

Citizens' awareness and perceptions of EU regional policy

Summary

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This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Flash EB Series #298

Citizens' awareness and perceptions of EU regional policy

Survey conducted by The Gallup Organization,
Hungary upon the request of
Directorate-General for Regional Policy



Coordinated by Directorate-General
Communication

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THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION

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Introduction

Even though Europe is one of the richest regions in the world, economic and social disparities exist between the EU's Member States and their regions. The challenge to reduce these differences has grown, since 2004, with the entry of 12 new Member States with GDPs that are well below the EU's average. The objective to enhance growth and to create jobs in Europe's poorer regions is pursued by means of the EU's structural and cohesion funds; new programmes began in 2007 and will end in 2013¹.

The aim of this Flash Eurobarometer survey “*Citizens’ awareness and perceptions of EU regional policy*” (N° 298) is to investigate EU citizens’ attitudes about the Union’s regional policy. This Flash Eurobarometer survey is part of a trend series; the results of the previous wave were published in February 2008 – *Flash Eurobarometer survey N° 234*².

The survey obtained interviews – via fixed-line and mobile phones with some conducted face-to-face – with nationally representative samples of EU citizens (aged 15 and older) living in the 27 Member States. The target sample size in most countries was 1,000 interviews; in total, 27,067 interviews were conducted by Gallup’s network of fieldwork organisations from June 18 to June 22, 2010. Statistical results were weighted to correct for known demographic discrepancies.



Cohesion Policy 2007-2013 – Eligible areas in the EU under the convergence objective and the regional competitiveness and employment objective
Source: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/index_en.htm

¹ For more information, see http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/object/index_en.htm

² See: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_234_en.pdf

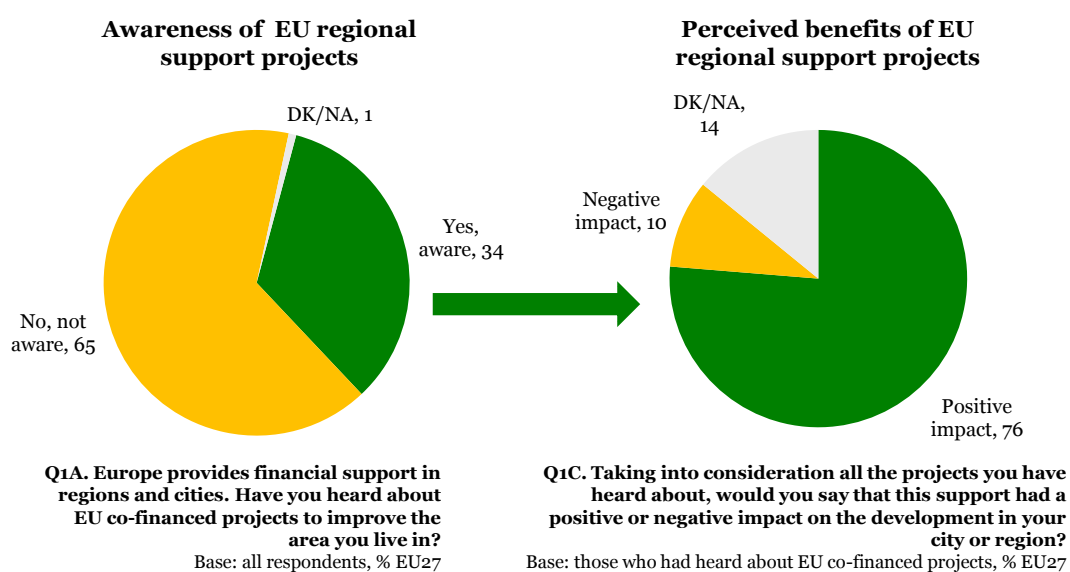
1. Awareness of regional policy and perceived benefits

1.1 Regional support projects – citizens' awareness and perceived benefits

Roughly a third (34%) of EU citizens said they had **heard about EU co-financed projects** to improve their local area; of those “aware” citizens, three-quarters (76%) felt that the EU’s support had had a positive **impact on development in their city or region**.

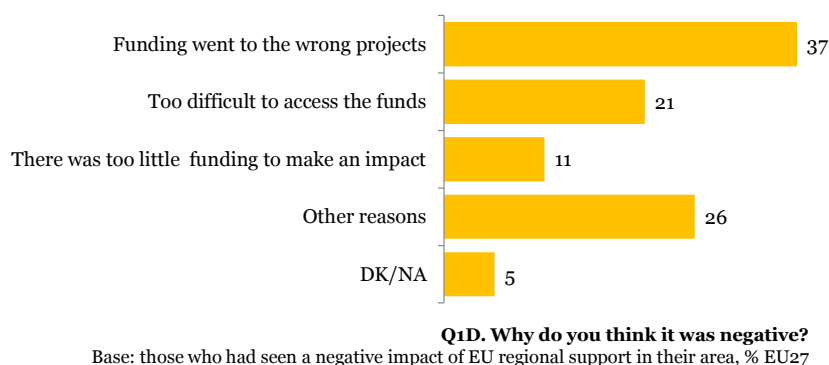
Over a third (36%) of *respondents who had heard of EU co-financed projects and who said that these projects had had a positive impact* on development in their city or region also felt that they had **personally benefited** from such projects.

Awareness – and perceived benefits – of EU regional support, 2010



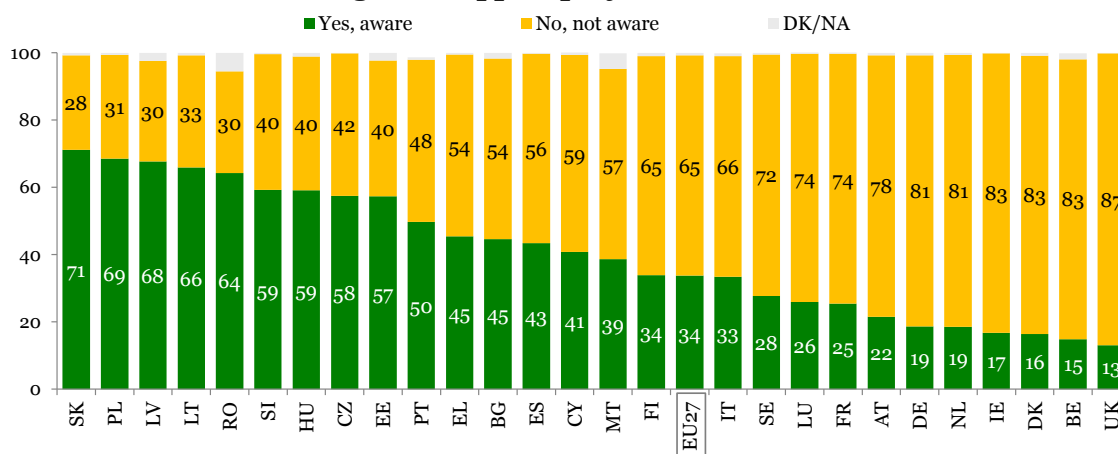
Respondents who thought that the EU’s support had had a negative impact on development in their city or region were presented with a list of potential reasons to explain why this was the case. The largest proportion (37%) mentioned that funding had gone to the wrong projects. About a fifth (21%) of these particular respondents felt that access to EU funds was too difficult and 11% said the funding had not been sufficient to have a genuine impact.

Reasons why EU regional support projects were seen to have had a negative impact



EU citizens’ **awareness levels of funds received** were higher in countries that were eligible for support under the Convergence objective than in countries only covered by the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective or European Territorial Cooperation objective. In Latvia, Poland and Slovakia, more than two-thirds of respondents were aware of EU regional support projects in their area (68%-71%). The UK, Belgium, Denmark and Ireland, on the other hand, had the lowest levels of awareness (13%-17%).

Awareness of the EU regional support projects



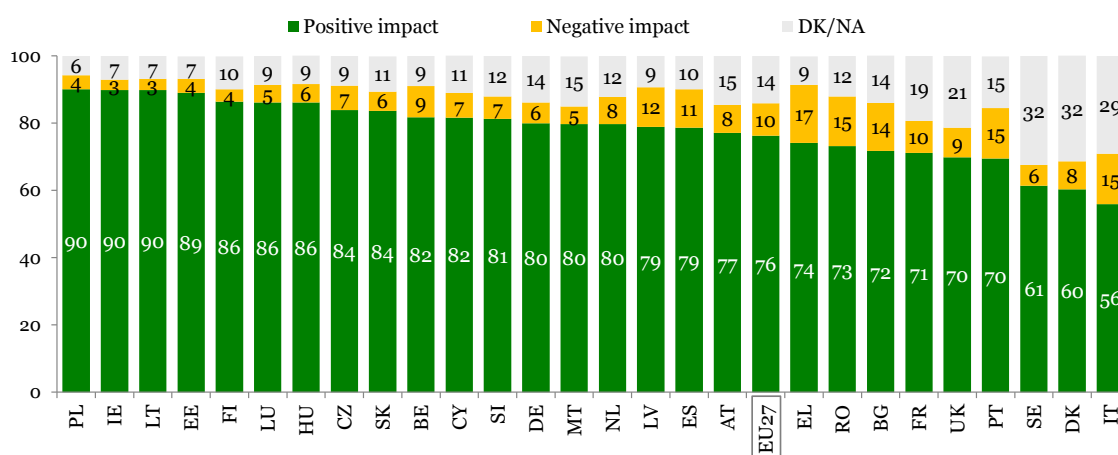
Q1A. Europe provides financial support in regions and cities. Have you heard about EU co-financed projects to improve the area you live in?
Base: all respondents, % by country

In all EU Member States, more than half of respondents, *who had heard about EU co-financed projects in their region*, said that this support had been **positive for development in their area**; the proportion of respondents expressing such optimism ranged from 56% in Italy to 90% in Lithuania, Ireland and Poland.

The countries where respondents were the most likely to say that they had **personally benefited from an EU regional support project** were similar to the ones where respondents said that such projects had been beneficial for their region or city.

Perceived benefits of EU regional support projects for respondents’ areas

(Base: those who had heard about EU co-financed projects)



Q1C. Taking into consideration all the projects you have heard about, would you say that this support had a positive or negative impact on the development in your city or region?
Base: those who had heard about EU co-financed projects, % by country

Certain **socio-demographic segments** were more likely than their counterparts to have heard about EU co-financed projects to improve their local area: men, respondents with a high level of education and self-employed respondents. The youngest respondents (below 25) and full-time students, on the other hand, were the least likely to have heard about such projects.

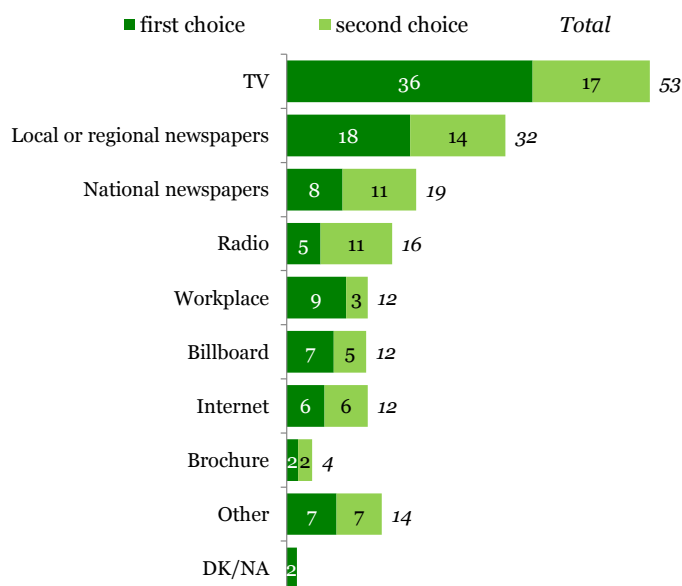
High perceptions of benefits for development in respondents' areas were measured among 15-54 year-olds (78%-80% vs. 73% of the over 54s), respondents with the highest level of education (79% vs. 69% of those with the lowest level of education), employees and manual workers (79%-80% vs. 75% of the self-employed), and city dwellers (77%-79% vs. 74% of rural residents).

1.2 Information sources about EU regional support projects

When respondents were asked where they had heard about EU co-financed projects³, more than half (53%) mentioned TV as their source of information. Local or regional newspapers were mentioned by 32% of respondents and 19% said they had read about the projects in national newspapers. Radio programmes were mentioned by 16% of interviewees.

Similarities could be seen between the two waves of the survey (in 2008 and 2010); in both waves, respondents were most likely to refer to TV as their source of information, followed by regional newspapers and national newspapers.

Sources of information about EU regional support projects



Q1B. Where did you hear about it?

Base: those who had heard about EU co-financed projects, % EU27

In all EU Member States (except Ireland), **TV** appeared among the three most popular information channels; the proportions selecting this channel were the highest in Slovakia (86%), Romania (80%) and Malta (77%).

Newspapers also appeared among the three most popular information channels in almost all of the Member States. Local newspapers were the most frequently mentioned source of information in Finland (60%), Germany (50%) and Sweden (46%). Respondents in Estonia (36%), Ireland (34%) and Portugal (31%) most frequently referred to national newspapers.

Ireland stood out from the pack: although in 26 Member States the most important source of information about EU regional support projects was either TV or local newspapers, respondents in Ireland were most likely to say they had seen information about an EU co-financed project on a **billboard** in their area (41%).

³ Respondents were presented with a list of information channels and asked to identify the two most important sources for information about EU regional support projects, i.e. where they had heard about the projects.

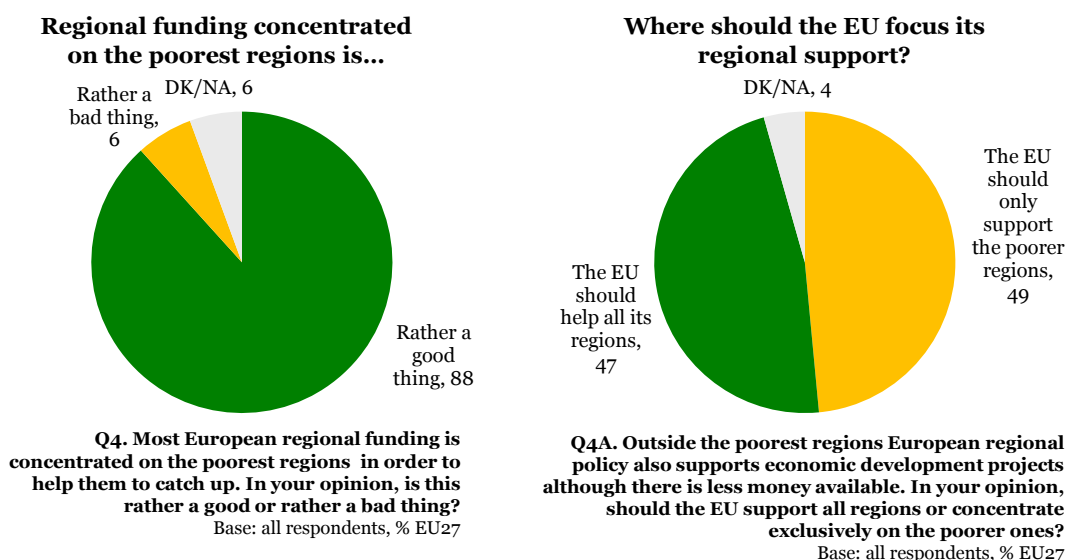
2. Views about priorities for EU regional support

2.1 Preferred beneficiaries of EU regional policy initiatives

A large majority of EU citizens accepted that the Union's regional policy served as a tool to reduce the gap between development levels of the various regions in the EU: 88% said that it was ***rather a good thing that most regional funding was concentrated on the poorest regions*** in order to help them catch up with the rest of the EU.

About half (49%) of EU citizens said that EU regional policy should focus *exclusively* on the poorer regions, while 47% answered that – in addition to the poorer regions – **more affluent regions should also be eligible for EU support**. A comparison across waves showed that respondents in the current wave appeared to be more likely to believe that EU regional policy should focus *exclusively* on the poorer regions.

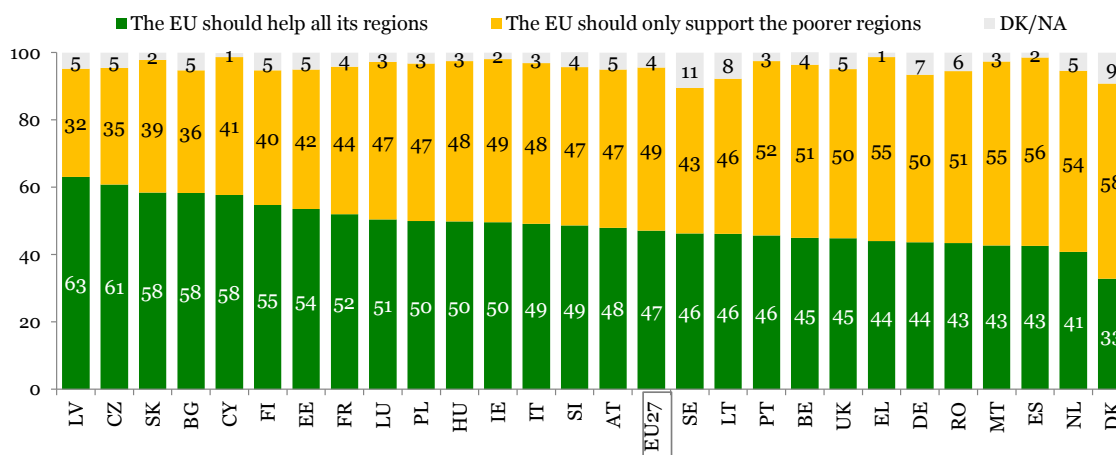
Preferred beneficiaries of EU regional support, 2010



Respondents in all EU Member States were in agreement that it was *rather a good thing* that most regional funding was concentrated on the poorest regions in the EU; the level of agreement ranged from 82% in Austria to 94% in Poland and Cyprus.

The individual country results for the question as to whether the EU should support all regions or focus exclusively on the poorer ones showed considerably more variation. In Denmark, 58% of respondents said that **only the poorer regions should get support**, while in Latvia, about half as many respondents shared this view (32%). Almost two-thirds of Latvians (63%) answered **that more affluent regions should also be eligible for EU support** in order to strengthen economic development and employment across the Union.

Should the EU support all regions or focus exclusively on the poorer ones?



Q4A. Outside the poorest regions European regional policy also supports economic development projects although there is less money available. In your opinion, should the EU support all regions or concentrate exclusively on the poorer ones?

Base: all respondents, % by country

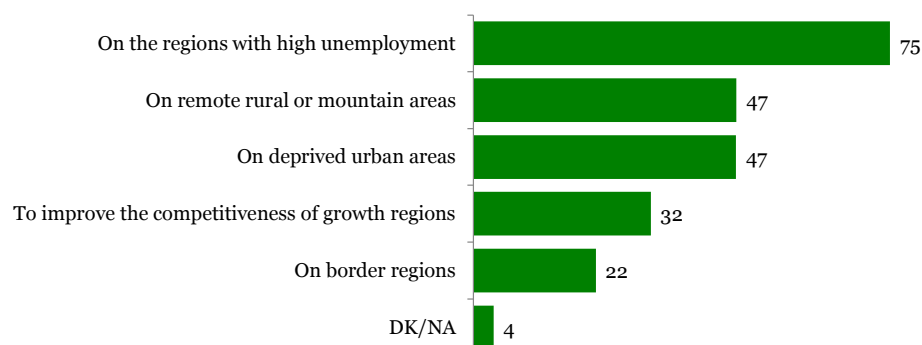
Younger and higher educated respondents were more likely to say that more affluent regions should also be eligible for EU support in order to strengthen economic development and employment across the Union. For example, while 55% of 15-24 year-olds answered that all EU regions should be supported, this proportion decreased to 37% of the over 54 year-olds. More than half of the over 54 year-olds (57%), respondents with the lowest level of education (60%) and those not working (53%) answered that EU regional policy should focus *exclusively* on the poorer regions.

2.2 Where should EU regional support be targeted?

When asked where EU regional support should be targeted, 75% said that it should go to regions with high unemployment. Next in line, remote rural or mountain areas and deprived urban areas were each mentioned as priority candidates by just under half of respondents (47% for both).

A smaller proportion of EU citizens – 32% – thought that EU aid should focus on improving the competitiveness of growth regions. Finally, just under a quarter (22%) of respondents suggested that support should be focused on each country's border regions.

Where should EU regional support be targeted?



Q4B. Where would you target aid under EU Regional Policy?

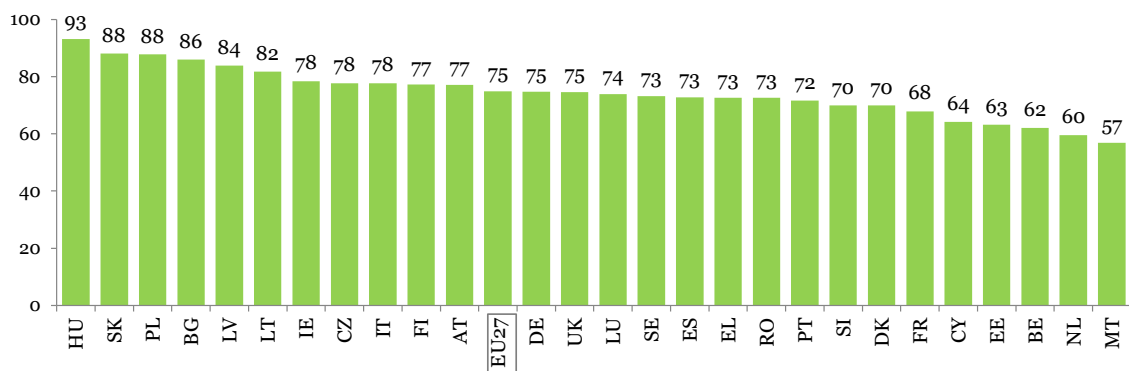
Base: all respondents, % 'mentioned', EU27

Individual country results revealed that in all Member States except Romania, the largest proportion of respondents thought that EU aid should be targeted on **regions with high unemployment**; the proportion of respondents who shared this view ranged from 57% in Malta to 93% in Hungary.

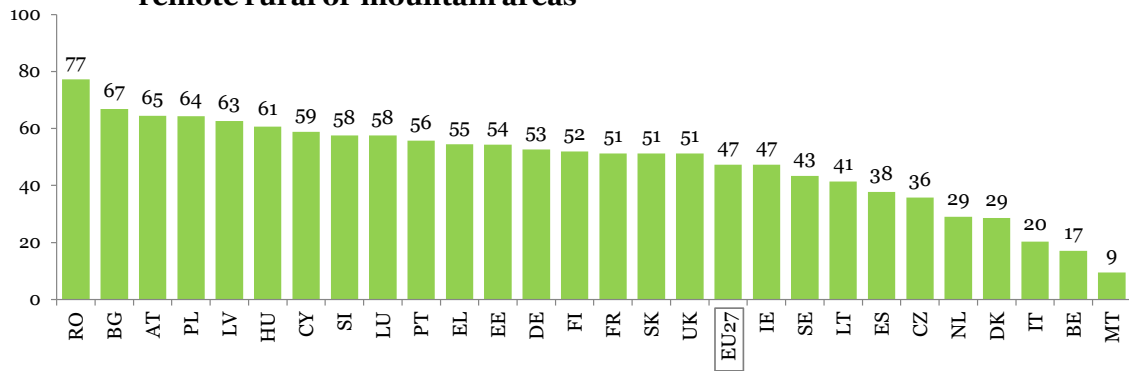
Romanians were the most likely to say that EU support should be targeted at **remote rural or mountain areas** (77%). In the remaining countries, the proportion of interviewees who wanted to target remote areas ranged from 9% in Malta to 67% in Bulgaria. Interviewees in Romania were, however, also among the most likely to mention **deprived urban areas** in this context (68%); respondents in Latvia, Luxembourg and Hungary also wanted to give priority to deprived urban areas in the EU (65%-69%).

As was seen for the EU-wide results, in most countries, a lower number of respondents identified growth regions or border regions as targets for EU support.

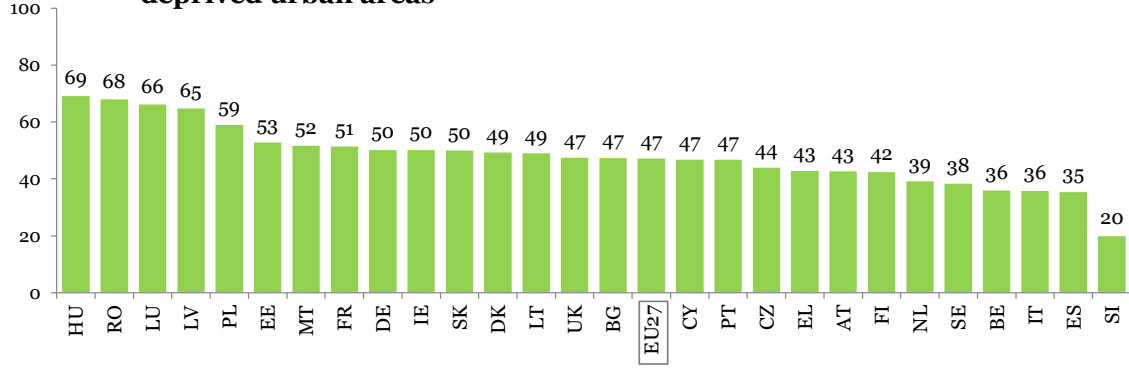
Targets for EU support:
regions with high unemployment



remote rural or mountain areas



deprived urban areas



Q4B. Where would you target aid under EU regional policy?
Base: all respondents, % 'mentioned' by country

Across all **socio-demographic groups**, respondents most frequently said that EU support should go to regions with high unemployment (ranging from 70% of self-employed respondents to 79% of manual workers) and least frequently thought that support should be focused on each country's border regions (20%-23% across all groups).

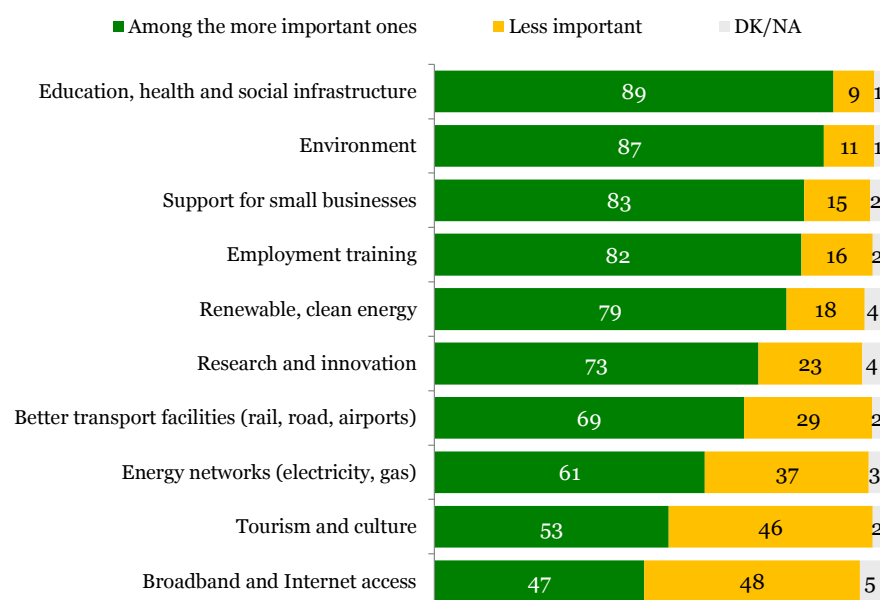
2.3 Priority sectors of EU regional policy

Interviewees were asked in which policy areas they would prefer to see their city or region being supported by the EU; for each of 10 policy areas, they were requested to say if they considered it to be among the *more* or *less important* ones for their city or region.

The 2008 and 2010 results were similar in the sense that, in both waves, respondents appeared to accept almost all policy areas listed in the survey as being among the *more important ones* for their city or region. For example, in both 2008 and 2010, more than 80% of respondents identified educational, health and social infrastructure, environmental issues, support for small businesses and employment training as important policy areas.

Support for tourism in their cities or regions and support to provide broadband Internet access were seen as the least pressing policy areas; 53% listed “tourism and culture” among the more important policy areas and 47% did the same for “broadband and Internet access”.

EU regional policy – respondents’ views on priority sectors



Q5. EU regional policy can support many different sectors. I will read a list of areas to you. Please tell me for each of them, if you consider them among the more important or less important ones for your city or your region?

Base: all respondents, % EU27

The table on the following page shows – for each country – the policy areas that respondents were most likely to select as the ones where they would prefer to see their city or region being supported by the EU. Respondents across the EU were in agreement that **educational, health and social infrastructure**, and **environmental issues** should be prioritised by EU regional policy – both topics appeared in the top three of most mentioned priority areas in almost all Member States.

Employment training appeared among the most mentioned priority areas for EU regional policy in 11 Member States (e.g. 89% in Italy and 88% in Cyprus and Spain) and **support for small businesses** figured in the top three in nine countries (e.g. 91% in Spain and 89% in Ireland and Greece).

Improving cities’ or regions’ **transport facilities** and creating a **renewable and clean energy supply**, however, only appeared among the three most mentioned priority sectors in half as many countries, while areas such as research and innovation or tourism did not appear among the top three in any of the 27 Member States.

EU regional policy – respondents' views on priority sectors*(three most mentioned policy areas, by country)*

BE	%	BG	%	CZ	%
Social infrastructure	86	Social infrastructure	86	Social infrastructure	89
Environment	85	Environment	78	Environment	87
Employment training	84	Transport	77	Support for small businesses	77
DK	%	DE	%	EE	%
Environment	89	Environment	91	Social infrastructure	95
Renewable energy	87	Social infrastructure	89	Employment training	86
Social infrastructure	85	Employment training	86	Environment	86
EL	%	ES	%	FR	%
Social infrastructure	96	Social infrastructure	91	Employment training	88
Environment	94	Support for small businesses	91	Support for small businesses	87
Support for small businesses	89	Employment training	88	Environment	86
IE	%	IT	%	CY	%
Social infrastructure	94	Social infrastructure	95	Social infrastructure	95
Support for small businesses	89	Environment	92	Environment	95
Environment	88	Employment training	89	Employment training	88
LV	%	LT	%	LU	%
Social infrastructure	95	Social infrastructure	86	Environment	90
Environment	81	Support for small businesses	85	Social infrastructure	88
Employment training	80	Environment	78	Renewable energy	87
HU	%	MT	%	NL	%
Social infrastructure	93	Environment	97	Social infrastructure	88
Environment	90	Social infrastructure	95	Employment training	85
Employment training	83	Renewable energy	95	Environment	82
AT	%	PL	%	PT	%
Environment	94	Social infrastructure	91	Social infrastructure	91
Renewable energy	91	Transport	85	Support for small businesses	86
Social infrastructure	90	Environment	84	Employment training	86
RO	%	SI	%	SK	%
Social infrastructure	91	Environment	94	Social infrastructure	90
Transport	81	Social infrastructure	92	Environment	88
Environment	81	Renewable energy	88	Transport	82
FI	%	SE	%	UK	%
Environment	88	Environment	91	Social infrastructure	88
Social infrastructure	87	Renewable energy	84	Environment	85
Support for small businesses	86	Social infrastructure	81	Support for small businesses	85

Q5. EU regional policy can support many different sectors. I will read a list of areas to you. Please tell me for each of them, if you consider them among the more important or less important ones for your city or your region?

Base: all respondents

Across all **socio-demographic segments**, educational, health and social infrastructure, and environmental issues were regarded as being among the most important policy areas by at least 85% of respondents. For example, between 85% and 89% of respondents across the different age groups agreed that environmental issues should be prioritised.

Looking at the other policy areas, however, more variation was seen across the socio-demographic groups; some of the largest differences observed were, for example, that:

- rural residents more frequently said that there should be EU support to provide broadband Internet access in their region or city (51% vs. 43%-44% in urban and metropolitan areas)
- the lower the respondents' level of education, the more likely they were to prefer to see their city or region being supported by the EU in the area of employment training (89% of respondents with the lowest level of education vs. 77% of those with the highest levels)

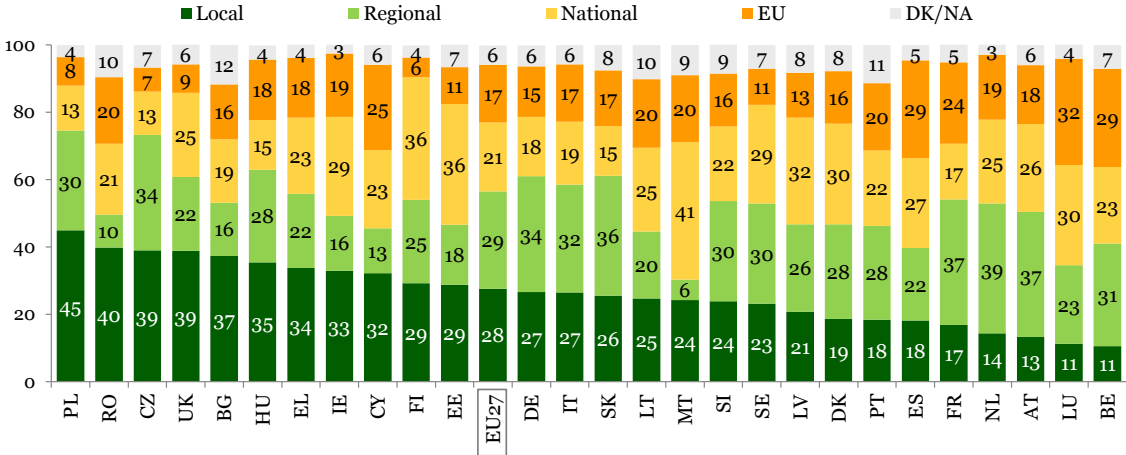
3. Opinions about multi-level governance

Roughly 3 in 10 (29%) EU citizens answered that decisions about EU regional policy projects should be taken at a **regional level**, and a similar proportion (28%) said that such decisions should be taken at a **local level**. About a fifth (21%) expressed a preference for **national decision-making** processes.

Decision-making at a regional level was especially welcomed in Slovakia, Austria, France and the Netherlands (36%-39%), while interviewees in the Czech Republic, the UK, Romania and Poland most frequently expressed a preference for local decision-making processes (39%-45%). Respondents in Finland, Estonia and Malta were the most likely to say that decision-making for EU regional projects should be taken at a national level (36%-41%).

In just four countries, a quarter – or more – respondents thought that decisions about such projects should be taken at **EU level**: Cyprus (25%), Spain and Belgium (both 29%), and Luxembourg (32%).

Preferred level of decision-making for EU regional support projects



Q6. At which level should decisions about EU regional policy projects be taken?
Base: all respondents, % by country

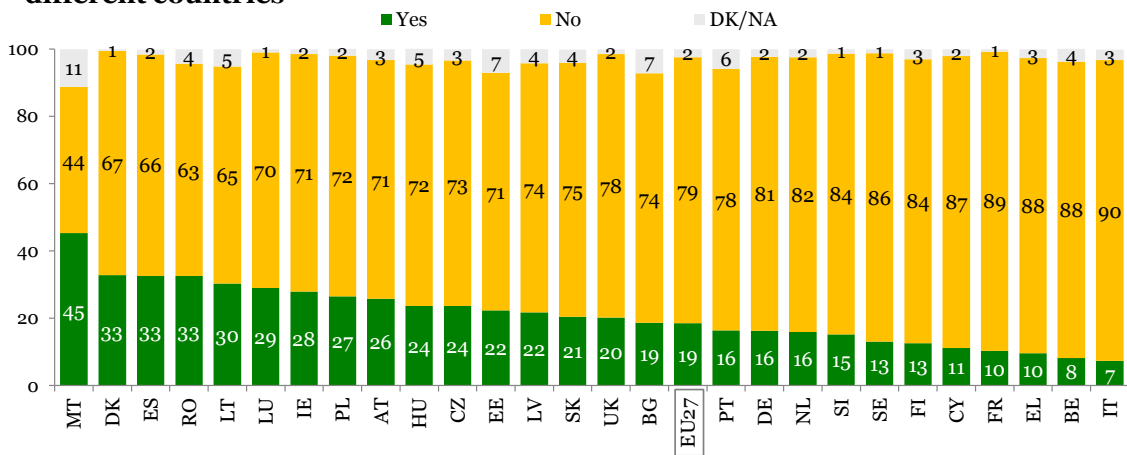
4. Awareness and perceptions about EU support for cross-border cooperation

4.1 Awareness of – and support for – EU regional funding for cross-border cooperation

Although the *European Territorial Cooperation* objective amounts to only 2.5% of the cohesion policy budget, roughly a fifth (19%) of EU citizens said they were aware that regions in different countries cooperated in order to be eligible for funding under this objective.

Respondents in Malta (45%) were – by far – the most likely to say they were aware that regions in different countries cooperated in order to be eligible for funding under the *European Territorial Cooperation* objective. Denmark, Spain and Romania were the closest to Malta with 33% of interviewees who said they knew about such cross-border initiatives.

Awareness that EU regional funding is helping cooperation between regions in different countries

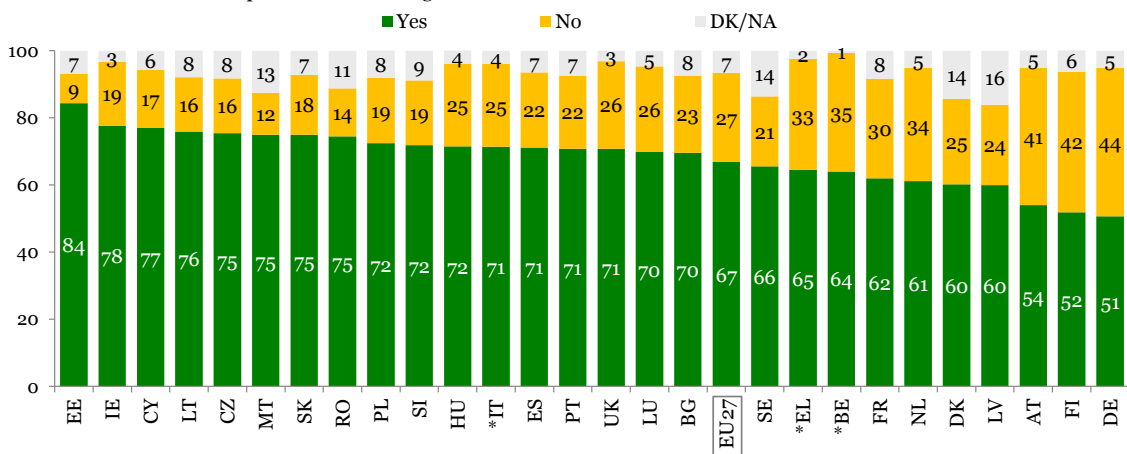


Q7A. Are you aware of regions in different countries cooperating because of EU Regional funding?
Base: all respondents, % by country

Among respondents who were aware that EU regional finding was helping cooperation between regions in different countries, at least half of them – across all EU Member States – agreed that **the EU should make more funds available to support such cooperation**; respondents in Estonia were leading the way in this view (84% “yes” responses).

Should more EU funds be available for cross-border cooperation?

(Base: those aware of cooperation between regions in different countries)



Q7B. Should more funds be spent on supporting co-operation between regions in different countries?
* n < 100 (unweighted number); Base: those aware of cooperation between regions in different countries, % by country

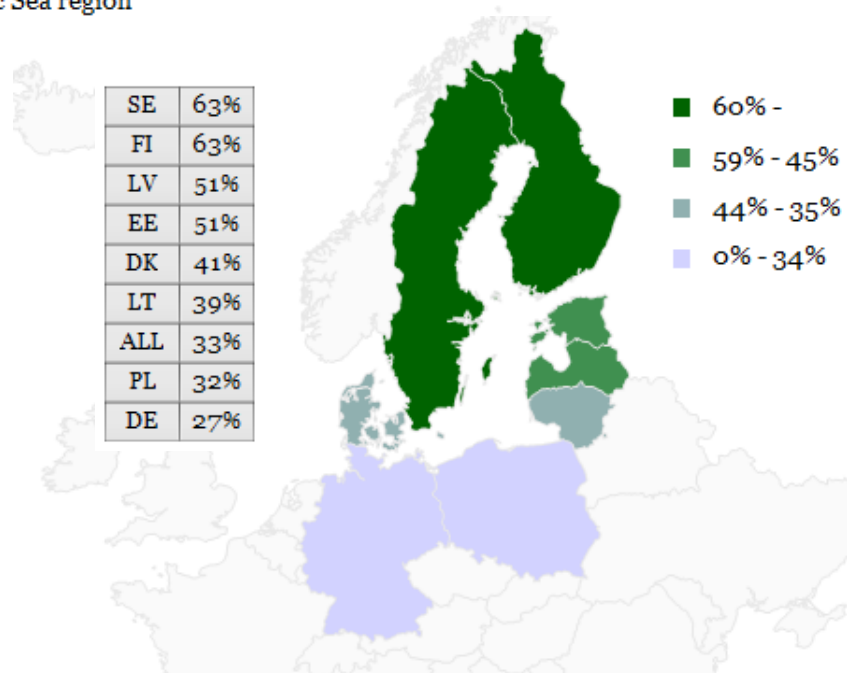
In accordance with the results for the awareness of EU co-financed projects, men, older respondents, those with a high level of education and self-employed respondents were more likely to know that EU regional funding was helping cooperation between regions in different countries.

Highly-educated respondents were also the most likely to feel that the EU should make more funds available to support such cross-border cooperation (29% vs. 22% of respondents with the lowest level of education). The opposite was true for the oldest respondents (over 54 years of age); although their awareness level was high, they tended not to agree that this funding was required: 24% thought that more EU funding should go to cross-border regional cooperation, compared to 27%-30% across other age groups.

4.1 Awareness of the Baltic Sea Region cooperation programme

A third of respondents in EU Member States around the Baltic Sea were aware that there was an EU strategy to promote cooperation between the Baltic Sea countries⁴. Respondents in Finland and Sweden were the most likely to say they had heard about *EU's Baltic Sea Region cooperation programme* (both 63%), while in Germany and Poland, only half as many interviewees were aware of its existence (27% and 32%, respectively).

Proportion aware of the strategy to promote cooperation between countries of the Baltic Sea region



Q8. Are you aware that there is strategy to promote cooperation between the countries around the Baltic Sea?

Base: all respondents from the Baltic Sea countries, % by country

⁴ See: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/index_en.htm