

# European Union Citizenship

## 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 #213

# European Union Citizenship

Conducted by  
The Gallup Organization, Hungary  
upon the request of the Directorate-General  
Justice, Freedom and Security.



Survey organised and managed by the  
Directorate-General Communication

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**THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION**

## Introduction

The Treaty of Maastricht established the Citizenship of the Union in 1992. The foremost purpose of the institutionalisation of this new legal status was to strengthen and enhance the European identity and enable European citizens to participate in the Community integration process in a more intense way.

European citizen's condition is reserved to every person that has the nationality of a Member State. The European citizenship does not substitute but rather supplements the citizenship of each State. Those holding European citizenship are entitled to some fundamental rights within the EU, regardless of which State they are the citizens of.

This Flash Eurobarometer survey on European Union citizenship (N° 213), commissioned by the European Commission, asked citizens of the EU to clarify how familiar they are with their status as an EU citizen, and the various rights they possess through this second “nationality”.

The survey's fieldwork was carried out between 14 and 18 of November, 2007. Over 27,000 randomly selected citizens aged 15 years and above were interviewed in the twenty-seven Member States of the European Union. Interviews were predominantly carried out via fixed telephone, approximately 1,000 in each country. Part of the interviews in Finland and Austria were carried out over mobile telephones. Due to the relatively low fixed telephone coverage in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, we sampled and interviewed 300 persons face to face as well.

To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented, based on important socio-demographic variables. More details on survey methodology are included in the Annex of this report.

Whenever possible, comparisons were made with a previous Flash Eurobarometer survey, Flash 133, carried out in the 15 member countries in 2002.

## Main findings

- Although the majority (78%) of EU citizens claim familiarity with the term “citizen of the European Union”, only 41% say they know its meaning and less than one-third (31%) of respondents from the 27 EU countries consider themselves well informed about their rights as citizens of the European Union.
- At EU15 level, familiarity with the term “citizen of the European Union” increased compared to 2002 by 7 percentage points. A higher proportion of respondents from the EU15 countries feel themselves informed about their rights as citizens of the European Union compared to 5 years ago, the increase being of 8 percentage points.
- There is only a little confusion as to how European citizenship can be “obtained”. Most (90%) respondents are aware that “*they are both citizens of the EU and (nationality) at the same time*”. However, about one-fifth of those interviewed believe that “*they have to ask to become citizens of the EU*” (18%) or that “*they can choose to be citizens of the EU*” (17%).
- The level of those consistently giving the right answers to all three propositions above is in some countries significantly lower than the level of correct answers to the individual propositions. The most substantial variations are found between levels of education: 66% of well educated respondents were able to correctly identify as true or false each of the propositions, while similar results were obtained from less than half of those who finished their studies at the age of 15 or younger.
- In 2007 respondents from EU15 countries judge the statements “you have to ask to become a citizen of the European Union” and “you are both a citizen of the EU and (nationality) at the same time” almost in the same way they did 5 years ago (+1 and +2 percentage points compared to 2002). One notices an increase of 11 percentage points in the number of EU15 citizens who, consider as false the affirmation “if you so wish, you can choose not to be a citizen of the EU”, as compared to 2002.

- Respondents are most aware of the freedom of residence right, and seem especially perplexed about their rights regarding municipal elections in another Member State they might reside in.
- The levels of consistent, firm knowledge of the rights of EU citizens are much less widespread compared to the levels indicated by the extent to which respondents could identify their rights on an individual basis. Focussing only on the rights that they actually have (and discounting the false statements that might have perplexed respondents), only 18% recognised each of the six as rights they possess. We noticed that voting rights are in particular troublesome for the citizens.
- Compared to 5 years ago, at EU15 level we noticed a significant decrease trend in the awareness on the right “*to vote or to stand as a candidate in municipal elections*” (-15 percentage points compared to 2002) and on the right “*to vote or to stand as a candidate in European Parliament elections*” (-17 percentage points compared to 2002). Six out of ten (60%) respondents from EU15 countries know in 2007 that an EU citizen living in another country does not have the right “*to vote or to stand as a candidate in elections to national Parliaments*”, as compared to five out of ten (51%) respondents in 2002.
- Respondents’ awareness of the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” is far from widespread – half of those interviewed have never heard of it.
- Overall, the awareness of EU15 citizens on the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” is slightly increased in 2007 by 4 percentage points, as compared to 2002.

## Familiarity with the term “citizen of the European Union”

***Three-quarter of respondents are familiar with the term “citizen of the European Union”, but 41% only say they know its meaning***

The majority of the EU citizens interviewed (78%) claims familiarity with the term “citizen of the European Union”. However, there are differences regarding how well respondents know what the term means: 41% say they are familiar with the term and know what it means, while 37% have heard the term but are not sure what exactly it means. 22% of respondents claim to have never heard about the term.

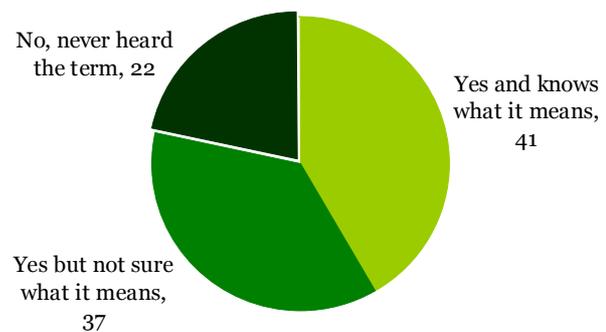
Estonia (94%), Romania (94%) and Hungary (93%) have the highest percentages of respondents declaring familiarity with the term “citizen of the European Union” – making them the countries most aware of this expression. At the other end of the spectrum, the Netherlands (67%), Belgium (64%) and Germany (60%) have the lowest percentages of those claiming to be familiar with the term.

The meaning of the term “citizen of the European Union” is thought to be known by most people in Italy, followed by Spain – 65% and 63% respectively saying they are familiar with the term and know what it means in these countries. The content of the term is least well known in Germany – 20% of respondents claim to be familiar with the term and know what it means.

The ones who most frequently stated that they have heard the term “citizen of the European Union” but are not sure what it means are those from Bulgaria (56%), Poland (51%) and Latvia (50%).

Respondents who declare that they *are familiar with the term* “citizen of the European Union” *and know its meaning* are more likely to be male (44%), aged between 25 and 54 (44%), those with 20+ years of education (48%), those living in a metropolitan zone or other urban centre (45-44%), or self-employed (47%).

**Familiarity with the term  
”citizen of the European Union”**



Q1. The survey concerns the citizenship of the European Union. Are you familiar with the term ”citizen of the European Union”?  
%, Base: all respondents

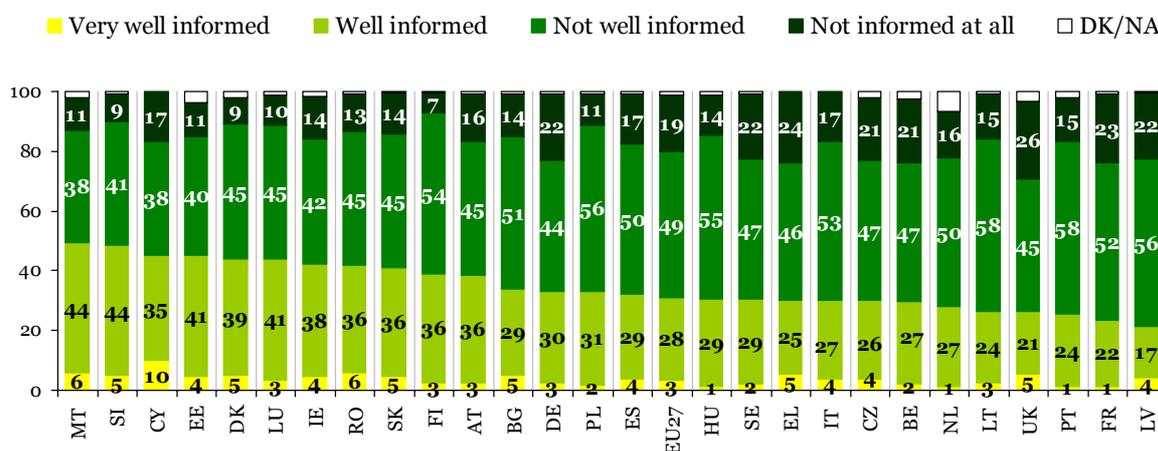
## Level of information on European Union citizen rights

*Two thirds of respondents do not feel sufficiently informed about their rights as a citizen of the European Union*

Only 3% of respondents from the 27 EU countries consider themselves “very well informed” about their rights as citizens of the European Union, and another 28% feel “well informed” in this respect. On the whole, less than one third (31%) of respondents from the 27 EU countries consider themselves well informed about their rights as citizens of the European Union.

Half of the persons interviewed (49%) indicate that they are “not well informed” regarding their rights as citizens of the European Union, and one respondent out of five (19%) considers him/herself “not informed at all”, adding up to more than two thirds in the EU being uninformed about their rights as EU citizens (68%).

### Being informed about the rights as a citizen of the European Union



Q2. How well do you feel that you are informed about your rights as a citizen of the European Union?  
%, Base: all respondents, by country

On the whole, half of the respondents from Malta (50%) and from Slovenia (49%) feel “very well informed” or at least “well informed” about their rights as citizens of the European Union, scoring the best among all nations in the EU. Other countries with higher proportions of sufficiently informed people are Cyprus, Estonia (45% in each), Denmark, Luxemburg (44%), Ireland, Romania (42%), Slovakia (41%), Finland and Austria (39%).

On the opposite side, countries with the highest percentages of respondents *who do not feel well informed* about their citizens’ rights are: Latvia (78%), France (76%), Lithuania (73%), Portugal (72%), UK, Italy, and Greece (both 70%).

Those still in education are most likely to be well or very well informed (41%). The proportion of well-informed respondents is likely to increase with the length of education. We found the highest level of information among those aged 15-24 years (39%), but second highest are the eldest citizens with 36% of being informed – while young adults (aged 25-39) and those in their later active ages (aged 40-54) are less confident in this regard (28% both). While there are no particular differences across occupational segments (other than manual workers are less informed compared to others), opinions differ according to urbanisation level: those in the metropolitan areas are somewhat more informed than those in the rural zones (34% vs. 29%).

## Who is a citizen of the European Union?

### *There is little confusion as to how European citizenship can be “obtained”*

The majority of those interviewed— nine respondents out of ten (90%) – are aware that they are both a citizen of the EU and their respective country at the same time. The overwhelming majority of respondents know that they do/did not *have to ask to become a citizen of the EU* (75%). Over seven in ten also know that there is no choice, they can not decide about EU citizenship independently of the nationality citizenship (72%). The proportion of those not sure is the highest in the last aspect (11%).

Combining the three propositions related to key aspects of citizenship in the European Union, the survey found the most consistent awareness of the term’s meaning in Italy, where 71% correctly identified as true or false each of the three propositions. The countries where respondents are nearly as aware of these facts are Poland (68%), Hungary (67%) and Slovakia (66%). On the other hand, Latvians (29%), Estonians (37%) and those from Belgium (38%) were the least consistently aware of these aspects of European Union citizenship.

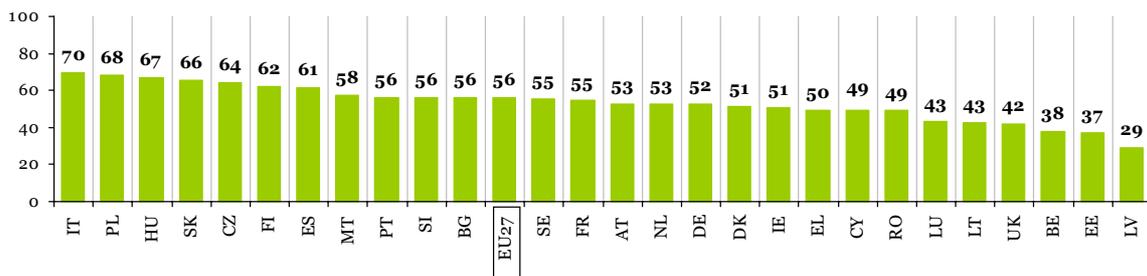
### Understanding of the term ” citizen of the European Union”

COMBINED CORRECT REPOSSES TO EACH OF THE PROPOSITIONS RELATED TO EU CITIZENSHIP:

You have to ask to become a citizen of the European Union - *False*

You are both a citizen of the European Union and (nationality) at the same time - *True*

If you so wish, you can choose not to be a citizen of the European Union - *False*



Q3. For each of the statements which I am going to read out, please tell me if this is true or false:

% Base: all respondents by country  
Correct answers shown

Men are generally more aware than women of these characteristics of EU citizenship. Somewhat more aware of these things are those in the active worker segment (both as indicated by age and by occupation – with the exception of manual workers). Also, those in metropolitan areas are generally more informed than others, as the table to the right indicates. But the most substantial variations are found between levels of education: 66% of well educated respondents were able to correctly identify as true or false each of the propositions, while less than half of those who finished their studies at the age of 15 or younger were similarly well informed (44%).

## Rights of a European Union citizen

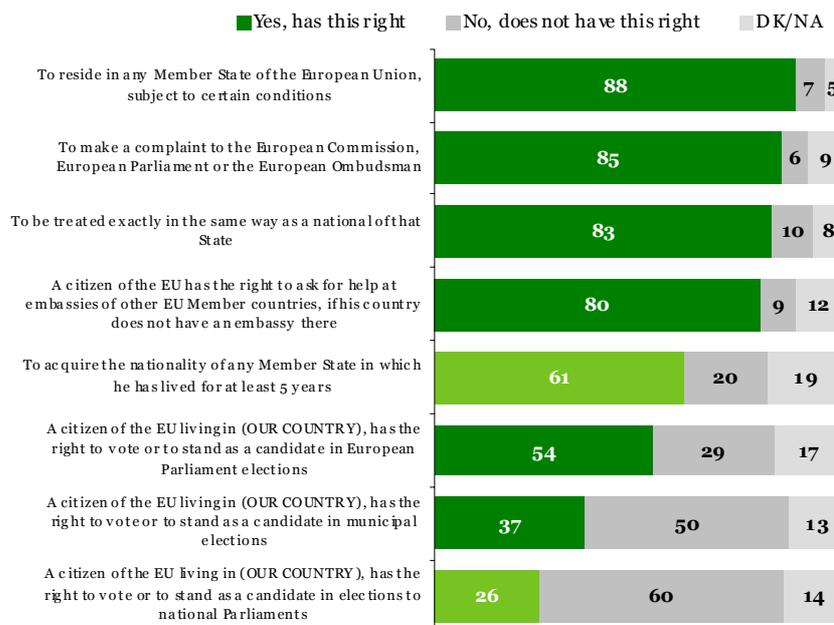
**Respondents are most aware of the right to free movement of persons, and especially perplexed about their rights regarding municipal elections in another Member State they might reside in**

Testing respondents’ familiarity with some of the most fundamental rights that they hold as citizens of the European Union<sup>1</sup>, the survey found that only 1% of citizens were able to correctly identify as true or false the eight propositions regarding their rights. (Six were true; two were false.) This suggests that the levels of consistent, firm knowledge of EU citizens’ rights are much less widespread compared to the levels indicated by the extent to which respondents could identify their rights, on an individual basis. Focussing only on the rights that they actually have (and discounting the false statements that might have perplexed respondents), only 18% recognised *each* of the six as rights they possess. Voting rights are especially troublesome for citizens.

The right most familiar to respondents of the survey is that of freedom of residence - 88% believe that a citizen of the European Union has the right “to reside in any Member State of the EU, subject to certain conditions”. 7% of respondents do not recognize the above as a right of EU citizens, and 5% could not or did not want to answer the question.

### Awareness of the rights that a citizen of the EU has (EU27)

Roughly eight out of ten respondents agree that citizens of the European Union have the following rights: “to make a complaint to the European Commission, European Parliament or the European Ombudsman” (85%), “when residing in another Member State, to be treated exactly in the same way as a national of that State” (83%), “when finding himself outside the EU, to ask for help at embassies of other EU Member countries, if his country does not have an embassy there” (80%).



The right “to acquire the nationality of any Member State in which he has lived for at least 5 years” is thought to be true by more than half (61%) of the EU public. One-fifth (20%) of respondents know that EU citizens are *not* entitled to acquire a second nationality in the manner described in the statement.

Q4. In fact, all citizens of the EU Member States are “citizens of the European Union”... In your opinion, what rights does a citizen of the European Union have?  
% Base: all respondents

Respondents are more aware of the rights that a citizen of the EU has in relation to European Parliamentary elections than in relation to municipal ones. 54% of interviewed persons recognize the right “to vote and to stand as a candidate in European Parliament elections”, while only 37% recognize the right “to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections”. Half (50%) of the EU

<sup>1</sup> The rights in relation with the transparency of EU institutions towards citizens and the right to be able to petition and be answered in any official EU language were not specifically investigated this time.

public believes that “*to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections*” is not a right of an EU citizen.

With regard to elections to national Parliaments (where, unlike the other two elections discussed before, citizens of other EU countries are normally *not allowed* to participate), six out of ten (60%) respondents know correctly that a citizen of the EU living in an EU state other than their own does not have the right “*to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections to national Parliaments*”, and a quarter (26%) state the opposite.

## The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights

### *Half of the interviewed persons have never heard of the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”*

The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights sets out in a single text, for the first time in the European Union's history, the whole range of civil, political, economic and social rights of European citizens and all persons resident in the EU. It was signed and proclaimed by the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission at the European Council meeting in Nice on 7 December 2000, 7 years ago. Today, EU citizens' awareness of the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” is far from being widespread.

Despite the fact that almost half (48%) of the respondents have heard of the “European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights”, only 8% say they know what it is. In other words, only one sixth of the respondents who *have* heard of the Charter say they also have an idea what it is about.

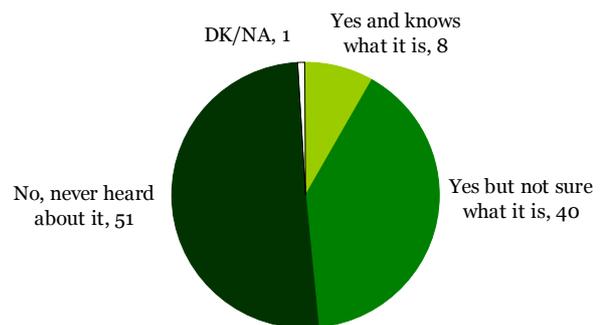
Half of those interviewed (51%) say they have never even heard of the Charter. On average, the public of the old Member States (EU15) is slightly less aware of the Charter than the public of new Member States (NMS12), as 53% in old Member States have never heard of the Charter, while 43% in the new Member States have heard of it.

The highest proportions of respondents aware of the existence of the Charter are observed in Finland (64%), Estonia, Poland (61% in each), the Czech Republic, Slovakia (60%), Italy (59%), Slovenia (58%), Bulgaria, and Spain (57%). The lowest percentages of those who have heard of the Charter are to be found in the UK and Belgium (32%), Malta, France (33%), Ireland (34%) and Denmark (38%).

Regarding the proportion of persons who mentioned they have heard of the Charter *and know what it is*, the highest proportions are found in Spain (18%), followed by the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Luxemburg (14%), Cyprus (13%), Italy, Greece (11%).

The highest variation in demographic groups with regard to the level of awareness of the Charter is related to the level of education completed. While 59% of those who left school at the age of 20+ years have heard of the Charter, and 12% know what it is, the percentages for people who stopped their full time education at 15 years of age or earlier are only 35% and 5% respectively. Women, people from rural zones, manual workers and younger people also tend to be less familiar with the Charter.

**Familiarity with the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”**



Q5. Are you familiar with the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”, which also guarantees fundamental rights to European Union citizens?  
%, Base: all respondents, DK/NA not shown