



Flash Eurobarometer 491

A long term Vision for EU Rural Areas

Summary



Fieldwork:

April 2021

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Survey requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development 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 491 – Ipsos European Public Affairs

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Survey coordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication
(DG COMM “Media Monitoring and Eurobarometer” Unit)

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Introduction

The European Union's (EU) rural areas face a number of common challenges ranging from lower connectivity and lack of services to lower employment opportunities. Conscious of these challenges, the European Commission (EC) will adopt a Communication 'A long term Vision for EU Rural Areas' under its 'A new push for European democracy' priority. The aim of the Communication is to draw attention to the specific needs of rural areas and launch a debate between the EC, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, as well as the regional and local levels of government, and a broad range of stakeholders and civil society. It will also commit to new actions aiming at tackling the challenges rural areas face by improving the coordination of policies affecting rural areas.

A Flash Eurobarometer survey was commissioned by the EC's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development gathering inputs from EU citizens to complement the results of the open public consultation. This Flash Eurobarometer contributes to assessing which priorities the long term Vision for Rural Areas (the Vision) should focus on.

For this Flash Eurobarometer, a representative sample of EU citizens, aged 15 and over, in each of the 27 EU Member States was interviewed. Between 9 April and 18 April 2021, 25 841 interviews were conducted over the telephone (landline and mobile phones) by Ipsos European Public Affairs. The methodology used is that of Eurobarometer surveys as carried out by the Directorate-General for Communications ("Media Monitoring and Eurobarometer" Unit). This summary report gives the main findings of this Flash Eurobarometer survey. Detailed results can be found in the full report.

In this report, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations correspond to:

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

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

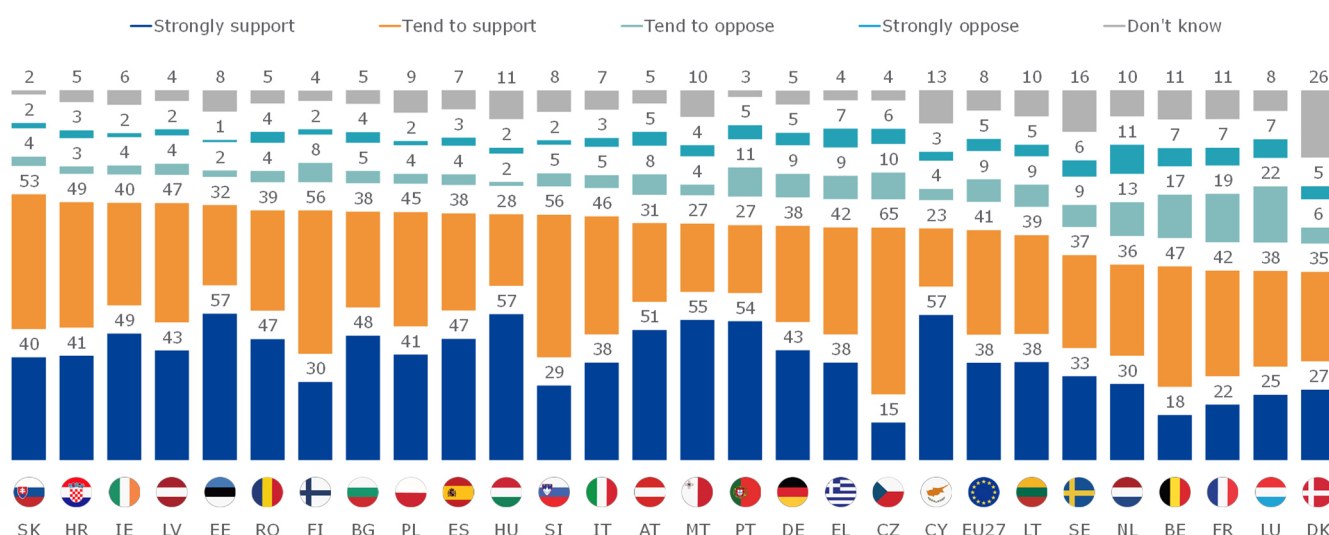
Section 1: EU investment in rural areas

1.1 Considering rural areas' needs in public spending decisions

A majority of EU citizens support the EU giving consideration to rural areas in public spending decisions, with 38% 'strongly supporting' and 41% who 'tend to support'. 13% oppose the fact that the EU considers the specific needs of rural areas in their public spending decisions and 8% answer that they 'do not know' whether they support or oppose this.

Although 'support' is expressed by a majority of respondents in all Member States, there is a large variation in the proportion 'strongly supporting' this practice. While 57% of respondents in Cyprus and Hungary are strong supporters of the EU giving consideration to the specific needs of rural areas, this figure drops to 18% in Belgium and 15% in Czechia.

Q1 When the European Union is making public spending decisions, it considers the specific needs of rural areas. Do you support or oppose the EU doing this? (%)



Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

1.2 Key needs of rural areas that must be addressed

Respondents who support the EU giving consideration to rural areas in public spending decisions were also asked what specific needs of rural areas in their country most need to be addressed.

The **key need of rural areas** that is mentioned most frequently by these respondents is **transport infrastructure and connections** (44%); all other needs are mentioned by considerably smaller numbers. Access to healthcare, childcare or care for the elderly and the availability of jobs/employment/business opportunities are each mentioned by 27% and a similar proportion (26%) mention digital infrastructure.

In 16 Member States, 'transport infrastructure and connections' is the most frequently mentioned need of rural areas. In eight countries, those selecting the availability of jobs and business opportunities, as a means to avoid depopulation, outnumber those referring to transport.

Q2 And what specific needs of rural areas in (THIS COUNTRY) do you think most need to be addressed? (%)

		Transport infrastructure and connections	Access to healthcare, childcare or care for the elderly	Availability of jobs/business opportunities (avoid depopulation)	Digital infrastructure	Access to education and training	Threats to the natural environment	Access to local amenities	Access to/affordability of different energy options	Access to cultural and recreational activities	Availability of housing	Something else	Don't know
EU27		44	27	27	26	23	20	17	14	14	12	21	9
BE		40	16	15	12	14	37	15	12	12	10	35	13
BG		51	41	58	26	34	24	28	26	25	19	29	6
CZ		59	30	30	18	23	32	32	14	23	17	26	6
DK		24	28	7	3	13	26	1	2	4	6	20	17
DE		54	34	26	50	33	26	24	20	21	21	14	3
EE		54	50	58	44	46	30	45	26	24	25	13	7
IE		57	12	22	43	10	10	20	6	10	10	19	7
EL		14	14	42	9	15	21	4	15	4	2	24	10
ES		37	25	27	21	15	4	6	2	3	2	29	11
FR		38	28	13	19	14	15	19	6	8	5	17	14
HR		29	18	35	16	16	12	10	14	10	10	37	10
IT		46	21	27	21	14	18	13	7	12	6	16	11
CY		40	29	35	13	26	18	20	15	15	18	17	13
LV		41	16	43	9	19	10	10	5	11	6	30	8
LT		43	20	43	11	18	10	12	15	21	9	15	12
LU		48	36	27	30	32	24	19	19	15	24	7	5
HU		40	19	42	11	15	9	7	7	10	7	32	12
MT		46	15	16	15	17	62	10	16	25	14	17	7
NL		31	25	25	25	22	38	19	22	15	23	16	10
AT		59	46	40	49	40	35	36	38	25	26	8	6
PL		45	25	25	26	32	24	19	22	21	15	29	17
PT		35	40	49	19	33	21	18	24	17	21	8	2
RO		50	25	22	9	36	5	4	35	6	3	33	4
SI		60	36	28	41	21	22	31	20	15	15	17	4
SK		48	21	38	20	23	36	25	18	34	17	41	3
FI		32	20	35	10	12	13	22	5	6	4	25	13
SE		42	38	31	29	26	26	24	19	16	21	28	13

Base: those supporting the EU giving consideration to rural areas in public spending decisions (n=20,942)

1.3 Level of governance for EU investments in rural areas

A majority (65%) of EU citizens think that, when the EU invests in rural areas, it is the **local area or province receiving the investment** that should be able to decide how the investment is spent. About a third (35%) think that the regional governments should have a say in this type of decisions. Smaller numbers think that, when the EU invests in rural areas, the national government (23%) or the EU itself (16%) should take part in the decision making on how the investment is spent (note that for this question, respondents could select more than one response).

Section 2: Transport connections to rural areas

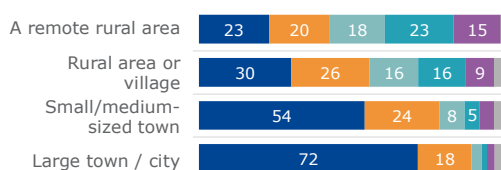
2.1 Moving around in rural areas by public transport

There are large differences between the most urbanised locations and the remote rural areas in the ease by which various places can be reached by public transport. Notably, in **remote rural areas**, between 52% and 59% answer it is **difficult, or not possible, to move around by public transport in their local area**. By contrast, among respondents living in large towns and cities, between 60% and 72% say that it is 'very easy' to reach their nearest supermarket, their doctor's surgery, the local post office and the nearest large town or city by public transport.

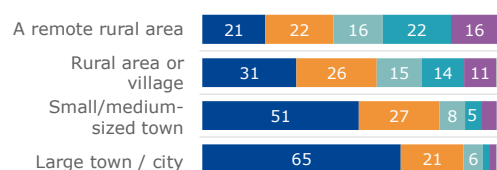
Q4 How easy or difficult is it for you to get to each of following places by public transport?
(% - EU27)

— Very easy — Fairly easy — Fairly difficult — Very difficult — Not possible by public transport — Don't know

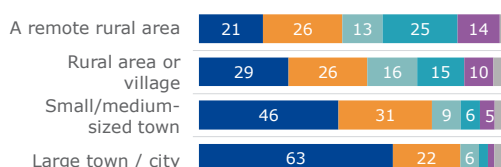
Your nearest supermarket



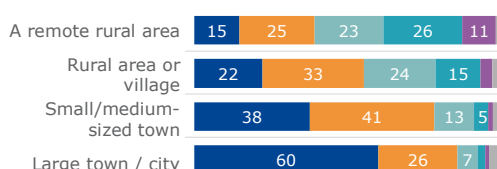
Your local post office



Your doctor's surgery



Your nearest large town or city



Data labels not shown for 5% or under

Base: all respondents (n=25,841)


Rural residents in Cyprus, Finland, France and Ireland are each time among the most likely to reply that it is difficult – or even not possible – to reach the places listed in the survey by public transport. The proportion saying that reaching places by public transport is difficult (or not possible) is consistently over 60% in these countries.

2.2 Transport modes that should be developed

Respondents were asked what type of transport connections and facilities they would like to see more of in their local area. Although preferences differ across urban and rural areas, the proportions of respondents who think there is no need for more transport connections and facilities remain low across all locations (between 9% and 12%).

In **rural areas, respondents would like to see more local bus services** (56%-57% vs 38% in large towns and cities), while in large towns and cities, the most frequently given response is more cycling paths (58% vs 43% in remote rural areas and 52% in villages and non-remote rural areas). **Intercity bus services** are most frequently mentioned by respondents in villages and non-remote rural areas (40% vs 33%-36% in other locations).

Q5 Which, if any, of the following would you like to see more of in your local area? (% - EU27)

	Cycling paths	Local bus services	Intercity bus services	Local train services	Intercity train services	School bus services	Car sharing	None of these
EU27	55	45	36	34	32	32	28	10
 Place of residence								
A remote rural area	43	57	34	25	20	30	23	10
Rural area or village	52	56	40	33	27	33	26	9
Small/medium-sized town	56	43	36	35	33	31	27	9
Large town/city	58	38	33	34	36	32	32	12

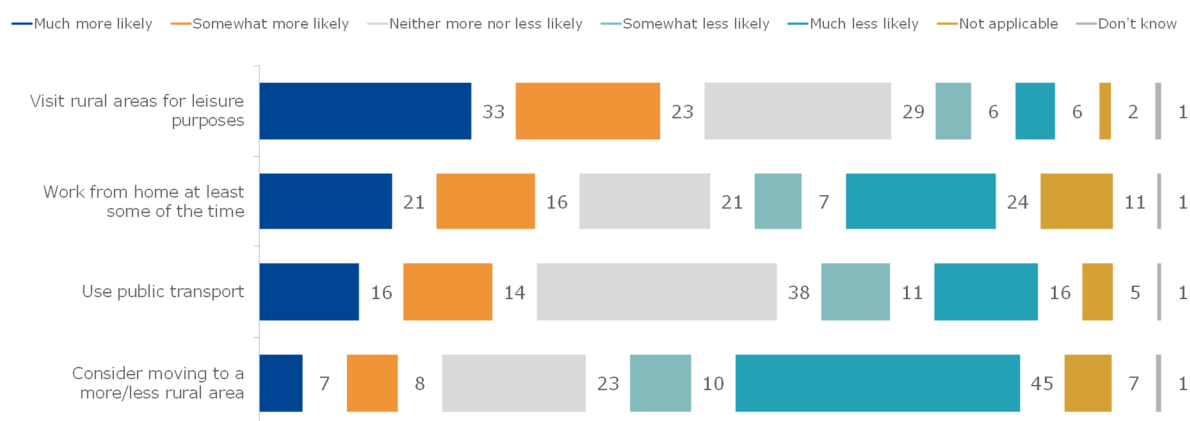
Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

Section 3: Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

A third of EU citizens say that, when all the current COVID-19 restrictions end, they will be much more likely to **visit rural areas for leisure purposes** compared to before the pandemic, and a further 23% say they will be somewhat more likely to do so.

About one in seven also say that, compared to before the pandemic, they are more likely to consider **moving to a more rural area** (for urban residents) **or a less rural area** (for rural residents). The largest share of respondents, however, answer that they will be much less likely to do so (45%).

Q6 When all of the current COVID-19 restrictions end, will you be more likely or less likely to do each of the following compared to before the pandemic? (% - EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=25,841); base for the item about work from home are working respondents (n= 16,450)
Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

A comparable number of respondents report that they will be more likely or less likely to **use public transport** when the current COVID-19 restrictions end (30% and 27%, respectively), while a higher proportion (38%) say they expect no change in their use of public transport.

Among employed respondents, 21% say they will be much more likely and 16% somewhat more likely to **work from home at least some of the time** when all the current COVID-19 restrictions end. This compared to 24% who say they will be much less likely and 7% somewhat less likely to work at home; 21% expect no change in how frequently they will work from home.

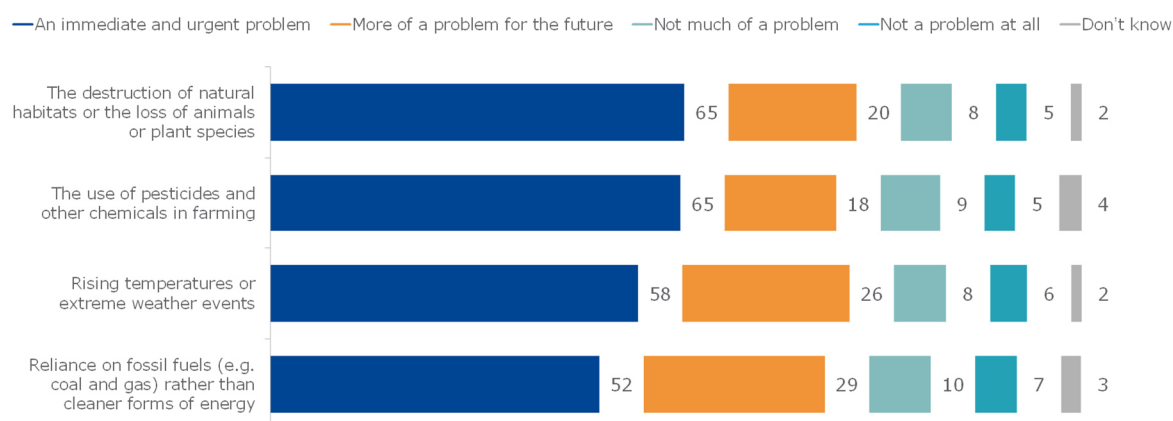
Section 4: Environmental problems in rural areas

4.1 Awareness of environmental risks in rural areas

For each of the environmental problems listed in the survey, **a majority** of respondents reply that it is an **immediate problem for the rural areas** in their country, while each time less than one in five respondents answer that it is not much of a problem, or no problem at all.

The **destruction of natural habitats or the loss of animals or plant species** is identified as an immediate and urgent problem for rural areas by 65% of EU citizens, while 58% say that **rising temperatures or extreme weather** events are an immediate and urgent problem for rural areas. Asked about the use of **pesticides and other chemicals in farming**, 65% say that this is an immediate and urgent problem for the rural areas in their country. Finally, 52% think that there is an immediate and urgent problem linked to the **reliance on fossil fuels rather than cleaner forms of energy**.

Q7 How much of a problem, if at all, do you think each of the following are in your local area/in rural areas of your country? (% - EU27)




Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

Those in **large towns and cities** are overall the most likely to reply that the environmental problems listed in the survey are an immediate and urgent problem in the rural areas of their country; respondents in rural areas are less likely to share this view.

For example, 72% of large town and city inhabitants think that the destruction of natural habitats and the loss of animals or plant species is an immediate and urgent problem in rural areas, compared to 67% of those living in small and medium-sized towns, 57% in villages and non-remote rural areas and 54% in remote rural areas.

Q7 How much of a problem, if at all, do you think each of the following are in your local area/in rural areas of your country? (% - EU27)

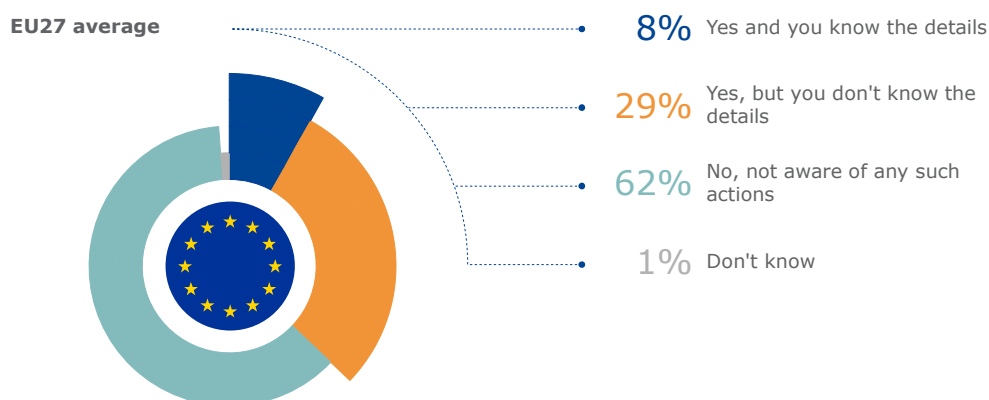
	The destruction of natural habitats or the loss of animals or plant species		Rising temperatures or extreme weather events		The use of pesticides and other chemicals in farming		Reliance on fossil fuels rather than cleaner forms of energy	
	Urgent problem	Problem for the future	Urgent problem	Problem for the future	Urgent problem	Problem for the future	Urgent problem	Problem for the future
EU27	65	20	58	26	65	18	52	29
 Place of residence								
A remote rural area	54	21	50	26	58	17	42	26
Rural area or village	57	23	50	29	56	19	42	31
Small/medium-sized town	67	20	60	26	67	18	54	30
Large town/city	72	18	63	25	70	17	59	26

Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

4.2 Awareness of EU action aimed at tackling environmental problems in rural areas

Although more than one in three citizens, in total, reply being aware of actions by the EU aimed at tackling environmental problems in rural areas in their country, less than one in ten also say they know the details about these actions (8% know the details vs 29% who do not). **62% of respondents reply not being aware** of any action by the EU aimed at tackling environmental problems in the rural areas of their country.

Q8 Are you aware of any action by the EU aimed at tackling these environmental problems in your local area/in rural areas of your country? (% - EU27)



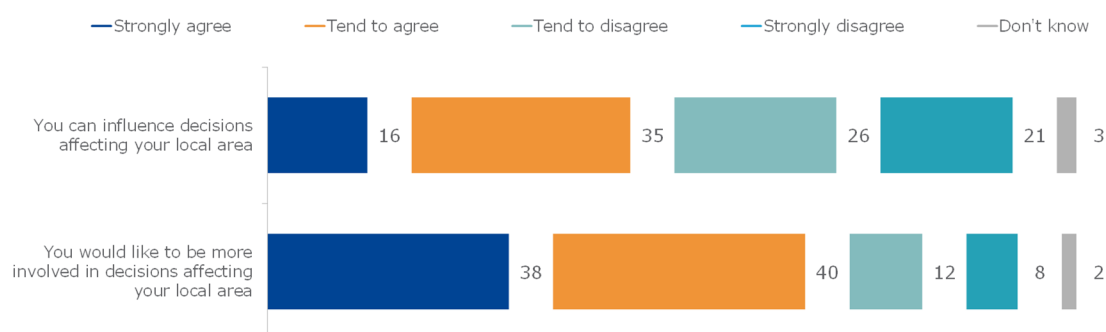
Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

Section 5: Participation of rural citizens

5.1 Are rural people sufficiently involved in public debate?

EU citizens are divided when asked whether they can **influence decisions affecting their local area**, with 51% agreeing and 47% disagreeing. More than half of respondents (78%) agree that they would like to be **more involved in decisions affecting their local area**.

Q9 To what extent do you agree or disagree that... (% - EU27)

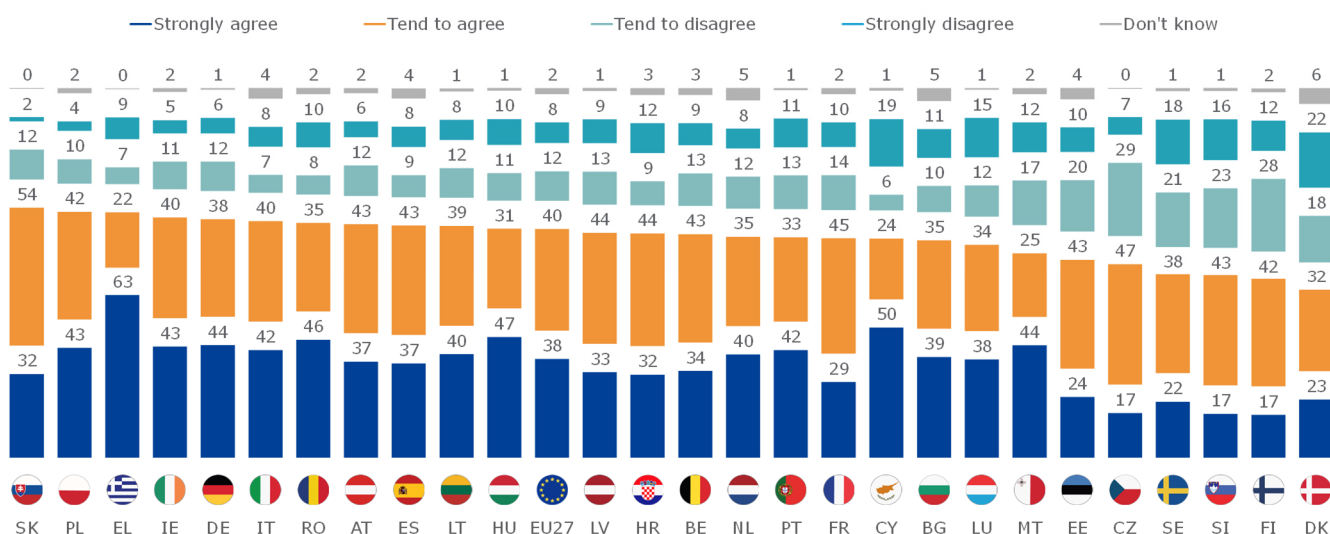


Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

When being asked whether they would like to be **more involved in decisions affecting their local area** more than half of respondents agree across all countries surveyed. The highest levels of agreement are observed in Slovakia (86%), and Greece and Poland (both 85%).

Q9.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that...

You would like to be more involved in decisions affecting your local area (%)

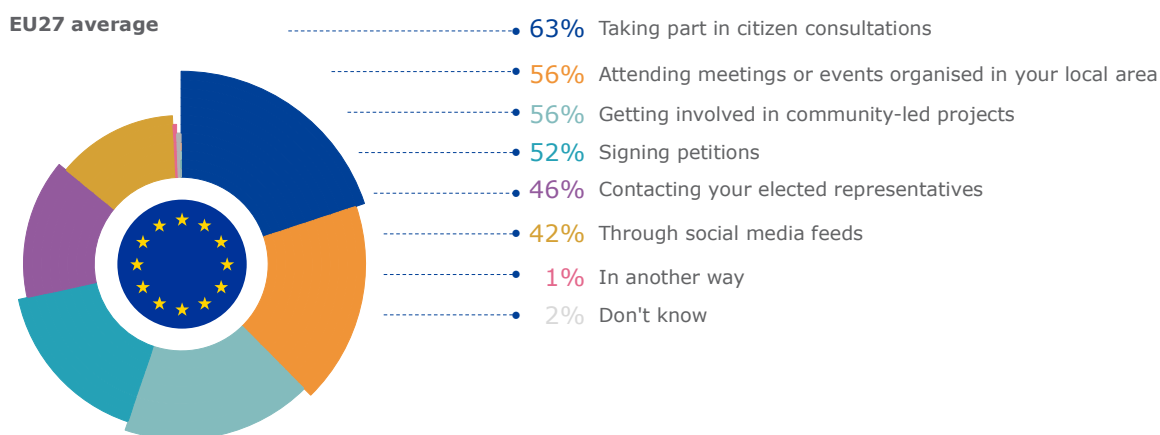


Base: all respondents (n=25,841)

5.2 What is the best way to involve citizens in decision making?

Respondents who said they want to be more involved in decisions affecting their local area were also asked **in which way they would like to be more involved**. 63% of these respondents say they would like to be more involved by taking part in citizen consultations, followed by 56% who would either attend meetings or events organised in their local area or get involved in community-led projects. 52% think about getting more involved by signing petitions and 46% by contacting their elected representatives. 42% would like to be more involved through social media feeds. 42% would like to be more involved through social media feeds. 1% in another way and 2% don't know.

Q10 In which of the following ways would you like to be more involved? (%)



Base: respondents who would like to be more involved in decisions affecting their local area (n=19,469)

The preferred ways to be more involved in decisions affecting their local area vary by **age groups**. Compared to older age groups, respondents aged 15-24 more often have a preference to get involved in decisions affecting their local area by means of **signing a petition** (61% vs 49%-53%) or through **social media feeds** (58% vs 34%-45%), but they are less likely to take part in **citizen consultations** (55% vs 62%-66%).

Those aged 25-39 are most likely to want to get involved in **community-led projects**, while those age 55 and over are the least likely to do so (61% vs. 52%). Those aged 40 and above are overall the most likely to say they would **contact their elected representatives**, especially when compared to 15-24 year-olds (46%- 48% vs. 40%).

Finally, no differences are observed across age groups in the proportions who would like to be more involved via **attending meetings or events** organised in their local area (55%-57% across all age groups).

