

Whose responsibility is sustainability?

More and more people are recognising the importance of sustainability, but there is no agreement among different age groups about which generation should make the sacrifice and how much. Generations agree that the individual, family and education have a strong role to in driving the discourse on sustainability and encouraging action, yet they highlight the responsibility of big business, politicians and governments, according to research of UniCredit Bank and SteiGen.

In recent years, sustainability has also become one of the topics that almost certainly comes up at a family event or in a conversation with friends. However, while there is a consensus that sustainability is something we all have to do, the interpretations of what sustainability means to us all can differ. **Views on sustainability are strongly influenced by the generation to which one belongs, while attitudes are also shaped by different age groups**, according to research of UniCredit Bank and SteiGen.

The age group that learns from younger people and teaches older people

The **Baby Boomer** generation (aged 56–74), which is into repairing things and recycling food, was **somewhat unprepared for the issue of sustainability to become such a central issue**. As one of them put it, *„we didn't deal with it as children, so we had to go through a change, whereas today's young people have grown up with this attitude.”* This is why many of them feel that some higher authority, such as the relevant ministry, should lead by example and regulation in this area, but they also expect much stronger action from companies. *„It would motivate me if others did it, because a swallow doesn't make a summer, I can't change it on my own”,* say many of the generation, but they also see that their children, now in their thirties, are much more aware of the issue and in many cases learn from them. **Learning for this generation is a two-way process: they are adopting new habits from their children and teaching the older veterans to collect waste**. Many of them believe that not only positive examples but also financial incentives are needed to encourage people to be more environmentally aware.

Generation X is looking upwards for a solution

Generation X (41–55 year old) saw the change of regime as an opportunity for a significant rise in living standards and consumption, and are still reluctant to give up the comfort they have gained since then. At the same time, they **recognise the need to educate future generations to be environmentally aware**. They have great faith in young people, but they are less willing to accept their own responsibility: as consumers, they feel almost forced to buy polluting products and would only choose more sustainable products if they were cheaper. *„We should be pushing manufacturers from above to put more sustainable products on the market, because they are the ones who concentrate the harmful activity,”* said one of them. **They are critical of the unsustainability of their own lifestyles, with many mentioning that people in their 30s now live much more sustainably than they do**, but, like the Boomers, they see that *„those who are not smart enough should be financially motivated”*.

A generation that would act but feels they cannot

Generation Y (26–40 year old) feel the need for change, but are passive and sceptical about the impact achieved through individual action. However, they recognise that *„we cannot expect help from above, we have to do it ourselves”*. Most Y-ers in their thirties are trying to do something about it – not ordering unnecessary products, using less packaging, many cycling to work, composting – and **yet they feel they can't do anything on their own**. *„It's not down to one person, we don't have the opportunity to change back the packaging, the bottle, we're not being given the opportunity to make a change,”* one of them said, echoing the frustration of a generation. This generation is angry at older generations for hoarding unnecessary items, but they feel they can trust the young. **They feel it is particularly**

important that sustainability should be more prominent in education than it is at present, and that the environment should be included in as many subjects as possible.

The stakes are high for the youngest

Z generation (18–25 year olds), now in their 20s, stand out from the mostly passive generations that have been resigned to the problem and are **demanding radical change**: they feel the need for change because of the effects of climate situation, and therefore perceive it not as one of the economic and social problems, but as the most pressing issue that needs an immediate solution. The vast majority (96%) place the **responsibility for promoting sustainability on the shoulders of their generation**. Like the older generations, they have less trust in companies and politicians: „*where there should be role models, in political circles, there is only hypocrisy*”, said one of them, and they also see the spread of electric cars or the sham sustainability activities of international companies. However, they also **believe strongly in the power of education**, alongside information on the internet. They believe **it is important to give positive feedback and reward sustainable behaviour**, as this is more motivating than penalising harmful behaviour. They are not alone: the power of positive reinforcement to shape behaviour is one of the few issues on which almost all generations agree.

Despite this optimism, Zers, like their Y peers, feel a little left behind by their generation and point to the responsibility of the political elite: „*I can convince 10 people at most, and the government could convince hundreds of thousands*”, one of them said.

Who is responsible for a more sustainable lifestyle?

Research by UniCredit Bank and SteiGen shows that different generations have different views on whose responsibility it is to make sustainability a mainstream approach. They agree that the responsibility of the governments of the day is paramount, with almost two thirds (65%) of respondents ranking the importance of public involvement as one of the three most important factors.

Among the youngest respondents, the **education system** (49%) and the **media** (44%) were just behind **government responsibility** (51%). The importance of **individual action** was cited by just over one in three (38%), but also reflects the higher affinity of Generation Z and Baby Boomers to the scepticism of the generations in between.

This same fragmentation is also reflected in the influences that shape attitudes towards sustainability across generations: while the overwhelming majority of society (56%) believes that schools are responsible for raising awareness, Generation Z, which is most in touch with the education system, also values the importance of talking to friends and colleagues at home (57%) and at work (59%) more highly than other age groups. **Almost all age groups agree on the importance of positive personal experiences** (54%). There is also cause for optimism that 82% of respondents feel **it is the responsibility of their peers to address sustainability**, so there is hope that over time, points of agreement will emerge from discussions at the dinner table.

Contact: sajtoinformacio@unicreditgroup.hu

SteiGen and UniCredit used a representative online survey of 1,000 people, as well as focus group discussions with different generations and places of residence, and individual in-depth interviews to investigate the attitudes of four different generations towards sustainability.

The target group of the research was 4 different generations:

- Baby Boomers born between 1946-64, now aged 56-74,
- Generation X, born 1965-1979, now aged 41-55,
- Generation Y, born 1980-1994, now aged 26-40, and
- Generation Z, born 1995-2003, now aged 18-25.

UniCredit

UniCredit is a successful pan-European commercial bank with a fully integrated corporate and investment banking service and a unique network of clients in Western, Central and Eastern Europe. UniCredit offers both local and international expertise to its clients, providing them with unrivalled access to leading banks in its core markets of 13 countries through its European banking network: Italy, Germany, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. Through its international network of representative offices and branches, UniCredit serves customers in a further 16 countries worldwide.

SteiGen

The team at SteiGen Consultancy Ltd. has decades of market experience helping clients achieve their goals. With a long-standing and experiential approach, the company works with a unique, state-of-the-art approach that takes into account generational differences. SteiGen's goal is to ensure that their partners experience their time with them as an experience and get the most out of it.