

# Iceland and the European Union

## Summary

Fieldwork: December 2010

Report: March 2011

This survey was requested by the Directorate-General for Enlargement and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication

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 #302

# Iceland and the European Union

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



Coordinated by Directorate-General  
Communication

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**THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION**

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## Presentation

Iceland has been a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) since 1970 and has had a bilateral Free Trade Agreement with the EEC since 1972; two-thirds of Iceland's foreign trade is with EU Member States. Iceland also enjoys a high degree of integration with the EU through its membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) since 1994, as well as the Schengen area, which allows its citizens to travel and work freely throughout the EU<sup>1</sup>.

Through the EEA, Iceland participates in the single market and contributes financially towards social and economic cohesion in Europe. A significant proportion of the EU's laws are applied in Iceland today. Iceland also participates, albeit with no voting rights, in a number of EU agencies and programmes, covering areas including enterprise, environment, education and research.

### Steps towards EU membership

Iceland submitted its application for EU membership to the Council in July 2009. On 17 June 2010, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with the country. The first intergovernmental conference on the accession of Iceland to the EU was held in Brussels on 27 July 2010, formally opening accession negotiations with the country.

### Flash Eurobarometer “Iceland and the European Union” (N° 302)

The objective of Flash Eurobarometer “Iceland and the European Union” (N° 302) was to measure Icelanders' views on their country's relationship with the EU. In detail, the topics covered in the survey included:

- familiarity with the EU and knowledge of several facts about EU membership
- views about Iceland's current integration with the EU
- attitudes towards EU membership and support for adopting the euro
- views about the potential consequences of EU membership
- countries seen as models for Iceland and countries that respondents felt closest to
- travel habits and countries visited in the past five years
- favourite channels used to stay informed about current affairs and use of foreign news media.

The fieldwork was carried out in Iceland between 5 and 9 December 2010. Roughly 1,000 randomly selected citizens aged 15 and older were interviewed via fixed-line telephone. To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of results was implemented based on key socio-demographic variables.

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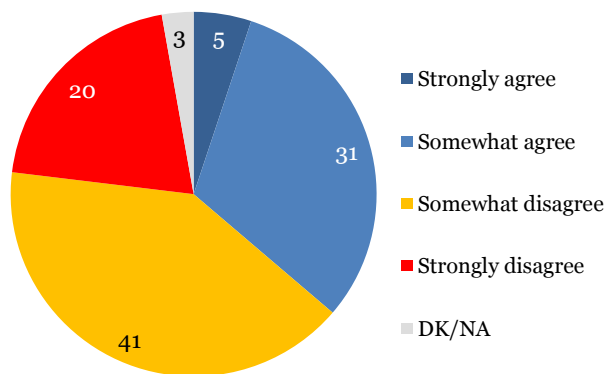
<sup>1</sup> For more details, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/iceland/relation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/iceland/relation/index_en.htm)

# 1. Familiarity with the EU

A large majority of Icelanders disagreed when presented with the statement, “**I feel familiar with the EU**” (41% said they *somewhat disagreed* with the statement and 20% *strongly disagreed*). A minority (5%) of respondents *strongly agreed*, while 31% *somewhat agreed*, that they felt familiar with the EU.

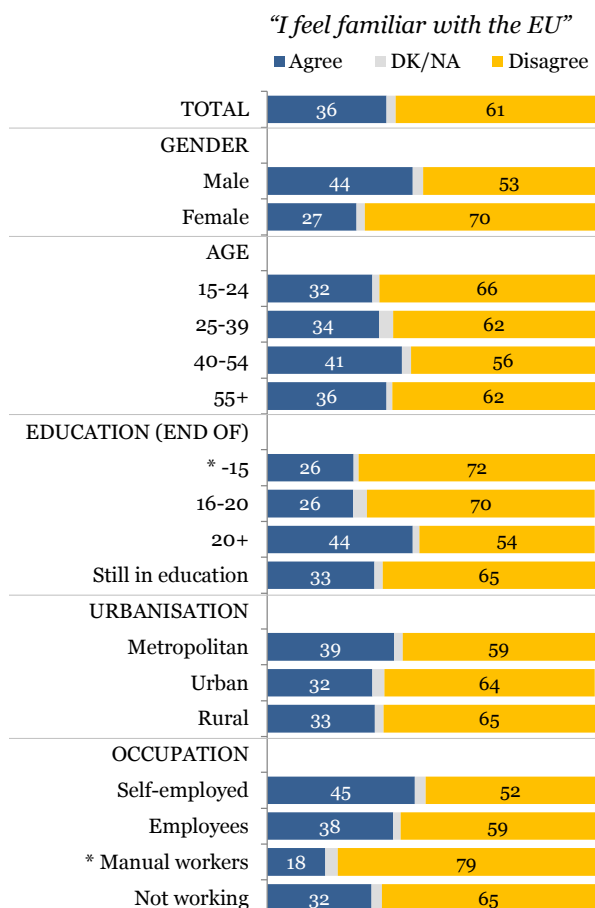
Across all socio-demographic segments, a majority of respondents *disagreed* that they felt familiar with the EU; the total level of disagreement ranged from 52% for the self-employed to 79% for manual workers.

“I feel familiar with the EU”



Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree: %, Base: all respondents

## Familiarity with the EU



Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree: %, Base: all respondents

Note: \* <50 respondents

%, Base: all respondents

Men (44% vs. 27% of women), 40-54 year-olds (41% vs. 32%-36% among other age groups), respondents with the highest level of education (44% vs. 26% of respondents with the lowest levels of education), self-employed respondents (45% vs. 18% of manual workers<sup>2</sup>) and metropolitan residents (39% vs. 32%-33% of rural/urban residents<sup>3</sup>) were more likely to feel familiar with the EU.

While 72% of respondents who never read foreign news media, and 57% of those who occasionally read such media, disagreed that they felt familiar with the EU, the figure decreased to 40% among those who said they regularly read foreign news media. Moreover, for the latter group of respondents, the survey found that a majority (58%) felt familiar with the EU.

This overall feeling of a lack of familiarity with the EU could also be seen when looking at the results for other statements. For example, when asked whether Icelanders would be able to keep their national passports after joining the EU, less than 4 in 10 (37%) respondents *strongly agreed*. Furthermore, 19% of Icelanders said they “did not know” and 9% disagreed that they would be able to keep their national passports when Iceland joined the EU.

<sup>2</sup> In certain socio-demographic segments (such as manual workers), less than 50 respondents were interviewed; caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of these groups.

<sup>3</sup> The variable “subjective urbanisation” was based on respondents’ answers to the following question: “Would you say you live in a metropolitan zone, other town/urban centre, or a rural zone?”.

Similarly, although Icelandic would become one of the EU's official languages when Iceland entered the EU, almost 4 in 10 (37%) interviewees *strongly disagreed* with the statement explaining this fact, and a further 25% *somewhat disagreed*. Slightly more than a tenth (12%) of respondents did not answer this question.

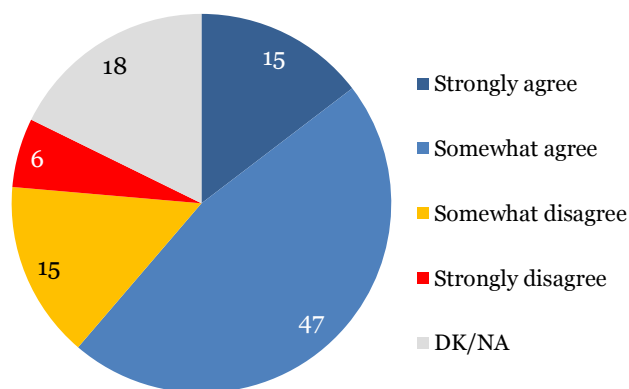
### *Icelanders and EU citizens share the same values*

More than 6 in 10 Icelanders agreed with the statement, **“Icelanders and EU citizens share the same values, such as democracy and equality”** (15% said they *strongly agreed* and 47% *somewhat agreed*). Almost equal proportions of respondents either disagreed with the statement or decided not to express an opinion (21% vs. 18%).

Respondents who felt familiar with the EU were more likely than those not feeling familiar with the Union to agree that Icelanders and EU citizens shared the same values (76% vs. 53%).

Men (68% vs. 53% of women), 25-54 year-olds (63%-65% vs. 56% of the over 54 year-olds), respondents with the highest level of education (66% vs. 51% of respondents with the lowest levels of education), manual workers (66% vs. 56% of non-working respondents) and metropolitan residents (67% vs. 51% of rural residents) were also more likely to agree that Icelanders and EU citizens shared the same values.

### **“Icelanders and EU citizens share the same values, such as democracy and equality”**



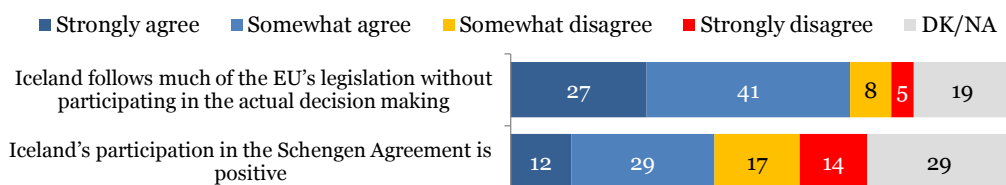
Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree:  
%. Base: all respondents

### *Iceland's membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) and the Schengen area*

In accordance with the finding of an overall low level of familiarity with the EU, a considerable number of respondents did not express an opinion when presented with statements about EU laws currently being applied in Iceland (19% “don't know” responses) and the Schengen Agreement (29%).

Two-thirds of Icelanders agreed that **Iceland followed much of the EU's legislation without participating in the actual decision making** (27% *strongly agreed* and 41% *somewhat agreed*); about one in eight (13%) disagreed with this statement. Although less than half of respondents agreed that **Iceland's participation in the Schengen Agreement was positive**, respondents who expressed agreement outnumbered those who said they disagreed (41% *agreed* vs. 31% who *disagreed*).

### **Membership of the European Economic Area and the Schengen area**



Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree:  
%. Base: all respondents

Men (45% vs. 35% of women), 25-54 year-olds (47%-49% vs. 29% of 15-24 year-olds), respondents with the highest level of education (50% vs. 32%-35% across other educational groups), metropolitan residents (45% vs. 33% of rural residents), self-employed respondents and employees (44%-49% vs. 28% of non-working respondents) were most likely to agree that membership of the Schengen Agreement was positive for Iceland.

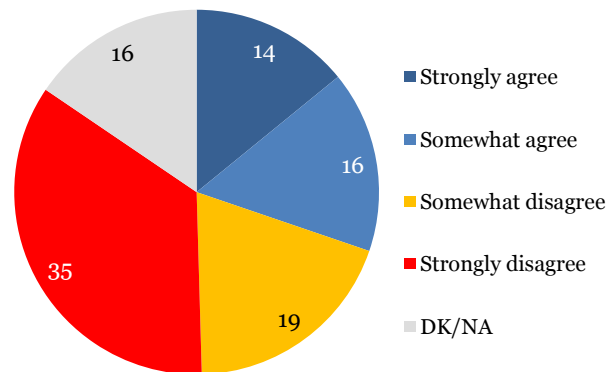
## 2. Support for EU membership

The survey measured a low level of support for EU membership: 14% of respondents *strongly agreed*, and 16% *somewhat agreed*, that **Iceland’s future should be as part of the EU**.

Slightly more than a third (35%) of respondents *strongly disagreed* that Iceland’s future should be as part of the EU, and a further 19% *somewhat disagreed*. A considerable proportion (16%) of Icelanders had either not yet formed an opinion about this topic, or did not want to share their opinion.

Overall the highest levels of support for Iceland’s membership of the EU were measured among 40-54 year-olds (39% vs. 23% of 25-39 year-olds), respondents with the highest level of education (35% vs. 21%-25% of respondents with the lowest levels of education) and employees (35% vs. 19% of manual workers). Other groups that were more likely than their counterparts to agree that Iceland’s future should be as part of the EU were men (33% vs. 27% of women), 15-24 year-olds (32%) and metropolitan residents (34% vs. 22% of rural residents).

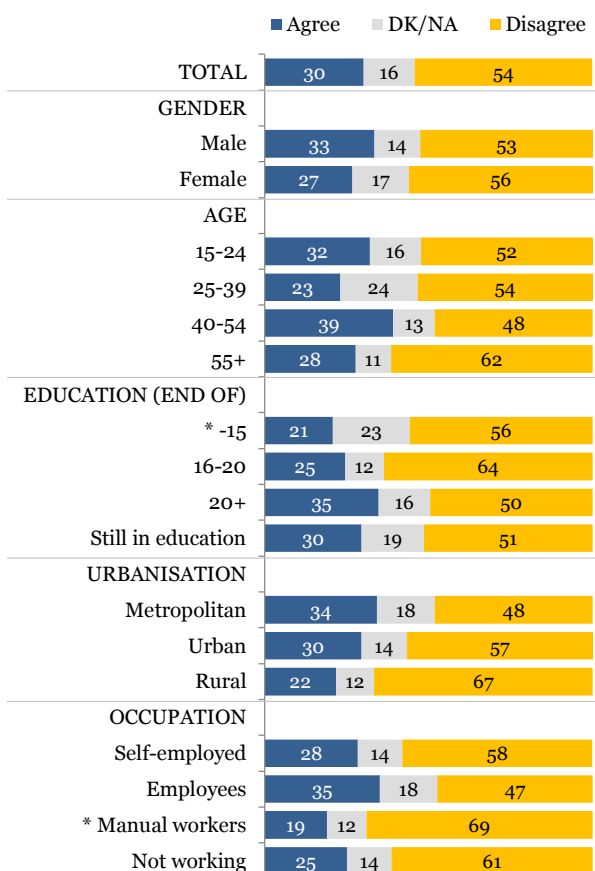
“Iceland’s future should be as part of the EU”



Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree:  
%, Base: all respondents

### Support for EU membership

“Iceland’s future should be as part of the EU”



Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree:  
%, Base: all respondents

Note: \* <50 respondents

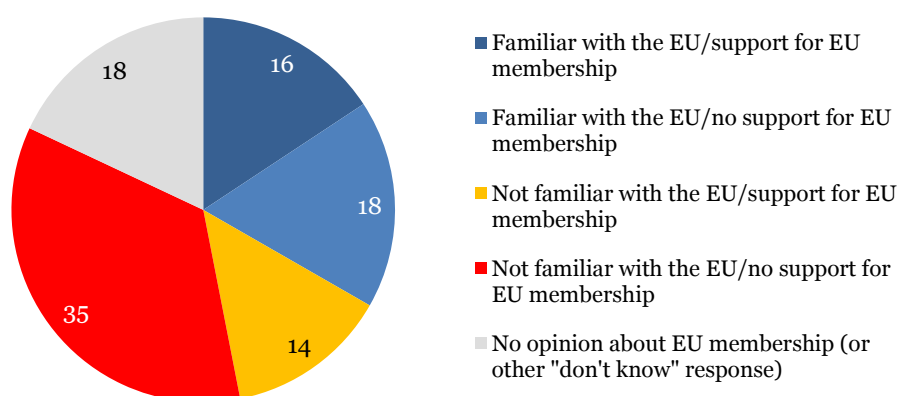
Respondents who never consulted foreign news media were also less likely to support EU membership: 60% disagreed with the statement, compared to 44% of respondents who regularly read foreign news media. Members of the latter group were as likely to agree, as to disagree, that Iceland’s future should be as part of the EU.

Combining responses for the question about “familiarity with the EU” and “support for EU membership” (see chart on the next page), it was noted that 35% of all respondents said they did not feel familiar with the EU and also did not support Iceland’s membership of the Union.

Among those feeling familiar with the EU, almost equal numbers would support, or rather not support EU membership (16% and 18%, respectively, of all respondents).

Finally, about a sixth (18%) of respondents did not know whether they would support Iceland’s EU membership or not (or they could not say whether they felt familiar with the EU or not).

### “Informed” support for EU membership



Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree:  
%, Base: all respondents

### Support for Iceland's adoption of the euro

About 4 in 10 Icelanders agreed that **Iceland's adoption of the euro would help its economy** (15% *strongly agreed* and 24% *somewhat agreed*). This view was opposed by 46% of respondents; they disagreed that the euro's introduction would be positive. About one in seven (14%) respondents did not answer.

Although respondents who *disagreed* outnumbered those who *agreed* when presented with this statement about the euro (46% vs. 39%), the overall level of support for Iceland's adoption of the euro appeared to be higher than the level of support for Iceland's membership of the EU (40% “euro” vs. 30% “EU membership”).

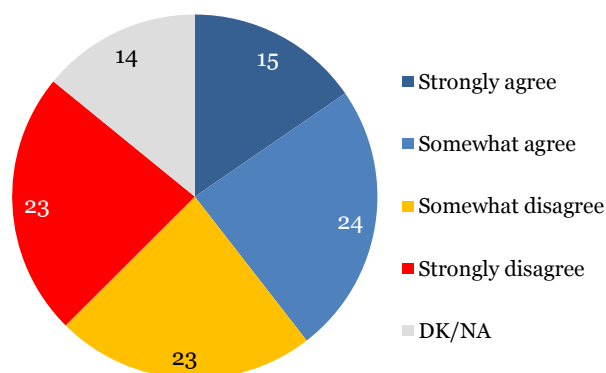
Differences across socio-demographic segments in the levels of support for the introduction of the euro mirrored those observed for support for EU membership. For example, 48% of 40-54 year-olds agreed that Iceland's adoption of the euro would help its economy, compared to 38%-39% of 15-39 year-olds and 34% of the over 54 year-olds.

### Consequences of EU membership

When presented with a number of statements about the potential consequences of EU membership, the largest proportion of Icelanders agreed that **food producers in their country would face more competition** from those in other EU countries: 84%, in total, agreed – with 36% *strongly agreeing*. The proportion who thought that there would be a **decrease in food prices after joining the EU**, however, was considerably lower: 57%, in total, agreed – with 21% *strongly agreeing*.

Slightly more than 6 in 10 Icelanders agreed that their country's **interests would be harmed by the EU's fishery policy** (35% *strongly agreed* and 27% *somewhat agreed*) and a rather lower proportion believed that **whaling would be prohibited** when Iceland joined the EU (26% *strongly agreed* and 31% *somewhat agreed*).

### “Iceland's adoption of the euro will help its economy”

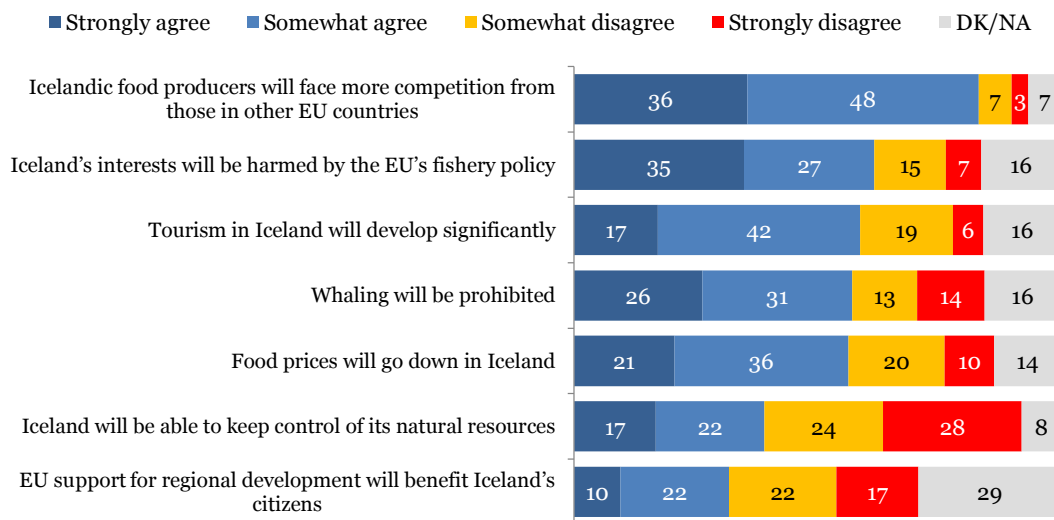


Q1. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree:  
%, Base: all respondents

Although roughly 6 in 10 respondents agreed that **tourism in Iceland would develop significantly** after the country joined the EU (17% *strongly agreed* and 42% *somewhat agreed*), only half as many respondents agreed that **EU support for regional development would benefit their country’s citizens** (10% *strongly agreed* and 22% *somewhat agreed*). It should, however, be noted that many respondents found it difficult to formulate their opinion on the topic of EU regional support (29% “don’t know” responses).

Finally, of all the statements about potential consequences of EU membership, Icelanders were the most likely to disagree with the statement that **Iceland would be able to keep control over its natural resources**: 52%, in total, disagreed – with 28% *strongly disagreeing*.

### Consequences of Iceland’s EU membership



**Q2. Now, imagine that Iceland becomes a member of the EU. Would you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each the following statements about the consequences of the membership of Iceland to the EU?**  
 %, Base: all respondents

Not surprisingly, respondents who thought that Iceland’s future should be as part of the EU were considerably more likely to agree with the positively-formulated statements about potential consequences of the EU (e.g. “tourism in Iceland will develop significantly”) and considerably less likely to agree with the negatively-formulated statements (e.g. “Iceland’s interests will be harmed by the EU’s fishery policy”).

Across all socio-demographic segments, about three-quarters – or more – interviewees agreed that Icelandic food producers would face more competition from those in other EU countries. The largest difference in agreement for this statement was observed across occupational groups: 75% of non-working respondents agreed that there would be more competition among food producers, this proportion increased to 89% among the self-employed. As for the (average) results for the whole sample, across all segments, respondents were less likely to agree that food prices would go down when Iceland entered the EU.

Across most socio-demographic segments, respondents who disagreed that their country would be able to keep control over its natural resources when joining the EU outnumbered those who agreed. For example, almost 6 in 10 25-39 year-olds and women disagreed with the statement (57%-59%), compared to roughly a third who expressed agreement (33%-34%). The most important exceptions were those respondents frequently reading foreign news media; among the members of this group, 44% disagreed, while 50% agreed, that Iceland would be able to keep control over its natural resources.

## 3. Iceland's relations with other countries

### 3.1 Countries “close” to Iceland

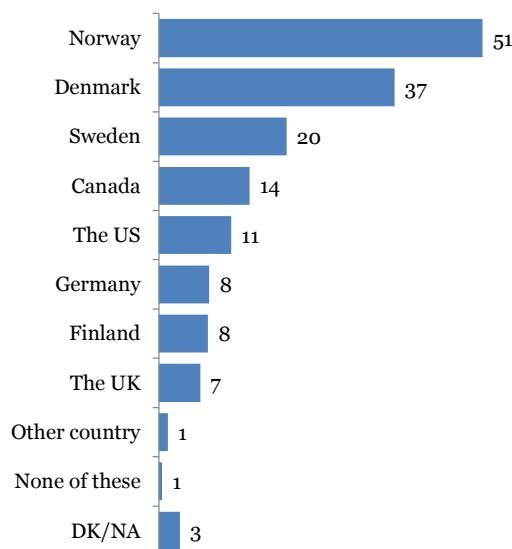
Respondents were asked to list two **countries that could be seen as models for Iceland**. About half (51%) of Icelanders chose Norway as a country that could be seen as a model for their country. Norway was followed by Sweden and Denmark; selected by 23% and 21%, respectively, of respondents.

A quarter of respondents did not know which country could be seen as a model for Iceland (or preferred not to give an answer). However, when presented with a **list of eight countries**, almost all respondents were able to **select the one they felt the closest to**. One in two (51%) Icelanders answered that they felt closest to Norway. Although similar shares of respondents selected Sweden or Denmark as a “model for Iceland” in the previous question, the proportion naming the country as the one they felt closest to was almost twice as high for Denmark as for Sweden (37% vs. 20%).

Canada and the US were selected by 14% and 11%, respectively, of respondents as the country (from the eight countries listed) that they felt closest to. The UK, Finland and Germany were each chosen by 7%-8% of respondents.

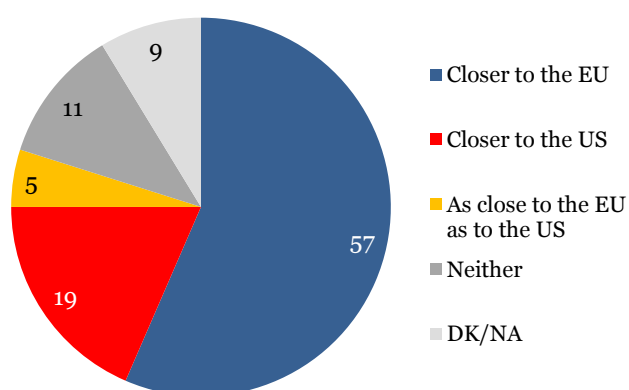
Summing up the proportions of respondents who selected one of the EU Nordic countries as the country they felt closest to, this figure varied between 58% for respondents living in “urban areas” and 75% of manual workers. Not unexpectedly, respondents who did not support EU membership were less likely to select one of the EU Nordic countries as the country they felt closest to, while those in favour of Iceland's EU membership were the most likely to select one of these countries (53% vs. 81%).

#### To which countries do Icelanders feel the closest?



Q4. To which of the following countries do you feel the closest?  
%, Base: all respondents

#### Do Icelanders feel closer to the EU or to the US?



Q5. Do you feel closer to the EU or to the US?  
%, Base: all respondents

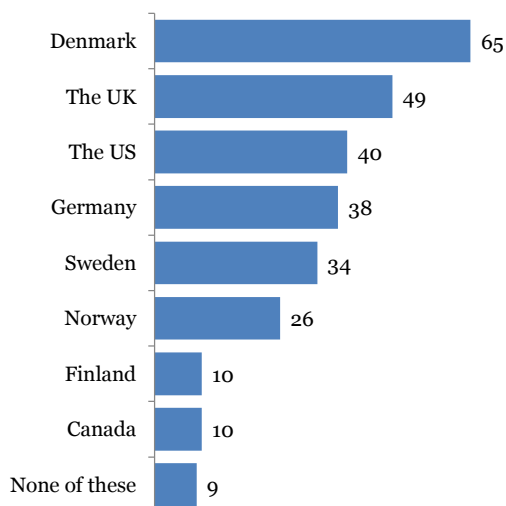
Combining the results of the two questions discussed so far in this section, it was noted that 75% of Icelanders mentioned at least one EU country – either as a “model for Iceland” or as “the country they felt closest to” (or both). A majority (57%) of Icelanders also said they **felt closer to the EU than to the US**; about one in five (19%) held an opposite view – they felt closer to the US than to the EU.

Across almost all socio-demographic groups, a slim majority answered that they felt closer to the EU than to the US. The largest difference was observed when comparing respondents who supported Iceland's membership of the EU and those who did not: 87% of the former said they felt closer to the EU than to the US, compared to 38% of the latter.

### 3.2 Countries Icelanders visited in the past five years

More than 8 in 10 (83%) Icelanders said they had travelled abroad *several times* in the past five years. A tenth of respondents had only travelled outside of Iceland once in the past five years and a smaller proportion (7%) had not left Iceland during that time frame.

#### Countries respondents visited in the past five years



**Q7a. Have you travelled to any of the following countries in the past five years?**  
 %, Base: those who have travelled outside of Iceland in the past five years

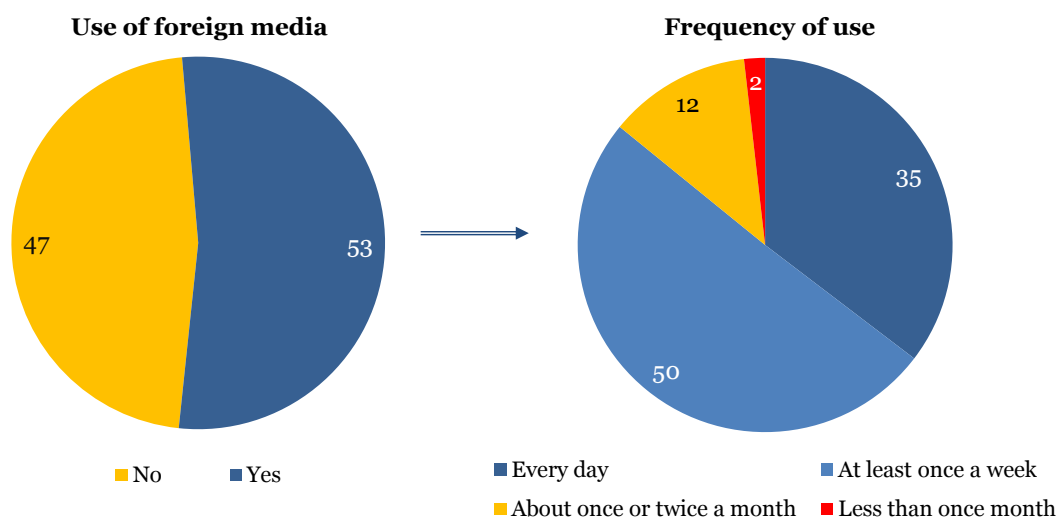
Over 54 year-olds, respondents with the lowest levels of education and rural residents were somewhat more likely to say that they had travelled outside of Iceland only once in the past five years or that they had not left Iceland during that time frame. For example, 15% of the over 54 year-olds had made one trip abroad and 10% had not made any trips; the corresponding proportions for 25-39 year-olds were 9% and 5%, respectively.

Denmark was the number one destination among the eight countries listed in the survey: 65% of travellers had visited this country. The UK was next, selected by 49% of travellers; third place was shared by the US and Germany (40% and 38%, respectively, mentioned these countries). Roughly a third (34%) of respondents, who had travelled abroad, had visited Sweden and 26% had travelled to Norway. Finland and Canada were the least popular destinations of those listed (10% of responses each).

### 3.3 Icelanders' use of foreign media

A slim majority (53%) of Icelanders said they read, watched and/or listened to news media other than Icelandic media. Out of these respondents who consulted foreign media, 35% said they read, watched or listened to foreign news media on a daily basis and another 50% consulted these media sources *at least once a week*. About one in eight (12%) said that they read, watched or listened to foreign news media *about once or twice a month* and a minority (2%) said they did this *less than once a month*.

#### Reading, watching and/or listening to foreign news media



**Q9. Do you read, watch or listen to news media other than Icelandic media?**  
 %, Base: all respondents

**Q10a. How often do you read, watch or listen to foreign media?**  
 %, Base: those who read, watch or listen to foreign media

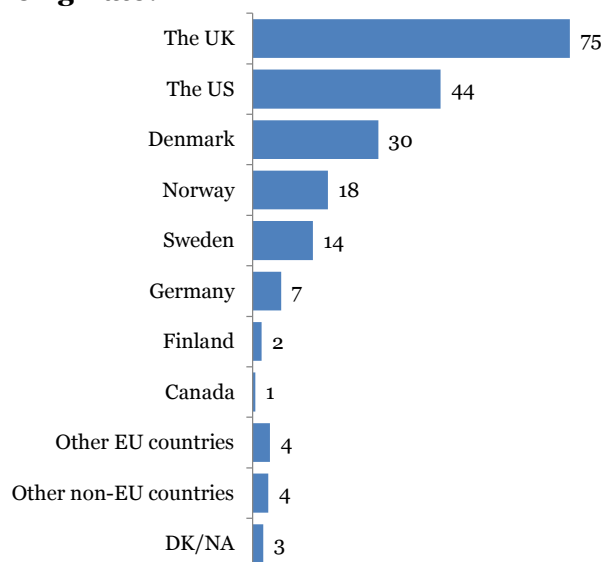
Men (60% vs. 45% of women), 25-54 year-olds (56%-57% vs. 46% among the over 54s), respondents with the highest level of education (58% vs. 22% of respondents with the lowest levels of education), self-employed respondents (59% vs. 44% of manual workers) and urban residents (61% vs. 43% of rural residents) were more likely to read, watch or listen to foreign news media.

### *Most popular news media in terms of source countries*

UK news media were by far the most popular source for foreign news; 75% of respondents who read, watched or listened to foreign news media said these media were UK-based. Media from the US were selected by 44% and media from Denmark by 30%. That these three countries ranked highest could be expected given that English and Danish are commonly taught in Icelandic schools.

Roughly a sixth (18%) of respondents who consulted foreign news media said that these media originated from Norway and 14% mentioned Swedish media; the corresponding proportion for Finland was just 2%. Less than a tenth (7%) said they read, watched or listened to German media; media from “other EU countries” were mentioned by 4% of interviewees.

### **From which countries do these media originate?**



**Q11. From which countries do those media originate?**  
%, Base: those who read, watch or listen to foreign media

### *Preferred channels for news media*

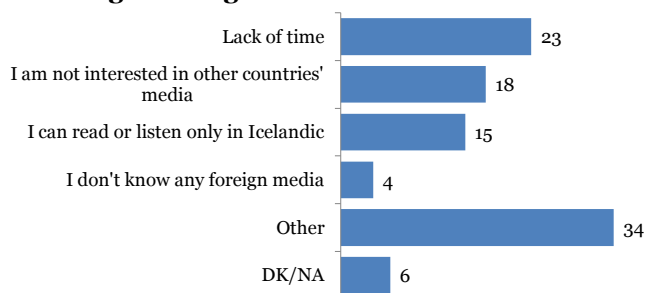
The Internet was the most popular method of staying informed about current affairs; 50% of respondents said they preferred this channel. Half as many respondents (26%) preferred to stay informed by watching television. Newspapers and radio were each mentioned by a tenth of respondents (10%-11%).

The younger the respondents and the higher their level of education, the more likely they were to prefer to browse the Internet to stay informed about current affairs. For example, while 77% of 15-24 year-olds and 72% of 25-39 year-olds selected this media channel, this proportion decreased to 46% for 40-54 year-olds and 14% for the over 54 year-olds. Men, metropolitan residents, employees and manual workers were also more likely than their counterparts to select the Internet as their favourite method to stay informed.

### *Main reason for not reading foreign news media*

Among respondents who said they did not read, watch or listen to foreign news media, about a quarter (23%) said this was mainly due to a lack of time. A considerable proportion (18%) said they were not interested in other countries' media. A somewhat smaller share (15%) said they did not consult foreign media because they did not understand any foreign languages and 4% said they did not know any foreign media. About a third (34%) of respondents mentioned other reasons than the ones listed in the survey.

### **Main reason for not reading, watching or listening to foreign media**



**Q10b. What is the main reason why you do not read, watch or listen to foreign media?**  
%, Base: those who don't read, watch or listen to foreign media