



*Standard Eurobarometer*



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Commission

# EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The major issues covered in the full report are highlighted in this executive summary.

### **Has the UK benefited from EU membership?**

Across the European Union, there was a wide disparity of opinion between citizens as to whether their country had benefited from being a member of the European Union. Approximately three-quarters of Greeks (74%), Danes (74%) and Lithuanians (77%) held this positive view.

These high figures are still ten percentage points below the figures recorded in Ireland where virtually nine out of ten (87%) of those polled held this belief.

Over the past six months, there has been no change in the beliefs of EU citizens in general that their particular country has benefited from membership and this figure remains constant at 54%. In the UK, however, there has been a fall from 42% to 39% of those polled taking this positive view.

There was a wide disparity in the constituent parts of this average figure on this fundamental issue as to whether the UK had benefited from EU membership.

Age was a significant factor with more than half (53%) of those aged between 15 to 24 taking a positive view and 33% holding the contrary view. These figures are virtually reversed amongst UK citizens aged 55 or more. In this oldest segment, less than a third (31%) believed the country had benefited and 55% said it had not benefited.

This contrast is repeated when educational levels are taken into account. 62% of those UK citizens educated to age 20 or more believed the UK had benefited from membership – a figure more than twice the 30% taking the opposite view.

### **Is EU membership a good thing for the UK? Q 7**

Across the twenty-five EU countries surveyed, the image of the European Union has slipped over the past six months. While in the spring of 2006, 55% of EU citizens and 42% of UK citizens believed the EU was a good thing, these figures have now fallen to 53% and 34% respectively.

31% of UK citizens went as far as to say membership was a bad thing although this figure, seen in the context of 47% of the UK poll saying that the country had not benefited from EU membership, might reasonably have been expected to be larger.

Although representing just a third (34%) of the UK poll, it should be noted that the largest proportion of UK citizens interviewed believed membership of the European Union was a good thing for the country.

As was noted in the question above, this average figure conceals some substantial variations with younger and better educated people having a noticeably more positive view on membership.

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58% of those educated to age 20 or above who said that membership was a good thing compared with just 19% taking the opposite view. In a similar way, 45% of those aged 15 to 24 supported the positive view compared with just 14% stating that membership was a bad thing.

### **Image of the EU**

Ireland and Greece feature high on the rankings of countries with a positive attitude to the European Union with 73% and 58% of their respective polls taking this view.

These figures can be compared with an EU average of 46% and a UK figure of just 28% - the lowest among the twenty-five Member States surveyed - itself some six percentage points behind Austria and Finland (34%).

Generally, across Europe, opinion has weakened in this area and the EU figures at 46% are down from 50% six months previously. The UK figures show a similar decline from 34% to 28%.

Making up the UK figure of 28% who had a positive view of the European Union were more men (33%) than women (24%).

Older people were considerably less enthusiastic about the European Union and only 22% of those aged 55 or more held this view compared with nearly twice as many (41%) of those aged 15 to 24.

An even stronger difference was noted by educational level. Amongst those who had left school aged 15 or less, only 17% had a positive view of the EU compared with three times this number amongst those educated to age 20 or more where 52% of those polled held a positive view.

### **Understanding how the EU works**

When EU citizens are asked whether they **understand how the EU works**, there has been an increase in the average from 41% to 43% over the past twelve months. The UK figure has shown a greater percentage growth than the EU average and has risen from 35% to 40%.

Although the UK figures have shown this substantial growth, they still trail behind countries such as Greece (55%), Slovenia (57%), Cyprus (58%) and Luxembourg (65%).

### **Are you looking for info about the EU, its policies & institutions.**

This edition of Eurobarometer did not include the question often asked in the past to which the UK response was always relatively high which relates to the **desire** of citizens to have more information about the European Union.

In its place, Question 15 deals with a related but very different question as to whether citizens are **looking for** information about the European Union.

The UK figures produce the statistic that 41% of those polled never look for this kind of information. This seemingly high figure is, however, only four percentage points greater than the EU average of 37% and less than the 42% noted in Belgium and the Netherlands, 49% in Ireland and 60% in Spain.

## **Trust**

The full report looks in detail at trust in methods of communication as it is important to identify those media which have higher levels of trust as these would be the platforms for information to be disseminated on European matters with a better hope that the content would be seen as being credible.

Across the European Union, just 44% of those polled tended to trust **the press** compared with 49% who did not. This first figure shows a small decline from the 45% recorded a year previously.

The UK has the distinction of being the EU Member State which has the lowest level of trust in printed media - the next smallest figure being 32% in Hungary. Just 19% of the UK poll had trust in this medium compared with figures as high as 58% in Lithuania, Finland and Portugal and virtually two-thirds (63%) of the Dutch poll.

**Radio** continues to be the most trusted medium across both the UK and the European Union. In the UK, the trust factor has risen from 61% to 62% over the past year and an increase from 61% to 63% is noted in the average EU25 statistics.

**Television** remains the second most trusted medium after radio although there is a ten percentage point difference in the EU25 figures and eight percentage points on the UK figures in favour of radio.

Accordingly, across the European Union, 53% of those polled tended to trust television and a very similar figure of 54% is noted in the UK. Countries where this medium received high levels of trust were Finland (72%), the Czech Republic (73%), Denmark (74%) and Estonia (75%).

While across Europe opinions were fairly equally divided between those who trusted the **internet** (34%), those who did not trust it (35%) and those who did not give a clear response (30%), this new medium already has the trust of a third of EU citizens.

In the UK, the trust figure is at the lower end of the scale at 30% which is approximately half of the highest figure in the Union provided by the Czech Republic where 55% of those polled tended to trust this new medium.

No comparable figures to show trends in this attitude are available as this is the first time this question has been asked. It will, however, be interesting to see whether the anticipated take-up rate in internet connectivity and usage causes this trust figure to grow.

### **Trust in national institutions**

The level of trust that UK citizens have in their government and parliament is assessed and compared with other EU Member States to see if the British view of these institutions shows any marked differences.

There has been a substantial decline in the trust that EU citizens give to their **national governments** over the past six months and the percentage of citizens who said they tended to trust this institution has fallen from 35% to 30% in this short period.

The figures in the UK show the same but even greater proportionate fall from 30% to 24%.

The trust level in **national parliaments** follows the same decline over the past six months as was shown in the data for national governments.

Accordingly, across Europe, just 8,000 of the 24,600 people polled tended to trust their national parliament. This figure represents 33% of those polled and shows a marked decline from 38% in just six months.

Over the same period, the decline in the UK figures is even greater and just 29% of this country's poll now tends to trust their parliament compared with 36% in the last poll.

### **Trust in European and international organisations**

Trust levels in the European Union and the United Nations are analysed and compared with the benchmarks of national institutions.

Over the past six months, trust of the **European Union** amongst the 25 Member States had fallen from 48% to 45%.

Making up this average figure were figures in excess of 60% from Belgium, Hungary and Estonia (61%), Czech Republic and Slovakia (62%), Greece (65%) and Slovenia (70%).

At the other end of the scale, were figures of 38% from Germany and Sweden, while some way adrift, at 26%, was the UK.

By far the largest 'don't know' factor – nine percentage points larger than the EU25 average - was a figure representing nearly a quarter of the poll (23%) in the UK. A diminishing of this figure should lead to an increase of the trust factor in the EU by UK citizens.

The UK figure, at 26%, was made up of widely differing figures by age, education, household composition and occupation. Accordingly, while just 15% of those over 55 trust the EU, this figure rises to 43% of those aged 15 to 24.

A similar range of attitude is seen by education. While just one in eight (12%) of those only educated to age 15 trusted the Union, this figure rises to 42% of those educated to age 20 or more and the majority (53%) of those still studying.

The fall in trust amongst EU citizens towards the European Union was mirrored by a similar fall in their trust level towards the **United Nations**. While just six months previously 54% of EU25 citizens and 55% of those resident in the UK trusted this organization, these figures have both fallen by three percentage points to 51% and 52% respectively.

Making up the EU25 average of 51% were figures above 60% observed in Malta (62%), the Czech Republic (66%), Finland (70%), Denmark (73%) and Sweden (76%).

The UK figure, at 52%, was marginally above the EU25 average but noticeably larger than figures such as 42% in Greece and just 26% in Cyprus.

### **Areas of concern**

The report also looks at what UK, as well EU, citizens see as the two main domestic issues facing their countries at present and then to look outwards towards the broader picture and to see if there is any correlation between these internal/domestic concerns and the three actions that citizens consider should be priority for the European Union.

#### **Four most important areas of concern for citizens**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>EU</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>High %</b>	<b>Low %</b>
<b>1</b>	Immigration	40	Unemployment	40	70 DE, 66 PL	4 IE, 6 DK
<b>2</b>	Terrorism	35	Crime	23	55 IE, 45 EE	10 HU, LU
<b>3</b>	Crime	34	Economic situation	23	47 HU, 41 EL	5 IE, UK
<b>4</b>	Healthcare	20	Immigration	21	64 ES, 45 MT	1 HU, 2 SI

Across the EU, **unemployment** was the most important issue facing citizens and 40% of those polled listed this as one of the two most important issues facing their country.

In the UK, however, this issue was ranked only fifth (11%) and the first three most important issues were seen to be immigration (40%), terrorism (35%) and crime (34%).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These figures total more than 100% - due to multiple choices being allowed

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**Immigration** was one of the two most important issues to 40% of the UK poll – a marked increase on just 28% six months previously.

While there were no major variations in responses by gender, age and household composition, there was a marked difference by education level. This issue was one of the two most important to just 25% of those educated to age 20 compared with 44% of those educated to age 15 or less. Perhaps surprisingly, 38% of those still studying held this view.

35% of the UK poll saw **terrorism** as one of the two most important issues facing their country and this concern was felt virtually identically by men and women. This figure has virtually doubled from 18% in just six months.

There was no obvious variations by educational level, although a high figure of 54% was noted amongst those still studying. This perhaps reflects the fact that the youngest age-group surveyed (15 to 24) had virtually half (48%) of its number citing terrorism compared with just 31% of people aged 40 or more.

There was also a sharp increase in concern as size of household rose. Accordingly, only 28% of people living on their own felt terrorism was one of the two most important issues compared with 42% of households numbering four or more members.

One in three (34%) of the UK poll cited **crime** in this instance and while no clear patterns emerge by age and household composition, women (37%) were more concerned than men (32%) and the least educated (46%) were more than twice as concerned as those educated to age 20 and beyond where the figure reaches just 20%.

One in five (20%) of UK citizens cited **healthcare** as one of the two most important issues facing their country and higher than average figures were seen amongst women (23%) and people educated to age 20 or beyond.

Young people, however, did not see healthcare as being an important issue and only 10% of their number cited it.

### **The three actions the European Union should follow in priority**

EU citizens after having detailed the two most important issues facing their own country were then asked what they considered should be the three areas in which the European Union should act as a matter of priority.

Across the European Union, 43% of those polled said that fighting poverty and social exclusion was their primary concern and, in the UK poll, this is the third most popular response at 33% behind fighting illegal immigration (34%) and fighting terrorism (46%).

The table below shows the four most cited actions that citizens in the UK and across the twenty-five Member States felt that the European Union should pursue.

Rank	UK	%	EU	%	High %	Low %
1	Fighting terrorism	46	Fighting poverty and social exclusion	43	LT 64, PL 61	MT 31, UK 33
2	Fighting illegal immigration	34	Fighting unemployment	40	PL 65, PT 62	DK13, NL 16
3	Fighting poverty and social exclusion	33	Peace and security in Europe	29	SK 43, CY 49	IE 17, MT 26
4	Peace and security in Europe	28	Fighting terrorism	27	UK 46, ES 42	PT 5, LT 7

Making up the 46% of UK citizens who said that **fighting terrorism** was one of three actions the European Union should take were 42% of men and 50% of women.

This action was more popular amongst younger people and, on average, 54% of people aged between 15 and 39 supported it as opposed to 40% of those aged 40 or above.

34% of the UK poll made **fighting illegal immigration** one of their three choices and while there were little or no differences by gender or age, there were substantial differences by education level.

Just 18% of those educated to age 20 and beyond chose this option compared with 39% of those who had left school aged 15 or less.

In terms of EU action, **fighting poverty and social exclusion** was the third most popular choice amongst UK respondents, just one percentage point below the 34% noted above for fighting illegal immigration.

As might be expected, 44% of the unemployed saw this as an EU priority compared with just 27% of the retired.

No clear patterns emerge by age or household composition but the most educated group (36%) were more convinced that **maintaining peace and security in Europe** was important than those educated until age 16-19 (25%) and those who had left school aged 15 or less (25%).

### **Decision-making – UK or EU-level?**

Having looked at what are the major domestic issues and the most important actions that the European Union should take, the report looks at the important issue of where these decisions should be made.

UK citizens distinguish between issues where they believe control and decision-making is best done on a country-by-country basis and other issues where they are

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able to take a broader and perhaps less insular view because of the core nature of the issue in question.

**Immigration** and **crime** are the two issues which UK citizens consider to be the most important facing them at the moment. Both of these issues with this high level of importance are felt to be subjects which should be dealt with on a local, i.e. national, basis rather than jointly within the European Union. However, as will be seen in a more detailed analysis, these broad figures contain substantial variations by socio-demographic characteristics.

69% of UK citizens feel that decisions regarding the **fighting of crime** should be taken by the UK government rather than jointly within the EU while 28% of the poll takes the contrary view. These figures show a drift towards the domestic position from the 65% and 33% recorded in EB64, just one year ago.

63% of UK citizens feel this decision regarding **immigration** should be made by the UK government and just half this number (33%) thinks it should be made jointly within the EU.

These figures show a move towards a more UK-focused viewpoint as the figures from just a year before showed a divide of 19 percentage points (58% and 39%) compared with the 30 percentage points in this latest survey.

What is interesting to note, however, are the variations in the socio-demographic data making up these average figures.

While three-quarters (75%) of those aged 55 or more support this view and only 21% take the contrary stance, there is an even split amongst 15-25 year olds (47% each) on this issue.

Education also has a major effect upon this belief. 77% of those who left school aged 15 or less support the 'national' view and just 18% think the decision should be made jointly within the EU.

Amongst those educated to age 20 or more, however, there is a radical shift in opinion. 50% of those with this higher level of education believe decisions should be made on a joint EU basis while 47% take the contrary view.

In the important area of **protecting the environment**, the awareness of a united European approach is appreciated amongst UK citizens. It appears that UK citizens appreciate that protection of the environment has no national boundaries. This is a different viewpoint than that taken on issues such as crime and immigration where UK citizens believe the issues are essentially part of a national rather than pan-European agenda.

Accordingly, more than half (55%) of the UK poll believe that decisions should be made jointly within the EU. Amongst those aged 40 to 54, the figure rises to 62% of those polled and amongst those with the highest level of education, the figure moves even higher to 71% - nearly three-quarters of this respondent group.

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The importance of a joint EU view was held more strongly in larger family units and particularly high figures of 74% and 73% were noted amongst managers and other white-collar workers.

Only amongst the retired (39%) and those aged 55 or more (45%) were there more people believing environmental decisions should be made by the UK government rather than jointly within the EU.

While one in three (35%) of UK citizens believes that decisions relating to **fighting terrorism** should be made by the UK government, the great majority (61%), however, sees the real need for these decisions to be made jointly within the European Union.

This majority rises to nearly three-quarters of those polled amongst those aged 15 to 24 and amongst the most educated with figures reaching 72% in both groups.

While there were only minimal differences in attitude between men and women, further noticeable variations were seen by occupation with 69% of the self-employed, 70% of managers and 72% of other white-collar workers taking the 'European' view on this issue.

56% of UK citizens believe that the important area of **scientific and technological research** should be governed by decisions made jointly within the European Union and this figure is noticeably higher than the EU average. Only 38% of those polled take the contrary view

Amongst the male population, this view is even more strongly held with 60% of the male poll taking this position compared with just 52% of women where a relatively high 'don't know' figure was also observed.

65% of the youngest group (aged 15 to 24) and more than two-thirds (68%) of the most educated also held this view.

Across every occupation, more people believed decision-making should be done at the EU level rather than in the UK alone.