne T.D., European Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets Union Mairéad McGuinness and European Ombudsman Emily O Reilly.

The Government also undertook its own consultation process, led by MoS Byrne. Inclusivity and listening to all perspectives, whether positive and negative, was a core philosophy for Conference events in Ireland. The Department of Foreign Affairs worked with European Movement Ireland, a key partner, to organise regional panels and events. Centrally, the Department of Foreign Affairs organised a number of events with sector specific groups. These are outlined in further detail below.

In addition to events on the island of Ireland, Minister of State for European Affairs Thomas Byrne T.D. was also pleased to undertake Conference events (both in-person and remotely) with his Ministerial counterparts in Lithuania, Austria, Greece and Slovakia. Minister Byrne also participated in a Conference on the Future of Europe event in the University of Limerick as part of the State Visit of His Excellency President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of Germany to Ireland in late October 2021.

As part of their events, European Movement Ireland prepared various position papers on the key issues being discussed by the Conference. These papers were a basis for a discussion at online regional panels organised all across the country and beyond.

The first round of discussions took place in June 2021, and continued online throughout 2021. These were a broad, open, and inclusive set of online regional and sectoral panels, where people discussed the future of Europe by sharing their ideas and views. These discussions included a diverse set of voices from across the regions on the island of Ireland, those who have made Ireland their home, and the Irish in Europe. Those who attended included young people, minorities, community groups, islanders, educators, former MEPs, Irish language organisations, students, cross-border communities, farmers, fishers, representatives of local government, to people who do not always feel they are heard in discussions about the EU.

The reflections and suggestions from all the panel discussions organised in 2021 formed a base for a comprehensive position paper outlining a specific set of proposals. These proposals were then presented at town hall meetings in Cork, Galway, Donegal and Dublin. The participants of





those meetings discussed in depth each set of proposals and voted accordingly. These proposals demonstrate priorities from every facet of Irish life and are a genuine record of our citizens' vision for the future of Europe

*List of panel events 2021 – all online*

- Leinster – 17 June 2021
- Munster – 24 June 2021
- Connacht/ Ulster – 22 July 2021
- Irish Abroad – 02 September 2021
- Gaeilge – 04 November 2021
- Youth – 11 November 2021
- Diversity and Inclusion – 18 November 2021
- End of Year Panel – 7 December 2021



*List of town hall events 2022 – in person*

- Cork – 17 February 2022
- Galway - 24 February 2022
- Donegal – 10 March 2022
- Dublin – 31 March 2022



*Participants in EMI Town hall events in Dublin, 31 March 2022 (Top) and Donegal, 10 March 2022 (bottom).*

*Credit: Robbie Reynolds (Dublin) and Clive Watson (Donegal) for European Movement Ireland*





## Department of Foreign Affairs led events

The national programme of Conference events also included Department of Foreign Affairs-led events where Minister of State for European Affairs Thomas Byrne T.D. engaged with smaller groups of citizens in virtual discussions. These consultations, all virtual in nature, owing to public health restrictions, are all outlined below. Full reports of all these meetings are available on the Conference Digital Platform (<https://futureu.europa.eu/>).

### **Gaisce – The President’s Award**

Gold Award participants of Gaisce-The President’s Award met with Minister Byrne to discuss the following Conference topics - Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, European Democracy and Climate Change and Environment in June 2021.

### **LGBTQI+ Organizations,**

In July 2021, board members of the National LGBT Federation (NXF); Youth Action Panel members from SpunOut.ie; a representative of Gender Orientation Sexual Health HIV (GOSHH) -- a Limerick-based organization; and a representative of Outwest – a group who work across Connacht met with Minister Byrne.

### **Comhairle na nÓg**

Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne T.D. along with Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O Gorman T.D. hosted a virtual meeting with representatives of Comhairle na nÓg, Ireland’s National Youth Council to discuss the Conference in July 2021.

### **Migrant Communities**

The New Communities Partnership, an independent national network of more than 150 immigrant-led groups in Ireland comprising 65 nationalities met with Minister Byrne in July 2021.

### **Residents of Ireland’s offshore islands**

Residents of Ireland’s offshore islands through their representative body Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann met with Minister Byrne in September 2021. Participants included residents of Clare Island, Inis Bó Finne, Bere Island, Oileán Chléire, Sherkin, Inis Oirr, Inis Mór, and Inislyre.

### **Traveller Community Organisations**

Representatives of four traveller organisations met with Minister Byrne in September 2021. These were Pavee Point, The Irish Travellers Movement, National Traveller Women’s Forum and Minceirs Whiden.







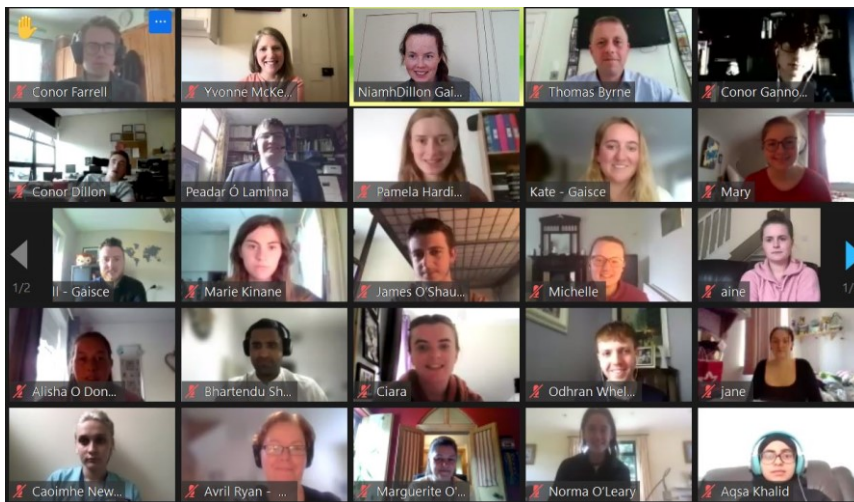
**Inner City/Communities with Fewer Opportunities**

A number of organisation working with Inner City Communities and those with fewer opportunities met with Minister Byrne in October 2021. These included the Cork City Partnership, Donegal Youth Service and the Dublin North East Inner City Partnership (NEIC).

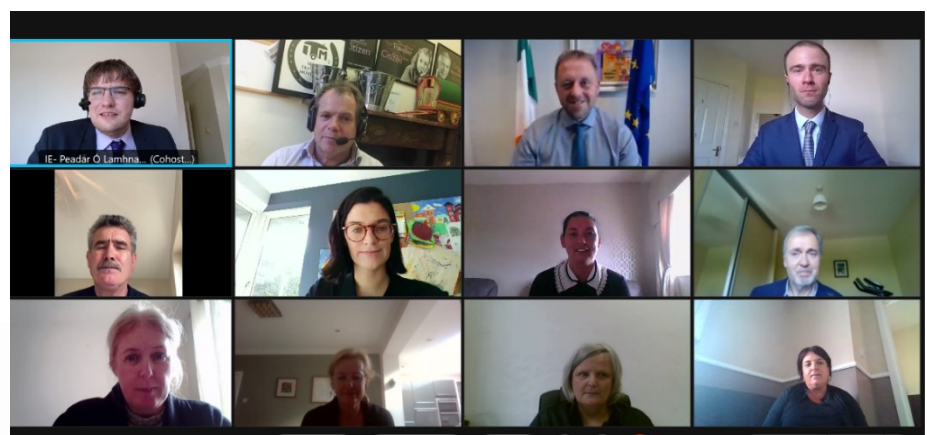
**Pobal na Gaeltachta**

Finally the Minister had a virtual meeting *as Gaeilge* with representatives of the Gaeltacht Communities around the country in October 2021. These included residents of Gaeltacht Chonamara, Corca Dhuibhne, An Rinn, Gaoth Dobhair and Gaeltacht Mhuscraí.

Minister Byrne also met with approximately 40 senior cycle secondary school pupils from across County Meath to discuss some of the main Conference themes including Rule of Law and Climate Change and the Environment. Similar events were also organised by a number of Irish MEPs.



*Gaisce- the President’s Award Participants meeting with Minister Thomas Byrne in July 2021 (above). Members of the Traveller Community meet with Minister Byrne in September 2021 (below); Included are, Martin Collins and Mary Brigid Collins from Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre; Bernard Joyce from the Irish Traveller Movement; Maria Joyce and Bridget Kelly from the National Traveller Women’s Forum Ireland and Kathleen Sherlock Minceirs Whiden Credit: Department of Foreign Affairs*





## Conference Plenary Sessions

Pan-European Conference Plenaries played a key role in the Conference process. Membership (totalling some 450 participants) included representatives from the Council, the European and national parliaments, Commission, Committee of the Regions, along with citizen representatives. The Plenaries also included nine thematic Working Groups (one per Conference theme). Seven Conference Plenaries took place over the lifetime of the Conference.

At Ministerial level, Ireland was represented at Conference Plenaries by Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne T.D, Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation, Robert Troy T.D., Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Senator Pippa Hackett and Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion, Josepha Madigan T.D.

Each Member State was also asked to nominate a National Citizens Representative who would report to plenary on events taking place in each Member State. Following an open and independent recruitment process Noelle O'Connell was appointed by Minister Thomas Byrne as Ireland's National Citizen Representative for the Conference. Emmy Coffey Nguyen was appointed as an alternate National Citizen Representative.

The Oireachtas were asked to nominate four representatives to the Conference plenary. These were Ruairí Ó Murchú T.D., Senator Alice-Mary Higgins, Neale Richmond T.D. and Niamh Smyth T.D. Ireland South MEP, Deirdre Clune, was a member of the European Parliament delegation. Ireland also had one representative in each of the Committee of the Regions, EESC and Social Partners Delegations - Cllr. Kieran McCarthy, Séamus Boland, and Esther Lynch respectively. Two Irish citizens, Eoin Stafford and Aoife O'Leary, were selected to be members of the citizens' component of the Plenary.



*Uachtarán na hÉireann Michael D. Higgins (left) and German President Frank Walter Steinmeier (right) taking part in a Conference on the Future of Europe event in the University of Limerick, October 2021. Credit: Áras an Uachtaráin*





## Conference Digital Platform

As part of the Conference, a multilingual Digital Platform was launched which received almost 19,000 ideas from over 53,000 participants. Organised around the nine topics of the Conference, the platform invited citizens to discuss and debate issues and upload reports from their own Conference events. The platform has been a key component of the Conference and allowed every citizen the chance to participate in any of the EU's official languages including Irish. Citizens from across the EU and beyond have put forward their ideas and endorsed and supported the ideas of others. Contributions from the platform were collated into interim reports which were published on the Platform. These interim reports also fed into the Plenary and Working Group debates and discussions.

Based on the analysis carried out by Kantar on behalf of the Conference's Common Secretariat, 287 contributions (ideas, comments and events) were recorded on the platform as being from Irish participants. According to the analysis, 15% of Irish participants were female, 65% male and 19% did not provide gender information. In terms of age, 40-54 year olds were the most active age group on the Platform accounting for over one-third of Irish contributions on the platform. It should be noted however, that this data does not count those who participated in Conference events in Ireland where gender balance was maintained in the vast majority of events organised by both the Department of Foreign Affairs and European Movement Ireland. The gender or age of participants was not requested when uploading event reports to the platform.

In terms of Conference topics and contributions, the Kantar report notes that Irish citizens engaged with the topic of European Democracy most often. Other Conference topics which had high levels of engagement in Ireland included A Stronger Economy, Social Justice and Jobs, Digital Transformation, Climate Change and the Environment, Education, Culture Youth and Sport and Health. In all, every Conference topic was covered in at least one event in Ireland.



*Irish citizens, Emmy Coffey Nguyen (Alternate National Citizens' Representative) and Eoin Stafford, Citizens' Panel 1 address the Conference Plenary in Strasbourg.*

*Credit: Mathieu Cugnot European Parliament Multimedia Centre (left) Brigitte Hase*



*European Parliament Multimedia Centre (right)*





## Citizens' Panels

Citizens' Panels involved 800 citizens chosen at random over the course of four events (200 citizens per panel). Each panel met across three sessions. There were 16 Irish citizens (4 per panel) among the 800. The participants of the European Citizens' Panels were selected in summer 2021 with random telephone calling the main method used by 27 national polling institutes coordinated by an external service provider. The panels were evenly balanced in five areas – geography, gender, age, socioeconomic background and level of education. At least one female and one male citizen per Member State were included in each of the four panels and one third of each panel was composed of citizens aged between 16-25.

On February 25-27 2022, Dublin hosted the final session of the first panel discussing stronger economy, social justice jobs/ education, culture, youth and sport and digital transformation (rescheduled from early December). The Government was pleased to make Dublin Castle available to the panel for their discussions and deliberations. The Dublin event was organised by the IIEA with participation by An Taoiseach and the Lord Mayor of Dublin. Two of the Conference Co-Chairs also attended – Commission Vice President Dubravka Šuica and Guy Verhofstadt MEP.

The Four European Citizens' Panels produced 178 recommendations on the future of Europe. The recommendations were subsequently discussed and debated in the Conference Plenary, with 80 of the Citizens' Panels members (20 per panel) being chosen as members of the Plenary.



*Lord Mayor of Dublin Councillor Alison Gilliland addresses the Citizens' Panel in Dublin Castle (left). Citizens attending the Panel in Dublin Castle (below) in February 2022  
Credit: Karl Burke (European Parliament Multimedia Centre)*





## Recommendations from Ireland

Based on the contributions made by the participants at the panel discussions and the recommendations adopted by the town hall meetings' participants, the following recommendations are broadly representative of what Irish citizens would like the EU to focus on over the coming years.

Overall, from all events, how the EU communicates with its citizens was an issue that many Irish citizens believed needs addressing. This includes the EU doing more to communicate with its citizens about policies that affect our day-to-day lives. Citizens also felt there should be further investment and improved communications in sharing best practices from Member States in all policy areas. There was also a discernible interest on the part of young participants for more efforts to strengthen our common European identity (e.g., the possibility of making Europe Day, 9 May, a public holiday).

Irish citizens have engaged with the Conference topics and have put forward many constructive ideas throughout our national conversations. In the area of democracy, Irish citizens would like to see the EU heighten engagement with its citizens through a number of means and fora. In the area of the economy, Irish citizens would like to see more done in the area of employment and social rights to ensure a fairer society. Fairness too was raised in discussions in the area of migration. In the area of digital transition, citizens would like to see the EU doing more to ensure that our most rural areas remain digitally connected to the rest of the continent.

Young people from Ireland care deeply about our planet. This is evident from the number of suggestions and proposals made under the topic of climate change and environment in a number of events including the EU doing more to tackle environmentally unfriendly consumption habits.

Other recommendations included increasing the availability and accessibility of the Erasmus+ programme and an expansion of the EU's abilities to widen the reach of a rules-based multinational international order. Other priorities for our citizens have included ensuring rural communities are not left behind in the green transition needed to address the climate crisis and EU-led education initiatives to help counter misinformation and disinformation. Education too plays a key role in the lives of younger citizens in Ireland and the opening up of more student mobility programmes, exchanges and greater access to education have all been raised throughout our national conversation over the last year.

A list of the top recommendations from the EMI-organised regional and online panels are included as an annex to this National Report.





## Conference Outcomes

The formal proceedings of the Conference on the Future of Europe concluded on 9 May 2022 with a ceremony in Strasbourg at which a final report prepared by the Executive Board was presented to the Presidents of the Council, Parliament and Commission. This report outlined all the citizens' recommendations adopted by the EU-level citizens' panels, national panels and national-led events as well as 49 proposals, based on the citizens' recommendations, adopted at the final Plenary session on 29-30 April.

Under the Joint Declaration and Rules of Procedure governing the Conference, each Institution will now undertake an assessment of all the citizens' recommendations and decide on further steps to implement the recommendations, in accordance with the Treaties and their respective mandates. This will include the Council of Ministers which chose to reserve its position on all recommendations until after 9 May to allow a serious analysis and scrutiny of all recommendations (both from European Citizens' Panels and National events) to take place.

EU citizens have made clear that they want and expect both to be better informed and more fully engaged in how the EU conducts its business. These recommendations will now provide a guide as to how we can achieve this common goal.

Addressing the final Conference Plenary on 29 April, Minister Byrne noted that:

*“This Conference has been a real innovation, not least in reaffirming the key values, including dialogue, inclusivity and transparency, which underlie our Union. The conclusion of this first stage of the Conference is not an end but rather a beginning of trying to fashion a better, more citizen-centred Union. As a Council member, Ireland reaffirms its absolute commitment to this task that lies ahead of us and will work constructively with other Member States in the weeks and months ahead.”*



*Minister Byrne addresses the Conference Plenary Credit: European Parliament Media Centre*





## Annex: Top Recommendations per Conference Topic from EMI led events

### General Findings

1. Better communication of policy interlinkages and their effects on our day-to-day lives.
2. Further investment and improved communication in sharing best practices from Member States in all policy areas.

### Climate Change and Environment

1. The EU should increase awareness of its biggest polluters and their direct impact on health, biodiversity and the environment, introduce labelling to highlight the carbon footprint of products and increase support to and highlight the work of companies in Member States which are transitioning to green and sustainable alternatives.
2. The EU should undertake the necessary social, economic and cultural action that is required to tackle the climate crisis by adopting immediate and appropriate policies with the same effort and approach that was applied in response to Covid-19.
3. The EU should recognise climate refugees and proactively support them and the Member States which accept them.
4. The EU should support greater interconnection of electricity grids, increase renewable energy production and develop better storage capacity.

### Digital Transformation

1. The EU should take stock of and communicate all opportunities and disadvantages that will come with the increasing digitalisation of 'life', focusing on promoting healthy lifestyle choices as part of the digital transformation and highlighting the impact of increased online activity on mental and physical health.
2. The EU should implement the idea of 'Leave No One Behind' in the digital transformation, reducing digital poverty and inequality which leads to digital exclusion. This should be achieved by promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups and using all available resources to ensure the digital transition is just, fair and sustainable.
3. The EU should ensure that more investment and education is provided on digital literacy, disinformation, and misinformation.
4. The EU should facilitate greater capacity in cybersecurity across the EU.
5. The EU should consider increasing its remit on penalties and enforcement relating to disinformation.





*National Citizens' Representative Noelle O Connell takes part in a Conference Plenary Session in Strasbourg. (Left) Credit European Parliament Media Centre.*



*Participants take part in a Conference Event organised by the DCU Centre for Religion, Human values and International Relations (above) in February 2022. Credit: Professor Philip McDonagh, Dublin City University*

### **The Economy**

1. The EU should promote and fund economic models that provide socio-economic supports that were observed during the Covid-19 pandemic. These should direct job creation, gender equality and diversity in the job market.
2. The EU should ensure that rules relating to cross-border financial issues are clearly outlined, implemented and better supported.
3. The EU should provide further support and clear accessible information on the rights of EU citizens in other EU Member States; supports available for starting new businesses in EU Member States; employment supports and job creation in EU Member States.

### **EU in the World**

1. The EU should deepen and expand its abilities to widen the reach of a rules-based multinational international order with countries, global partners, institutions, and bodies. It







should continue to play a greater role in promoting, defending, and upholding existing multilateral projects.

2. The EU should continue to promote and highlight the benefits of the EU Consular Protection Directive for EU citizens working and travelling in non-EU countries.
3. The EU should better prepare for potential physical and cyber-attacks, and work with Member States' authorities to help educate people around security challenges facing them and how to protect themselves from them.



*Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne T.D. (centre) participates in a Conference event for young people in Vilnius, Lithuania, with Erica Jennings (left) and then Lithuanian Deputy Foreign Minister for European Affairs Arnoldas Pranckevičius in October 2021 Credit Mano Europa, Lithuania*

## Health

1. The EU should ensure better coordination and improved information sharing and provide people with access to the same resources, promoting equality between Member States.
2. The EU should monitor health crisis and related research in order to share relevant information between Member States and help them to improve their crisis preparedness strategy. It should have a strengthened role in health-related areas.
3. The EU should consider mental health as an overarching issue, spanning across all policy areas, be that economy, digital transformation, fundamental and human rights, education.
4. The EU should further promote patient rights, access to care across different Member States, the European Health Insurance Card and other issues that relate to patient rights.

## Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law

1. The role of the EU in promoting the Rule of Law within the EU itself should be highlighted across all age groups, but in particular to young people so that younger generations also have a better understanding of different issues in EU Member States.





2. The EU should remain engaged on the important issue of EU citizens in Northern Ireland. The EU should maintain access to their fundamental EU rights because of Brexit, as it impacts many people on the island of Ireland.

## Education

1. The EU should set out a dedicated range of funded programmes that will enable individuals, groups, institutions, and organisations to explain the EU, promote its work, highlight the benefits of EU membership, but also provide space for debate and engagement about the EU.
2. The EU should increase its Erasmus+ programme's availability and accessibility for people, institutions, and organisations, in order to ensure better mobility and greater uptake by people from all walks of life. This can be achieved by expanding the scope of those who can take part in it, continuing to promote Erasmus+ and its benefits within current stakeholders and expand into new ones, and providing increased financial supports.
3. The EU should create funding support schemes for people to access post-graduate studies in another EU Member State. By helping people take up these studies, a greater number of people would be able to upskill, which will in-turn boost the overall competitiveness of the EU economy.
4. While the EU promotes and protects fundamental rights, it should play a greater role in educating and engaging with people, organisations, and institutions in the EU on this issue. It should have greater resources to enable it to share best practices, analysis and stakeholder input from across the EU. Further, such research should be shared, promoted, and made more available for national, EU and international policy makers.
5. The EU should continue to advance and deepen the scope of the European Education Area. It should increase mutual recognition of diplomas and learning periods from abroad; improve language learning; rollout the European Student Card initiative; and the European Universities initiative.



*Minister Byrne meets with participants at one of the Townhall events in Donegal Town on 10 March 2022  
Credit: Clive Watson for European Movement Ireland*



