

Citizens' perceptions of EU Regional Policy

Summary

Fieldwork: January 2008

Report: February 2008

This survey was requested by Directorate-General Regional Policy 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 Eurobarometer Series
#234

Citizens' perceptions of EU Regional Policy

Survey conducted by The Gallup Organization
Hungary upon the request of Directorate-
General 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 regions. The challenge to reduce these differences has grown with the entry of 12 new Member States, since 2004, whose GDPs 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, whose new programmes began in 2007 and will end in 2013.

This summary gives an overview of the most important findings of the Flash Eurobarometer survey No. 234 on EU citizens' attitudes on the Union's Regional Policy. Questions asked included:

- Are Europeans aware of the support received in the framework of EU Regional Policy?
- Do they feel that their cities or regions benefit from the policy?
- Do Europeans agree with the notion that EU Regional Policy should mainly serve to help poorer regions to catch up with the more affluent ones?
- Do they agree with the principle of subsidiarity and the involvement of different stakeholders in the decision-making processes?
- What should EU Regional Policy have as its priorities, both today and in the future?

The fieldwork was carried out from January 30 to February 4, 2008. Over 27,000 randomly selected citizens, aged 15 and above, were interviewed in the 27 EU Member States. Approximately 1,000 interviews in each country were conducted, predominantly via fixed-line telephone. Due to the relatively low fixed-line telephone coverage in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, face-to-face (F2F) interviews were also conducted (70% telephone and 30% face-to-face interviews) in those countries.

Main findings

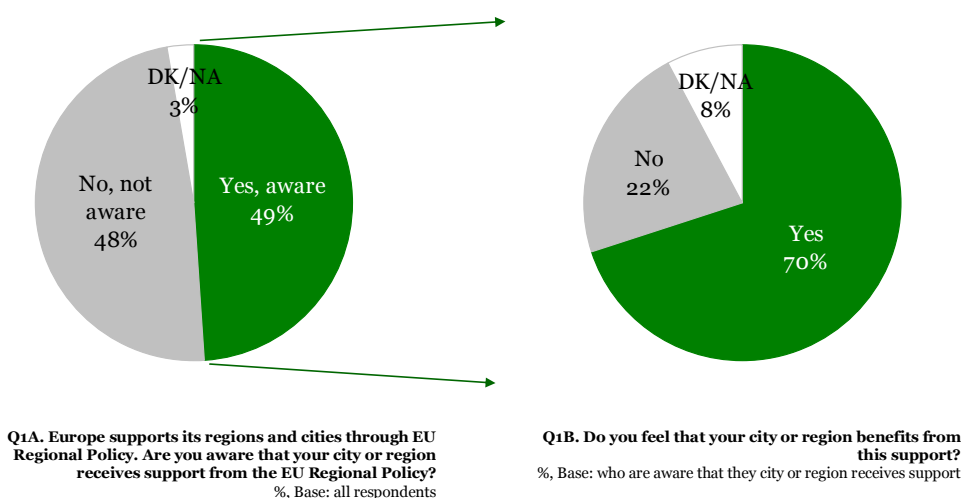
- **Half (49%) of the respondents were aware that the EU supported their city or region. More than two-thirds of those respondents knowing about the EU's support also said the support was actually beneficial (70%).** Only one in five respondents saw no positive effects from EU Regional Policy (22%).
 - We saw that **the greater the number of regions eligible for receiving support from EU structural and cohesion funds** over the past years were, in a particular country, then **the higher were that country's respondents' awareness levels of the EU's regional support.** For example, in nearly all of the countries where all or a majority of regions have been eligible for receiving funds over the past years, more than 60% of respondents were aware that the EU supported their city or region. This was, for example, the case in the **eastern European countries Slovenia, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia and Romania** and in **Ireland, Malta and Spain.**
 - **Those countries where the awareness of the EU's support was the highest were also the ones with the most positive views about the policy.** Exceptions were Slovenia, where awareness of the support was high but opinions about it were rather negative, and Denmark and Sweden, where the opposite was true.
- **Television was by far the most important information source used by EU citizens to learn about EU Regional Policy.** Thirty-eight percent of respondents cited TV as the most important information source and around a quarter (26%) of respondents said it was the second most important source.
- Respondents were **nearly unanimous in approving European Regional Policy's focus on the poorest regions** in order to help them catch up faster with the rest of the EU (85%). However, a majority of respondents also thought that support in the framework of EU Regional Policy should not exclusively focus on those regions, but that **all regions should be beneficiaries of EU Regional Policy (58%).**
- **Citizens wanted educational, health and social issues and the protection of the environment to be the top priorities of EU Regional Policy,** followed by **business development and infrastructure improvement.**
- **Most respondents appreciated that the principle of subsidiarity was used when assigning EU Regional Policy's strategies and projects:** Eight out of 10 respondents said it was a good thing that EU Regional Policy gives EU Member States and regions the right to decide their own strategies and projects.
- Similarly to the principle of subsidiarity, **about eight out of 10 EU citizens welcomed the fact that bodies such as local business associations, trade unions and organisations promoting equal opportunities and the environment, had a say in the project selection process:** 82% of respondents considered this to be a good thing, with only 11% thinking the opposite.
- **Respondents were in no doubt that globalisation, climate change and demographic change should be addressed in the future by EU Regional Policy:** 84% wanted to see these issues tackled, while only one in 10 respondents saw no role for EU Regional Policy in those domains (11%). A majority chose **climate change as the top priority for future action by the EU as part of Regional Policy (61%).**

1. Attitudes on EU Regional Policy

1.1 Awareness of support received in the framework of EU Regional Policy and perceived benefits

Approximately half of the respondents answered they were aware that the EU supported their city or region through EU Regional Policy (49%), while the other half was not aware (48%). More than two-thirds of those respondents who said they knew about the EU's support also felt that it was actually beneficial for their city or region (70%). Only one in five respondents saw no positive effect from EU Regional Policy (22%).

Awareness of support received in the framework of EU Regional Policy and perceived benefits (EU27)



The main focus of EU Regional Policy is to support its lesser developed regions in their efforts to match the living conditions of the more affluent ones. The bulk of the appropriations of the structural and cohesion funds are therefore allocated to regions where the GDP is below 75% of the Community average.¹

Before the EU's enlargement in 2004, the beneficiaries of the allocations were mainly Spain, southern Italy, Greece, Portugal, eastern Germany, Ireland, some regions of the UK, the thinly populated (northern) regions of Sweden and Finland and the French overseas departments. After 2004, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Baltic States, Malta and Cyprus joined the countries receiving financial support from the structural funds. For the new programming period (2007 to 2013), the newest Member States, Romania and Bulgaria, were also allocated funds.

While in the newer Member States (NMS12), almost all regions were, and are, eligible to receive support, in most of the older Member States the support was limited to some (underdeveloped) regions. For the programming periods of 2000-2006 and 2007-2013, in EU15 many regions in Portugal, Greece and Spain as well as in the South of Italy, the East of Germany, the UK and Ireland

¹ For the programming period 2000-2006, as the "Objective 1" of EU Cohesion Policy concerned the "promotion of development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind". More than two-thirds of the structural and cohesion funds were allocated to this objective (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/objective1/index_en.htm). For the current programming period from 2007 to 2013, the "Convergence objective" aims to promote growth-enhancing conditions and factors leading to real convergence for the least-developed Member States and regions. 82% of the structural and cohesion funds will serve this objective (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/object/index_en.htm).

received significant support from the Objective 1/Convergence allocations, some of which on a transitional basis. However, for the current planning period, all the regions not covered by the Convergence objective are eligible for funding under the Competitiveness and Employment objective.

When looking at the EU citizens' awareness levels of the funds received we could observe that **the greater the number of regions eligible for receiving support from EU structural and cohesion funds** over the past years were, in a particular country, then **the higher were that country's respondents' awareness levels of the EU's regional support**².

For example, in nearly all of the countries, where all, or a majority of, regions have been eligible for receiving funds in previous years, more than 60% of respondents were aware that the EU supported their city or region. This was, for example, the case in the **eastern European countries Slovenia, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia and Romania** and in **Ireland, Malta and Spain**. In line with those findings, the Netherlands and Denmark, Member States that did not receive much funding under this objective, had low levels of awareness (30% and 23%, respectively). Appreciation of support was also low in Sweden, where only the sparsely populated regions received funding (23%).

There were, however, exceptions. In Austria, nearly two-thirds of respondents said that their city or region was supported by EU Regional Policy, even though only one region was eligible under Objective 1 and the Convergence objective. Other exceptions were Greece, Hungary and Portugal: in those countries, all or most of their regions received support but only less than half of their respondents were aware of this. In regard to Ireland, since 2007, the regions no longer receive funding under the Convergence objective, but the positive effects of the earlier funding efforts still seem to resonate in the Irish awareness levels.

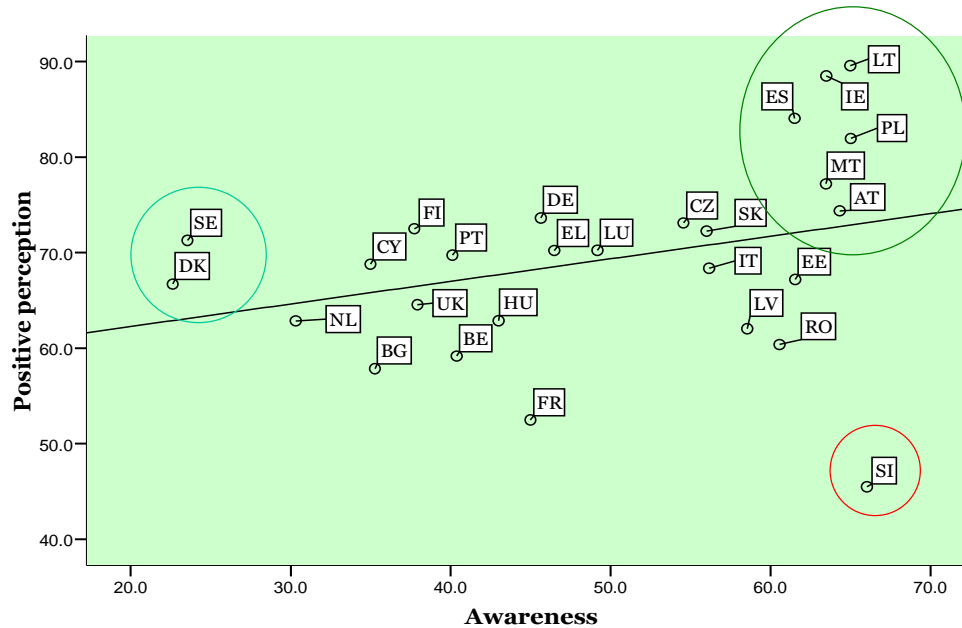
Concerning the perceived benefits of EU Regional Policy, we saw that it was **most often in those countries where awareness of the EU support was the highest that also saw the most advantages**. In Lithuania (90%) and Ireland (89%), for example, where around two-thirds of respondents were aware of the support, there was almost unanimous agreement that the regions and cities would benefit from the support. The perception of benefits was also positive in Spain (84%), Poland (82%), Malta (77%) and Austria (74%) – and that coincided in those cases with high awareness levels. At the other end of the scale, we found France, Bulgaria and the Netherlands: not only were the levels of awareness of the EU's support low, but also the perception of its benefits were inferior to most of the other EU Member States.

Also here, we observed exceptions to that pattern: the most extreme exception was **Slovenia**, where, on the one hand, awareness was the highest among all of the EU Member States but judgement was the most negative: while two-thirds of Slovenian respondents were aware of the EU support, half of those respondents denied that their region or city was seeing any benefit.

Sweden and **Denmark** also stood out, in a positive sense: while only around a quarter of respondents were aware of the EU's support, more than two-thirds of those respondents said they felt that the support was beneficial for their region or city.

² Eligible under Objective 1 for the programming period 2000-2006, and for the Convergence objective in the programming period of 2007-2013.

Awareness and perception of EU support



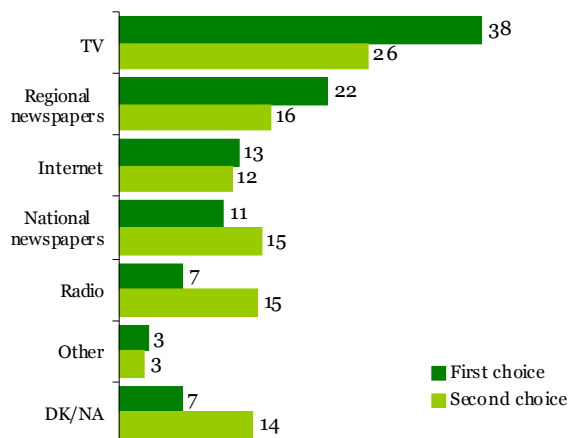
Socio-demographic analysis

Male, older and highly-educated respondents, city-dwellers, the self-employed and employees were most likely to say that they *were aware of the fact that the EU supported their city or region* through its Regional Policy.

Patterns were less clear concerning the *perceptions of the benefits of the EU's support for cities and regions*. While gender had no influence here, it was especially the 25 to 39 year-olds, those with the lowest educational levels and manual workers who saw no benefit for their city or region. Those living in metropolitan areas (72%) were slightly more likely to see a benefit of EU Regional Policy than respondents living in rural areas (69%).

1.2 Information sources

The most important sources of information (EU27)



Q2. What are the most important channels of information where you get information on EU-support for your region and city?
%, Base: all respondents

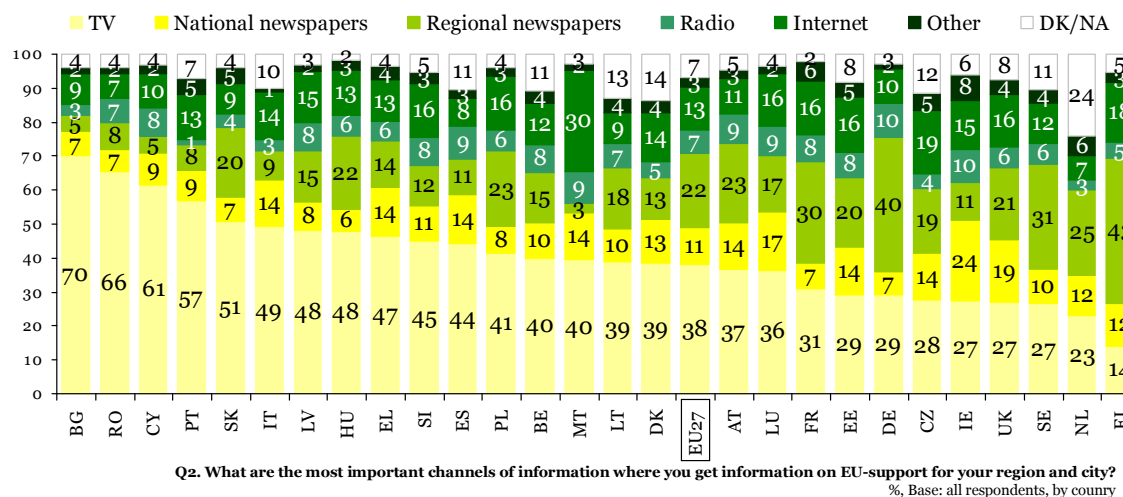
Television was by far the most important source for information about EU Regional Policy. Thirty-eight percent of respondents named TV as the most important information source and around a quarter (26%) of respondents said it was the second most important source. After television, the regional newspapers were most often cited, both as a first choice (22%) and as a second choice (16%).

The **Internet** marginally overtook the more classical information sources, such as national newspapers and the radio, as a main information source. While 13% of respondents cited the Internet first, 11% did so for national newspapers and only 7% for the radio. However, those media channels were more

often cited as the second most important information sources (both 15%) than the internet (12%).

When comparing results across the EU Member States, we saw that in nearly all of the countries, the television was the medium that was most often used - relatively speaking - as the main information source about EU Regional Policy. We observed, however, that **while in some countries, citizens focused nearly exclusively on the TV as the main information source, other countries used a much broader variety of information channels.**

The most important sources of information – *first choice*



Particularly in the newest Member States, Bulgaria and Romania, television played *the* predominant role in providing information on EU regional support: two-thirds or more of respondents cited the TV as their most important source of information.

In the other EU Member States, television was challenged by other media as the main information source on EU Regional Policy, especially by *regional newspapers*, that were cited by approximately 43% of Finnish, 40% of German and around 30% of French and Swedish respondents as the main information source on EU Regional Policy.

When turning to the country results for the media that were cited as the **second most important information sources** about EU support for cities and regions, we saw a **much more varied usage** of the **media across the EU Member States**.

For example, respondents citing the *television* as the second most important information source only ranged from 15% in Portugal to one-third of respondents (34%) in Germany. However, television remained the most often cited medium in most of the countries. Only Italian, Cypriot, Romanian, Bulgarian and Portuguese respondents mentioned another information channel more frequently than the TV as their second most important information source on EU Regional Policy. Of the other media, *regional newspapers*, were mentioned in this respect by approximately one-fifth of Austrian and Hungarian (both 22%), German (21%) and Finnish (19%) respondents.

Socio-demographic analysis (Primary source of information)

Both *national and regional newspapers* were primarily used as the main source of information on EU Regional Policy by older and highly-educated respondents. National newspapers were more often cited in cities, whereas regional newspapers were more frequently named in rural areas as the main information sources on EU Regional Policy.

Television was more often mentioned by women, the less-educated, those living in an urban or rural area, manual workers and those not working than by men, the more educated, city dwellers, the self employed and employees.

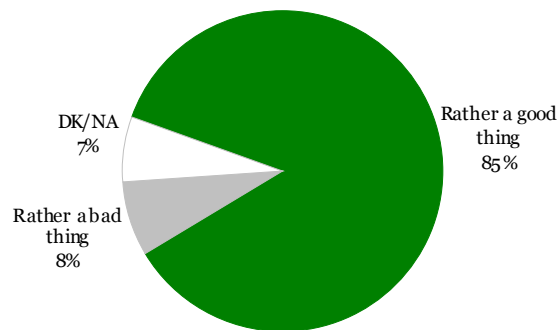
The usage of the *radio* as the main information source for EU Regional Policy didn't differ much between socio-demographic groups. The only factor that mattered was age: the older respondents were slightly more likely to use the radio as the main information source than the younger ones

Typically, the *Internet* was the medium mentioned by male, young, highly-educated, city-dwellers and by the self-employed or employees as a primary information source about EU Regional Policy.

2. EU Regional Policy measures

2.1 Beneficiaries of EU Regional Policy measures

Focus on poorest regions (EU27)



Q4. European Regional Policy is concentrated on the poorest regions in order to help them to catch up faster with the rest of the EU. In your opinion, is this rather a good or rather a bad thing? %; Base: all respondents

It was widely accepted among European citizens that EU Regional Policy served as a tool for establishing equal living conditions in Europe: respondents were **nearly unanimous** in saying that it was rather a **good thing that the European Regional Policy concentrated on the poorest regions** in order to help them to catch up faster with the rest of the EU (85%).

Only 8% of respondents thought that this focus was rather a bad thing.

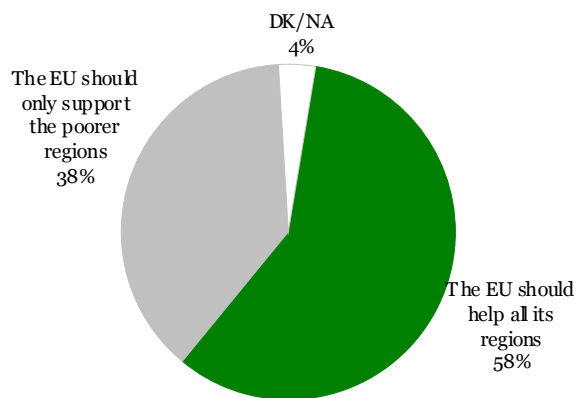
Even if results were quite uniform across the EU Member States, we observed a higher approval rate in most of the southern and

eastern European Member States than in northern and western European states: in Greece, Malta, Romania, Cyprus, Spain, Poland and Slovakia for example, over 92% of respondents thought that the focus on poor regions was a good thing. In Finland, the UK, Germany and Austria (and the Czech Republic), on the other hand, at least one in 10 respondents said this focus was rather a bad thing.

However, a majority of respondents also thought that EU support should not exclusively focus on the poorer regions, but that **all regions should be beneficiaries of EU Regional Policy (58%)**. Only a minority of 38% of interviewed citizens stated that the EU should only support the poorer regions.

The Cypriots in particular (70%) wanted all of the EU's regions to be supported. In Luxembourg, the UK, Latvia and France, around two-thirds also held the same view. Portugal and Spain were the only countries where a majority of respondents thought that the EU should focus exclusively on the poorer regions (54%, 55% respectively).

Preferred beneficiaries of European Regional Policy (EU27)



Q5. In all the other regions, European Regional Policy intervenes to help them to foster innovation, to create jobs and to work together. In your opinion, should the EU support all regions or concentrate exclusively on the poorer ones? %; Base: all respondents

Socio-demographic analysis

The younger and the more educated the respondents were, then the more likely they were to state that the *concentration of EU Regional Policy on poorer regions* was a good thing. This view was also slightly more often advanced by city-dwellers than by the inhabitants of rural areas.

However, the younger the respondents were, the more likely they were to say that the *EU should help all of its regions and not just the poorer ones*. Concerning education, those having an average level of education were the ones most frequently having this opinion, followed by those with the highest level of education, whereas the less educated were the least likely to hold this opinion.

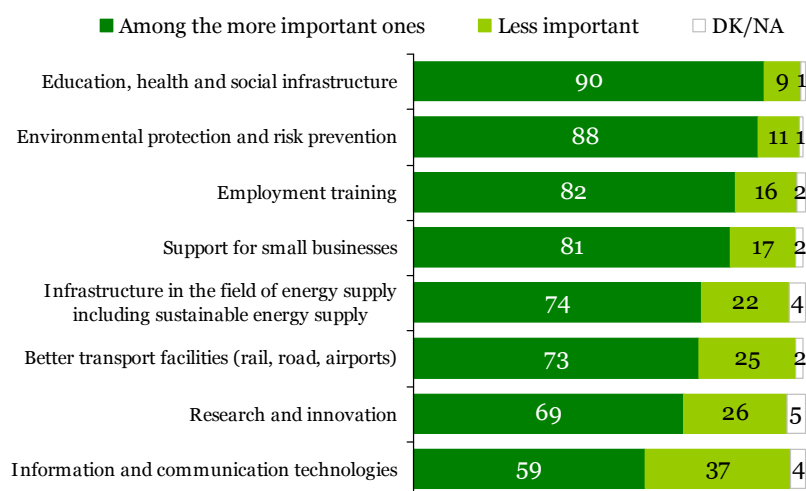
2.2 Priorities of EU Regional Policy

Asked in which policy areas they would prefer to see their city or region being supported by the EU, respondents gave **top priority to educational, health and social issues and the protection of the environment**, followed by **business development** and **infrastructure improvement**.

In terms of the EU's support for its regions and cities, **education, health & social infrastructure** and **environmental protection and risk prevention** (90% and 88%, respectively) were almost unanimously regarded as being the most important policy areas. After these two, around eight out of 10 respondents considered **employment training** and **support for small businesses** as the most important policy areas.

Information and communication technologies were seen as the least pressing policy area: this topic was seen to be a priority by the lowest number of respondents (59%). In addition it was viewed as being a less important topic by the highest number of respondents (37%).

Priorities of EU Regional Policy (EU27)



Q6. EU Regional Policy can support different activities and areas in different regions. I will read a list of activities/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

When looking at the differences in responses between the various Member States, two general observations could be made: First, we observed that **Europeans were less divided in the importance they attached to the two top-priority policy areas (socio-political issues and environmental protection) than they were concerning the other policy areas**. Second, **Spain, Greece and Ireland** were frequently found among those countries where a high number of respondents thought that *any* of the policy areas was important, whereas respondents from the **Czech Republic, Denmark, Poland** and **Latvia** were often seen replying that a given policy area was of less importance.

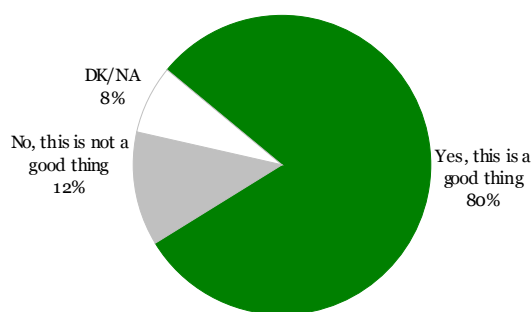
Socio-demographic analysis

Especially **gender, age and level of education** played a role in the choices made concerning which EU Regional Policy areas were more important than others.

For example, *education, health & social infrastructure, environmental protection & risk prevention and employment training* were given priority by **women**, whereas men were more likely to favour support for *research & innovation and information & communication technologies*.

2.3 Multi-level governance

Strategies and projects being selected by the Member States and Regions (EU27)



Q7. When it comes to selecting strategies and projects, EU Regional Policy gives the right to decide on them to the Member States and regions. Do you think this is a good thing?
%, Base: all respondents

Most Europeans appreciated the principle of subsidiarity in the selection process of the EU's regional policies' strategies and projects.

Eight in 10 respondents answered that it was a good thing that EU Regional Policy gives Member States and regions the right to decide when it comes to selecting strategies and projects. Only approximately one in 10 respondents said that this was not a good thing (12%).

The decision-making on a regional or Member State level was especially welcomed in Malta and Slovenia, where approximately nine in 10 respondents said that it was a good thing that EU

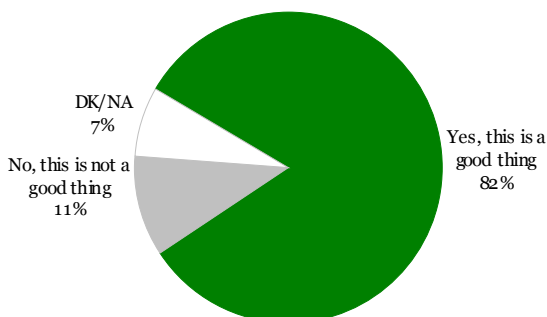
Regional Policy gives Member States and Regions the right to decide on strategies and projects.

While still approved by a large majority of respondents, the Hungarian and Czech were least often saying that the principle of subsidiarity in the framework of EU Regional Policy was a good thing (73%). In Denmark, most respondents could be found that actively rejected this notion (17%).

The **participation of various bodies**, such as local business associations, trade unions and organisations promoting equal opportunities and the environment, **in the project selection process, was also welcomed by around eight in 10 EU citizens**: 82% of respondents considered their participation to be a good thing and only 11% took the opposite view.

The involvement of different types of organisations in the selection of projects was appreciated by a large majority of respondents in all EU Member States. The approval of this principle ranged from 74% in Greece and 76% in Italy and Denmark, to 92% in Slovenia and Malta. Greece had the highest number of respondents opposed to this idea (23%).

Participation of organisations in the selection process of projects (EU27)



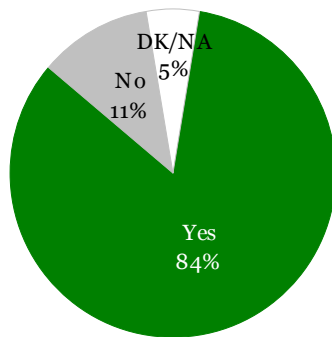
Q8. EU Regional Policy obliges Member States and regions to involve in the selection of projects local business associations, trade unions and organizations taking care of equal opportunities and the environment. In your opinion, is the involvement of those organizations a good thing?
%, Base: all respondents

Socio-demographic analysis

Approval for both the principle of subsidiarity and the involvement of different kind of organisations in the framework of EU Regional Policy **decreased with age** and **increased with the respondent's level of education**. Concerning other socio-demographic characteristics, we found only minor differences.

3. The future of EU Regional Policy

Addressing globalisation, climate change and demographic change (EU27)



Q9. Do you think that in the future EU Regional Policy should address issues such as globalisation, climate change and demographic change?
%, Base: all respondents

Respondents were in no doubt that globalisation, climate change and demographic change should be addressed in the future by EU Regional Policy.

Eighty-four percent wanted to see these issues tackled in the future, while only one in 10 respondents saw no benefit in using EU Regional Policy in those domains (11%).

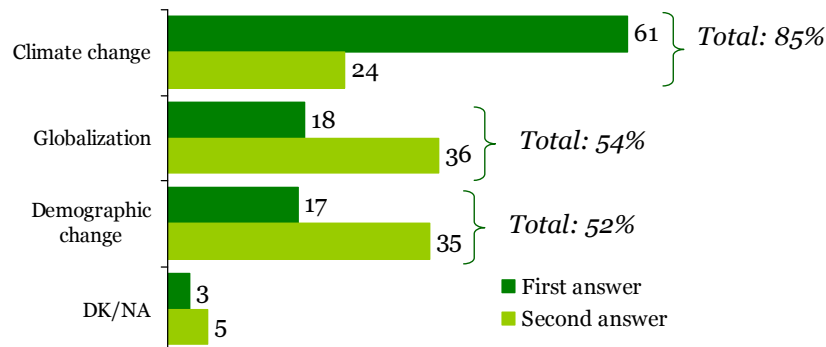
It was the Swedish, Irish, Slovakian, Hungarian and Finnish respondents that primarily wanted globalisation, climate change and demographic change to be addressed (90% and more), while the Cypriots, Romanians and Czechs were the least likely to express this view (66% and less).

Concerning socio-demographic characteristics, it was most notably the youngest, the highly-educated, city-dwellers and employees who wanted EU Regional Policy to address these issues in the future.

Among those issues **to be addressed by EU Regional Policy in the future, climate change was assigned the highest priority**: 85% of respondents thought that climate change was an important issue to address, with 61% choosing this as the most important issue.

Globalisation and demographic change were equally ranked, with each other, as important issues: Slightly more than half of respondents thought that those topics should be addressed (54% and 52% respectively) by EU Regional Policy, and just less than one in five respondents saw either globalisation (18%) or demographic change (17%) as a priority for EU Regional Policy in the future.

Priorities concerning issues to address (EU27)



Q10. Which of these would be most important in your view?
%, Base: who think that in the future EU Regional Policy should address new issues

Country comparison (first answer)

Swedish and Spanish respondents, in particular, ranked *climate change* as a priority for EU Regional Policy, while in the Baltic States, Lithuania and Latvia, and in Bulgaria, less than half (between 41% and 44%) saw this as the most pressing issue.

Latvians and Bulgarians seemed to be rather preoccupied by the challenges that their societies and economies face due to *demographic change*: over a third of respondents mentioned this issue as a priority for EU Regional Policy in the future. Cypriots and Slovaks were the ones that were most often regarding *globalization* as an issue that should also be tackled at a regional level: approximately a third of those respondents saw this as a priority for EU Regional Policy in the future. The Finns were the least often assigning priority to this issue (8%).

Socio-demographic analysis (first answer)

Climate change was considered to be the most important issue to be tackled by EU Regional Policy in the future by the youngest respondents, the less-educated and manual workers.

Globalisation was least often cited by the oldest respondent group (55 and over), by the less-educated and by respondents living in a rural area as the most important topic to address.

The higher the educational level of the respondents, the more likely they were to choose *demographic change* as most important issue to address. This pattern could also be seen in the occupational categories: 20% of employees and 19% of the self-employed said this would be the most important issue for EU Regional Policy to address in the future, while 15% of manual workers and 16% of those who are not in paid employment did so.

The 15-24 year-olds did not choose this option as frequently as the older survey participants as a priority and gender did not play a role in the choice of priorities for EU Regional Policy in the future.