

Europeans receptive to new welfare policy ideas

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Using European Social Survey data collected in 23 countries during 2016/17, the authors established that people in Europe widely endorse national government responsibility to protect vulnerable people.

Whilst people are in favour of [welfare support](#) for the elderly, financial support for the unemployed and immigrants is met with more opposition by a considerable share of the population.

Universal Basic Income

The percentage of respondents that support the introduction of a universal basic income scheme varies widely, from 33.9% (Norway) to 80.4% (Lithuania).

Support for a universal basic income is lower in more affluent countries in Northern and Western Europe, and higher in the less wealthy welfare states in the East and South.

Over 60% of respondents in Lithuania, Russia, Hungary, Israel, Slovenia and Portugal support the introduction of a universal basic income. Lowest levels of support were found in Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. The report states:

"This pattern suggests that basic income is welcomed as a way to improve social welfare rather than as a replacement for well-performing welfare systems."

A European Union-led welfare state?

67.1% of those interviewed across Europe support the introduction of a EU-wide social benefit scheme that would guarantee a minimum standard of living for the poor.

But, on average, only three in ten Europeans (30.5%) believe that more European Union involvement would lead to higher or much higher

levels of social protection.

As with the introduction of basic income, support for EU involvement is higher amongst those in Eastern and Southern European countries where welfare expenditure is relatively low.

Over 80% of respondents in Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Lithuania, Italy and Hungary support the introduction of a EU-wide social benefit scheme.

Only in Austria and The Netherlands was support for a EU-wide social benefit scheme below 50%.

Attitudes towards the unemployed

Respondents were asked what should happen to someone's unemployment benefit if they refuse to take a job that pays less than what they earned previously.

Over a quarter of respondents (26.1%) felt that the full unemployment benefit should continue to be paid; 34.3% wanted to cut a small part of the benefit; 20.6% felt it should be cut in half and 19% felt it should be cut completely.

Support for cutting unemployment benefit in these circumstances is particularly high in Italy, Norway, Poland and Slovenia, and comparatively low in Lithuania, Israel, Estonia and Russia.

Italians are the most likely to want to limit unemployment benefit if someone refuses to take a job but think the government should take more financial responsibility for the unemployed.

The Polish do not expect high levels of unemployment benefit from their government and are most likely to support benefit reductions for those who do not accept a job offer.

The opposite is true of Israelis and Lithuanians, who believe the government should offer strong

protection to the unemployed, and tend to think that those who turn down new work should not have their benefits cut.

Immigrant access to welfare

The vast majority of people in Europe are open to allowing immigrants access to social benefits and services, but with some conditions.

The report's authors found that fewer than 10% of respondents think that immigrants should never be allowed access to the welfare state, whilst only 9% believe that they should be granted full access to benefits and services immediately upon arrival.

43.1% of respondents think that social rights should be granted to immigrants following residence and payment of taxes for at least a year, with a further 29.1% thinking they should only be granted to citizens.

When comparing responses to identical questions asked in Round 4 (2008/09) of the European Social Survey, the authors found no evidence that the refugee crisis led to more opposition to immigrants receiving social benefits:

"In Portugal and Spain, the percentage indicating that newcomers should receive social rights upon arrival has even increased substantially (from 9.6 to 20.3% in Portugal; from 11.7 to 18.9% in Spain)."

Eastern Europeans are considerably more reluctant to provide social rights for immigrants despite relatively low immigration rates and lower levels of social security expenditure.

Support for the Elderly

Support for the government to maintain acceptable living standards for the elderly is very high across Europe, especially in areas where perceived living standards are currently lower.

Public support for the government to provide for the elderly is highest in Israel, Iceland, Lithuania, Portugal, Russia and Spain.

In the Netherlands and Switzerland in particular,

support for government responsibility is lower but may partly be attributed to the perception that the elderly have relatively higher living standards.

The report - The Past, Present and Future of European Welfare States - was authored by: Bart Meuleman, Wim van Oorschot, Sharon Baute, Sam Delespaul, Dimitri Gugushvili, Tijs Laenen and Federica Rossetti (University of Leuven, Belgium) and Femke Roosma (Tilburg University, The Netherlands).

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