



Flash Eurobarometer 531

Citizens' awareness and perception of EU regional policy

Summary



Fieldwork:

June 2023

Publication:

October 2023

Survey requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy and coordinated by the Directorate-General for 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 531 – Ipsos European Public Affairs



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(DG COMM “Media Monitoring and Eurobarometer” Unit)

Project title	Flash Eurobarometer 531 Citizens' awareness and perception of EU regional policy – June 2023 Summary
Linguistic version	EN
Catalogue number	KN-05-23-362-EN-N
ISBN	978-92-68-07835-8 doi:10.2776/884433
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<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer>

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Introduction

EU Cohesion Policy aims to enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion among EU Member States by correcting imbalances among countries and regions within the European Union (EU). EU Cohesion Policy is one of the most impactful areas of EU activity, accounting for around a third of its budget or €392 billion in the 2021-2027 programme period. Priorities of the EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 correspond to the broader strategic agenda for the EU 2019-2024 - the five objectives of regional policy should ensure the building of a smarter, greener, more connected and more social Europe that is closer to its citizens.

On behalf of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Urban and Regional Policy, Ipsos European Public Affairs interviewed a representative sample of citizens, aged 15 and over, in each of the 27 Member States of the EU. Between 22 July and 8 August 2021, 25 718 interviews were conducted over the telephone (landline and mobile phones). This report covers the following topics:

- Citizens' awareness of and opinion on EU regional policy support, including the recovery programme in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, as well as information on the sources of information from which respondents found out about the support
- Priorities for EU regional policy from the citizen perspective: which geographical regions and areas of investment the EU should target and who should take decisions about regional investments
- Public awareness of cross-border cooperation, including four EU macro-regional strategies in the Baltic Sea, along the Danube, the Adriatic and Ionian Sea regions, and the Alpine region.

Survey data presented in this report are weighted to known population proportions. The EU27 averages are weighted according to the size of the 15+ population of each EU Member State. Percentages may not add up to 100%, as they are rounded to the nearest percent. Due to rounding, it may happen that the percentages for separate response options shown in the charts do not exactly add up to the totals mentioned in the text. Response percentages exceed 100% if the question allowed respondents to select multiple responses. In this report, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations used in this report correspond to:

BE		Belgium	FR		France	NL		Netherlands
BG		Bulgaria	HR		Croatia	AT		Austria
CZ		Czechia	IT		Italy	PL		Poland
DK		Denmark	CY		Rep. of Cyprus	PT		Portugal
DE		Germany	LV		Latvia	RO		Romania
EE		Estonia	LT		Lithuania	SI		Slovenia
IE		Ireland	LU		Luxembourg	SK		Slovakia
EL		Greece	HU		Hungary	FI		Finland
ES		Spain	MT		Malta	SE		Sweden

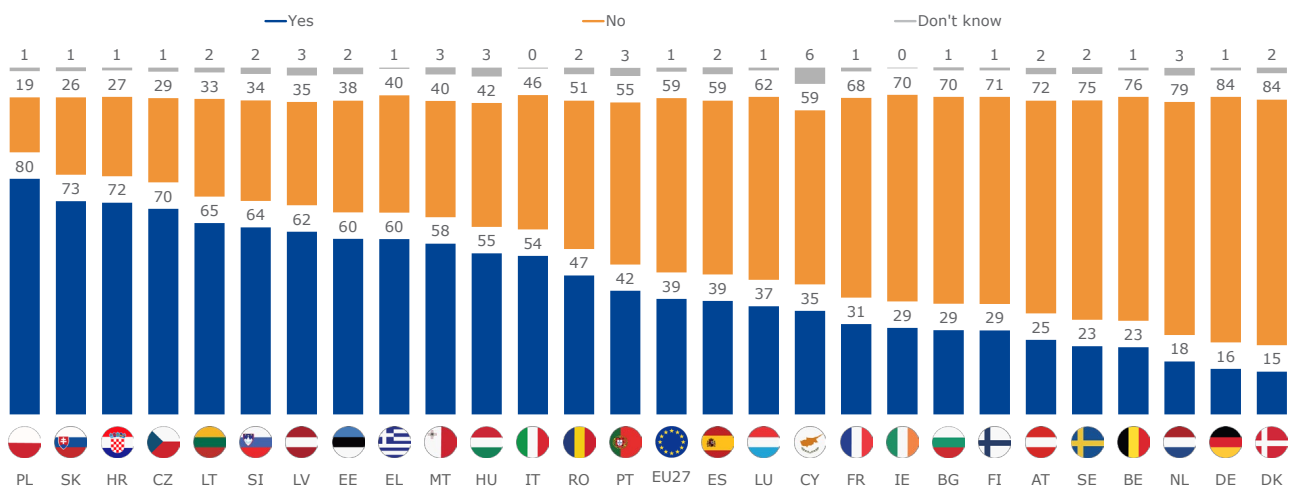
* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 27 EU Member States. However, the 'acquis communautaire' has been suspended in the part of the country not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. For practical reasons, interviews are only carried out in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Section 1. EU co-financed projects that improve local areas

About four in ten (39%) respondents say they have heard about EU co-financed projects to improve the area where they live. When this question was asked in 2021, a similar figure was observed (41%). There is a **large variation across the EU Member States in the proportion of respondents who report having heard about EU co-financed projects to improve the area where they live**, ranging from 15% in Denmark to 80% in Poland.

Compared to 2021 (Flash Eurobarometer 497), awareness of EU co-financed projects to improve the regions and cities where respondents live has **significantly decreased** in Hungary (55%, -8 pp), Bulgaria (29%, -7 pp), Finland (29%, -7 pp), Latvia (62%, -5 pp) and Germany (16%, -4 pp).

Q1A Europe provides financial support to regions and cities. Have you heard about any EU co-financed projects to improve the area where you live? (% by country)

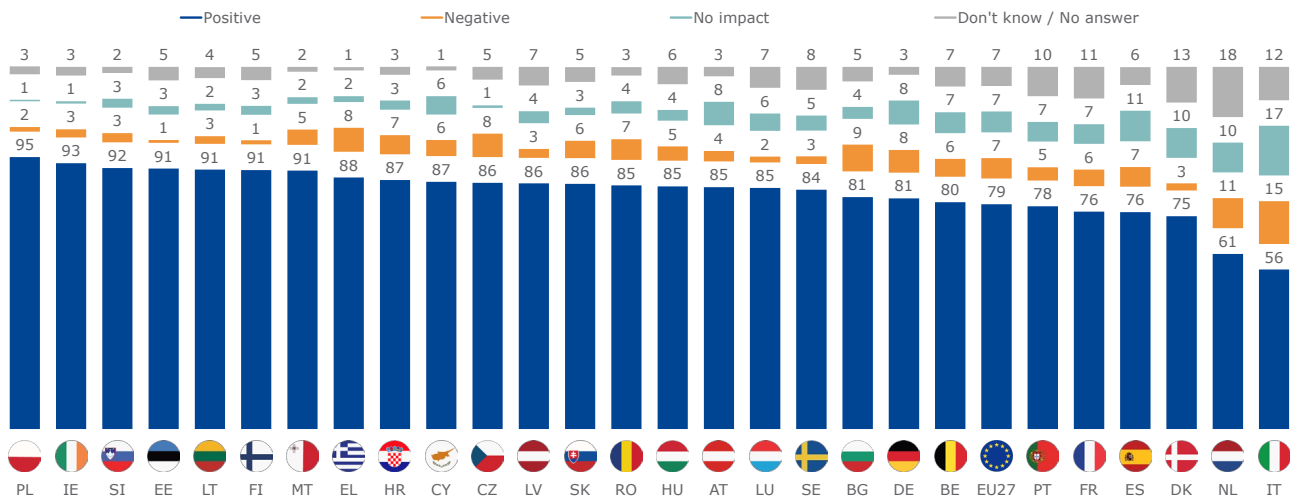


Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

About eight in ten respondents (79%) who have heard about EU co-financed projects in their region also **say that the impact of these projects has been positive for the development of their city or region**, while less than one in ten (7%) think the impact has been negative and the same share (7%) *spontaneously* say there has been no impact. The proportion of respondents saying that the impact of EU co-financed projects in their region has been positive remains **at about the same level as in 2021**. In the longer term, the trend since 2010 shows a slight positive trend in the proportion seeing a positive impact – from 76% in 2010 to 79% in 2023.

In all but two Member States, at least three-quarters of respondents who have heard about EU co-financed projects in their regions **think that these projects have had a positive impact on the development of their city or region**. In seven countries, this view is shared by at least nine in ten respondents; this is the case, for example, in Malta and Finland (both 91%), Ireland (93%) and Poland (95%). At the lower end of the country ranking, in the Netherlands, 61% say that that EU co-funded projects have had a positive impact on the development of their city or region, but the overall lowest proportion is observed in Italy (56% 'positive' impact).

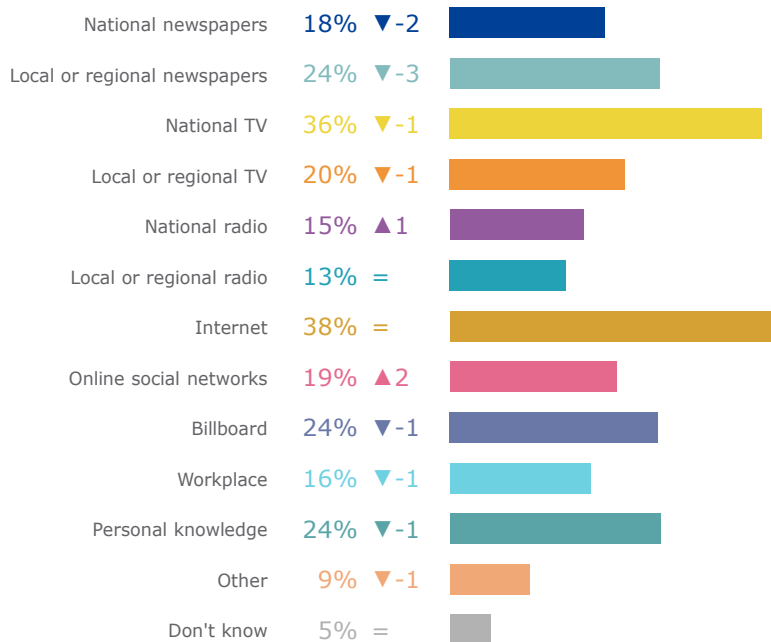
Q1C Taking into consideration all the projects you have heard about, would you say that this support has had a positive or negative impact on the development of your city or region? (% by country)



Base: respondents who have heard about EU co-funded projects (n=11 835)

Respondents who have heard of EU co-financed projects in their local area were asked where they have done so. **National TV (36%) and the Internet (38%) are the most-frequently mentioned sources**, with close to four in ten respondents saying that they get their information from this source. National TV and the Internet stayed at about the same level as in 2021. Other sources selected by one in five – or more – respondents are local and regional newspapers (24%, -3 pp compared to 2021), billboards (24%), personal knowledge (24%) and local or regional TV (20%).

Q1B Where did you hear about it? Firstly? And then? (% total mentions, by country)



▼▲ Evolution 2023-2021 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 497, July-August 2021)

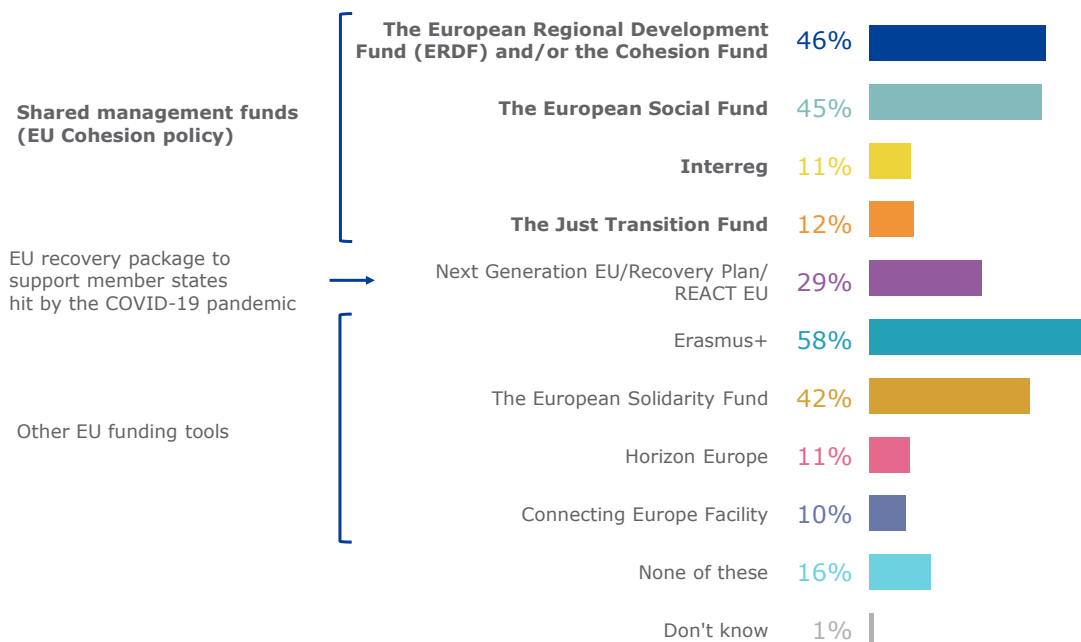
Base: respondents who have heard about EU co-funded projects (n=11 835 in 2023 and 12 182 in 2021)

Section 2. Awareness of EU Cohesion Policy

Almost one in two respondents (46%) say they have heard about the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and/or the Cohesion Fund**, and a similar proportion (45%) have heard about the **European Social Fund**. However, just one in ten respondents say they have heard about Interreg (11%) and **Just Transition Fund** (12%). About one in three respondents (29%) say they have heard about **REACT-EU or NextGenerationEU** (the EU's COVID-19 recovery plan).

In total, **66% of respondents have heard of at least one of the shared management funds (ERDF/Cohesion Fund, European Social Fund, Interreg, Just Transition Fund)**. This number increases to 70% when also including those who have heard about REACT-EU or NextGenerationEU.

Q2 Which, if any, of the following forms of EU support you've heard about before? (% - EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

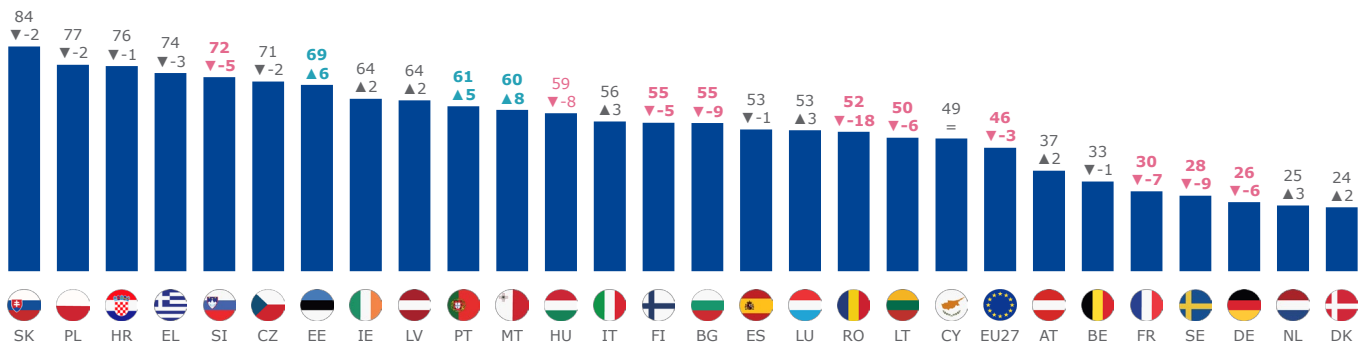
Awareness of EU regional policy funds is assessed against awareness of other EU funding tools, such as Erasmus+. This assessment shows that the highest level of awareness (58%) is observed for **Erasmus+** (the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe) and the lowest (10%) for **connecting Europe Facility** (a key EU funding instrument to promote growth, jobs and competitiveness through targeted infrastructure investment at European level) (10%).

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund

In Slovakia, 84% of respondents reply that they have heard of **the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and/or the Cohesion Fund**. Poland (77%), Croatia (76%), Greece (74%) and Slovenia (72%) are also found at the higher end of the country ranking with more than seven in ten respondents saying that they have heard of ERDF and/or the Cohesion Fund. In Denmark (24%), the Netherlands (25%) and Germany (26%), on the other hand, just about one in four respondents say the same.

Since 2021, awareness of ERDF and the Cohesion Fund appears to have decreased somewhat at EU level (from 49% in 2021 to 46% in 2023, -3 pp). At the individual country level, awareness of these two funds has significantly **decreased in nine Member States**.

Q2 Which, if any, of the following forms of EU support you've heard about before?
The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and/or the Cohesion Fund
(% mentioned by country)

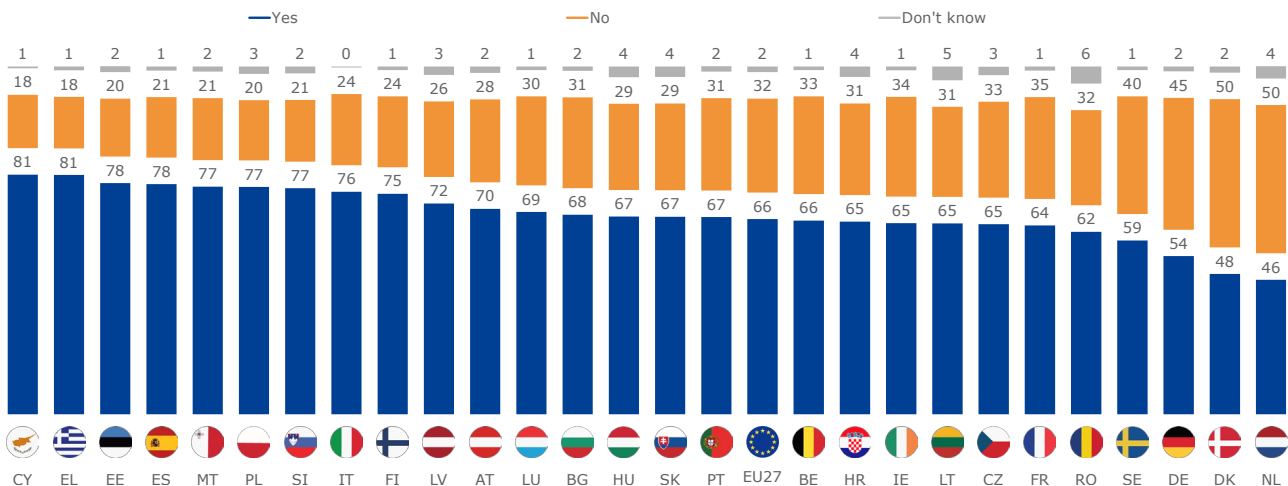


▼▲ Evolution 2023-2022 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 497, July-August 2021 – statistically significant changes shown in bold blue/pink); Base: all respondents (n=25 718 in 2023 and 25 706 in 2021)

EU regional support to COVID-19 recovery

In total, across the EU, **66% of respondents report being aware that EU regional policy supported Member States in the health emergency and economic recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**. The highest level of awareness is measured in Cyprus and Greece (both 81%). In Denmark, however, less than half of respondents (48%) say they are aware of EU regional support to COVID-19 recovery; this figure decreases further to 46% in the Netherlands, where awareness is overall the lowest. **Compared to 2021**, the percentage of respondents being aware of EU regional policy support to Member States in the health emergency response and economic recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has decreased in six Member States.

Q3 Are you aware that the EU regional policy supported Member States in the health emergency response and economic recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

Section 3. Perceived benefits of EU regional policy

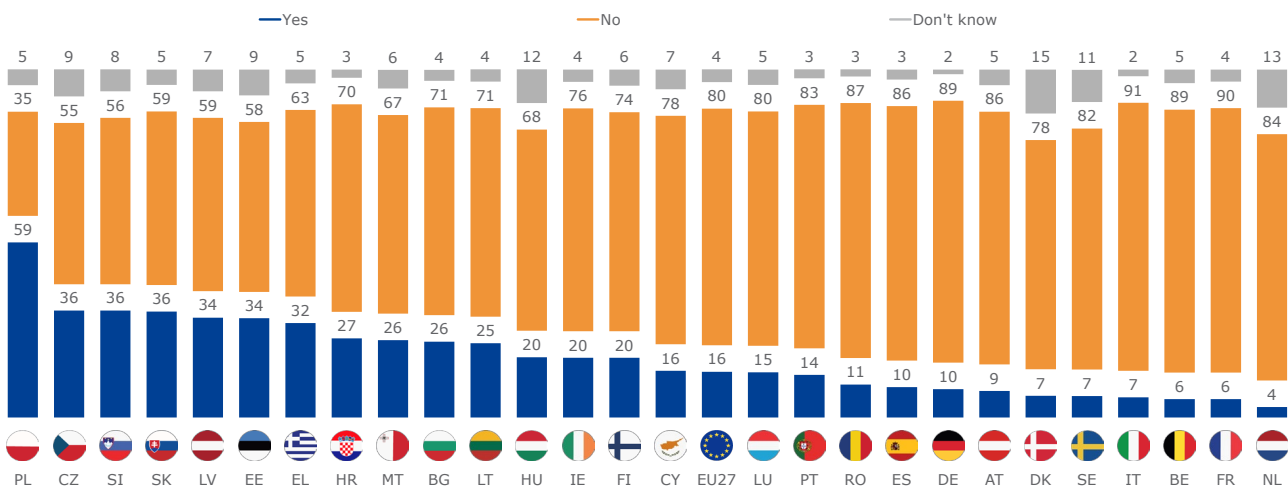
Perceived benefits in daily life

On average, **16% of respondents say they have benefitted in their daily life from a project funded by the ERDF or the Cohesion Fund**; 80% say they have not and 4% that they do not know.

Poland stands out with 59% of respondents saying they have benefitted in their daily life from a project funded by the ERDF or the Cohesion Fund. In Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia, between 32% and 36% of respondents say that they have benefitted in this way. In seven countries, less than 10% of respondents say the same: the Netherlands (4%), Belgium and France (both 6%), Denmark, Italy, Sweden (all 7%) and Austria (9%).

Compared to 2021, the share of respondents who have benefitted in their daily life from a project funded by the ERDF or the Cohesion Fund has increased in Greece (+10 pp) and Croatia (+8 pp), while the share has decreased in Ireland (-8 pp), Austria (-5 pp) and Italy (-5 pp).

Q4A Have you benefitted in your daily life from a project funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the Cohesion Fund? (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

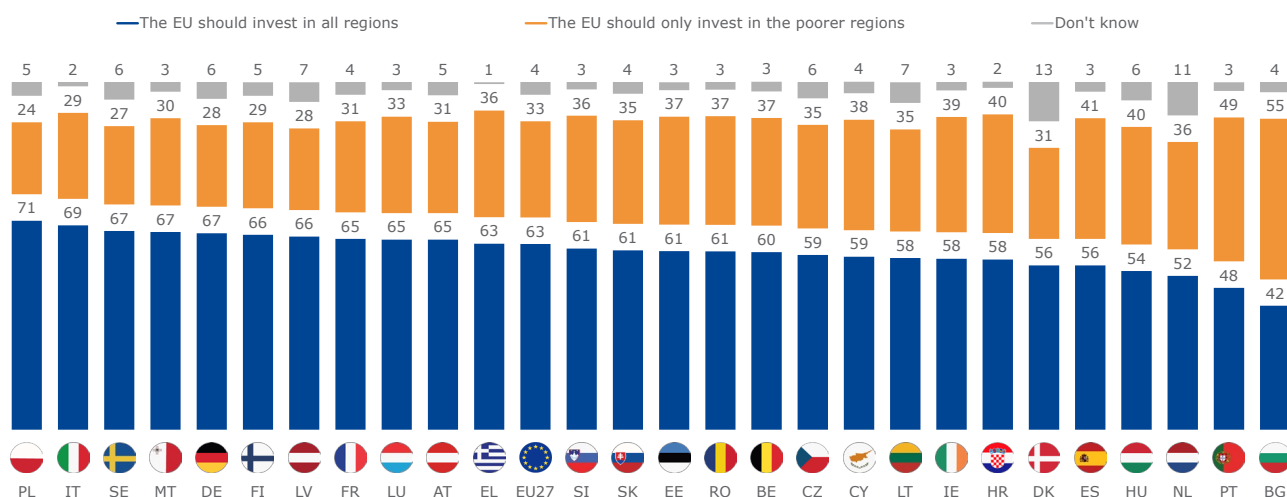
'Feeling like an EU citizen'

About one in five (22%) reply that EU funded projects in their area contribute to a large extent to their feeling of being an EU citizen, and 35% say these projects contribute to some extent to this feeling. In most Member States (24 out of 27), at least half of respondents agree that EU funded projects in their area make them feel at least to some extent like an EU citizen. Poland stands out with 45% of respondents saying these projects make them, to a large extent, feel like an EU citizen, and 36% saying this applies to some extent.

Section 4. Priority regions for EU regional policy

More than six in ten respondents (63%) say that the EU should invest in all its regions, while one in three (33%) say the EU should only invest in the poorer regions. In all but two Member States, a majority of respondents say the **EU should invest in all its regions**, led by respondents in Poland (71%) and Italy (69%). In Bulgaria, on the other hand, a majority of respondents (55%) think that **investments should be targeted only at the poorer regions**, and respondents in Portugal are divided on the subject (48% 'all regions' and 49% 'only the poorer regions').

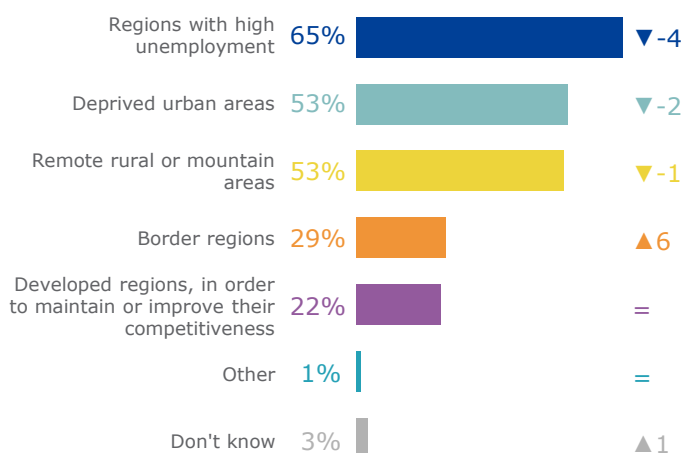
Q5A European regional policy supports economic development projects in all regions. In your opinion, should the EU continue to invest in all regions or concentrate exclusively on the poorer ones? (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

The highest priority is given by respondents to **regions with high unemployment** (65%). These are followed by **deprived urban areas** (53%) and **remote rural or mountain areas** (53%). About one in three respondents (29%) would give priority to **border regions**. **Maintaining and improving competitiveness of developed regions** is considered a priority for investment by just over one in five respondents (22%). **Compared to 2021**, border regions are now selected by a higher share of respondents (29%, +6 pp), while regions with high unemployment (65%, -4 pp) and deprived urban areas (53%, -2 pp) are now selected by a lower share of respondents.

Q5B Which regions would you target for investments under EU regional policy? (multiple answers allowed) (% - EU27)



▼▲ Evolution 2023-2021 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 497, July-August 2021); Base: all respondents (n=25 718 in 2023 and 25 706 in 2021)

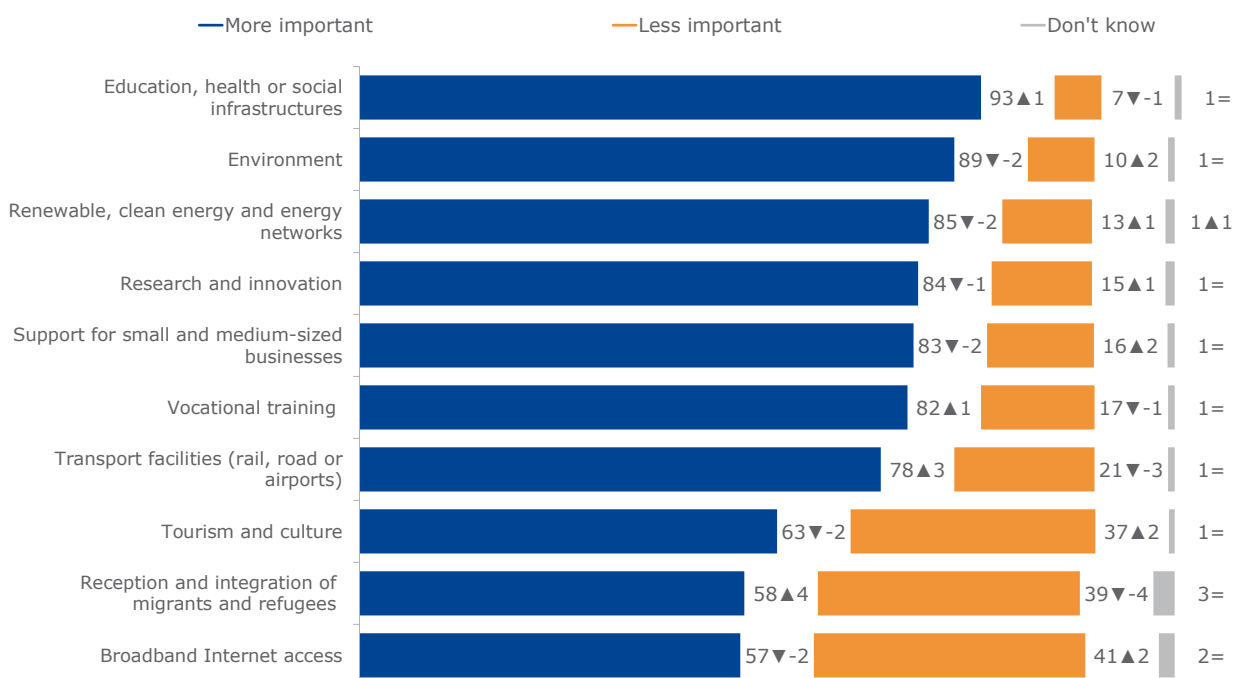
Section 5. Important areas for EU regional policy investment

All domains of EU regional policy listed in the survey are regarded as being meaningfully important domains by a majority of respondents. At the EU level, 93% consider investment in **education, health or social infrastructures** as important for their city or region, followed by investments in **the environment** (89%). More than eight in ten respondents say that **renewable, clean energy and energy networks** (85%) **research and innovation** (84%), **support for small and medium-sized businesses** (83%) and **vocational training** (82%) are important domains.

Smaller majorities support the other investment domains: 78% state that investment in **transport facilities** is important for their city or region and 63% say the same about **tourism and culture**. Finally, 58% say that the **reception and integration of migrants and refugees** is an important area for investment and 57% say the same about **broadband Internet access**.

There is no shift in priorities compared to 2021, and education, health or social infrastructures, and the environment remain at the top of the list.

Q6A EU regional policy can invest in many different domains. Which of the following examples do you consider among the more important or less important for your city or region?
(% - EU27)



▼▲ Evolution 2023-2021 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 497, July-August 2021)
Base: all respondents (n=25 718 in 2023 and 25 706 in 2021)

Respondents were also asked **which domains should be targeted for EU investment in the next few years**. They were presented with the same list of policy domains and were asked to name all the ones that they think should be prioritised in the next few years. One in two respondents (51%) say that

education, health and social infrastructures should be prioritised in EU regional policy in the next few years; 39% think that the EU should invest in **the environment** and 34% think it should invest in **renewable, clean energy and energy networks** in the next few years. More than 20% of respondents mention **support for SMEs** (28%), **transport facilities** (27%), **research and innovation** (26%) and **vocational training** (24%). Fewer respondents say that EU investment over the next few years should be targeted at **reception and integration of migrants and refugees** (18%), **tourism and culture** (13%) or **broadband Internet access** (10%).

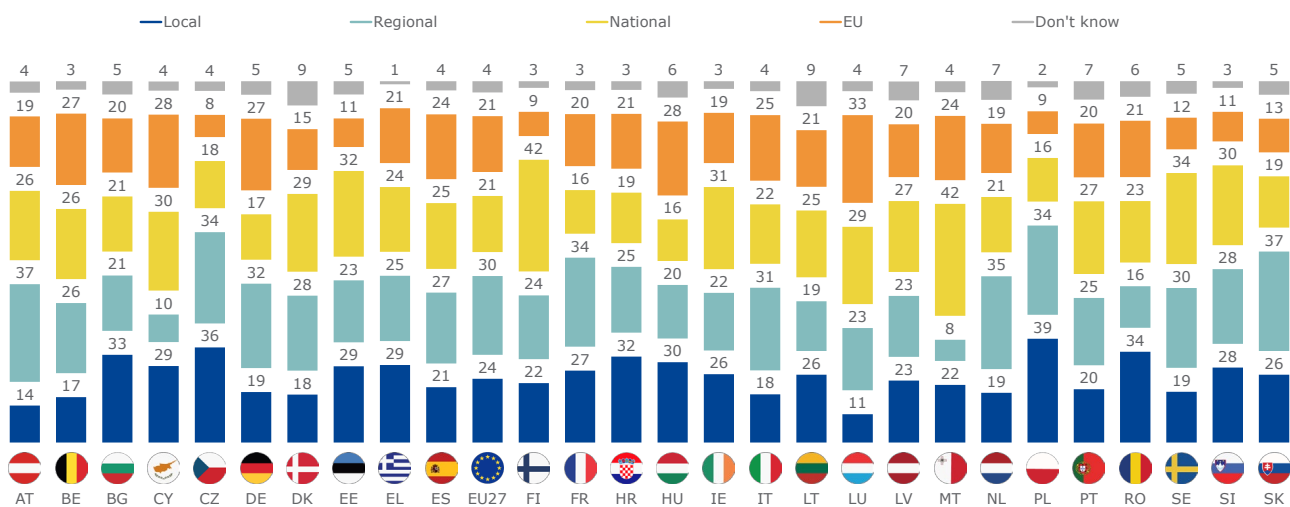
Primary level of governance

A majority of respondents think that decisions about EU regional policy projects should be taken at sub-national levels, with 30% opting for the regional level and 24% for the local level. The remaining respondents think that decisions should be taken at the national level or higher, with 21% opting for the national level and 21% who think that the EU should take decisions on projects funded by its own regional policy. Since 2021, these results have remained nearly unchanged.

The **regional level** is the preferred level for decisions about EU regional policy for 37% of respondents in Austria and Slovakia; this figure decreases to 8% in Malta. In Poland, 39% of respondents reply that decisions about EU regional policy should be made at **local level**; this view is also shared by 36% of respondents in Czechia and 34% in Romania. In Luxembourg, on the other hand, just 11% of respondents share this view.

The largest shares of respondents who think that decisions about EU regional policy should be made at **national level** are found in Finland and Malta (both 42%); in Cyprus, Slovenia, Ireland, Estonia and Sweden, this level is selected by between 30% and 34% of respondents. Finally, the view that **the EU** should take decisions on projects funded by regional policy ranges from 8% in Czechia and 9% in Finland and Poland to 33% in Luxembourg.

Q7 At which level should decisions about EU regional policy projects primarily be taken? (% by country)



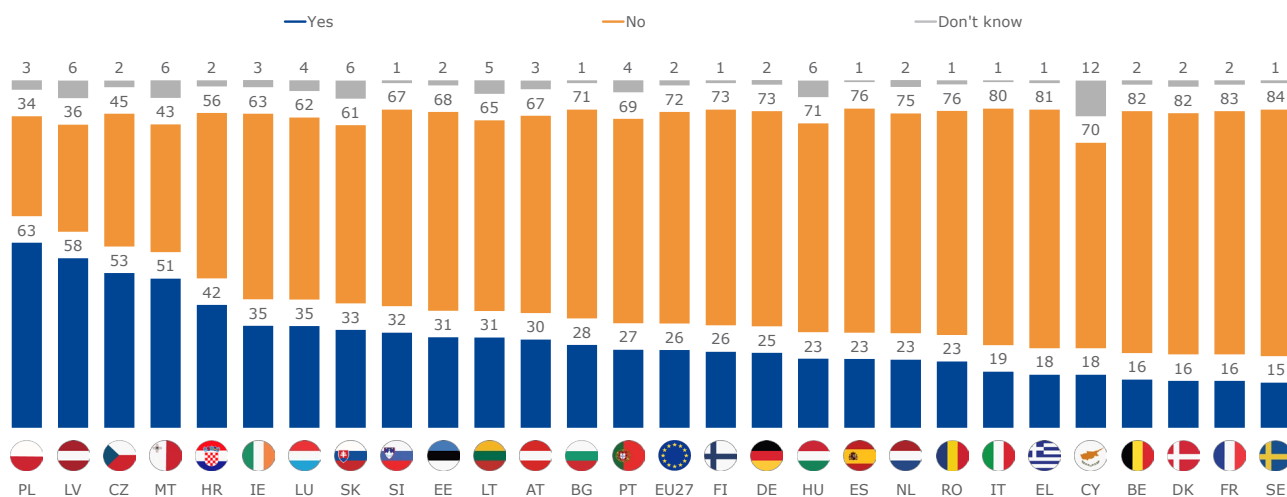
Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

Section 6. Cross-border cooperation

About one in four respondents (26%) say they are aware of cooperation between regions from different countries because of EU regional funding. In the longer term, the overall level of awareness of this type of cooperation has increased – from 19% in 2010 to 26% in 2021 and 2023.

In four EU Member States, a majority of respondents say they are aware of cooperation between regions from different countries because of EU regional policy: Poland (63%), Latvia (58%), Czechia (53%) and Malta (51%). In the seven countries at the lower end of the country ranking, on the other hand, less than one in five respondents are aware of this type of cooperation.

Q8 Are you aware of cooperation between regions from different countries because of EU regional funding? (% by country)



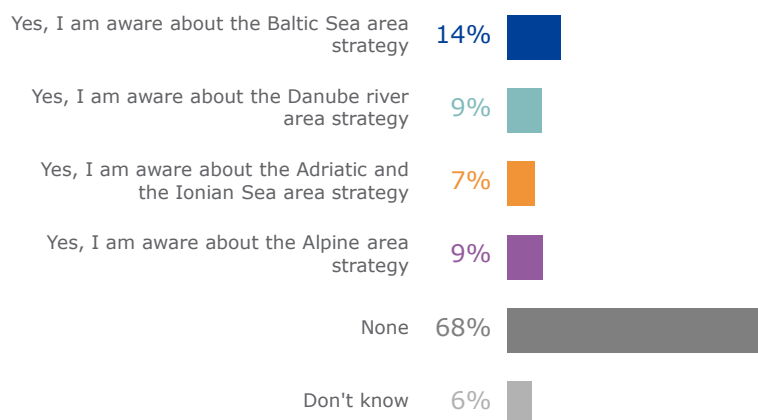
Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

Areas benefiting from an EU cooperation strategy

About one in four respondents, in total, say they are aware of at least one of the four macro-regional strategies; at the individual country level, this figure varies between 7% in Portugal and 64% in Finland.

Looking at the specific EU strategies, 14% say being aware of the **Baltic Sea Area Strategy**, 9% of the **Danube River Area Strategy**, 7% of the **Adriatic and the Ionian Sea Area Strategy** and 9% of the **Alpine Area Strategy**.

Q9 Are you aware that there is an EU strategy to promote cooperation between countries in the following areas? (% - EU27)



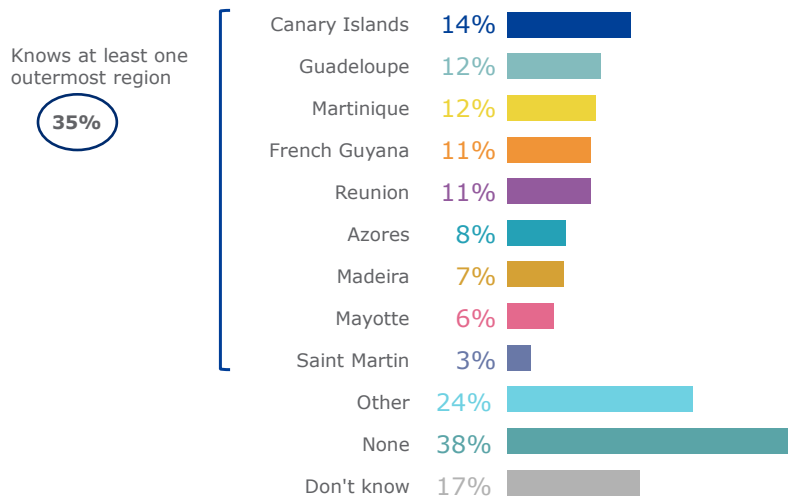
Base: all respondents (n=25 718)

EU Outermost regions

On average, across the EU, 35% of respondents can name at least one of the nine outermost regions. The EU level result is, however, mostly driven by the higher level of knowledge observed in three large Member States – France, Spain and Germany. In 18 Member States, less than one in four respondents can name at least one of the nine EU outermost regions.

The outermost region mentioned most-frequently is the **Canary Islands** (14%), followed by the four of the five **French overseas departments**: Guadeloupe (12%), Martinique (12%), French Guiana (11%) and Reunion Island (11%). The **Azores** are mentioned by 8% of respondents and **Madeira** by 7% of respondents. The smallest shares are observed for **Mayotte** (6%) and **Saint Martin** (3%).

Q10 There are nine EU outermost regions which are territories or islands located far away from the European continent. Which territories or islands can you name? (% - EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25 718)



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