

Special Eurobarometer: How fair do Europeans think life in the EU is?

April 23 2018

New poll shows most Europeans think life is generally fair, but have concerns over justice, political decisions and income inequality.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker made [fairness](#) in the EU the cornerstone of his political priorities. To support this effort with scientific evidence, the Commission's science and knowledge service, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) produced its first Fairness Report last year. The results of the Special Eurobarometer survey published today will contribute to tackling wider questions of perceived unfairness in employment, [education](#), health and society at large.

According to the Eurobarometer published today, a majority of Europeans think that most things that happen in their lives are fair and that they have equal opportunities to get ahead. Nevertheless, they are less convinced that justice and political decisions are applied in an equal and consistent way in their countries- regardless of people's [social status](#), wealth and connections. The vast majority also feel that income inequalities are too great and that governments should address them, while fewer than half believe that equality of opportunity and their social status have improved over time.

Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, responsible for the JRC, said: "Fairness is a crucial part of building a more resilient, cohesive Europe. Our initiatives in this area need to be based on sound evidence, but at the same time take the values and perceptions of Europeans into account. I am proud that the JRC's

work is helping us increase our knowledge on both counts, making a vital contribution to our efforts to build a better Europe for the future."

The main findings of the Eurobarometer survey cover education, income, social status and inter-generational mobility. They also address perceptions of migration and globalisation, the former being one of the drivers of rising inequalities and the latter being a proxy for political preferences which are among the determinants of attitudes to fairness and inequality:

- More than half of respondents think that people have equal opportunities to get ahead (58%). However, this figure hides substantial regional disparities, with 81% agreeing in Denmark, but only 18% in Greece.
- Respondents are less optimistic about fairness in specific fields. Only 39% are confident that justice always prevails over injustice, while the same proportion disagrees. Even more pessimistically, only 32% agree that political decisions are applied consistently to all citizens and 48% disagree. Overall, people are more likely to perceive things to be fair if they are better educated, younger, and better-off.
- The overwhelming majority think that income differences are too great (84%), ranging from 96% in Portugal and 92% in Germany to 59% in the Netherlands. In all countries except Denmark more than 60% agree that governments should take measures to reduce differences.
- For getting ahead in life, good health and quality education are regarded as essential or important by 98% and 93% of respondents respectively. Working hard and knowing the right people are also deemed essential or important by more than 90%. Coming from a wealthy family, having political connections, being of a specific ethnic origin or birth gender are seen as less important.

- Fewer than half of respondents (46%) believe that opportunities to get ahead have become more equal compared to 30 years ago, with more than 70% agreeing in Malta, Finland and Ireland, but fewer than 25% in Croatia, France and Greece.
- Overall, 47% of Europeans think that globalisation is a good thing and 21% disagree. 39% think migration into their country is a good thing while 33% do not.

The JRC will use the survey data and the latest scientific research to continue building a knowledge base to support EU policies aimed at creating a fairer society. In 2019 it will publish a series of policy briefs as well as the second edition of the Fairness Report.

Background

The Special Eurobarometer 471 "Fairness, inequality and inter-generational mobility" was conducted through face to face interviews between 2 and 11 December 2017. A total of 28,031 people were interviewed in 28 EU countries.

The earlier fairness report by the JRC analysed data and statistics on [income inequality](#), on the impact that family background and geographical location have on opportunities in education, health and the labour market, and on people's perceptions and attitudes. The JRC also launched a Community of Practice on Fairness, connecting EU policy makers with academics and researchers working on fairness related issues.

As part of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Commission has put forward a series of legal and policy initiatives in this sense, including a proposal to increase gender equality by improving the balance between private and professional life for working parents, as well as proposals aiming at creating more predictable and transparent working conditions

and access to social protection for all.

To harness the full potential of education and culture in boosting social fairness, participation and economic growth, the Commission is working towards a European Education Area by 2025, proposing a series of initiatives on education, youth and culture. Its first package of measures presented in January included a proposal strengthening inclusive education to promote quality education for all pupils.

Provided by European Commission Joint Research Centre

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