



Flash Eurobarometer 507

Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU

Summary



Fieldwork:

April 2022

Publication:

July 2022

Survey requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs and coordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication

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Flash Eurobarometer 507 – Ipsos European Public Affairs



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<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer>

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

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Introduction

Corruption takes many forms, such as offering, giving, requesting and accepting bribes or kickbacks, valuable gifts and important favours, as well as **any abuse of power for private gain**, but it can also hide behind nepotism and conflict of interest.

The European Commission has been given a political **mandate to measure efforts in the fight against corruption and to develop a comprehensive EU anti-corruption policy**. In 2010, a set of measures were defined to assess efforts in the fight against corruption. Where businesses or the general public perceive corruption as widespread, this can act as a barrier to growth, investment and economic activity. The proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe, by those public officials during the previous 12 months is one of the two key indicators for measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal that aims at reducing corruption in all its forms.¹

This Eurobarometer survey, first conducted in 2013, and repeated in 2015, 2017 and 2019, is part of this collection of data and is designed to explore the level of corruption perceived and experienced by businesses employing one or more persons in the following six key sectors: energy, mining, oil and gas, chemicals; healthcare and pharmaceutical; engineering and electronics, motor vehicles; construction and building; telecommunications and information technologies; and financial services, banking and investment.

The survey covers a range of areas, including perception of:

- Problems encountered when doing business;
- Businesses' perception of the level of corruption in their town;
- The prevalence of practices leading to corruption;
- Corrupt practices in public tender and public procurement procedures;
- How corruption is investigated, prosecuted and sanctioned.

For this Flash Eurobarometer, **a representative sample of businesses, employing one or more persons in six key sectors (see above) was interviewed between 4 April and 22 April 2022** by Ipsos European Public Affairs. Interviews took place via telephone with someone with decision-making responsibilities in the company (managing director, general manager, CEO, financial director), someone leading the commercial activities (commercial manager, sales manager, marketing manager) or a legal officer. In total, 12 790 interviews were conducted.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100%, as they are rounded to the nearest percent. Due to rounding, it may also happen that the percentages for separate response options shown in the charts do not exactly add up to the totals shown in charts and tables, or mentioned in the text. Response percentages will exceed 100% if the question allowed respondents to select multiple responses.

¹ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=16&Target=16.5>

Section 1. Perceptions about the level of corruption

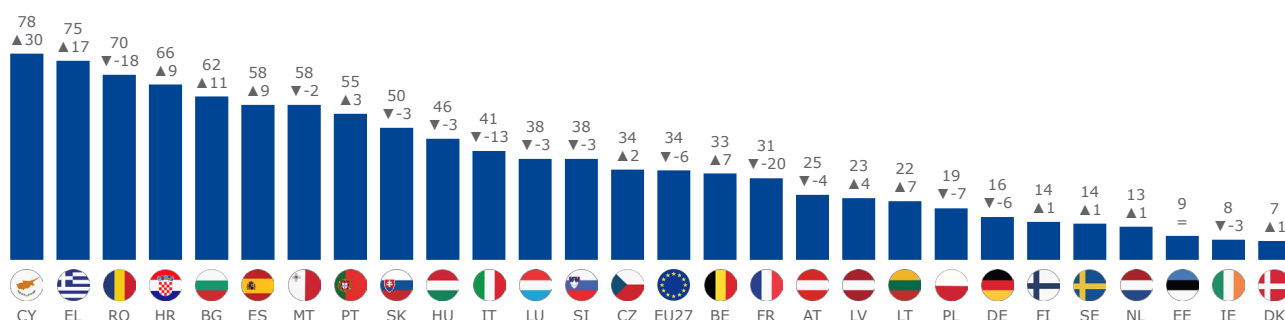
1.1. Corruption as a problem when doing business

Corruption is seen by 34% of companies in the EU as serious problem when doing business in their country. The **extent to which corruption is considered a serious problem** when doing business **varies considerably across Member States**. The highest proportions of companies for which corruption is a problem are seen in Romania (70%), Greece (75%) and Cyprus (78%), while the lowest ones are observed in Denmark (7%), Ireland (8%) and Estonia (9%).

There is a positive trend when it comes to corruption perceptions across the EU. Compared to 2019 (Flash Eurobarometer 482) and on average across the EU, the proportion of companies **identifying corruption as a problem** has **decreased** to 34% (-6 pp). At the individual country level, however, a significant decrease in this proportion is only seen in France (-22 pp, to 31%), Romania (-18 pp, to 70%) and Italy (-13 pp, to 41%).

Q1 Do you consider the following to be a problem or not for your company when doing business in (YOUR COUNTRY)?

Corruption (% Total 'A problem', evolution 2022-2019, by country)



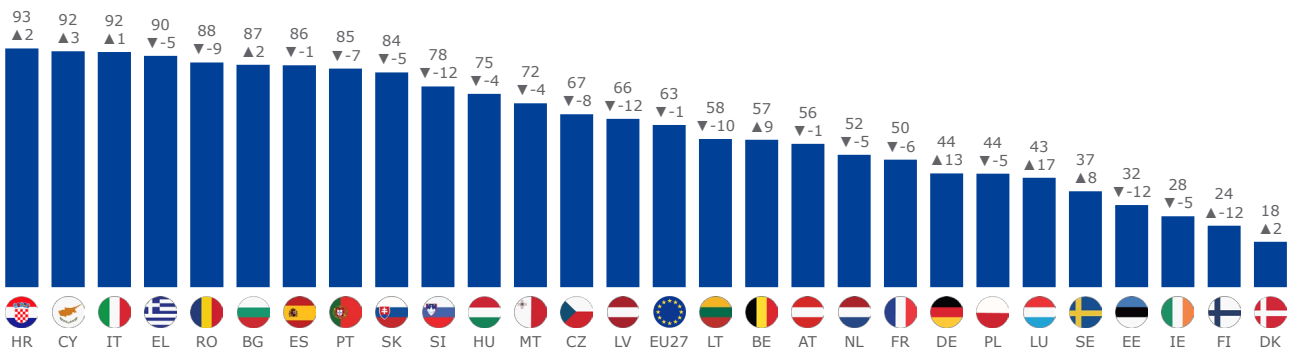
▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

1.2. How widespread is corruption?

Just over six in ten (63%) companies in the EU think the **problem of corruption is widespread in their country**. The **highest proportions** reporting that **corruption is widespread** in their country are seen in **Greece** (90%), **Cyprus** and **Italy** (both 92%), and **Croatia** (93%). In Denmark, on the other hand, only 18% of respondents reply that corruption is widespread in their country.

In six Member States, there is a **positive trend** when it comes to perceptions about the level of corruption. Compared to 2019, a significant **decrease** is observed in the proportion of respondents saying that **corruption is widespread** in Slovenia (-12 pp compared to 2019, to 78%), Latvia (-12 pp, to 66%), Estonia (-12 pp, to 32%), Finland (-12 pp, to 24%), Lithuania (-10 pp, to 58%) and Romania (-9 pp, to 88%).

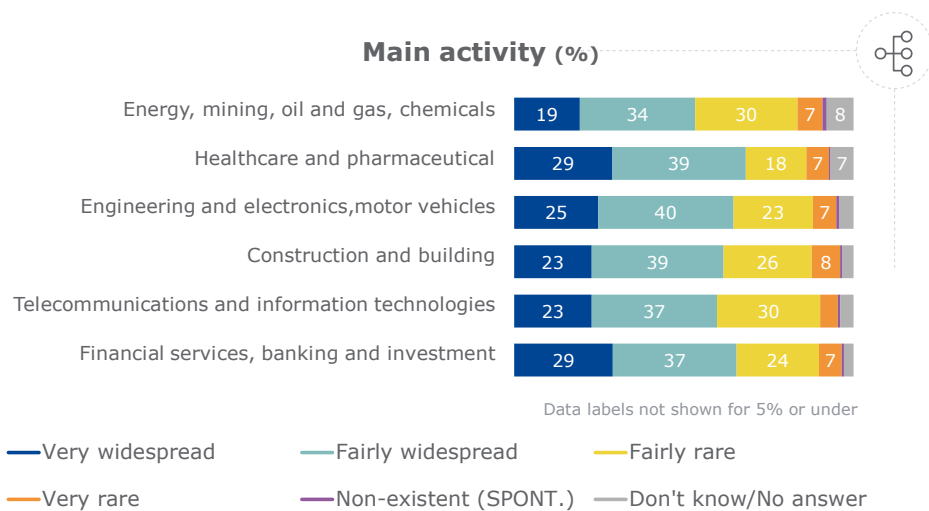
Q3 How widespread do you think the problem of corruption is in (YOUR COUNTRY)?
(% Total 'Widespread', evolution 2022-2019, by country)



▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September – October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

Across all activity sectors surveyed (**energy, healthcare, engineering, construction, telecommunications and financial services**), a majority of companies think that corruption is widespread in their country. For example, this view is shared by 68% of companies active in 'healthcare and pharmaceutical' (the highest figure) and 53% of companies in the 'energy, mining, oil and gas, chemicals' (the lowest figure).

Q3 How widespread do you think the problem of corruption is in (YOUR COUNTRY)? (% by business characteristics)



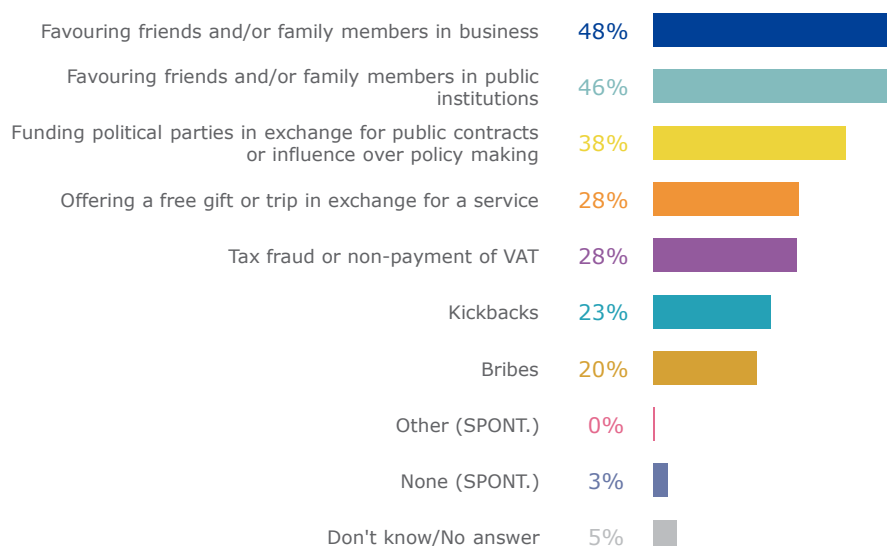
Base: all companies (n=12 790)

1.3. Most common types of corruption

Across the EU, 48% of companies reply that **one of the most widespread corruptive practices in their country** is **favouring friends and/or family members in business** and 46% say the same about favouring friends and/or family members **in public institutions**. These two practices were also selected by the largest shares of respondents in 2019.

Favouring friends and/or family members is considered one of **the most widespread corrupt practices by companies across the EU**. In 11 Member States, favouring friends and/or family members in **business** features as the (joint-)highest ranking corrupt practice. This is the case, for example, in Portugal (58%), France (57%) and Austria (55%). Favouring friends and/or family members in **public institutions** is the (joint-)highest ranking corrupt practice in another seven Member States. This is the case, for example, in Spain (57%) and Slovakia (55%).

Q6 Which of the following practices do you consider to be the most widespread in (YOUR COUNTRY)? (Maximum three answers allowed) (% EU27)



Base: all companies (n=12 790)

Almost four in ten respondents (38%) select **funding political parties in exchange for public contracts or influence over policy making** as one of the most widespread corrupt practices in their country. **Offering a gift or trip in exchange of a service** and **tax fraud or non-payment of VAT** are each selected by 28% of respondents. **Kickbacks** (selected by 23%) and **bribes** (20%) are considered the least widespread corrupt practices. The overall rank order of these practices remained unchanged compared to 2019.

1.4. Gifts and bribes

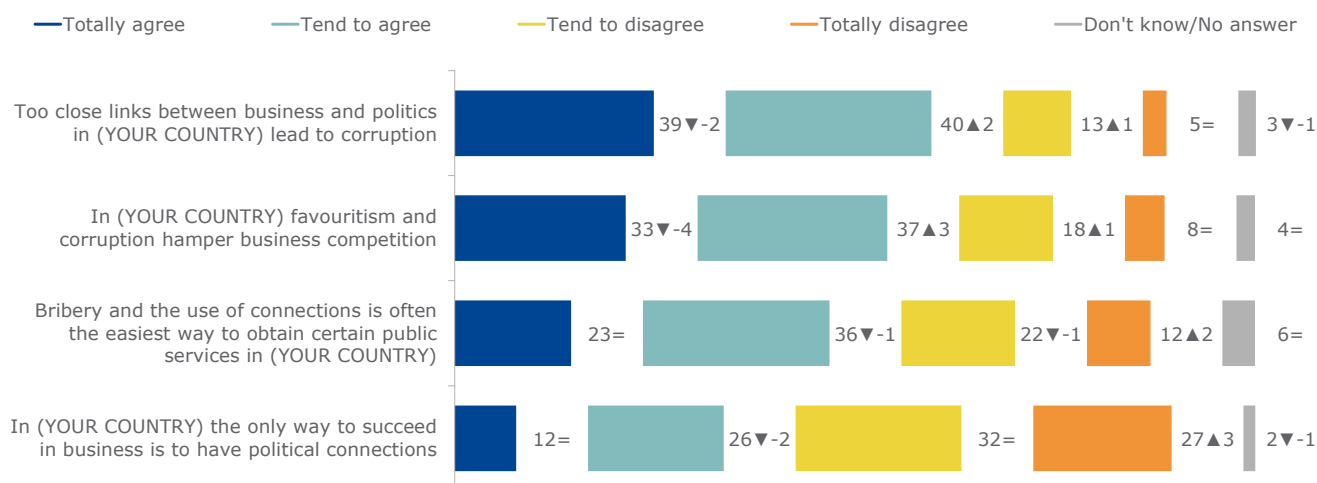
Companies in this survey were asked about the minimum value at which they would consider a gift or service received by a public official in return for a favour to be a bribe. As in 2019, **a majority of respondents reply that even a small gift, with a value of up to 50 euros, should be considered a bribe**. In more detail, 26% of respondents reply that **'any gift is a bribe'** and 31% that **a gift with a value of between 1 euro and 50 euros** would be considered a bribe. At the other end of the spectrum, 16% of respondents answer that only if a public official has received a **gift of more than 200 euros** they would consider this a bribe.

Respondents in companies with 250 or more employees are more likely than those in smaller companies to answer that any gift in return for a favour, even if the value is low (between 0 and 50 euros), should be considered a bribe (77% in large companies compared to, for example, 54% in companies with between 50 and 249 employees).

1.5. Opinions about practices leading to corruption

About eight in ten companies (79%) agree that too close **links between business and politics** in their country **lead to corruption**. Just under four in ten respondents (38%) agree that, in their country, the only way to succeed in business is to have **political connections**.

Q7 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (% EU27)



▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

Seven in ten companies (70%) agree that, in their country, **favouritism and corruption hamper business competition**. About six in ten companies (59%) agree that **bribery and the use of connections** is often the **easiest way to obtain certain public services in their country**.

Opinions about practices that lead to corruption remained largely unchanged compared to 2019, except for the statement that the only way to succeed in business is to have political connections.

Companies in Greece (+11 pp, to 57%) and Germany (+10 pp, to 35%) are now more likely than in 2019 to agree that, in their country, **the only way to succeed in business is to have political connections**. A positive trend – i.e. a decrease in the proportion agreeing – is observed in Romania (-20 pp, to 43%), Slovenia (-18 pp, to 40%), Italy (-14 pp, to 47%), Spain (-12 pp, to 45%), Lithuania (-12 pp, to 36%), Latvia (-11 pp, to 27%) and Slovakia (-8 pp, to 33%).

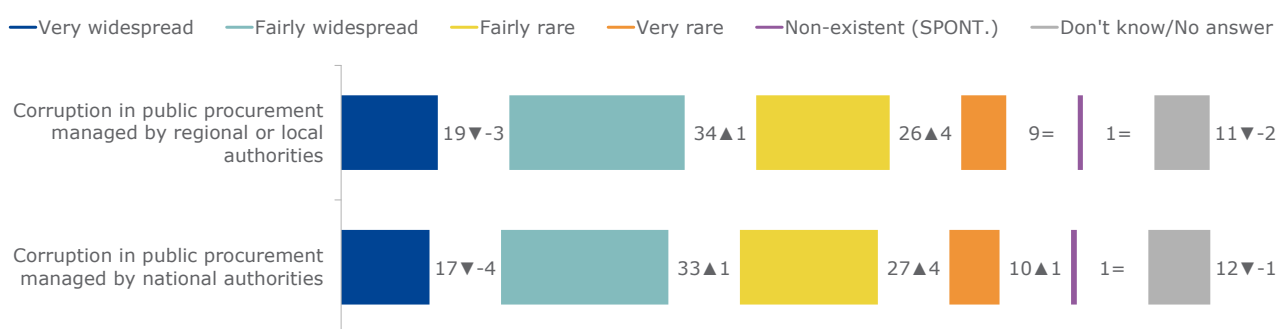
Respondents from the **'healthcare and pharmaceutical'** and **'engineering and electronics, motor vehicle'** sectors are somewhat more likely to agree that **favouritism and corruption** hamper business competition in their country, especially when compared to respondents in the 'energy, mining, oil and gas, chemicals' sector (74% vs 61%). Companies active in the field of 'healthcare and pharmaceutical' are also more likely to agree that, in their country, the only way to succeed in business is to have **political connections** (45% vs 32%-38% in the other sectors).

Section 2. Corruption in public procurement

2.1. Perceived level of corruption in public procurement

Overall, across the EU, 50% of respondents report that **corruption in public procurement managed by national authorities** is 'very' or 'fairly widespread' in their country and a similar proportion (53%) say the same about **corruption in public procurement managed by regional or local authorities**.

Q5 And how widespread do you think the following practices are in (YOUR COUNTRY)? (% EU27)



▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

In eight Member States, less than three in ten companies reply that **corruption in public procurement managed by national authorities** in their country is widespread (from 19% in Denmark to 27% in Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden). In Portugal (79%) and Croatia (80%), on the other hand, about eight in ten respondents think there is widespread corruption in public procurement managed by national authorities.

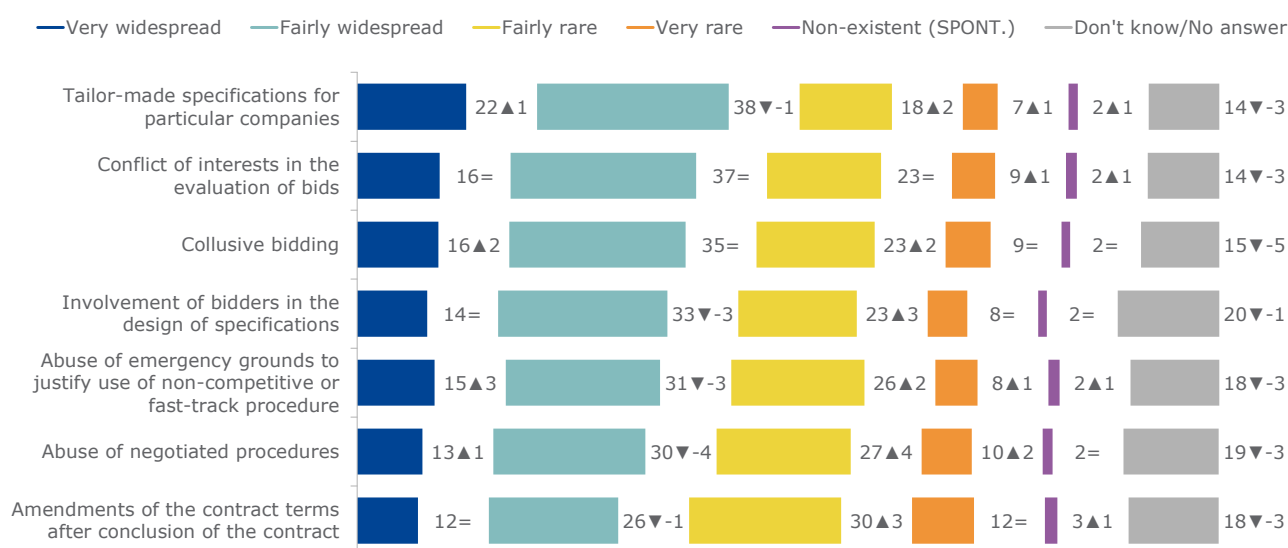
In Denmark (19%), Ireland (24%), and Luxembourg and Finland (both 27%), companies are also among the least likely to reply that **corruption in public procurement managed by regional or local authorities** is widespread in their country.

2.2. Extent of illegal practices in public procurement procedures

The largest share of companies (59%) think that **specifications that are tailor-made for particular companies** are a widespread practice in their country. In turn, the smallest share of respondents (38%) say that it is a widespread practice in their country to make **amendments of contract terms after conclusion of the contract**.

A slim majority of respondents (53%) think that **conflicts of interest in the evaluation of bids** is a widespread practice in public procurement in their country. About one in two respondents (51%) answer that **collusive bidding** is widespread and a slightly lower proportion say the same about **involvement of bidders in the design of specifications** (47%) or about **abuse of emergency grounds to justify use of non-competitive or fast-track procedures** (46%). Just above four in ten companies (43%) think that **abuse of negotiated procedures** is a widespread practice in their country.

Q4 And how widespread do you think the following practices are in public procurement procedures in (YOUR COUNTRY)? (% EU27)



▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

Across most Member States, the largest share of companies think that **specifications tailor-made for particular companies** are a widespread corrupt practice in their country. In five Member States, more than three quarters of companies describe this practice as widespread: Cyprus (86%), Greece (82%), Croatia (79%), and Slovakia and Portugal (78%).

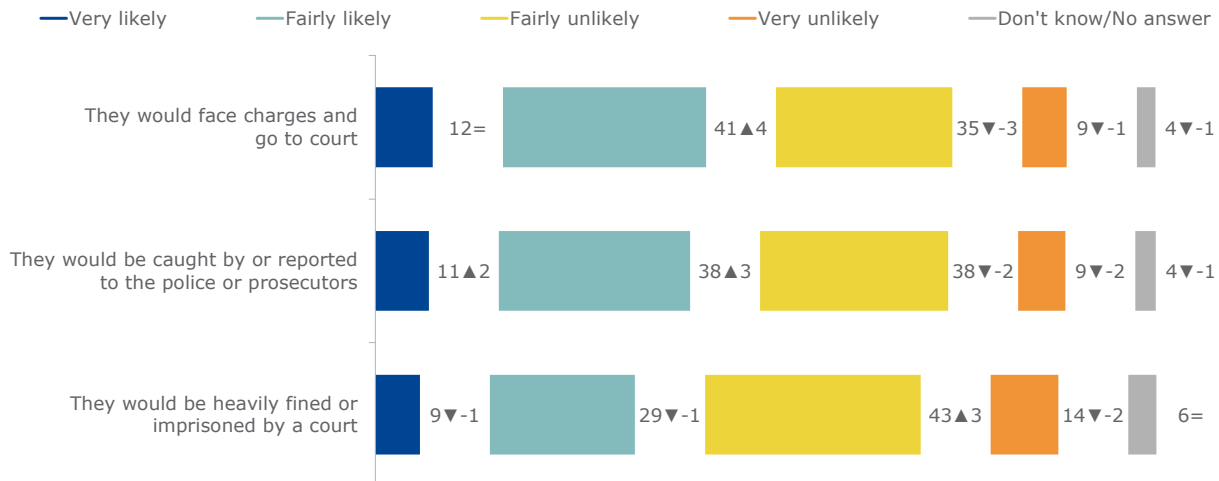
In Estonia and Slovakia, there is a **clear negative trend** – i.e. for most practices, there is an **increase in the proportion of companies describing the practices as widespread**. The figures for Romania, on the contrary, show a **clear positive trend** – i.e. for most practices, **companies are now less likely than in 2019 to describe the practices as widespread**.

Section 3. Attitudes about measures against corruption

3.1. Opinions about law enforcement

Overall, across the EU, a slim majority of companies (52%) think it is likely that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices in their country would **face charges and go to court**. About half of companies (49%) also believe that individuals and businesses engaged in corrupt practices are likely to **be caught by or reported to the police or prosecutors**. Less than four in ten respondents (38%) think that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices will be **heavily fined or imprisoned by a court**.

Q8 How likely do you think it is that the following would happen to people or businesses engaging in corrupt practices in (YOUR COUNTRY)? (% EU27)

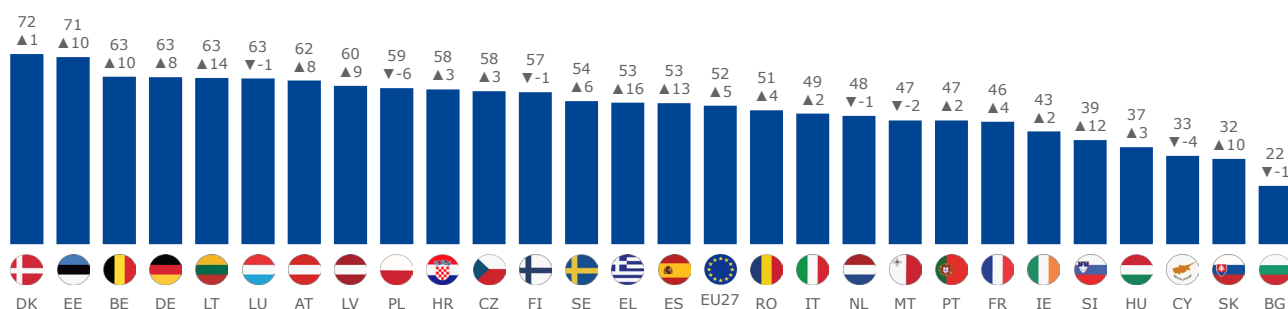


▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

About seven in ten companies in Estonia (71%) and Denmark (72%) consider it likely that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices in their country would **face charges and go to court**. In Bulgaria, in sharp contrast, 22% of companies agree that this is likely. Other countries close to Bulgaria are Slovakia (32%), Cyprus (33%), Hungary (37%) and Slovenia (43%).

In Greece (+16 pp, to 54%), Lithuania (+14 pp, to 63%), Spain (+13 pp, to 53%), Slovenia (+12 pp, to 39%), Slovakia (+12 pp to 39%), Estonia (+10 pp, to 70%) and Latvia (+9 pp, to 60%), the proportion of companies considering it likely that businesses and individuals engaging in corruptive practice would face charges and go to court has significantly **increased** compared to 2019.

Q8 How likely do you think it is that the following would happen to people or businesses engaging in corrupt practices in (YOUR COUNTRY)?
They would face charges and go to court
(% Total 'Likely', evolution 2022-2019, by country)



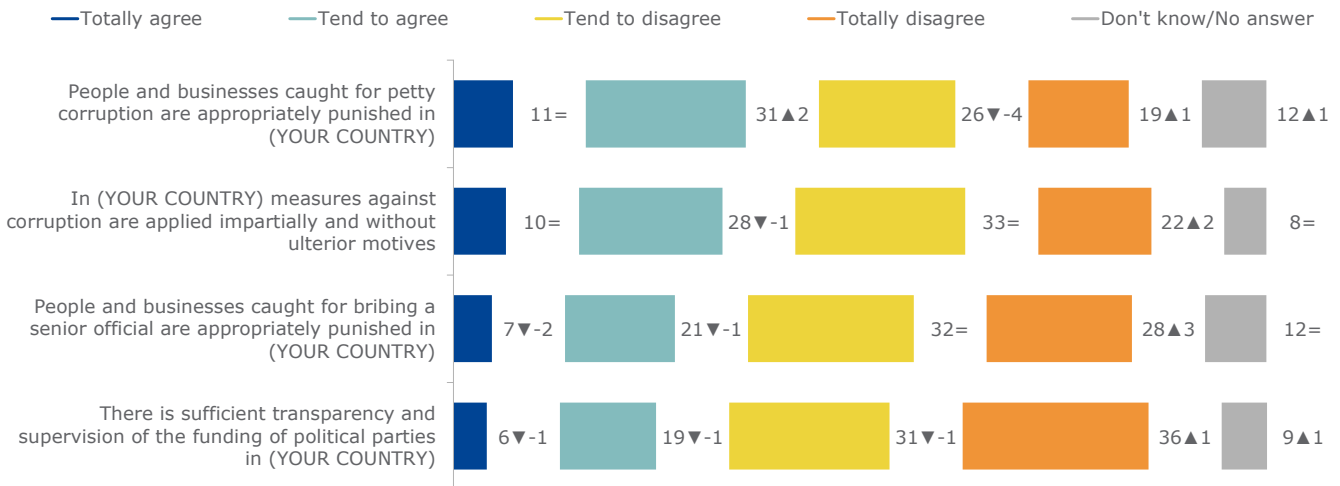
▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

3.2. Opinions about how corruption is tackled

When asked if people and businesses caught for **petty corruption are appropriately punished** in their country, companies are divided, with similar shares agreeing (42%) and disagreeing (46%). However, a clear majority (60%) disagree that people and businesses caught for **bribing a senior official are appropriately punished**.

A majority of respondents (54%) also doubt whether **measures against corruption are applied impartially and without ulterior motives** in their country. A quarter of companies (25%) agree that there is **sufficient transparency and supervision of the funding of political parties** in their country, while two-thirds (67%) disagree.

Q7 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (% EU27)

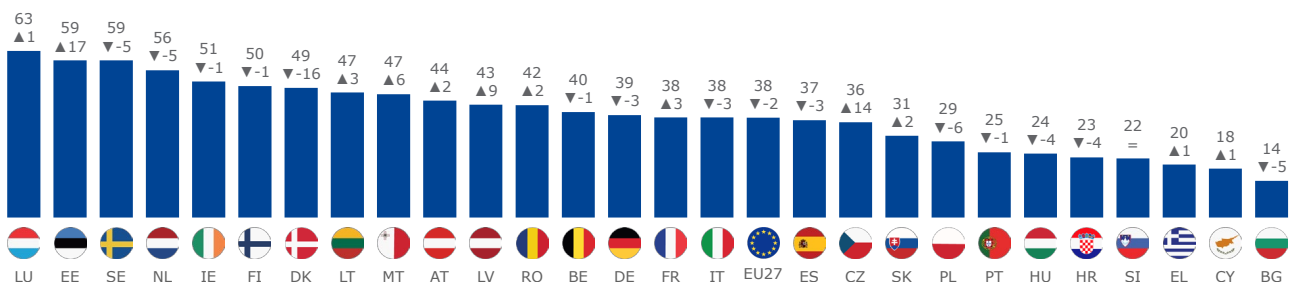


▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)

In Luxembourg, 63% of companies agree that, in their country, **measures against corruption are applied impartially and without ulterior motives**. In another five Member States, at least half of respondents agree with this statement on impartiality: Finland (50%), the Netherlands (56%), and Sweden and Estonia (both 59%). In Bulgaria (14%) and Cyprus (18%), on the other hand, less than one in five respondents agree that anti-corruption measures are applied impartially in their country. In another five Member States, not more than a quarter of companies agree with this statement: Greece (20%), Slovenia (22%), Croatia (23%), Hungary (24%) and Portugal (25%).

In three countries, there is a **significant positive trend** with companies being now more likely than in 2019 to agree that, in their country, measures against corruption are applied impartially and without ulterior motives: Estonia (+17 pp, to 59%), Czechia (+14 pp, to 36%) and Latvia (+9 pp, to 43%).

Q7 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
In (YOUR COUNTRY) measures against corruption are applied impartially and without ulterior motives
(% **Total 'Agree'**, evolution 2022-2019, by country)



▼▲ Evolution 2022-2019 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 482, September - October 2019)
Base: all companies (2022: n=12 790; 2019: n= 7 722)



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