



# Attitudes towards the EU in the United Kingdom

## Summary

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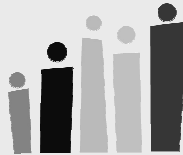
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Flash EB Series #203

# Attitudes towards the EU in the United Kingdom

Conducted by  
The Gallup Organisation Hungary/Europe  
upon the request of the EC Representation to the  
United Kingdom



**EUROBAROMETER**

Survey organised and managed by the  
Eurobarometer Team of DG Communication

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**THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION**

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## Main findings

### Overall: no real improvement in the UK's attitudes towards the EU

There has been no significant improvement in the attitudes of UK citizens towards the EU. One ray of light is that half of the people questioned feel that EU membership has brought some benefits to the UK: such as the free market of goods, a cleaner environment and a greater say in trade negotiations. However, the bad news far outweighs the good:

- compared to the numbers registered in 2006, fewer citizens see the positive effects of the EU on working conditions and the benefits of the Single Market
- at best, the information about new EU initiatives only reaches one in two UK citizens
- there has been no increased awareness about the presence of the EU information sources

Surprisingly, however, when serious global issues have been raised - fighting terrorism, climate change, global poverty, etc. - the vast majority of UK citizens (over 80% on all issues) believe that the EU has a role to play.

### Effective communications

The EU's **communications** initiatives concerning its efforts to improve the lives of EU citizens vary in effectiveness across the UK's regions. At best, information about new measures reaches one in two UK citizens; in other cases, it only reaches about a quarter of the population.

- The best known of the EU's initiatives are food safety standards (54%), the regulation of international roaming charges for mobile phones (50%), the Bathing Water and Blue Flag guide (50%) and the European Health Insurance Card (52%). However, awareness of the last-named has declined considerably since 2006 (down from 65% to 52% in 2007).

### Knowledge about information sources

- Relatively few British people know about **the EU's information sources** and there has been no improvement in the past year. Less than two in 10 of the UK's citizens are aware of the available sources, such as European Public Information Centres (EPICs) (15% awareness) and the EUROPA website (14%). The numbers have gone down since 2006 for each of the information resources.

### European news in the media

According to the survey, only half of the UK's citizens are interested in European news. So there is obviously scope for improvement. Television is generally seen to be more objective than the printed press, with the latter seen by many to be overly negative about the EU.

- Roughly one-third feel that British TV and radio services are objective about the EU; while more people feel (38%) the British press is too negative about the EU.
- Graduates are far more likely than other demographic groups to feel that the press is too negative (52%).

- Nearly half (48%) of all UK citizens feel that it is the British government's role to disseminate information about the EU — nearly 30 percentage points higher than those who feel newspapers and TV should be responsible.

### Domestic vs. European interest

British people are more interested, and more active, in **domestic politics** in comparison to EU affairs. The level of political activity and the willingness to participate in elections is especially low for people under the age of 40.

- While 70% of British citizens say they participated in the last domestic election, only half as many people (34%) say they voted in the 2004 European elections.

### Benefits of the EU

The relative majority, just under half of British citizens, see the **positive effects of EU membership** on trade and environmental issues. However, in terms of working conditions, peace in Europe and human rights, the majority of British people do not think that EU membership has been positive.

- Roughly half of UK citizens agree that EU membership has meant consumers benefit from the Single Market, (49%), the environment is now cleaner (48%) and the UK has more say in trade negotiations (46%).
- Compared to last year, far fewer people see the positive effects of EU membership on working conditions and trade. It would be worth investigating whether these opinions are based on real experience, a negative media campaign or on poor communications.

### The EU's responsibilities concerning global affairs

The majority of British citizens see the fight against terrorism and the response to climate change as the most serious tasks. Interestingly, people with a higher level of educational attainment find climate change to be the most important challenge, while people with a lower level of education are more concerned about terrorism. In general, people in Wales and the East of England are more concerned than the rest of the UK about all global problems discussed.

- Approximately 90% of British citizens feel that terrorism, climate change, global poverty, protecting human rights and securing energy supplies are “very serious” or “serious” issues. **A resounding 80% or more feel that the EU has a role in tackling these issues.**

### A snapshot of the UK

- **East of England** residents are among the most aware of EU initiatives, but awareness levels in the **North East** are lower than the UK average.
- **Londoners** have a high level of interest in all areas of political affairs.
- **North West** citizens are the least likely to feel climate change is a serious issue.
- Residents of **Northern Ireland** and **Scotland** report great advantages of EU membership, while citizens of **South East England** tend to be negative.
- In the **South West**, awareness of EU information sources has dropped noticeably.
- **Welsh** citizens are positive about EU initiatives, interested in European affairs and see benefits in EU membership.
- Citizens from **Yorkshire and the Humber** have a low level of interest in politics and European affairs.
- **West Midlands** residents are highly likely to see the fight against terrorism as a very serious issue; people from the **East Midlands** see little benefit from the EU.

## Introduction

Concerning the attitudes toward the European Union (EU) in the United Kingdom (UK), the European Commission is keeping track of general opinion, levels of knowledge and information, and familiarity with certain important issues of the British public.

The main themes in the report are the following:

- self-perceived knowledge of the EU
- need for more information on the EU
- knowledge of the EU
- who should be responsible for keeping people informed about the EU
- areas on which the British would prefer more information
- information channels
- EU laws
- benefits of EU membership
- opportunities provided by EU membership
- awareness of several benefits and projects related to the EU
- the next big action area for the EU

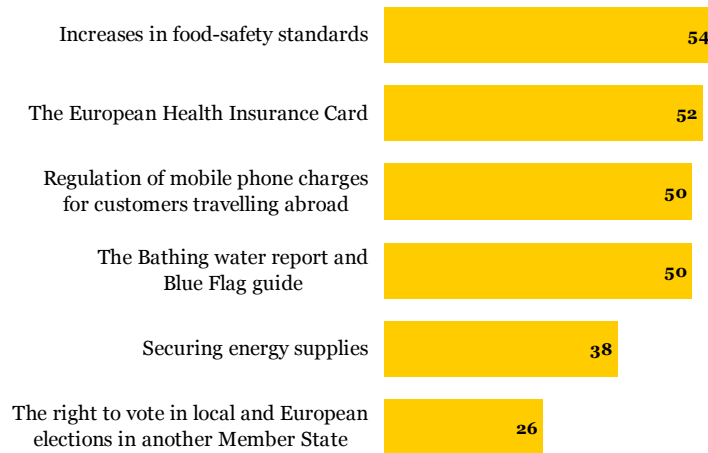
This study is continuing on from an earlier Flash Eurobarometer survey undertaken in 2002. The content of the questionnaires, however, changed substantially to reflect the changing reality within the EU and the UK. This report sums up the most important attitudes regarding the EU in 12 regions of the UK.

The survey's fieldwork was carried out between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2007. Over 6,000 randomly selected citizens aged 16 years and older were interviewed in the 12 Government Regions of the UK; roughly 500 respondents were in each region. Interviews were carried out via landline telephone. To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented based on important socio-demographic variables.

## Awareness of recent EU projects

A majority of UK residents are familiar with recent initiatives undertaken by the EU to improve its citizens' lives and their environment. The programmes that are known by at least half of UK citizens include the improvements in food safety standards (54%), the European Health Insurance Card (52%), control of mobile phone roaming charges (50%), and the Bathing Water report / Blue Flag guide (50%).

### Awareness of recent efforts that aim to benefit Europeans



Source:  
FLASH EB 203  
December 2006 - January 2007

Q1. There are a number of recent efforts that aim to benefit Europeans directly. Have you heard of any of the following? *Base: all respondents*

### Increases in food safety standards

Across all regions, more than half of the population have heard of the improvements in food safety standards. The Welsh are significantly more aware of this item (60%) than people living in other UK regions. Just over half of the residents of London are familiar with the new standards. The spread between the highest and lowest levels of awareness by region is not terribly great, with a maximum of a mere 9 percent difference.

### The European Health Insurance Card

Again, over half of UK respondents have heard about the European Health Insurance Card (52%), though here, a wider gap exists between the best and the least informed. There are significant variations in the awareness of the Insurance Card across the various regions. In the East of England and Wales, significantly more people have heard about it than in the UK's Northern regions. Awareness is highest among women (55%) and those in the 40-54 year-old age group (57%), as well as among those with the highest education levels (60%).

### Regulation of mobile phone roaming charges

Being informed about the regulations about mobile phone roaming charges appears to be mainly dependent on education; those with the highest levels of educational attainment are much more likely

to be aware of these EU rules. People from the East of England are again most aware, as 58% claim to have heard of the programme. In several regions, less than half of the residents are aware of the regulations. The least informed citizens are those from the East Midlands (46%) and the North West (45%).

### **Other initiatives**

One in two British citizens have heard about the Bathing Water report and Blue Flag guide. People older than 40, the Welsh and those from the South West are significantly more knowledgeable about this area than others. However, the EU's efforts to secure energy supplies are not at all apparent to the British in comparison to previous initiatives. Only a third of UK correspondents have heard about this, and those with a higher level of education know more about it than others. Finally, the initiative - to give the right to vote in local and European elections in another Member State – has hardly touched the nation's consciousness.

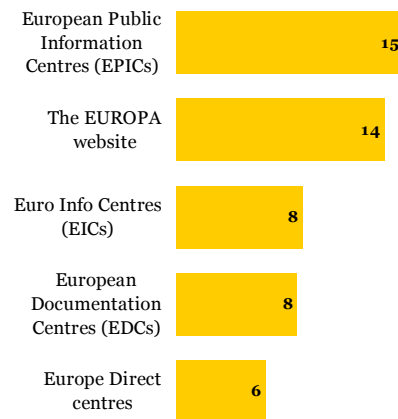


## Awareness of EU information sources

Across the UK, relatively few British citizens are aware of the available information channels that provide EU-related news. The best-known sources are the European Public Information Centres (EPICs) housed at local libraries, and the EUROPA website itself. However, with only 14%-15% of the population reporting that they have heard about these two resources, it's fair to say that these facilities are not exactly household names.

Even fewer people, almost half as many, have heard about the Euro Info Centres (EICs, 8%), that supply information on topics such as business law, tax law, and contracts to SMEs; the European Documentation Centres (EDCs, 8%), which distribute relevant EU information to students and academics or the Europe Direct Centres (6%), which can provide answers to a variety of institutional questions about the EU.

### Awareness of resources and providers of EU information



Source:  
FLASH EB 203  
December 2006 - January 2007

Q2. There is a network of sources – and providers of EU information available to UK citizens.  
Which of the following have you heard about?  
Base: all respondents

Compared to last year's survey, the awareness of all of the information resources has decreased by at least a few percentage points. The largest decrease is for the UK's awareness of the EUROPA website, which fell from 21% in 2006 to 14%. The biggest reductions were seen in London (from 27% to 14%) and in the East of England (24% to 13%).

### Target groups and usage

The news of two of these information channels, EPICs and the EUROPA website, has reached 20% of the most receptive target groups, those below 24 years of age and those still at school. Communication about the other resources was ineffective across all demographic groups.

Among the UK citizens who have already heard about the above information resources, the highest proportion (40%) utilise the EUROPA website to obtain EU-related information.

Half as many people who are aware of, and use, the EUROPA website make use of the EICs (22%) and European Documentation Centres (EDCs) (20%). The use of these information resources

corresponds primarily with the level of education. Those with higher levels of education and those below 50 years of age are characteristically users of these facilities, while the rest are not.

#### Awareness of resources and providers of EU information, by sex, age, and educational attainment

	European Public Information Centres	The EUROPA website	Euro Info Centres	European Documentation Centres	Europe Direct Centres
UK	15	14	8	8	6
Male	14	14	8	8	6
Female	16	13	9	8	6
15-24	22	19	10	11	9
25-39	13	14	8	7	4
40-54	14	12	9	7	6
55+	14	12	7	8	5
-15	16	10	8	7	6
16-20	16	12	9	9	6
20+	11	19	7	7	3
still in education	19	22	8	9	8



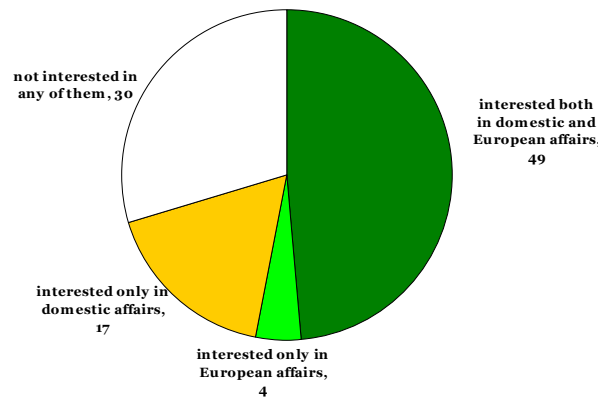
Source:  
FLASH EB 203  
December 2006 - January 2007

Q2. There is a network of sources- and providers of EU information available to UK citizens.  
Which of the following have you heard about?  
Base: all respondents

## Levels of interest in EU and UK affairs

Half of British citizens are interested in European events, compared to two out of three citizens who follow national news. This means of course, that one-third of Brits do not have any interest in national affairs, and are unlikely to be receptive to items of European interest.

Interest in domestic and European affairs  
 %interested (very and fairly interested)  
 % not interested (not and not interested at all)



 Source:  
FLASH EB 203  
December 2006 - January 2007

Q3. Would you say you are very interested, fairly interested, not interested, or not at all interested in ...  
 Base: all respondents

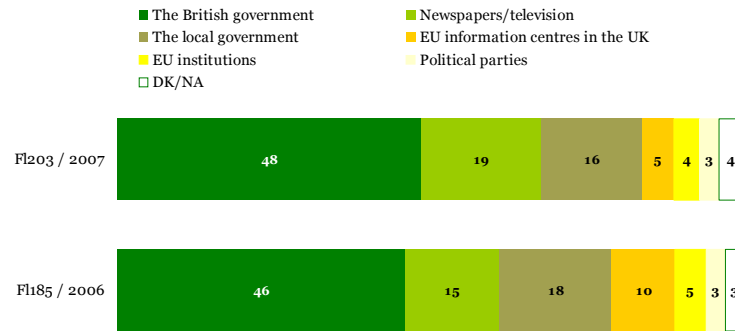
Almost 60% of Londoners like to keep in touch with European affairs, a figure that's higher than in any other region. Citizens in the North East have the lowest level of interest in the EU and its dealings. Respondents reporting the highest levels of interest are graduates, with 75% of that body stating that Europe is important to them.

In terms of the public's perception of the media, approximately one-third of British citizens think that the broadcast media (TV and radio) is objective in regard to its EU reporting. That is low, but it's a healthy score compared with their opinion of the printed press, where only 27% of citizens feel it is objective. Forty percent of respondents believe TV reporting is biased (either negatively or positively, with more people arguing the former case), while a similar number are unable to form any opinion at all about radio coverage.

Opinions about the press differ in regard to the levels of the citizens' education; half of the respondents with the highest levels (52%) believe that the UK press is negatively biased; but barely one-third (29%) of people who left school at 15 agree with view.

When it comes to receiving information from the public, almost half of the UK's citizens (48%) feel it is the responsibility of the British government to keep them informed about the EU and associated matters. In the opinion of British citizens, EU information centres in the UK (see previous section), EU institutions or political parties do not have primary roles in providing such information (5%, 4%, and 3%, respectively).

Who do you think should be responsible for keeping you informed about the EU and its decisions? 2006-2007



Source:  
FLASH EB 203  
December 2006 - January 2007

Q5. Who do you think should be responsible for keeping you informed about the EU and its decisions?  
Base: all respondents  
Total %

In demographic terms, those still in education are the most likely to disagree that it is the Government's role to inform everyone about the EU and its way of working. Interestingly, it is young respondents (under the age of 24) who are also the most likely to disagree that the UK Government should be the prime source of European information.

## Participating in the political process

When British families discuss political events, they are more likely to focus on national issues than on European political affairs. While two-thirds of the population take an interest in politics (22% frequently, 45% occasionally), the remainder say they never discuss such matters with friends and family.

A smaller proportion, but at 52%, still a majority of the population, do talk about European political matters when they get together with friends and relatives. One in 10 of those citizens claim to discuss the topic frequently. That, of course, leaves nearly half of the population (48%) admitting that they never talk about this subject.

Looking at interest in Europe and plans to participate in elections, the citizens in the various UK regions differ somewhat with regard to their political behaviour and activity.

Region	Interest in Europe	Participation in domestic election	Participation in last European election	Participation in next European election
North East	*	**	*	*
North West	**	**	**	**
Yorkshire & the Humber:	*	**	**	*
East Midlands:	*	*	*	*
London	***	*	**	***
Wales	**	***	**	***
Scotland	**	**	***	***
Northern Ireland	**	**	**	**
West Midlands,	**	**	**	**
East of England,	**	**	**	*
South East,	**	***	**	**
South West:	**	***	**	**

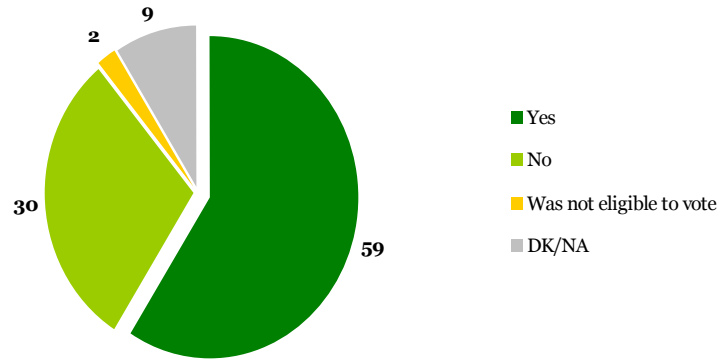
Key: \* below average, \*\* average, \*\*\* above average

The citizens of London hold the most interest in Europe, while Scotland has high rates of participation in European elections (both present and planned in the future).

As for voting, the next European Parliament elections could see the same proportion of British citizens participating (59%) as did not vote in 2004. Approximately one-third (30%) declare that they have no intention of voting in a European-wide election.

The propensity to vote is much higher among those with a greater level of education. The political activity and the readiness to take part in European elections of those below 40 years are also lower than older citizens.

### Participation in the next European Parliament election



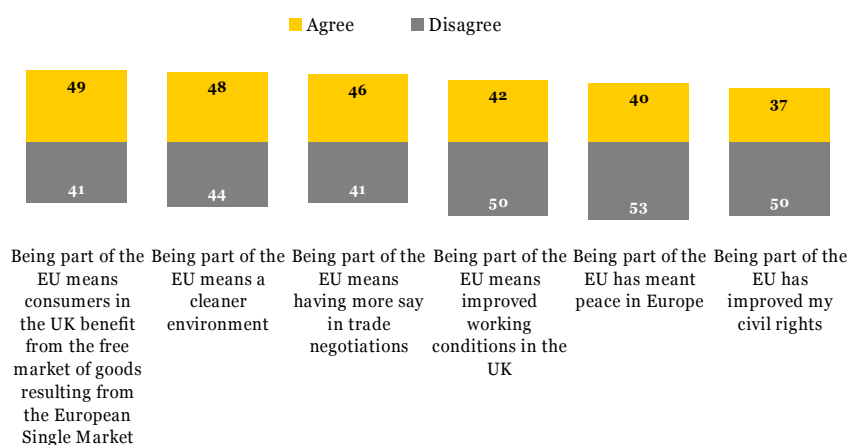
 Source:  
**FLASH EB 203**  
December 2006 - January 2007

Q10. Do you intend to vote in the next European Parliament election?  
Base: all respondents  
Total %

## Benefits of EU membership

The relative majority, still barely half of the British population, perceive the positive effects of Union membership in the areas of trade and a cleaner environment. On the other hand, the majority of British citizens do not agree that being part of the Union has positively affected working conditions, peace in Europe or human rights.

Do you agree or disagree with ...



Source: FLASH EB 203 December 2006 - January 2007

Q11. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Being part of the EU... Base: all respondents

People in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are much more inclined to see improvements stemming from membership of the EU, while it is least appreciated in various regions of England, primarily in the East Midlands, South East and East of England.

The Northern Irish (60%) and the Scots (55%) agree in the highest proportions that UK membership of the EU benefits the nation’s consumers because of the European Single Market. Residents of the East Midlands (42%) and the North East (44%) are the least likely to agree with this view. Looking at several issues, the following pattern emerges.

Issue	Region most likely to see benefit of EU membership	Region least likely to see such a benefit
Help for consumers	Northern Ireland	East Midlands
Environmental issues	Northern Ireland	East of England / South East
Trade negotiations (assisted)	Northern Ireland	East Midlands
Better working conditions	Northern Ireland	East Midlands
(assist) Peace in Europe	Northern Ireland	East Midlands
Human rights improvements	Northern Ireland	East of England / South East

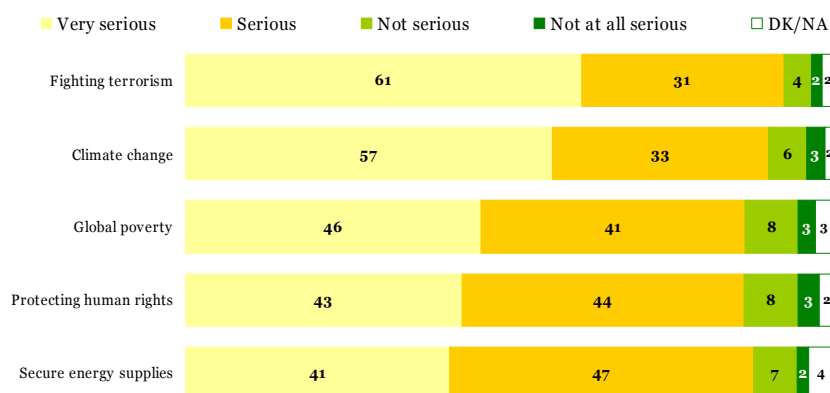
The current results can be compared to the 2006 survey. Last year, two-thirds (63%) of the population agreed that being part of the EU meant that consumers in the UK could benefit from the free market of goods resulting from the European Single Market. In the current survey, only half of the British (49%) agreed that UK consumers prosper by being part of the EU. The proportion of those who believe that being part of the EU means improved working conditions in the UK also decreased, from 51% (in 2006) to 42% (2007).

## Concern over critical issues

British citizens regard both terrorism and climate change as very serious issues. Interestingly, while climate change is given first preference by those with the highest education, fighting terrorism is the first for those with a lower level of educational attainment.

When UK citizens were asked about the seriousness of several issues that they faced, terrorism topped the list (61%), with climate change a close second (57%). Global poverty (46%), protecting human rights (43%), and securing energy supplies (41%) were seen as very serious issues, but to a lesser extent.

How serious are the following issues for this country?



Source:  
FLASH EB 203  
December 2006 - January 2007

Q12. How serious are the following issues for this country?  
Base: all respondents

Looking at the two highest areas of concern, women (66%), those over the age of 55 and non-graduates tend to agree at the highest rates that the fight against terrorism is a very serious issue. As for climate change, graduates, women and anyone over the age of 25 are most likely to find this environmental issue to be a very serious problem in the UK.

There are also significant differences among the regions; people in Wales and the East of England region regard all of the issues as being more serious than citizens in the other regions. The East of England came second to Wales in the amount of concern in several issues.

Issue	Region with the most concern	Region with the least concern
Terrorism	Wales / West Midlands	Northern Ireland
Climate change	Wales	North West
Global poverty	Wales	East Midlands / South East
Protection of human rights	Wales	South East
Securing energy supplies	Wales	South East, Scotland, North West



## Regional Summaries

Looking at the UK in total, interest in the EU and European affairs is the highest outside of England, i.e. in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. All three of those regions are more positive about EU membership and the benefits to be gained. Within England, Londoners have a high level of interest in politics in general, while citizens of the East of England are the most aware of EU initiatives.

### A snapshot of the UK

- **East of England** residents are among the most aware of the EU's initiatives, but they are among those unlikely to agree that the EU has added benefits to their lives.
- The awareness about EU initiatives in the **North East** is lower than the UK average. Citizens here also show little interest in both domestic and European affairs.
- **Londoners** have a high level of interest in all areas of political affairs - both domestic and European. In terms of EU membership benefiting the UK, Londoners do feel that it has improved human rights and working conditions, helped consumers and given the UK a stronger voice in trade negotiations.
- **North West** citizens are the least likely to feel climate change is a serious issue. They are not well informed about EU initiatives and not particularly aware of EU information resources.
- Residents of **Northern Ireland** believe there are significant benefits from EU membership, interest in European affairs is high, as is the awareness about the EU's initiatives.
- The citizens of **South East England** are amongst those with the highest rates of interest in both domestic and European affairs, but they are not convinced about the benefits of EU membership.
- Residents of **Scotland** consider that EU membership has brought advantages, and they intend to participate strongly in the next European elections.
- In the **South West**, awareness of EU information sources has dropped noticeably, but they tend to be more positive than other regions about the benefits of EU membership.
- **Welsh** citizens are positive about EU initiatives, interested in European affairs and see the benefits in EU membership.
- Citizens from **Yorkshire and the Humber** have a low level of interest in politics and European affairs.
- **West Midlands** residents are highly likely to see the fight against terrorism as a very serious issue; their views on all other issues are in line with UK averages.
- People from the **East Midlands** see little benefit from the EU and they are much less likely (46%) to take an interest in European affairs than the typical Brit (53%). They are

not particularly aware of the EU's initiatives, but a surprisingly high number (almost 20%) have heard of the EPICs.