

EUROBAROMETER 69

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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NATIONAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINLAND

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This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Finland

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This Executive Summary presents the overall results from the Finnish National Report of the Eurobarometer Poll 69 conducted for the European Commission. The report is based on the analysis of results obtained from the Eurobarometer survey that was carried out in Finland and in the other Member States of the European Union in March, April and May 2008.

On the basis of the results of the Eurobarometer poll the following conclusions can be made.

Satisfaction with their own lives

On the whole, the Finnish people are very satisfied with their lives at the moment. 94 percent say that they are very or rather satisfied. As for all the citizens of the European Union, 77 percent say that they are very or rather satisfied and 22 percent say that they are not satisfied with their lives. It can be noted, therefore, that Finns are still clearly more satisfied with their lives than Europeans on average.

Expectations for the next twelve months

62 percent of Finns believe that their lives, in general, will be the same for the next twelve months, whereas 33 percent are of the opinion that their lives will be better. As many as 70 percent believe that the financial situation of their household will be the same for the next twelve months and 21 percent trust that it will be better. 95 percent of the Finnish people are of the opinion that their personal job situation will be better or the same for the next twelve months.

62 percent say that the economic situation in Finland will be better or the same for the next twelve months. While in the Eurobarometer Poll six months earlier only two percent of Finns said that the economic situation in Finland would get worse, as many as 37 percent are now of that opinion. It can be clearly noted that the expectations of the citizens of the EU in the future are not as high as they were six months ago.

In which direction are the things developing?

Citizens were asked to estimate whether things in Finland and in the European Union are going in the right or wrong direction. Half of the Finnish people think that, in general, things are going in the right direction in Finland, while 38 % believe that things are going in the wrong direction. The Finnish citizens are still relatively negative about the development in the European Union, as 41 percent believe that things are going in the right direction in the European Union, while 40 % are of the opposite opinion and believe that things are going in the wrong direction.

The situation in Finland compared with the average of the European countries

Finns estimate the quality of life, the economic situation and the employment situation in Finland to be better than the average of the European countries. On the other hand, they believe that energy prices and the cost of living are higher in Finland than the average of the European countries.

The majority of the EU citizens believe things to be better in other EU countries than in their home

country. Only 35 percent of them estimate the economic situation in their country to be better than the European average and almost as many (34 %) estimate the job situation in their own country to be better than the European average.

The most important issues to be solved in Finland

When asked about the most important issues facing Finland that should be solved above all others, Finns name the healthcare system (39 %), rising prices/inflation (33 %) and energy related issues (20 %). If these top three prioritised issues are compared with the results of the previous Eurobarometer Poll, it can be noted that energy related issues have passed unemployment in terms of importance. Pensions are also considered to be a more important issue to be solved than unemployment.

Political discussion amongst the citizens

11 percent of the Finnish people say that they frequently discuss political matters with their friends while 62 percent say that they discuss political matters occasionally. 48 percent of 15-24 year olds, 47 percent of those taking care of the household and 39 percent of students say that they never discuss political matters with their friends. Men discuss political matters more frequently than women.

10 percent say that they often find themselves persuading their friends, relatives or fellow workers to share their political views. 39 percent find themselves persuading others occasionally and 20 percent never.

The support for Finnish membership of the European Union

Finland's membership of the European Union is considered to be a good thing by 44 percent of the Finnish population (-1 percentage point in six months), a bad thing by 20 percent (-1 percentage point in six months), while 35 percent are of the opinion that it is neither a good nor a bad thing.

Membership is considered to be a good thing especially by managers, students and people living in cities.

Has Finland benefited from its membership of the European Union?

51% of Finns (no change) think that Finland has benefited from membership of the European Union. The number of those who do not believe that Finland has benefited from its membership is currently 41% (+2 percentage points in six months). Managers, students, 15-24 years olds and people living in cities particularly believe that Finland has benefited from membership of the European Union.

Main reasons why Finland has benefited from being a member of the European Union

Finnish respondents are of the opinion that the most likely reason why Finland has benefited from being a member of the European Union is that membership of the European Union improves the cooperation between Finland and other countries. Finns also believe that the EU contributes to maintaining peace and reinforcing security, that it brings the Finnish people new employment opportunities and that it contributes to economic growth in Finland.

Main reasons why Finland has not benefited from being a member of the European Union

The majority of those citizens who do not believe that Finland has benefited from its membership of the EU say that Finnish people have very little influence on decision making at European Union level. They are also of the opinion that issues that are important for Finnish people are best dealt with at national level. Almost one fifth says that the European Union decreases Finnish people's standard of living.

The future of the European Union

When asked about the future of the EU, 62 percent of Finns say that they are optimistic about it, whereas 35 percent are pessimistic. Students, managers and supporters of the political right are among those who are most optimistic about the future of the EU. The least educated and the retired are the most pessimistic about the future of the EU.

Opinions on the European Union

70 percent of Finns believe that their voice counts in Finland but only 24 percent believe that it counts in the EU. Of the Finnish people, 70 percent say that the European Union imposes its views on Finland whereas 69 percent believe that Finland's voice counts in the EU. Over half of Finns feel that Finland is more stable economically because Finland is a member of the Euro area and feel that they are safer because Finland is a member of the EU.

As many as 73 percent of Finns do not believe that their voice counts in the European Commission and 63 percent do not believe that their voice counts within the Members of the European Parliament. On the other hand, 57 percent do not believe that their voice counts in the Finnish government. 68 percent do not believe that the interests of Finland are well taken into account in the EU.

The importance of the work of the European Parliament and the European Commission

77 percent of the Finnish people are of the opinion that the European Parliament plays an important role in the life of the European Union and almost as many (75 %) believe that the European Commission plays an important role. The role of the European Parliament is considered to be important especially by students, managers and people living in the Northern parts of Finland. The role of the European Commission is considered important by the groups mentioned above as well as by supporters of the political right.

Trust in the European Parliament and the European Commission

54 percent of the Finnish people trust the European Parliament and 53 percent say that they have confidence in the European Commission.

25-39 year olds and students, in particular, trust the European Parliament. The European Parliament is least trusted by 40-54 year olds. The European Commission is trusted by 15-24 year olds, students and the unemployed. The European Commission is least trusted by the least educated.

Main reasons for trusting or not trusting the European Parliament

Finns (39 %) say that the main reason for trusting the European Parliament is the belief that the decisions taken by the European Parliament are taken in a democratic way. 20 percent says that they trust the Members of the European Parliament.

When asked for the main reasons for not trusting the European Parliament, the citizens say that the European Parliament is too far away from the ordinary citizens. A quarter of those surveyed are of the opinion that they do not have enough information about the European Parliament.

Main reasons for trusting or not trusting the European Commission

Those citizens that trust the European Commission say the main reason for this is the fact that the decisions taken by the European Commission are taken in a democratic way. One-fifth says that they are generally in favour of the European Union and that this is the reason why they trust the European Commission.

On the other hand, 48 percent are of the opinion that the European Commission is too remote from ordinary citizens and 30 percent say that they do not have enough information about the European Commission and thus they do not trust it.

Purchasing power at the moment

Just over one third of the Finnish people say that their purchasing power has improved when they compare their present situation to five years ago, and just as many estimate that their purchasing power has got worse. The remaining Finns consider that no major changes have been recognised.

Managers, the self employed, 25-39 year olds and people living in households of three persons say that their purchasing power has improved. Other groups that say that their purchasing power has improved are 40-54 year olds, the highly educated, white collar workers and those living in households of at least four persons. While 43 percent of people living in the south of Finland say that their purchasing power has improved, only 18 percent of people living in Northern Finland agree with this.

Difficulties paying the bills

19 percent of the Finnish people say that they have difficulties paying all their bills at the end of the month and 7 percent say that they do not have any difficulties paying their bills.

Life of those who are children today

41 percent of Finns are of the opinion that the life of those who are children today will be easier than the life of those of their own generation. On the other hand, 3 percent believe that the life of those who are children today will be more difficult and a quarter says that it will be neither easier nor harder.

Here we can see a clear difference in the opinions of the Finns and the average of the EU. For all the EU citizens, as many as 61 percent say that the life of those who are children today will be more difficult and only 8 percent believe that it will be easier.

Transparency of the public administration in Finland

Over half of the Finnish respondents are of the opinion that public administration in Finland today is transparent and four percent estimate that it is very transparent. However, 41 percent of Finns do not consider the public administration in Finland to be transparent. For all the EU citizens, 68 percent are of the opinion that the public administration in their country is not transparent.

83 percent of Finns say that the transparency of the public administration is important to them and only 16 percent say it is not important.

Transparency of the public administration in the European Union

Only 31 percent of Finns estimate that the institutions of the European Union are transparent. 62 percent are of the opposite opinion and say that they are not transparent. For all the EU citizens, just over half considers the institutions of the EU to be transparent, while a quarter is of the opposite opinion.

Three Finns out of four say that it is important that the institutions of the EU are transparent and 20 percent say it is not important.

For all the EU citizens, 84 percent are of the opinion that it is important that the institutions of the European Union function in a transparent way and only eight percent are of the opposite opinion. Transparent functioning is considered to be particularly important by the Greek, the Cypriotes, the Swedes and the Maltese.