Future of Europe

Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges

A Data-Driven Study from a Centre–Right Perspective

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GLOCALITIES

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This report studies the position, aspirations, expectations and fears of Europe's middle classes concerning some of the key challenges that the EU is facing. It is based on an extensive online survey carried out in all 27 EU member states. It reveals an acute economic insecurity and fear of falling behind among EU citizens, especially in the lower social strata. It also shows that this crisis of citizens' expectations and prospects is a threat to political stability, as it feeds into a dangerous crisis of legitimacy and trust in public institutions and political parties. Concerns may be most strongly expressed in the economic field, but also extend to the possible consequences of the war in Ukraine and the broader geopolitical realignments it entails. In particular, the combination of middle-class insecurity and relatively high levels of trust in Russia in parts of Southern and Eastern Europe should be highlighted. However, citizens also think that most challenges can be tackled and reversed through adequate political and policy action. In particular, the centre–right's approaches to security, immigration and the economy retain great appeal among the European middle classes; there is a need to better connect with the lower middle classes though. Citizens also have a high estimation of the problem-solving capacity of civil-society actors and a relatively high level of trust in the EU. An inclusive narrative addressing European challenges on the basis of safety, stability, justice, freedom and cooperation could help to reassure Europe's middle classes. Centre–right forces have a fundamental role to play in this process.

Table of contents

Foreword

Paulo Rangel, Vice-President of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, Member of the European Parliament, European People's Party Treasurer

This report is the first systematic attempt to get to grips with the growing difficulties of Europe's middle classes from a Christian Democratic perspective rooted in the tradition of the European People's Party (EPP). The EPP and its member parties, following the classical teaching of Aristotle in his major work *Politics*, have long believed a strong and prosperous middle class to be the backbone of successful economies and cohesive societies. Countries with a robust middle class typically possess lower crime rates, enjoy higher levels of trust and life satisfaction, display greater political stability, and have healthier and less polarised democratic systems. In other words, a thriving middle class seems to be an essential aspect of the European way of life that the EPP has strived so much to protect in recent years, amidst unprecedented and successive crises in the most varied fields, from the economy to migration, from health to geopolitics.

The insightful findings of this Martens Centre paper confirm the acute economic insecurity and fear of falling behind among the middle classes, half of which declare that they are just getting by financially, while more than half report a decline in their standard of living over the last two years. Their future outlook appears equally bleak: almost half of the European middle classes expect their standard of living to worsen over the next two years. That these perceptions and realities are accompanied by a drop in trust in public institutions is hardly surprising, as the latter are increasingly blamed for ineffective policies that do not sufficiently enable wealth creation and social mobility. The rise of populist and anti-EU movements, in the course of well over a decade of challenges, has much to do with the mounting difficulties felt most acutely by the lower middle classes.

It is the duty of political representatives and policymakers at all levels of governance, from the local to the European, to redress a situation that risks becoming economically and politically unsustainable, as this report shows so well. This cannot mean, of course, giving in to the sirens of a new economic interventionism, which would only worsen the situation, piling up further debt on the shoulders of young Europeans, who are already the most burdened by the negative developments of the last years. It can only be accomplished by updating and adapting to new conditions the good policies that have proved their value by producing the rise of Western middle classes in the first place: from forward-looking reforms that increase productivity and therefore wages to fairer and less burdensome taxation systems, from measures that reduce the cost of housing and ensure quality education for all to improved access to business opportunities. In a nutshell, it can only be accomplished by a more balanced approach to growth that puts people's well-being at the centre and pursues policies that allow individuals and communities to thrive.

I can only concur with the report's conclusion that the parties and policymakers who share the values of the EPP seem the best positioned to implement good policies and deliver good results in

this field. Even in those countries where they have long occupied the conservative part of the political spectrum, EPP member parties tend to see themselves as the party of the centre and the middle, not of the right. This self-identification goes much deeper than a mere positioning on the political spectrum of Western democracies. It indicates our penchant to offer 'third-way' solutions that reject polarisation and one-sided approaches in a quest for mediation and balance. From the social market economy to federalism and subsidiarity, all key Christian Democratic concepts are balancing concepts that reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable: economic freedom with social solidarity, or supranational unity with national autonomy. That is why today we also feel a special responsibility to promote a balanced and pragmatic approach to sustainability, one which should incorporate not only the environmental dimension, but also necessarily the social and economic ones.

Unsurprisingly, as the party of the centre and the middle, the party of moderation, mediation and balance, historically Christian Democrats have also represented the party of choice for Europe's middle classes. To remain so in this challenging historical time, we have a special responsibility to ponder the results of this important research and to act decisively upon them.

Executive summary[1]

Defining and understanding the middle classes

The objective of the study is to research the positions, aspirations, expectations and fears of the European middle classes concerning some of the key challenges that the EU is facing. There exist numerous approaches to defining class: economic, educational, aspirational and so on. In this study, we used the encompassing social-ladder approach, in which people define their family's class on a social ladder, whereby higher positions denote a better financial situation, higher social status and more opportunities in life.[2] We use the plural form ('middle classes'), as there is not a single middle class when using the social-ladder approach.

Economic concerns prevail, especially among the lower (middle) classes

The data reveal continuing insecurity and concerns among EU citizens in general and among the lower social strata in particular. EU citizens are not just concerned about their personal finances, they are feeling the negative impact in practice in the form of a cost-of-living crisis and, before that, the impact of higher energy prices on their household budget.[3] Among the social classes, the lower middle class and the lower class are especially vulnerable from an economic perspective. It is revealing that more than half of the European middle classes say that they are just getting by financially. Furthermore, a large share of citizens say that their standard of living has worsened in recent years, regardless of social classification. Fear of falling behind is clearly present among the European middle classes, especially the lower middle class.

These economic struggles pose a significant threat to future policies. It is characteristic that the overwhelming majority of citizens are not willing to contribute financially to better public services (and the energy transition as an extension of this). This can be placed in the wider context of negative future expectations among citizens in general. Inflation, economic insecurity, unaffordable housing and wealth inequality are aspects that many people expect to get worse in the future. In contrast to Western Europe, where people are more pessimistic about their (future) standard of living, people in many upcoming economies in Eastern Europe believe that the standard of living of future generations there will keep improving.

Security concerns and the war in Ukraine

EU citizens' concerns find their strongest expression in financial terms, but there are broader, more fundamental processes at play in the background. The war in Ukraine and wider geopolitical shifts, as well as challenges such as climate change and energy (in)security are affecting how citizens think not only about the present but also about the future. At the same time, as a result of the war in Ukraine there is growing distrust of Russia. However, views are divided between Western and Eastern Europe about the kind of relationship that the EU should seek with Russia in the future, and this could potentially create frictions on other levels.

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[3] Prices have decreased since the fieldwork took place in March and April 2023, so the impact may have moderated in the meantime.

Trust and the democratic process

It is worth noting that more than half of the citizens who expect negative developments have faith that these negative (economic) developments can be reversed. This is an indication of resilience in European society, with people generally having hope for the future. Notable exceptions, where people do not believe that negative developments can be reversed, are in trust in the state and government. This is very concerning because trust in these institutions is already rather low.

The low level of trust in national government is contrasted with a high level of trust in the EU as an institution. This creates momentum for European parties and other actors to create impactful policies and be a force for good in citizens' lives. It is also important to note that trust levels diminish significantly overall as we move lower on the social-ladder scale. The people on the lower rungs feel alienated and let down. They are most at risk of disconnecting even further from the rest of society, adding to their vulnerability to populist narratives.

Solutions for the European middle classes are not universal

Making Europe more futureproof goes hand in hand with fulfilling different social classes' needs and aspirations. The lower (middle) classes' needs are positioned lower on the Pyramid of Maslow,[4] as they are more focused on meeting basic needs. Their struggles centre around financial and job security, and concerns over housing, among other things. This increases the alienation mentioned previously, and destabilises the base of the Pyramid of Maslow, which could indicate increased social and economic discontent and risks for the future of the EU.

The upper (middle) classes' needs and aspirations are comparatively positioned much higher on the Pyramid of Maslow, being much less concerned with survival and much more with meaning and self-actualisation. If EU policies focus disproportionately on the needs and aspirations that sit higher up in the pyramid, there is an increased risk of losing the lower middle class, which is in dire need of economic stability, economic prospects and security. Economic and societal reciprocity are increasingly relevant principles for regaining trust and keeping the lower middle class on board. There is one overarching need, however, which connects all citizens regardless of social class: to have enough space to be able to develop and flourish.

Moving forward, citizens expect well-informed solutions, especially from civil society and the EU, but also from national governments. A synergy between these three actors is clearly needed. Despite the challenges that it brings, the broader context of the war in Ukraine has the potential

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[4] The Pyramid of Maslow is a visual representation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This is an idea in psychology proposed by American psychologist Abraham Maslow in his 1943 article 'A Theory of Human Motivation' (A. Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370-96). The theory is a classification system that aims to reflect the universal needs of society as its basis. In the lower part one finds the physiological needs that ensure survival. The idea behind this is that individuals' most basic needs must be met before they become motivated to achieve higher-level needs. The latter needs (e.g. self-actualisation) are positioned higher up the pyramid.

to bring the EU closer together in the long run.[5] Given the differing views about Ukraine across the EU, extra efforts are especially needed to (re)connect with citizens in South-Eastern Europe. These citizens are the most at risk of moving away from EU values amidst increasing polarisation in their countries and general distrust in the EU.

The centre–right as a uniting force: (re)connecting with citizens based on shared values

At the moment, there is widespread disenchantment with politics in Europe, which aligns with the general disappointment among citizens, especially among the (lower) middle classes. The current economic climate is one of the key causes of citizens' disenchantment, as day-to-day life has become increasingly hard for them. The countries where people feel more disenchanted with politics are often the same as those where people more often say that they feel let down by society and where corruption is more widespread, notably in South-Eastern Europe. An overall feeling of being abandoned by society could result in a low interest in politics in general.

However, the centre–right still has great potential to remain a trusted political force. Traditional centre–right stances, such as support for a social market economy and the rule of law, and protecting the EU's external borders in a framework of regulated immigration, enjoy high support among the middle classes. Results show that the centre–right can develop an appealing narrative concerning European challenges based on the widely shared long-term desire for safety, stability, justice, freedom and cooperation. This narrative could positively reinforce the popular view that change *can* result in improvements, as long as citizens feel that their needs and concerns are being considered and addressed by policymakers.

The war in Ukraine continues to leave its mark on people's minds, primarily in concerns about its impact on the economy and security in Europe. However, such difficulties also emphasise the need for the EU to be an influential player on the world stage. People's high trust in the EU means that the EU could have a very strong role to play going forward. Its uniting story is especially important for the most vulnerable lower (middle) classes, which are at the greatest risk of feeling alienated.

Europe has reached a significant milestone and the decisions made now will shape the EU's future to a great extent. Despite a general environment of pessimism, fear and insecurity, there is still a deeply rooted desire for progress and positive change among citizens. The research findings indicate that the centre–right has a paramount role to play in this process, provided that the social contract with the (lower) middle classes is restored and an inclusive agenda, respectful of cultural diversity between and within countries, is developed.

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[5]   A. Blanksma Ceta and F. O. Reho, *Standing in Unity, Respecting Diversity: A Survey into Citizens' Perspectives on the Future of Europe*, Martens Centre (Brussels, 2022), accessed at https://www.martenscentre.eu/publication/standing-in-unity-respecting-diversity-a-survey-into-citizens-perspectives-on-the-future-of-europe/ on 13 July 2023.

Conclusions and recommendations

Writing in 1825 with reference to the American democratic experiment, the French sociologist and political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville famously argued that the thrust towards greater equality was the core underpinning of modern democracy.[6] The almost two centuries that separate our time from his have largely confirmed the validity of his insight. The spread of democracy throughout the Western world and beyond has been favoured and accompanied by the steady improvement of living conditions and by the formation of a robust and aspirational middle class that could reasonably expect a prosperous and safe environment for itself and future generations. Democracy thrived when this expectation was met, notably during Europe's post–Second World War decades. It dwindled when this expectation was frustrated, as in the interwar period.

With this historical background in mind, it is unsurprising that in most European countries democratic, centre–right people's parties have regarded the well-being of the population's central strata as the foundation for democratic regimes and the bedrock of their electoral fortunes within them. It is also no coincidence that, in the last 15 years of unceasing crises across multiple fields—financial and economic, migration, pandemic and public health, geopolitics and war—the success of anti-establishment 'populist' movements has gone hand in hand with the growing sense of insecurity perceived and experienced by the 'squeezed middle'.[7] This is why the Martens Centre and its continental network of political foundations have already been studying this important development for several years. These studies have produced a sizeable stream of publications analysing the phenomenon from a variety of angles and in a number of EU countries.[8]

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[6] A. de Tocqueville, 'Introductory Chapter', in A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (vol. I) (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835), accessed at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/815/815-h/815-h.htm#link2H_4_0002 on 10 July 2023.

[7] OECD, *Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class* (Paris, 2019).

[8] A. Siegmann and M. Schäfer (eds.), *No Robots. The Position of Middle-Class Households in Nine European Countries*, CDA Research Institute, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Brussels, 2017), accessed at https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/middle-class-europe-1.pdf on July 3, 2023; A. Siegmann (ed.), *The Middle. The Middle Class as the Moral Core of Society*, CDA Research Institute, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Brussels, 2018), accessed at https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/middle-class-society-values.pdf on July 3, 2023; E. Risso (ed.), *Beyond Resentment. A Journey Through the Italian Middle Class From Postwar to Pandemics*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and Fondazione De Gasperi (Soveria Mannelli, 2021), accessed at https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Beyond-Resentment.pdf on July 3, 2023; L. Tungul (ed.), *The European Green Deal and the Middle Class*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Hanns Seidel Stiftung and TOPAZ (Prague, 2021), accessed at https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-European-Green-Deal-and-the-Middle-Class-ENG_WEB_FINAL.pdf on July 3, 2023; L. Tungul (ed.), *The (Post)Covid Era: The Middle Class in Focus*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Hanns Seidel Stiftung and TOPAZ (Prague, 2020), accessed at https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Post-Covid-Era-The-Middle-Class-in-Focus.pdf on July 3, 2023; L. Tungul (ed.), *Middle Class at a Crossroads*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Hanns Seidel Stiftung and TOPAZ (Prague, 2019), accessed at https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Middle-class-at-a-Crossroads-ENG.pdf on July 3, 2023.

The present study builds on the knowledge gained in this previous research, but goes beyond it in several important ways. To begin with, the study covers all 27 EU member states, using online survey research[9] conducted in each of them in April 2023. It therefore offers a uniquely encompassing EU-wide perspective on the position, expectations and fears of Europe's middle classes.

Moreover, it is a data-driven study that combines quantitative methods with a sophisticated qualitative and interpretative apparatus. Part of this is a conscious choice to use the term 'class', albeit not in the sociologically precise and prescriptive sense typical of a bygone time, when social groups were relatively stable, structured and easily definable. Fully aware that we are living in fractured and individualised societies, we use 'class' more loosely, to identify porous social groups that nonetheless tend to share some important common features. Such features include income and educational levels, areas of residence, and key experiences and expectations. This looser use of the term is also captured in the plural 'middle classes', as opposed to the more monolithic 'middle class'.

Additionally, this study utilises Glocalities' unique ability to map out citizens' value preferences and the Martens Centre's knowledge of political ideologies and movements to understand to what extent and in what ways the middle strata of society in EU member states remain the core constituency of the centre–right and the ones most aligned with traditional centre–right values and policies. As such, it is best understood and read as a follow-up to our 2022 data-driven report which carefully mapped values diversity in terms of citizens' perspectives on the future of the EU.[10]

The study's rich and nuanced findings cannot be easily summarised here. However, some political and policy recommendations based on them deserve to be highlighted.

First, European and national policymakers should be aware that we are confronted with a serious crisis in the middle classes' expectations and prospects, which is feeding into a dangerous crisis of legitimacy in public institutions and political parties. This is no ordinary moment of difficulty, but one that could take on systemic proportions if inadequately managed. There is a growing interrelatedness between the local, the national and the EU level of government across most policy fields, including the economic and social ones. Therefore, effective policies to rekindle the prospects of Europe's middle social strata will require both country-specific initiatives and forms of supranational EU coordination and support.

Second, despite all the emphasis placed on self-expression and quality of life in our post-materialist age, ensuring economic and physical security actually remains the core of the middle-class problem. Even in this time of renewed identity conflict and geopolitical insecurity, the 1990s' quip, 'It's the economy, stupid!'—much decried as a symptom of Western elites' materialistic and simplistic view of politics—retains a certain truth and explanatory power. Our data shows how the economy and

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9   In Malta and Cyprus we complemented the sample with computer-assisted telephone interviewing. The sample size is between 500 and 750 people per country. Please consult the appendix for the technical specifications of this study.

10   Blanksma Ceta and Reho, *Standing in Unity, Respecting Diversity*.

finances top the list of concerns in all 27 member states. Such concerns are central not only to citizens' current priorities, but also to the way they envisage the future. Even citizens' perceptions of the Ukraine war are mostly filtered through its potentially negative economic consequences. The middle classes are naturally positioned in the middle of Maslow's pyramid of needs, mostly above the bottom income level, which allows only for the satisfaction of basic needs. However, the middle classes are more fearful of falling back towards the bottom income level than hopeful of moving towards the upper part of the pyramid, where affluence brings with it an emphasis on self-actualisation. This confirms that economic growth and widespread prosperity are the key prerequisites of political democracy. It also provides a caution for EU policymakers against conceiving and framing EU policies primarily as tools for self-actualisation, thus mostly catering to the needs of the more affluent classes.

Third, people's approach to economic difficulties is resilient, that is, they think that such challenges, however serious, can be tackled and reversed through adequate political and policy action. By implication, this also means that people *expect* effective action in those fields. They will hold decision-makers accountable for their successes and failures to act on issues such as standard of living, employment, pensions and affordable housing. Things appear to be different when it comes to restoring trust in government and the state, as well as decreasing ethnic and religious tensions. These are fields in which citizens' attitudes are rather more pessimistic and defeatist. This is predicated on their assumption that negative developments in these areas will intensify and cannot be reversed through political and policy initiatives. These are aspects over which, worryingly enough, a certain fatalism appears to have taken hold in European societies. This is very much in contrast to the field of equality between men and women, about which people are thoroughly optimistic, believing that positive changes will happen and any negative changes will be reversible.

Fourth, EU policymakers should be more alert to the geopolitical implications of values differences between Eastern and Western Europe. While the citizens of most countries in Central and Eastern Europe are characterised as having very low trust in Russia and an acute alertness to the geopolitical threat it represents, this is not always the case in parts of Southern and Eastern Europe, notably Bulgaria, Greece and Slovakia. A sizeable portion of the citizens in these countries feels let down by society, while significant minorities appear to have relatively greater distrust in the EU and more trust in Russia. This means that the societies in these countries are potentially more in danger of becoming exposed to the influence of hostile powers and of detaching themselves from the European project. These values differences must also be factored in when appraising the wider implications of the war in Ukraine and the different ways in which it affects citizens' perceptions in various member states. There is a pressing need to make the benefits of EU membership even more tangible to citizens in these countries. More generally, this finding reinforces a key recommendation from our previous data-driven study on the future of Europe: that diversity of values is an essential feature of EU politics and that a more rigorous engagement with it is needed by policymakers, who should carefully take it into account when crafting EU policies and initiatives.

Fifth, both the EU and civil society will have to play a central role in future efforts to restore trust, revive political parties and renew the democratic process. While revealing middle class—especially lower middle class—citizens' pessimistic distrust of state institutions and political parties, our study also shows relatively high levels of trust in both the EU and ordinary people. The EU appears to enjoy much higher trust than national institutions, something that generally bodes well for its future development as a more effective level of government in a more integrated federal union. As to the high trust in ordinary people, this probably captures what represents both the democratic danger and the democratic opportunity of our time. It captures the danger of populism, of an anti-establishment and anti-elite construction of a pure people. Populists refuse any constraints on their will and have 'had enough of experts', to quote the famous formulation of Michael Gove during the Brexit debate.[11] However, high trust in ordinary people also captures the potential to rejuvenate democracy through new forms of civic activism and participation at the local, national and transnational levels. The task ahead, therefore, appears twofold: on the one hand, averting the danger of populism while grasping the opportunity of this novel civic potential found among ordinary people; on the other, connecting this novel potential with the EU and embedding it more stably within its democratic process. Given their distrust of the political process, citizens' reliance on civil society more than on any other societal pillar to solve the current challenges is unsurprising. However, the EU ranks highly here too. This reality presents opportunities for combining the forces of civic activism and participation to reinvent contemporary European democracy through transnational public engagement and supranational policy action.

Sixth, the role of European political parties must become stronger. Enhancing the democratic connection between European citizens and civil society on the one hand, and EU politics and policymaking on the other appears to be a necessity for the future, but it cannot happen in a void. It requires the agency of stronger European political parties than we have today. Experiments with citizens' assemblies and other forms of direct democracy will not and should not in any way undermine—let alone replace—the representative democratic process that has guaranteed ideological pluralism and organised political participation in our systems since the post–Second World War period. There is no denying that representative institutions and traditional political parties are in crisis. Our results only confirm that. However, the solution cannot be to shift to completely disintermediated forms of political representation, which are often the antechamber of populist and plebiscitarian forms of democracy. Rather, the solution must be to rejuvenate political parties by reinforcing their transnational European umbrellas and injecting new forms of direct participation and citizen engagement into their increasingly centralistic and leader-centred structures.

Seventh, the centre–right should seriously reflect on how to regain the support of the lower middle class. Results clearly show that, far from having exhausted their appeal, centre–right values and policies still resonate with important sections of Europe's population, especially with what we define in this report as the middle class and the upper middle-class. The centre–right's approaches

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[11] H. Mance, 'Britain Has Had Enough of Experts, Says Gove', *Financial Times*, 3 June 2016, accessed at https://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c on 3 July 2023.

to security, immigration and the economy clearly retain great appeal among these strata of the population, though its traditional references to Judeo-Christian values appear to be experiencing declining favour in our largely de-Christianised societies. The correspondence between centre–right values and policies and the preferences of the lower middle class, however, appears weaker. The report data do not allow definite inferences on this point, but point to the possibility that the detachment of the lower middle class may at least partly explain the loss of political space and support experienced by centre–right parties in recent decades. Further reflection and research are needed to define how centre–right policies should be adjusted to reconnect with the large portion of citizens who currently feel left behind, especially in the lower middle class. Given the importance of economic security and the fear of falling behind among citizens, the centre–right's ability to offer a convincing economic and social agenda will be crucial.

All in all, the study points to the importance of reducing the increasing social and political polarisation by restoring the middle space of our social and political systems, a traditional locus of stability and moderation. The study also shows that, going forward, the centre–right has the potential to remain at the forefront of this important historical adjustment, not least by maintaining and reinforcing its connection with the middle classes and by developing new policies for them. In a time of uncertainty and increasing pessimism, we hope that the reflections and data presented in this study may contribute to achieving these two important goals.

Main survey findings

Defining and understanding the middle classes

A brief theoretical background

The middle class has traditionally been central to European countries' social cohesion, economic paradigm and policy. However, long before the appearance of the current inflationary and unstable socio-economic environment, concerns about the disappearing middle class were present. These concerns relate both to how the middle class is lagging behind economically, but also to the fact that the middle class is no longer the cultural determining group in society.

In the context of a lack of prospects among citizens, voting behaviour has also been affected. There has been a fragmentation of the political landscape, significantly affecting and diminishing the position of centre parties.[12] The challenge for centre–right parties at the national and EU level will be to stay loyal to their fundamental values while finding the right balance to appeal to and represent broader groups of citizens. Before crafting policies and strategies to ensure that the centre–right resonates better with the European middle classes, it is important to define what actually constitutes the middle class. The truth is, there is no universal definition. Existing definitions range from a subjective set of aspirations (e.g. people being able to buy their own home) and sets of behaviours to highly specific measures of household income.[13] Other theories even suggest that the term 'middle class' has implicit racial connotations in given countries, with an unspoken 'white' prefix.[14]

Defining the middle class does not have to come down to adopting one narrow criterion, to be used at all times. What is important is to identify the middle class with sufficient precision to be able to triangulate definitions, accurately measure progress, and develop and assess policy.

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[12] T. G. Schminke, 'Fragmentation: The Animal Party-isation of European Party Systems', *Europe Elects*, 7 March 2022, accessed at https://europeelects.eu/2022/03/07/fragmentation/ on 24 July 2023.

[13] R. V. Reeves, K. Guyot and E. Krause, *Defining the Middle Class: Cash, Credentials or Culture?*, Brookings (2018), accessed at https://www.brookings.edu/research/defining-the-middle-class-cash-credentials-or-culture/ on 10 July 2023.

[14] See the appendix for details of a few approaches that have been used in research to define the middle class.

Defining the middle class in this study: the social-ladder approach

In this research, we incorporated the following indicators that can be used to distinguish class groups:

- educational level (low, middle, high);

- income (five distinct quintiles);

- area that people live in (lower class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class);

- people's perception of their position on the social ladder based on the following question:
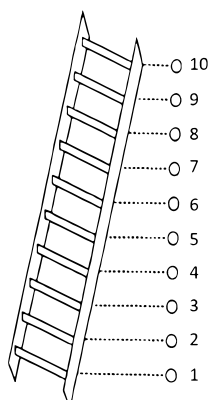
Imagine that this ladder is a picture of how [respondent's country] is set up.

- At the top of the ladder are the people that have the most money, the highest amount of schooling, the best jobs and the most respect.
- At the bottom are the people who have the least money, little or no education, no jobs or jobs that no one wants, and the least respect.

Now think about your family. Can you tell us where you think your family would be on that ladder at the moment?

Upon careful examination of all the parameters and the, formulation and scope of each approach, we decided to work with the latter method for defining classes. This is because the question using the social ladder incorporates a wide spectrum of aspects that have been used in literature to define the (middle) classes.[15] Furthermore, the distribution of respondents was, in practice, very balanced. Figure 1 shows the distribution as well as the distinct classes that we will be looking at in this report.

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[15]   See appendix for a description of the defining methods used in academia.

Figure 1 Distribution of classes among respondents
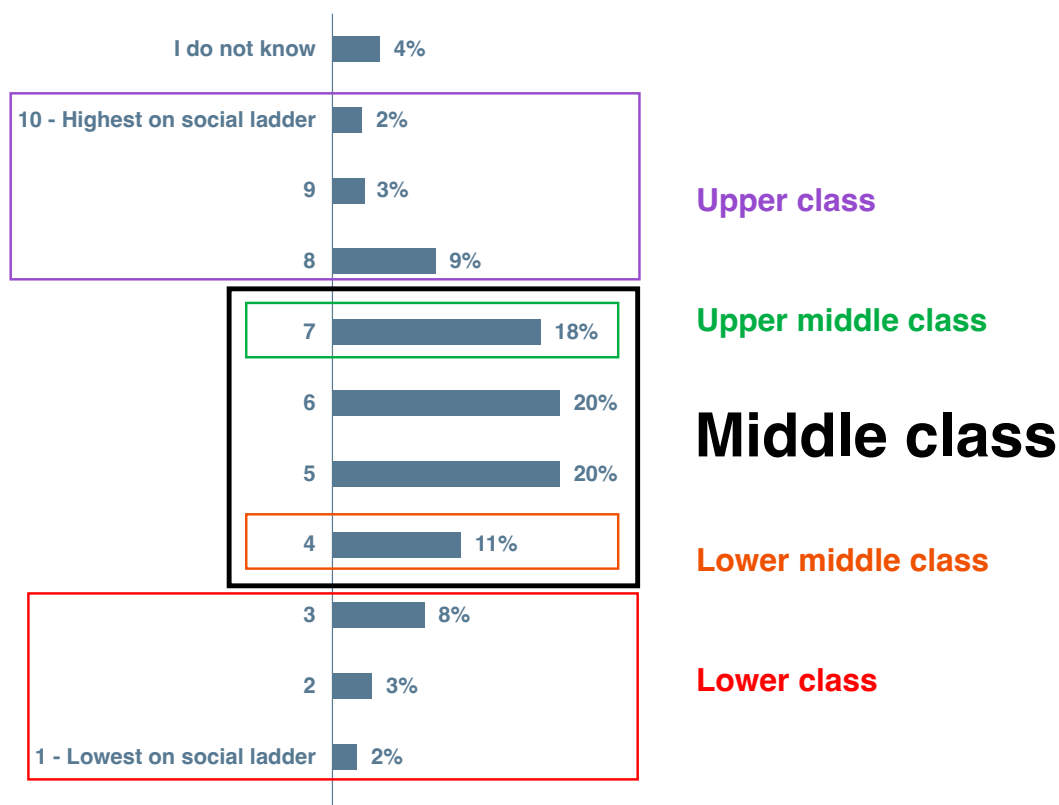
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: Respondents were asked where they placed themselves on the social ladder.

Based on the findings, 39.3% of the citizens in the 27 EU member states consider themselves middle class (rungs 5 and 6 on the ladder). An additional 11.2% belong to the lower middle class (rung 4) and 18.1% to the upper middle class (rung 7).

We examined the validity of the social-ladder approach for defining classes by cross-referencing it with other traditionally used instruments for defining classes, such as income (quintile), perceived living area and educational level. There was a notable correlation with all variables:

- the higher the social class, the higher the income;
- the higher the social class, the higher the share of those who stated that the area in which they reside is more affluent;
- there are notably more highly educated citizens among the higher (middle) classes.

Understanding the middle-class mindset

Values that distinguish each social class

There have been extensive theoretical discussions about what constitutes a class per se and the middle classes in particular. In literature, reference is made not only to economic indicators, but also to mindset as an indicator. We used a large set of Glocalities values statements to compare the classes as elaborated by the social-ladder definition.

We presented the statements to EU citizens and they indicated the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a five-point Likert scale.[16] Figure 2 shows the views on life where we observe the greatest statistical variation between the classes.

Figure 2 Typical values of the lower, middle and upper classes
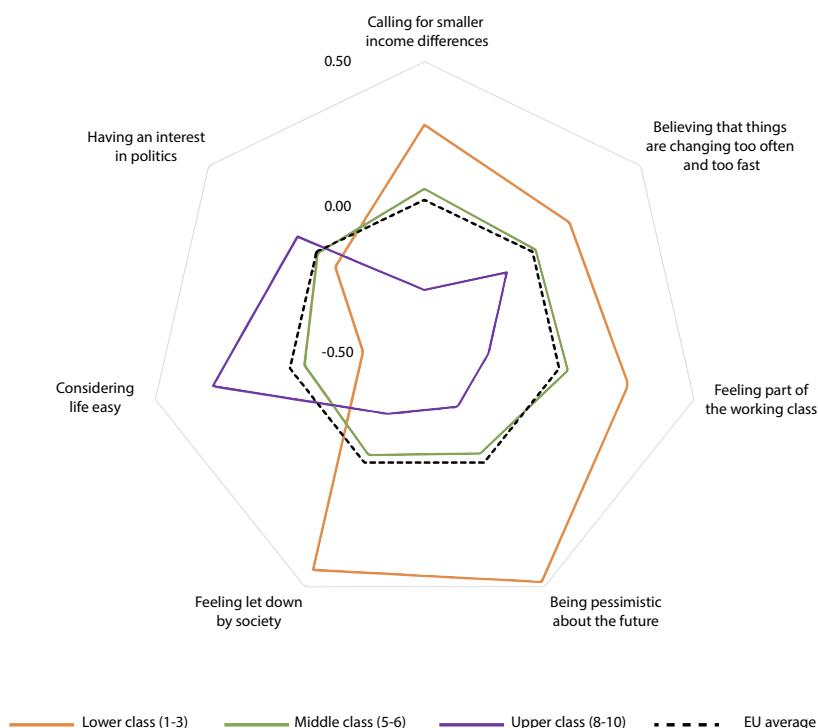
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: Question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about your outlook on life?' Each respondent answered 50 statements about their outlook on life. The above graph shows some of the most distinguishing statements per social class based on standard score differences. This is the difference between the means among a given group (e.g. middle class) versus the means of the total sample (all 27 EU member states).

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16   Many citizens in Southern and to a lesser extent Eastern Europe tend to agree more with statements in general, regardless of the content. In order to eliminate country-specific answering bias, we standardised the scores and calculated z-scores. These are expressed in the number of standard deviations that a response differs due to each respondent's personal answering style. A positive score indicates that people tend to (strongly) agree with a given statement, whereas a negative score indicates that people tend to (strongly) disagree with a given statement. Most scores are positioned roughly between a standard deviation of +1 and -1.

Future of Europe **Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges**

We observe similar patterns when we compare the findings of the social-ladder–based classes with the traditional income-based classes. The upper income group appears to be much more engaged in politics and has a generally more receptive mindset overall. For this group life is much easier than for people from the lower class. As we move lower on the social-ladder scale, citizens start to become much more pessimistic and also feel less able to cope with rapid changes in society.

The middle class is a transitional group between the two extremes but generally also appears relatively in need of support to cope with changes. The middle classes are not quite as disenchanted with politics, so there are possible bridges that can be built in this regard. Before building these bridges, however, it is paramount to understand how the citizens of the different (middle) classes experience reality and to what extent this reflects on what citizens had hoped for in life.

Geography also matters when trying to comprehend the middle classes' mindset

Another important aspect to consider, when thinking about the middle-class mindset and values, is where citizens live and their culture. The countries that have joined the EU since 2004 are mostly Eastern European, the populations of which contain a significant share of the *Traditionalists* values segment.[17] The EU's eastward enlargement has therefore increased diversity, but has also increased cultural differences, sometimes leading to tensions over issues pertaining to progressive and emancipative values.

Figure 3 The prevalence of Glocalities values segments by EU member state grouping, based on year of accession
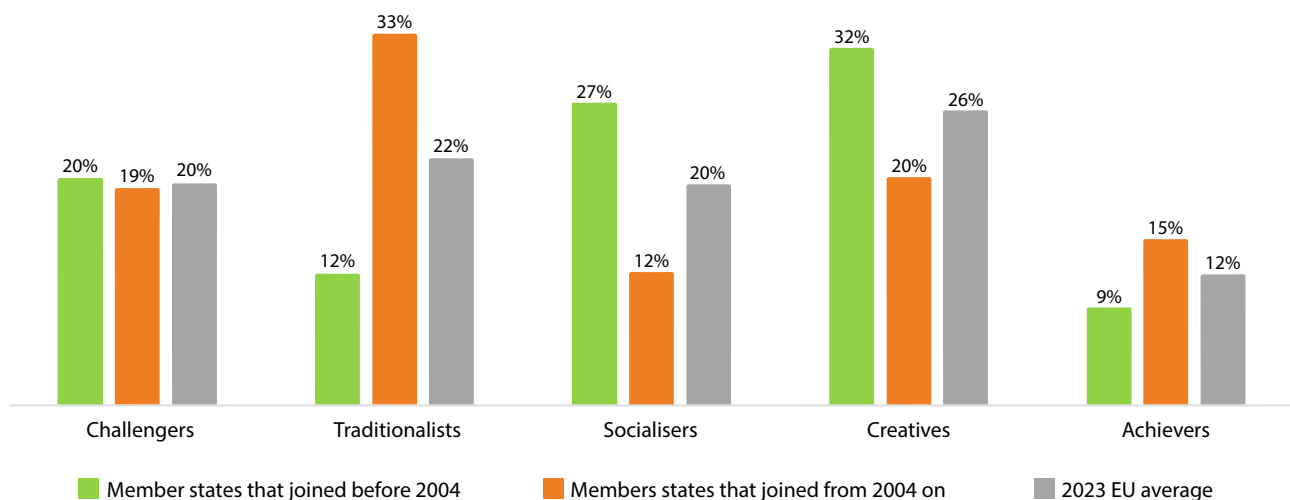
	Challengers	Traditionalists	Socialisers	Creatives	Achievers
Member states that joined before 2004	20%	12%	27%	32%	9%
Members states that joined from 2004 on	19%	33%	12%	20%	15%
2023 EU average	20%	22%	20%	26%	12%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The values segments were calculated based upon responses to 50 Glocalities statements. The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about your outlook on life?'

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17   This is one of the five distinct citizen groups of the Glocalities values segmentation. More information about the segmentation can be found in the appendix.

Traditionalists tend to be locally and family oriented. They appreciate a structured and predictable life. They are very proud of their country and feel attached to their traditions, long-term relations and the place in which they live. They strongly believe in traditional values and proper social etiquette. They prefer traditional family settings and well-defined gender and sexuality norms.

They tend to be more distrustful of (national) political institutions, media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which they see as far removed from their daily life. This is also the case for the EU. Instead, they have greater trust in religion and also in institutions such as the military. Their main concerns often revolve around safety and crime, terrorism, (uncontrolled) immigration, health and what they perceive as a lack of proper values. Ideologically they prefer more conservative policies that sometimes adopt a radical stance towards issues such as immigration and LGBTI rights.

Traditionalists are overrepresented among older (50+), mid-educated and married citizens, who often live in rural areas or small towns. On the EU level, Traditionalists are much more prominent in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and much less prominent in North-Western Europe.

At the same time, member states in Western and Southern Europe host many citizens who belong to the values segment of *Creatives*. These are cosmopolitan and open-minded idealists with a strong focus on freedom and exploration. They believe in positive social change and they challenge deeply rooted social norms about gender and sexuality. They value self-development and have a tendency to look beyond their immediate environment. They are global citizens at heart and believe that being in contact with other cultures will help them to broaden their horizons. Their ideology could be described as social–liberal and eco-conscious. They are especially concerned with issues pertaining to (in)equality and freedom of expression. Creatives have above-average trust in the EU as an institution and also expect a lot from it. They tend to trust institutions such as the military, multinationals and religious organisations much less.

Creatives are present in all age groups and have an above-average representation among highly educated citizens. The Creative mindset is dominant in EU policy circles. Overall Creatives represent about one in four Europeans, but this share is larger in some countries, especially among Western and Northern European member states. There are far fewer Creatives in most Eastern European countries.

In some countries—notably Croatia, Poland, Greece, Estonia, Hungary, Cyprus, Malta, Italy and Portugal—there are large groups of Creatives and Traditionalists in society. Due to their radically different worldviews, there is an increased risk of polarisation in these countries. It is worth mentioning that all values segments are present within the European middle classes. However, Traditionalists are much more common among the middle classes in those member states that have joined the EU since 2004. Resonating with the middle classes at large should thus take geography into account and build upon shared values.

Citizens' aspirations and expectations versus reality

All citizens naturally have aspirations, regardless of class, geography or values orientation. However, citizens' aspirations are not expressed in the same way. Table 1 clearly illustrates the changing priorities as we move between social classes.

Table 1 Life aspirations of citizens of different classes

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Being healthy	68%	69%	69%	69%	57%	66%
Higher income/salary	61%	56%	50%	40%	35%	47%
Feeling safe	47%	46%	46%	44%	39%	44%
Having a good family life	37%	42%	43%	46%	40%	42%
Having my finances under control	41%	39%	37%	33%	29%	35%
Helping my children progress	29%	34%	35%	36%	32%	33%
Having control over my life	29%	29%	27%	30%	28%	28%
Being independent	31%	28%	27%	27%	27%	27%
Having a place of my own	23%	22%	19%	17%	23%	20%
Experiencing new things	16%	15%	20%	23%	24%	20%
Helping my parents have a comfortable life	16%	17%	17%	18%	20%	17%
Doing useful things for others	14%	15%	15%	18%	19%	16%
Having a good career	13%	15%	15%	16%	20%	15%
Being in love	15%	14%	15%	15%	18%	15%
Having clearer goals in life	11%	11%	12%	12%	16%	12%
Feeling socially included	10%	9%	8%	11%	14%	10%
Looking beautiful	6%	7%	8%	8%	13%	8%
Having a lot of possessions	7%	7%	7%	8%	12%	8%
Gaining recognition from other people	4%	4%	6%	7%	11%	6%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'In which five aspects would you like your life to change in a positive way over the next five years?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

There is a general consensus that economic, health and security-related aspects dominate in order to help people flourish. However, there are also priorities that are typical of where a citizen is positioned on the social ladder. For the middle and upper middle classes, for instance, a harmonious family life, helping children to progress, maintaining control over things and also having the space to experience new things appear especially important. The EU and the centre–right in particular can therefore capitalise on these aspects by promoting discussion on the pan-EU level about how to develop and implement policies that help create the right environment for people to realise their aspirations.

Despite all good intentions, hopes and dreams do not materialise for every citizen. Unsurprisingly, this can cause drops in happiness. The data indicate that financial difficulties not only affect a sizeable part of European society, but often also cause concrete drops in people's happiness. The top cause of a drop in happiness is money problems/financial distress, which is by far the most mentioned issue. This is followed by the loss of someone close and chronic physical health problems. Only 5% of people say that they have not recently experienced a drop in happiness. Setbacks are just a natural part of life.

When it comes to people's current state versus what they wish they had achieved in life, financial security is the thing that most people had expected to gain when they were younger. This is followed by physical health and savings and investments. However, there are substantial differences between the classes, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Aspects of life that citizens wish were better for them at the moment

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Financial security	51%	45%	36%	28%	25%	35%
Physical health	36%	33%	28%	28%	24%	29%
Savings and investments	29%	31%	25%	22%	19%	24%
Lifestyle (sleep, diet, exercise etc.)	22%	22%	20%	19%	17%	20%
Family life	23%	20%	19%	20%	20%	20%
Job stability	23%	22%	16%	14%	16%	17%
Mental health	25%	20%	16%	15%	16%	17%
Housing	24%	19%	16%	14%	15%	16%
Friendly relationships	18%	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%
Romantic relationships	18%	16%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Career status	17%	16%	14%	13%	13%	14%
Social status in my country	9%	9%	8%	8%	10%	8%
Feeling connected with my country	7%	7%	7%	8%	9%	7%
Social status in my local community	6%	6%	5%	6%	8%	5%
Feeling connected with my local community	6%	5%	4%	6%	8%	5%
None of these	6%	6%	9%	13%	12%	9%
I do not know	7%	6%	8%	6%	6%	8%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Are there any of the following aspects where you had hoped to be in a better situation than you are now?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

It should be mentioned that many of these aspects naturally relate to people's life stage. For instance, older people more often mention financial security, physical health and the loss of someone close to them as influential factors in their satisfaction with life. Younger people more often mention mental health, housing, relationships and feeling stuck/not progressing in life as aspects that either cause them unhappiness, or that they had hoped to be in a better position with regard to today. However it is still telling that financial security tops the list overall, possibly pointing to structural difficulties in society that need to be addressed. The following section looks into economic concerns in more detail.

Economic concerns

Current issues of concern

The initial findings indicate that the current economic situation is challenging for a sizeable part of society. We looked into this further by explicitly asking people what they are concerned about (Table 3).

Table 3 Topics of concern by social class

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Cost of living	54%	49%	45%	38%	32%	43%
Hunger and poverty	31%	27%	26%	23%	25%	26%
Crime and safety	24%	24%	27%	29%	26%	26%
Environment/climate change	21%	25%	28%	29%	27%	26%
Corruption	24%	25%	26%	24%	25%	25%
Income and economy	31%	29%	24%	21%	20%	24%
Health and elderly care	23%	23%	23%	24%	20%	23%
Terrorism	14%	15%	19%	22%	23%	19%
Unemployment	18%	18%	15%	14%	15%	16%
Inequality	16%	17%	14%	15%	13%	14%
Attacks on human rights	13%	13%	15%	13%	14%	14%
Immigration/integration	13%	12%	13%	16%	15%	14%
Taxation	13%	15%	13%	12%	16%	14%
Refugees	13%	12%	13%	14%	14%	13%
Social welfare	15%	13%	11%	11%	10%	12%
Public health and pandemic response	10%	10%	12%	12%	13%	11%

Education	9%	12%	11%	12%	14%	11%
Decency and values	9%	9%	10%	12%	10%	10%
Freedom of expression	10%	10%	9%	9%	10%	9%
Rule of law	10%	8%	9%	9%	11%	9%
Discrimination	7%	7%	9%	9%	11%	9%
Public finances	7%	8%	8%	9%	10%	8%
Defence	4%	6%	6%	8%	9%	7%
Racial justice issues	3%	4%	4%	6%	5%	4%
Art and culture	1%	2%	1%	1%	4%	2%
None of these	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
I do not know	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Which four of the following topics make you feel most worried?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

The cost of living is by far the topic that citizens find most concerning, as almost half of all respondents are most worried about this particular issue. Even in the country where the smallest section of the population is concerned with the issue of the rising cost of living, Denmark, more than a quarter of the population still selected this as one of the most important issues. Approximately one in four citizens across the EU is also concerned about one of the following topics: the environment/climate change, crime and safety, and corruption. Table 4 illustrates the shares of each of the highest-scoring topics of concern per member state.

Table 4 The most-mentioned topics of concern on an aggregated level, by country

	Cost of living	Hunger and poverty	Crime and safety	Environment/ climate change	Corruption	Income and economy	Health and elderly care
Austria	45%	20%	26%	37%	22%	20%	26%
Belgium	43%	17%	29%	34%	17%	28%	21%
Bulgaria	30%	38%	30%	17%	37%	32%	23%
Croatia	49%	36%	21%	25%	46%	19%	26%
Cyprus	49%	37%	30%	18%	32%	35%	7%
Czechia	46%	20%	21%	17%	23%	31%	14%
Denmark	28%	22%	21%	38%	15%	23%	34%
Estonia	42%	19%	20%	17%	21%	35%	24%
Finland	48%	18%	36%	26%	12%	26%	39%
France	54%	23%	28%	38%	10%	26%	17%
Germany	44%	19%	28%	40%	12%	19%	22%
Greece	45%	36%	29%	21%	21%	31%	8%
Hungary	44%	23%	20%	21%	35%	26%	38%
Ireland	59%	25%	31%	24%	23%	25%	29%
Italy	45%	24%	26%	36%	20%	22%	11%
Latvia	32%	25%	25%	12%	33%	25%	12%
Lithuania	31%	24%	27%	17%	35%	23%	21%
Luxembourg	40%	25%	36%	34%	20%	18%	16%
Malta	53%	22%	32%	34%	58%	15%	10%
Netherlands	45%	22%	29%	29%	9%	20%	37%
Poland	55%	29%	13%	22%	23%	23%	18%
Portugal	45%	48%	24%	26%	31%	22%	22%
Romania	47%	34%	18%	24%	47%	32%	17%
Slovakia	32%	40%	29%	16%	26%	19%	24%
Slovenia	44%	27%	21%	20%	27%	20%	26%
Spain	47%	28%	18%	29%	25%	25%	27%
Sweden	32%	16%	46%	29%	11%	25%	32%
EU average	**43%**	**26%**	**26%**	**26%**	**25%**	**24%**	**23%**

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Which four of the following topics make you feel most worried?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. The topics of concern have been ranked by EU average (from left to right: highest to lowest percentage). Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Future of Europe Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges

It becomes evident that concerns are by no means universal in the EU, but rather are country/region-specific and certainly class-specific as well. The cost of living, for instance, is of even greater concern in Croatia, Finland, France, Ireland, Malta and Poland. Poverty is generally more mentioned in countries with higher levels of inequality,[18] such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Portugal and Romania. Slovakia is an exception, as inequality there is generally low, but concerns about poverty are widespread. This is possibly due to the country's lower income per capita. Lastly, the situation regarding corruption is also very country-specific, as some countries have much more pervasive levels of corruption[19] than others. This finding indicates that solutions are sometimes better implemented on a country level that also takes class effects into account.

Economic concerns manifest themselves in daily life

Economic concerns take an even more tangible form when looking at how citizens actually cope. Very few Europeans reported living (very) comfortably. The majority (55%) responded that they are just getting by or are finding it difficult to get by. This is especially evident among the lower (middle) classes (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 How citizens were managing financially at the time of the survey (self-reported)
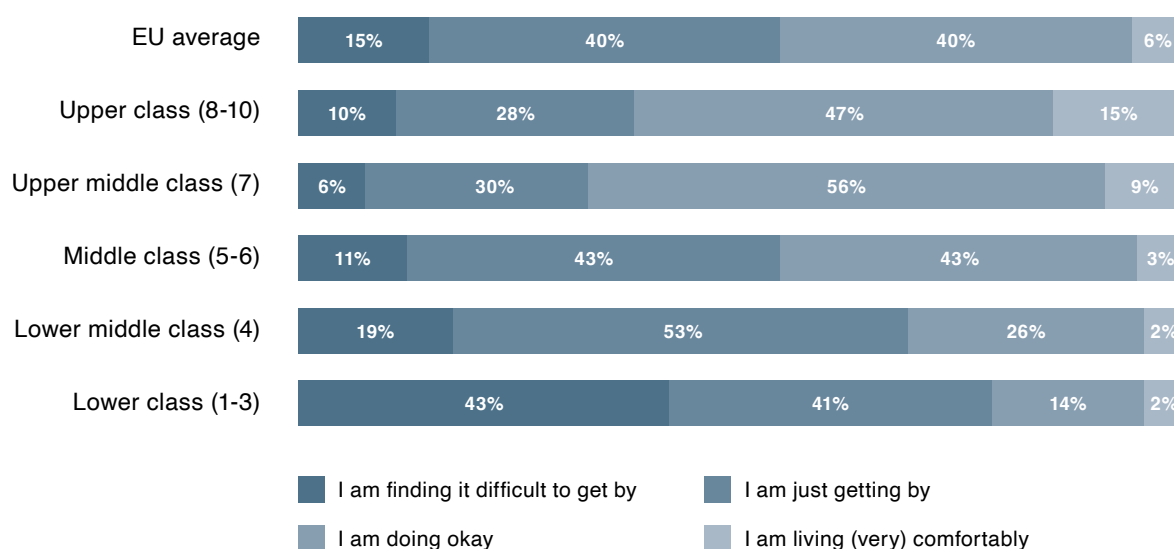
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Overall, which of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days?'

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18   As measured by the Gini index; see *Our World in Data*, 'Income Inequality: Gini Coefficient 2019', accessed at https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/economic-inequality-gini-index on 17 July 2023.

19   As measured by the Corruption Perceptions Index, see *Transparency International*, 'Corruption Perceptions Index', accessed at https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022 on 17 July 2023.

Notably, half of Europeans have experienced a (slight) decline in their standard of living in the last two years. Only a minority (18%) reported an improvement. Once again the negative development is much more common among the lower (middle) classes (Figure 5).

Figure 5 Standard of living progression in the last two years (self-reported)

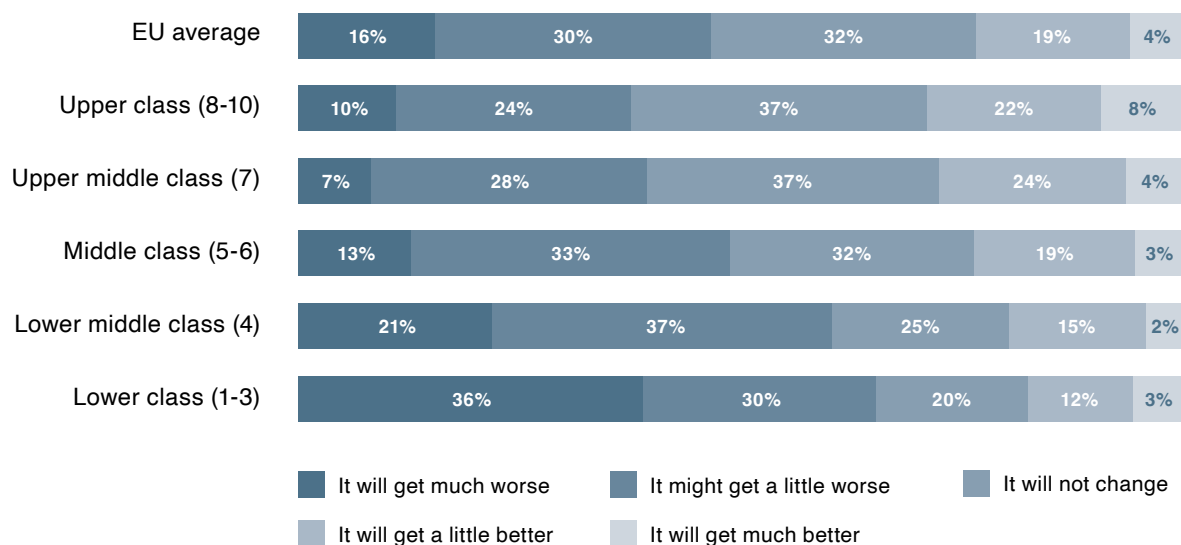| Category	It has got much worse	It has got a little worse	It has not changed	It has got a little better	It has got much better
EU average	18%	32%	31%	15%	3%
Upper class (8-10)	10%	24%	36%	23%	7%
Upper middle class (7)	8%	28%	39%	21%	4%
Middle class (5-6)	15%	36%	33%	14%	2%
Lower middle class (4)	26%	39%	23%	11%	1%
Lower class (1-3)	45%	31%	18%	5%	1%

■ It has got much worse   ■ It has got a little worse   ■ It has not changed

■ It has got a little better   ■ It has got much better
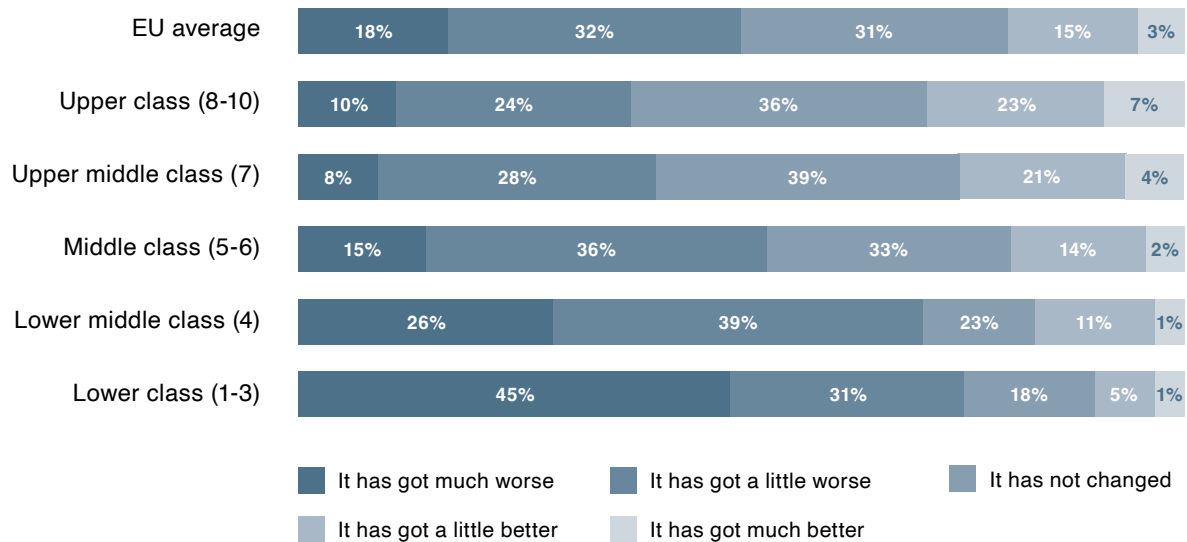
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'How has your standard of living progressed in the last two years?'

Gas and electricity price increases are likely partly behind the falls in the standard of living. This is especially the case among the lower (middle) classes. They are much more likely than average to have experienced a drop in their standard of living in the past two years. Overall, more than a third of EU citizens say that these increases have had a moderate impact on their household budget. One-third even says that energy prices have had a big impact on their household budget. The situation is not only difficult for many people at the moment, but a sizeable part of the population (46%) expects it to get worse still.

Figure 6 Expectations of citizens regarding standard of living in the next two years

	It will get much worse	It might get a little worse	It will not change	It will get a little better	It will get much better
EU average	16%	30%	32%	19%	4%
Upper class (8-10)	10%	24%	37%	22%	8%
Upper middle class (7)	7%	28%	37%	24%	4%
Middle class (5-6)	13%	33%	32%	19%	3%
Lower middle class (4)	21%	37%	25%	15%	2%
Lower class (1-3)	36%	30%	20%	12%	3%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'What do you think will happen to your standard of living in the next two years?'

Subsequently, we asked people to reflect on their own standard of living versus the standard of living of their parents when they were the same age. Only about a third believe that their parents' standard of living was worse than the standard of living they themselves have. However, in countries that were formerly under Communist rule, people tend to believe that their own standard of living has definitely improved compared to their parents' standard of living. This is a positive indication of citizens' recognition of the beneficial effects of EU accession. The process is ongoing, as Eastern Europeans are also much more likely to believe that their children's standard of living will be even better. People in longstanding EU member states, mostly in Western Europe, believe that their children's standard of living will be worse than theirs. This view has already received attention in academic literature,[20] and is part of a wider narrative about countries' economic convergence as a long-term goal.

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[20] *UCL*, 'Younger People Could Be Worse Off Than Their Parents' Generation for Their Whole Lives', 21 November 2018, accessed at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2018/nov/younger-people-could-be-worse-their-parents-generation-their-whole-lives on 10 July 2023.

Perceived threats to future economic progress

The results so far already make it clear that European citizens' concerns often revolve around economics and the impact on citizens' experience. When thinking about possible barriers to future economic progress, war and inflation dominate people's minds. However, once again the picture is not uniform, though the differences between the classes are somewhat less obvious. The lower (middle) classes see inflation and corruption as a bigger threat, whereas the upper (middle) classes more often mention energy dependency, the ageing population and worker shortages as threats.

Table 5 Perceived biggest threats to economic progress in Europe in the coming years, by class

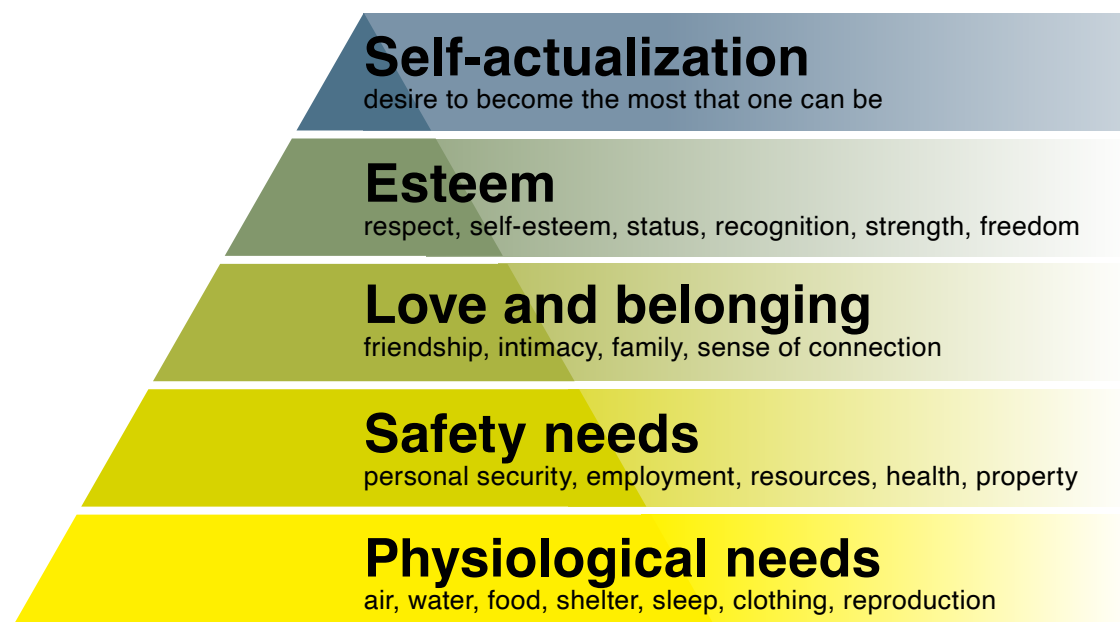|	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
War	29%	33%	33%	32%	28%	31%
Inflation	30%	31%	31%	26%	23%	28%
Corruption	19%	19%	17%	16%	17%	17%
EU depending on other countries for its energy supply	13%	13%	13%	17%	13%	13%
The ageing population	10%	13%	14%	16%	15%	13%
Immigration	14%	12%	12%	14%	13%	13%
Higher taxes	13%	11%	12%	11%	13%	12%
Increased housing costs	11%	9%	8%	8%	8%	9%
Trade wars	6%	7%	8%	9%	9%	8%
Increased unemployment	8%	9%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Decline in quality and cost of public services (e.g. education and health)	7%	7%	8%	7%	8%	7%
Shortage of affordable housing	8%	7%	6%	7%	7%	7%
Shortage of workers	4%	5%	5%	8%	9%	6%
Employment insecurity	5%	5%	5%	6%	7%	6%
The influence of multinational companies	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%	5%
Technological developments	2%	2%	2%	2%	5%	3%
Other	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
I do not know	6%	6%	6%	4%	5%	7%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'What do you see as the two biggest threats to economic progress in Europe in the coming years?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

The situation is also not uniform when we look at the various regions of the EU. Though war and inflation are often mentioned in all countries, other issues receive almost equal attention in some countries. These are corruption in Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Malta and Romania; the ageing population in Lithuania; immigration in Belgium, France and the Netherlands; higher taxes in Italy; the shortage of affordable housing in Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands; and unemployment in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden. As the above analyses make clear, the lower classes have been hit the hardest in the past two years.

The overarching message is that, the lower the class, the lower one is positioned on the Pyramid of Maslow. This implies that these citizens are more preoccupied with survival and serving their basic needs, than self-actualisation.

Figure 7 A common visualisation of the Pyramid of Maslow

Source: Simply Psychology, accessed at https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html on 25 July 2023.

The future looks bleaker among the lower and lower-middle classes

The lower classes tend to look at the past with more nostalgia, more often believing that their parents' standard of living was better when they were their age. But how about the future?

Table 6 Share of citizens who expect that things will get worse in their country in each of the areas below

	Lower class (1–3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5–6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8–10)	EU average
People's standard of living in general	71%	63%	54%	46%	39%	53%
Climate change	58%	57%	55%	50%	45%	53%
Political tensions	63%	59%	53%	50%	43%	52%
Public mental health	64%	57%	51%	47%	41%	51%
Providing more affordable housing	65%	58%	52%	43%	41%	51%
Social security and pensions	65%	56%	50%	45%	40%	50%
Trust in the government	62%	56%	50%	42%	40%	49%
Income inequality	61%	56%	48%	40%	38%	47%
General economic security	62%	54%	47%	41%	38%	47%
Trust in the state	61%	55%	47%	41%	37%	47%
Social welfare	61%	48%	43%	37%	34%	43%
Societal norms, values and morals	54%	48%	43%	39%	35%	43%
Public physical health	55%	47%	41%	37%	35%	42%
Tensions between ethnic or religious groups	48%	43%	39%	39%	35%	40%
Trust in each other	50%	43%	36%	33%	31%	37%
People who drop out of the community of [country]	48%	39%	35%	34%	32%	36%
Quality of education	46%	39%	33%	31%	31%	35%
Biodiversity	42%	33%	32%	31%	32%	33%
Creating jobs	44%	37%	31%	25%	26%	31%
My own standard of living	55%	40%	29%	20%	22%	31%
Chance that [country] gets involved in war	36%	28%	25%	23%	25%	26%
The knowledge economy	35%	27%	25%	20%	23%	25%
Equality between men and women	23%	14%	14%	12%	16%	15%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'How do you think that your country will evolve in the near future regarding the topics below?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Future of Europe Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges

There are strong negative expectations among the lower class and the lower middle class and these are dominated by people's standard of living. Worsening political tensions are often mentioned by the middle classes. People in the upper middle class are generally less worried. An exception is climate change, which is expected to get worse by the upper class and upper middle class.

A resilient world, despite adversities

Figure 8 looks at various issues from the perspective of whether people expect them to worsen (percentage difference between those responding that 'things will get worse' and those responding that 'things will improve'). This is juxtaposed with the degree to which the negative developments can be reversed (percentage difference between those responding 'Yes, the negative developments can be reversed' and those responding 'No, the negative developments cannot be reversed'). The graph is divided into four broad areas based on the sum of the above differences.

It shows that in terms of people's standard of living in general, for example:

- 53% expect that things will get worse and 12% think that things will improve. The difference is -41% (12% minus 53%), thus opinion strongly leans towards 'things will get worse'. This is why it is positioned on the left side of the vertical axis (-41%)

- At the same time, 55% of the citizens who expect things to get worse in this area believe that the negative development can be reversed. Only 32% expect that we cannot reverse the negative development. The difference is thus 23% (55% minus 32%). This is why the item is positioned relatively high on the vertical axis.

Figure 8 A juxtaposition of citizens' expectations regarding the development of various issues with their perception of the ability to reverse negative developments
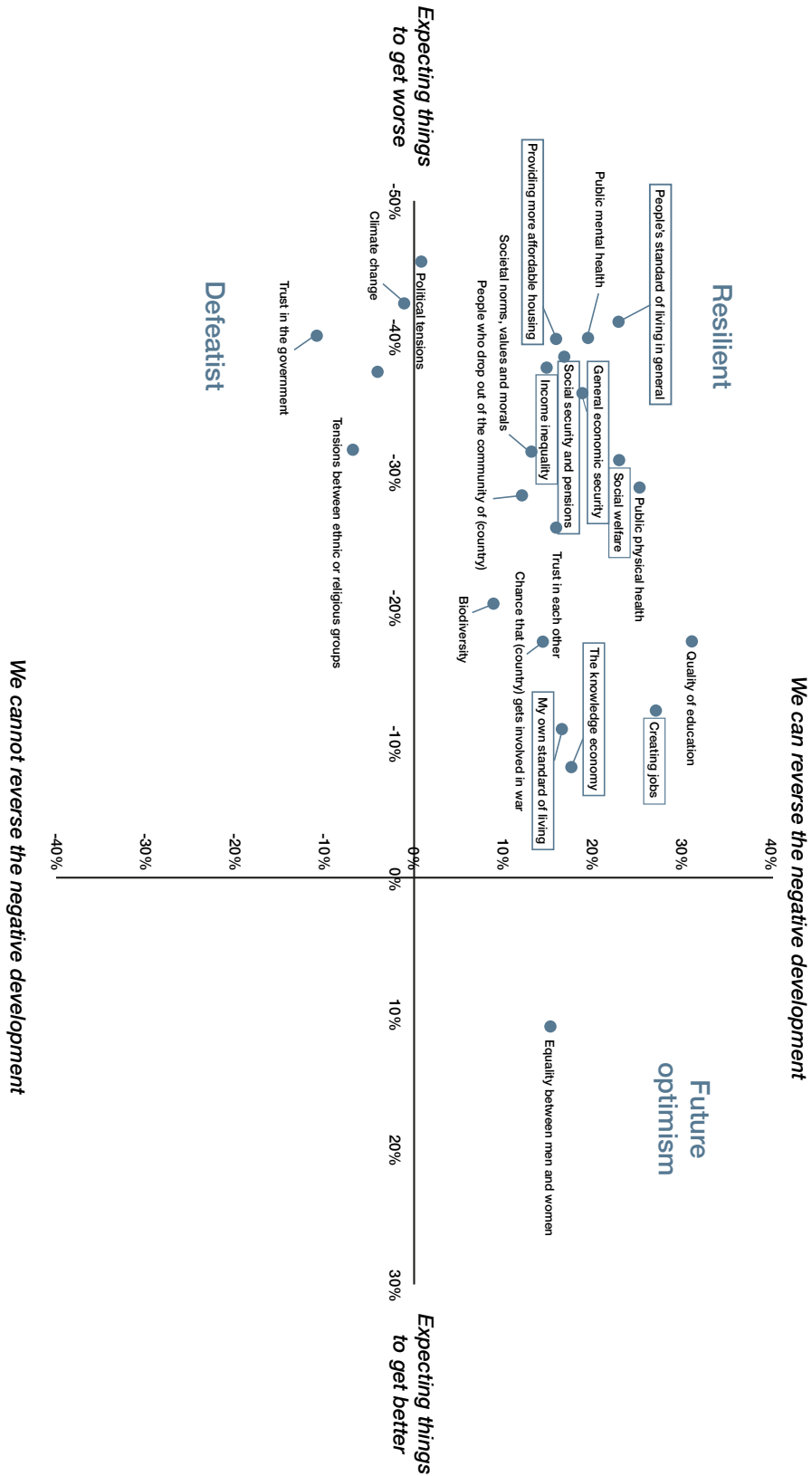
Note: The questions posed were,

- (Horizontal axis) 'How do you think that your country will evolve in the near future regarding the topics below?' Possible answers were 'Things will get worse', 'Things will not change', 'Things will improve', 'I do not know'.

- (Vertical axis) 'Do you think the negative developments on this issue can be reversed?' This question was shown for each topic that citizens had indicated that they expected to get worse in the previous question. Possible answers were 'Yes, the negative developments can be reversed', 'No, the negative developments cannot be reversed', 'I do not know'.

The main learning from the above analysis is that many EU citizens have a generally pessimistic view regarding the future state of our world. However, many citizens also believe that we can reverse the negative developments. There are very few issues that will be very hard to address according to EU citizens. Such issues include climate change, tensions between ethnic or religious groups, trust in the government and trust in the state. It should also be noted that there are significant differences between the classes. The lower (middle) classes tend to be much more negative about the future and are also less likely to believe that we can reverse the negative developments.

Many aspects of the wider economic challenges are expected to worsen, but those who expect things to get worse also widely believe that we can reverse the negative developments. For this reason, topic-specific policies need to be designed, addressed and implemented. This is a challenge for political parties, but there are opportunities to resonate with citizens and (re)gain their trust, as we show later in this report.

Security concerns and the war in Ukraine

Together with financial concerns, war represents a major external threat to Europe's future prosperity, according to citizens. This might not be so much due to people fearing for their own safety, but more about the wider destabilisation and uncertainty that war brings. When thinking about war as a threat, the war in Ukraine is almost certainly the one in people's minds.

Reflecting on the impact of the war in Ukraine and the response to the war

In the section above titled 'Perceived threats to future economic progress', we have already seen that war is viewed as the top economic threat, both overall and among the middle classes in particular. Thinking about the wider impacts of war, the main concerns of EU citizens are economic ones: the economic consequences for their country and themselves personally. This is also where we notice the greatest differences between social classes. However, safeguarding security is also paramount, even if this might mean causing tensions with traditional allies such as the US. Many citizens, irrespective of class, believe that the EU should support Ukraine with all the weapons it needs and that it should do more to protect Ukraine and the Ukrainians.

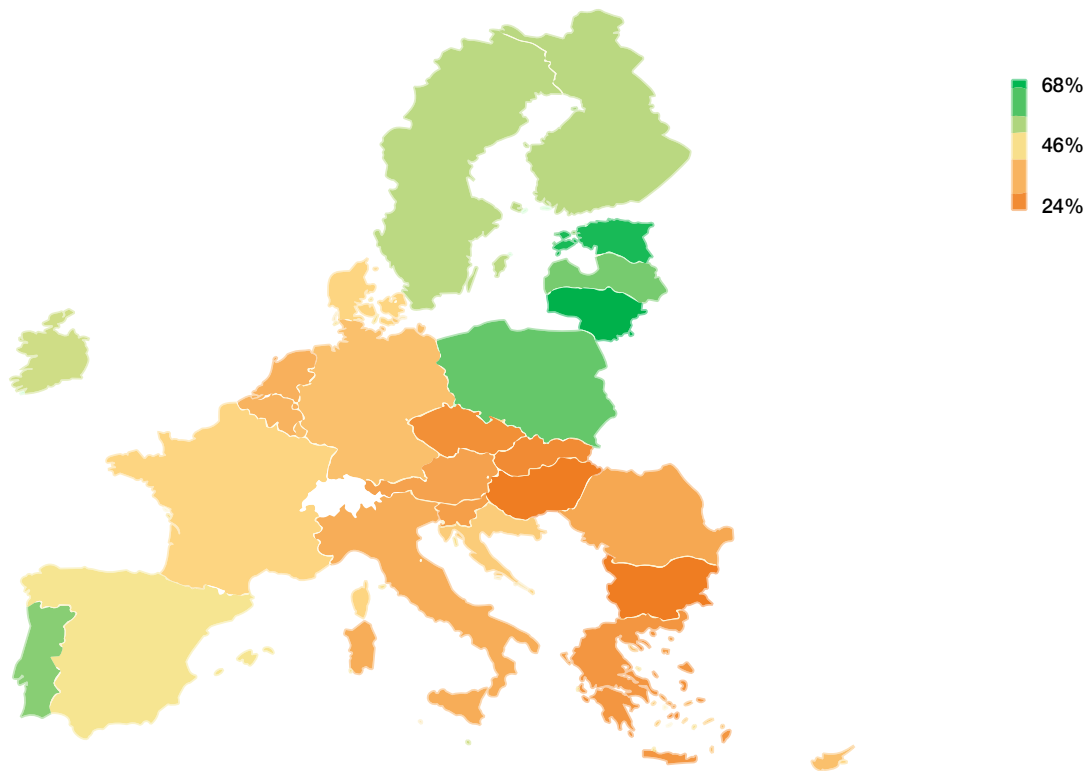**Figure 9 Citizens' views on statements in relation to the war in Ukraine**
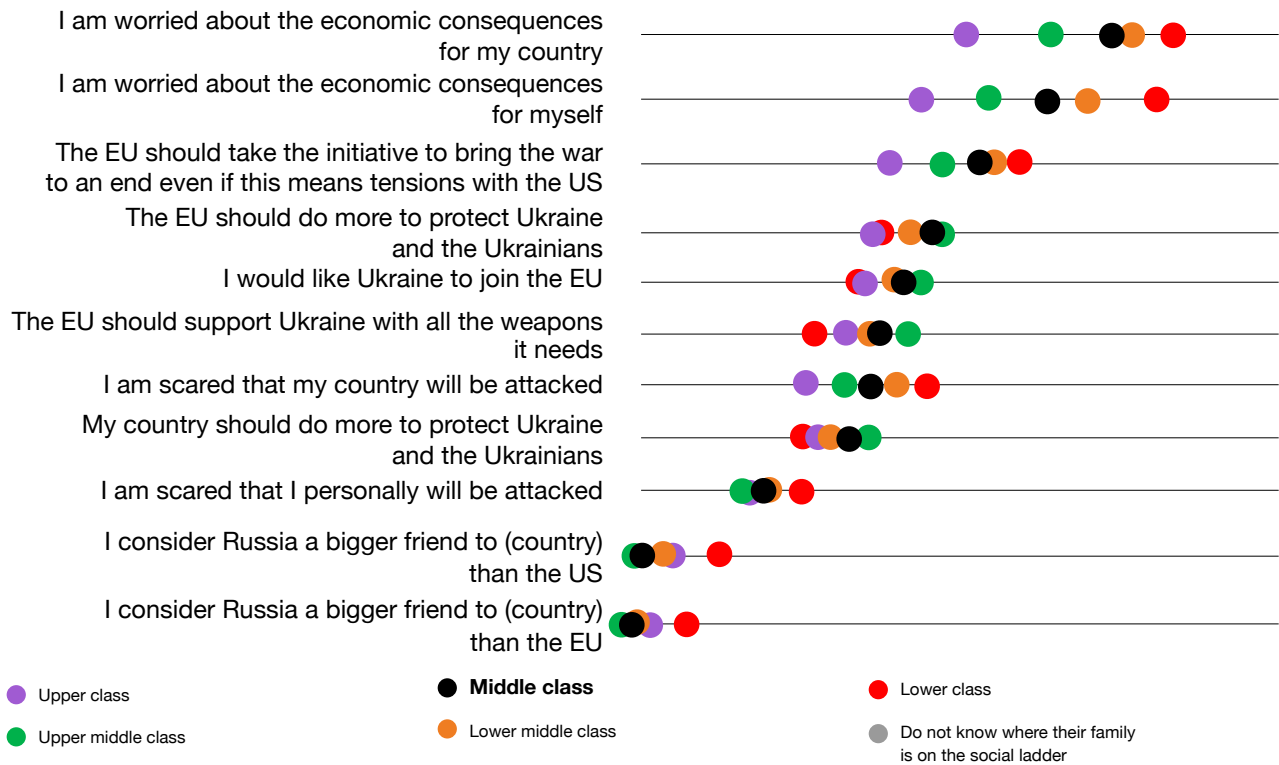
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine?' The position of each circle indicates the sum of the percentages of 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

Aside from the differences between the social classes, we have also detected considerable geographic variations as well. The maps in Figures 10 to 12 are revealing.
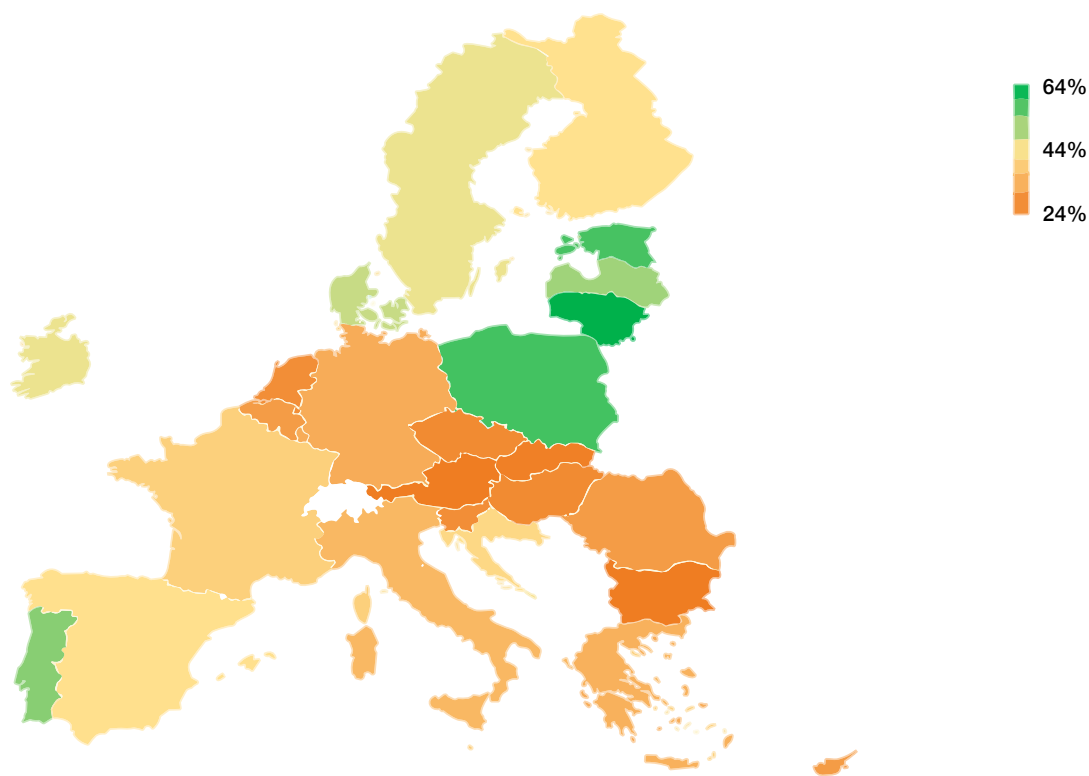
Figure 10 Percentage of positive responses by country on the matter of the EU doing more to protect Ukraine and the Ukrainians

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine?' The statement was, 'The EU should do more to protect Ukraine and the Ukrainians'. The map illustrates the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' by country.

Figure 11 Percentage of positive responses by country on the matter of Ukraine joining the EU

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine?' The statement was, 'I would like Ukraine to join the EU'. The map illustrates the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' by country.

Figure 12 Percentage of positive responses by country on the matter of the EU supporting Ukraine with all weapons necessary
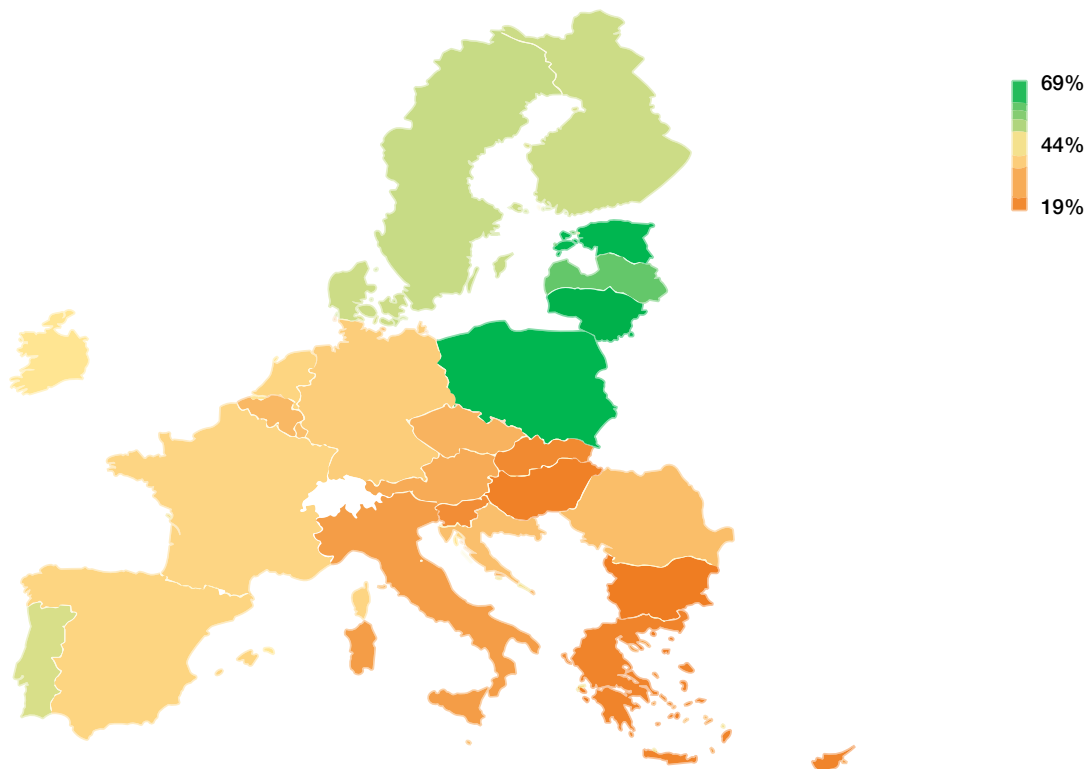

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine?' The statement was, 'The EU should support Ukraine with all the weapons it needs'. The map illustrates the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' by country.

The maps once again illustrate that geography matters when addressing geopolitical challenges, as historic aspects and the values orientation of the classes differ between Western and (South-) Eastern Europe. For instance, the Baltic states and Poland have a very pro-Ukraine stance, likely because of their experiences during the time of the USSR. Countries such as Bulgaria and Hungary, on the other hand, are much less sympathetic to the plight of the Ukrainians. This is possibly due to their energy dependency on Russia, but other factors might also be at play.[21]

21 A case study with possible explanations in the Bulgarian context: I. Bedrov and D. Dimitrova, 'For Putin, Against "Global Liberalism": Why So Many Bulgarian Parties Support Russia', *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, 2 October 2022, accessed at https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-elections-pro-russian-parties/32061638.html on 12 July 2023.

Trust, the democratic process and opportunities for the centre–right

Trust levels vary widely

People are not only concerned about a multitude of issues, but also show varying degrees of trust when it comes to specific actors and institutions. This is especially significant when thinking about solutions and the involvement of various actors. Overall, citizens have great trust in the EU, with half of respondents reporting that they trust it. This is much higher than trust in the state and parliaments, which only about a third of respondents trust on average.

Above we showed that people had negative views regarding trust in the state, with the majority expecting this situation to worsen and also believing that it will be hard to reverse. This indicates that it is very important to safeguard and maintain the high level of trust in the EU in these challenging times. There may be opportunities for the EU to work together with national governments to restore trust. Table 8 illustrates trust in the EU, shown by social class.

Table 7 Trust in institutions by social class

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Science	70%	79%	78%	82%	77%	77%
Education	54%	63%	66%	73%	72%	65%
Ordinary people	54%	62%	63%	69%	69%	63%
Military	45%	53%	55%	61%	61%	55%
The WHO	42%	51%	53%	61%	59%	53%
The EU	37%	46%	50%	58%	59%	50%
NATO	36%	44%	46%	56%	56%	47%
The UN	36%	43%	47%	57%	54%	47%
The democratic process	33%	45%	47%	55%	55%	46%
Business	32%	38%	44%	53%	55%	44%
National companies	32%	37%	42%	51%	53%	42%
Legal system	29%	36%	39%	50%	52%	40%
Labour unions	34%	37%	37%	45%	46%	39%
Banks	27%	33%	37%	45%	48%	37%
NGOs	30%	36%	36%	44%	45%	37%
Civil servants	28%	31%	36%	43%	49%	37%
National government	21%	28%	31%	42%	45%	33%
Churches	27%	26%	32%	34%	41%	32%
The US	22%	27%	30%	38%	42%	31%
National parliament	19%	25%	30%	40%	45%	31%

Multinational companies	20%	24%	29%	36%	42%	30%
Media	21%	24%	26%	34%	39%	28%
China	11%	11%	10%	12%	20%	12%
Russia	10%	9%	9%	9%	18%	10%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The survey asked respondents to, 'Please indicate your general trust in the following:'. Possible answers were 'Yes, I trust it', 'No, I do not trust it' and 'I do not know'. The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

The table clearly shows that there is a crisis of trust among the lower and lower middle classes, and especially so when compared to the upper middle class. This is an important insight for centre–right parties, which aim to achieve stability in society. This gap in trust levels is generally similar in each country, but the issue of trust should also be viewed in the local context too, as trust in general varies considerably between EU member states. Figures 13 and 14 illustrate the differences in trust in the EU and in national governments respectively.
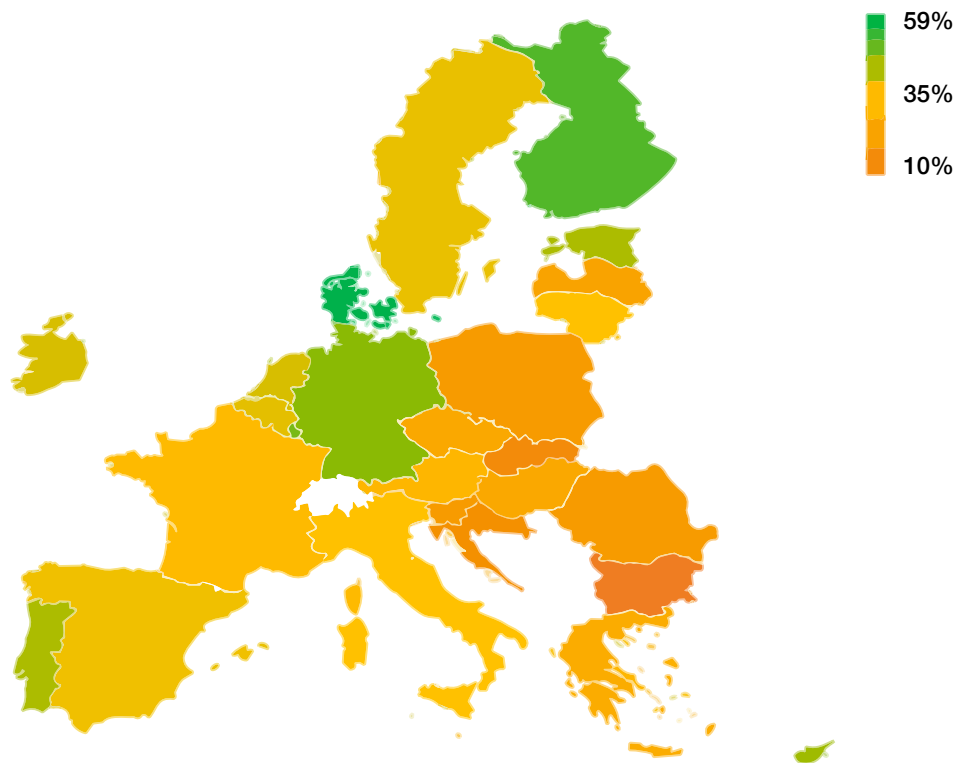
Figure 13 Trust in the EU, by country
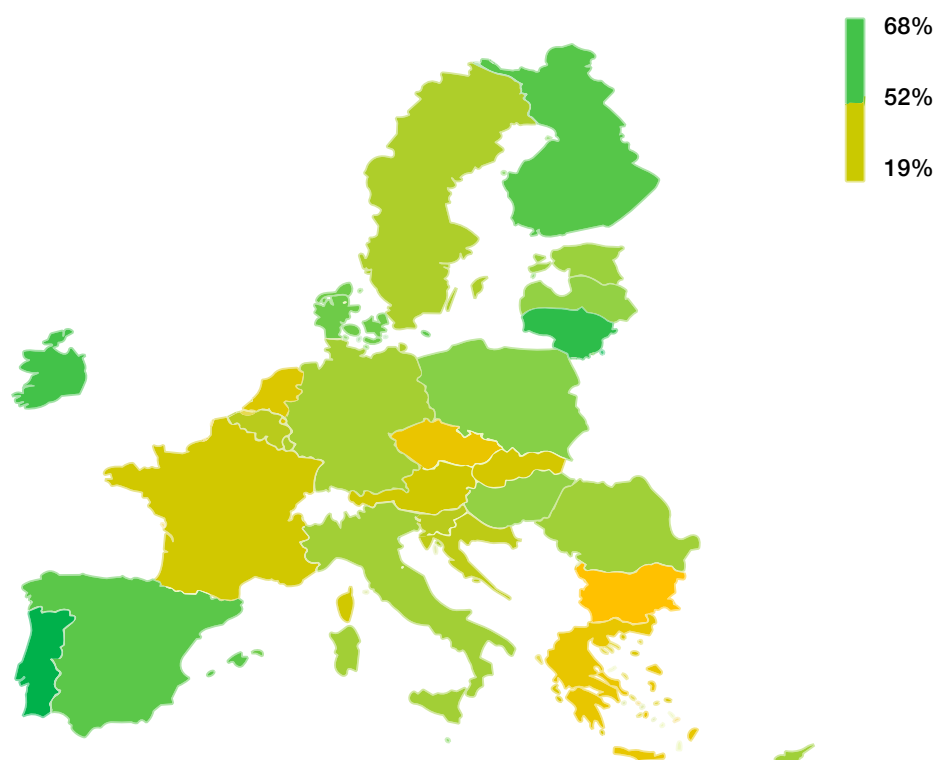
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The survey asked respondents to 'Please indicate your general trust in the following:'. Possible answers were 'Yes, I trust it', 'No, I do not trust it' and 'I do not know'.

Figure 14 Trust in the national government, by country

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The survey asked respondents to 'Please indicate your general trust in the following:'. Possible answers were 'Yes, I trust it', 'No, I do not trust it' and 'I do not know'.

There is no easy single solution to restoring trust among the (lower) middle classes as its lack is closely related to people feeling let down by society and politics, but being aware of these class-related and geographic differences is the first step towards mobilising actors to address the various issues and topics at hand. Therefore, in the next section we look at which actors could be mobilised for the purpose of (re)connecting with citizens.

Who is trusted to solve problems in society?

The above analysis shows that people generally have a clear opinion of the things that are not going well in Europe right now. Research insights further reveal that people have identified their preferred solutions and that they expect a synergy among civil society, the EU and also their national governments in order to tackle the issues. Despite relatively low levels of trust, governments are still expected to take the initiative, but the engagement of non-political actors is also essential. However, once again there are important differences between countries. Table 9 illustrates the entities trusted by citizens, those which citizens likely expect to take the initiative.

Table 8 Entities trusted to solve problems in society

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Civil society	27%	33%	32%	32%	31%	31%
The EU	21%	24%	27%	28%	31%	26%
My national government	19%	24%	25%	30%	28%	25%
Entrepreneurs	15%	18%	18%	22%	20%	18%
Public administration	12%	13%	15%	18%	20%	15%
Political parties	12%	12%	12%	15%	17%	13%
National companies	9%	11%	12%	14%	16%	12%
Financial actors	8%	9%	11%	13%	14%	11%
Multinational companies	5%	6%	8%	10%	12%	8%
None of these	24%	15%	14%	11%	10%	15%
I do not know	16%	15%	15%	12%	9%	15%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Who would you trust to solve problems in society?' The entities are ranked from the most to the least mentioned on the EU level. The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Citizens would likely welcome civil society, the EU and their governments working together in more creative ways to tackle issues. Solutions could go beyond simply collecting more taxes to finance solutions. From the previous figures it is evident that people trust civil society the most, but it is also notable that entrepreneurs are generally more trusted than political parties to help solve problems in society.

Political parties, and the centre–right in particular, also have a role to play in this. At this point, it is worth examining the degree of alignment among the middle classes with the key policy propositions of the centre–right. This is the first step towards involving the centre–right and centre–right thinkers in the next phase: helping to address the problems facing the middle classes.

Views on centre–right values regarding society and economy

In this study, we operationalised key positions of the centre–right by translating them into concrete statements. Subsequently, we asked citizens to what extent they agree with them.

Table 9 Citizens' agreement with the key positions of the centre–right, by social class

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Illegal migration from outside the EU must be limited and external EU borders must be protected	64%	67%	65%	64%	59%	63%
Respect for the rule of law and the separation of powers is essential for a well-functioning society	58%	61%	63%	66%	61%	61%
I believe a social market economy based on freedom, responsibility and fairness is best for our society	55%	57%	57%	62%	57%	56%
The EU and the US should be close allies and act together on the international scene to counter authoritarian powers such as China and Russia	42%	48%	49%	55%	52%	49%
I support European integration and believe in a strong EU	35%	41%	45%	52%	51%	44%
The EU should be more open to legal migration	29%	33%	33%	37%	42%	34%
Christianity and Christian values are the basis of my thinking	29%	30%	31%	32%	41%	32%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your outlook on life?' The percentages indicate the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

There are two key conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis. First, EU citizens in general are aligned with only parts of the centre–right ideology. EU citizens are not particularly open to immigration into the EU, as they often strongly agree that illegal migration from outside the EU must be limited. Citizens are also less open to legal migration as well. At the same time, there is a lot of support for the statements 'Respect for the rule of law and the separation of powers is essential' and 'The EU and the US should be close allies on the international stage'. Furthermore there is rather strong support for a social market economy based on freedom, responsibility and fairness.

However, in the context of increasing secularisation in Europe,[22] citizens tend to agree much less with the statement that Christianity and Christian values are the basis of their thinking.

Second, the best fit with centre–right values is observed among the upper middle class, closely followed by the middle class, with the lower middle class lagging behind. However, as Table 10 illustrates, the middle and lower middle classes have distinct life orientations that do not fully align with the values orientation of the upper middle class. Traditionalists (and Socialisers) form comparatively larger shares of the lower middle class, while the proportion of Creatives and Achievers is larger among the upper middle class.

Table 10 Glocalities values segment sizes on the EU level, by social class

Glocalities values segment[23]	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Challengers	20%	17%	17%	19%	30%	20%
Traditionalists	25%	26%	24%	18%	15%	22%
Socialisers	26%	24%	20%	18%	12%	20%
Creatives	22%	24%	27%	30%	27%	26%
Achievers	7%	9%	12%	14%	16%	12%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The values segments were calculated based on citizens' answers to 50 Glocalities statements that measure various aspects of life. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

This values composition partly explains why some of the centre–right-related statements mentioned above are widely supported and some are more specifically backed by the upper middle class. For instance, Creatives and Achievers tend to agree that respect for the rule of law and the separation of powers is essential for a well-functioning society, and also support the promotion of a social market economy based on freedom, responsibility and fairness. These values segments are more present among the upper middle class, hence the better overall alignment.

However, there are also specific topics of the centre–right agenda that can cause tension between citizen segments and classes. Support for further European integration is, for instance, controversial among the lower (middle) classes, which are often dominated by Traditionalists and Socialisers. In order to find a middle ground and counter fragmentation, it is important for the centre–right to connect more deeply with the lower middle class. This class is under more (economic) stress than average.

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[22]   G. Davie, 'Religion, Secularity, and Secularization in Europe', in G. Davie and L. N. Leustean (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe* (Oxford Academic, 2021; online edn.), Pages 268–XX doi:10.1093/oxford-hb/9780198834267.013.14.

[23]   See the appendix for a detailed description of all five values segments.

Geography once again matters

The great appeal of centre–right values among the middle and upper middle classes is in itself an encouraging finding, but the picture is by no means universal. Different countries bring their own special conditions and historical and political backgrounds. The following maps demonstrate that there are clear cultural cleavages to consider when promoting the centre–right agenda.

Figure 15 Percentage of positive responses to the matter of the EU and the US being close allies
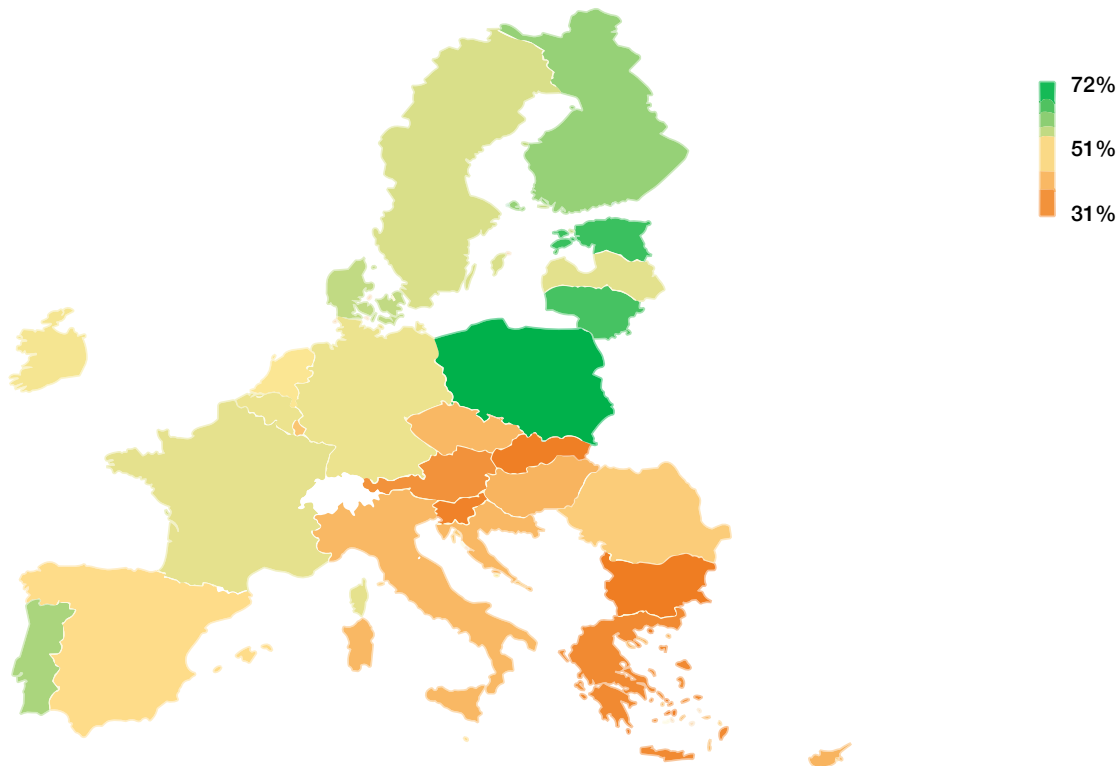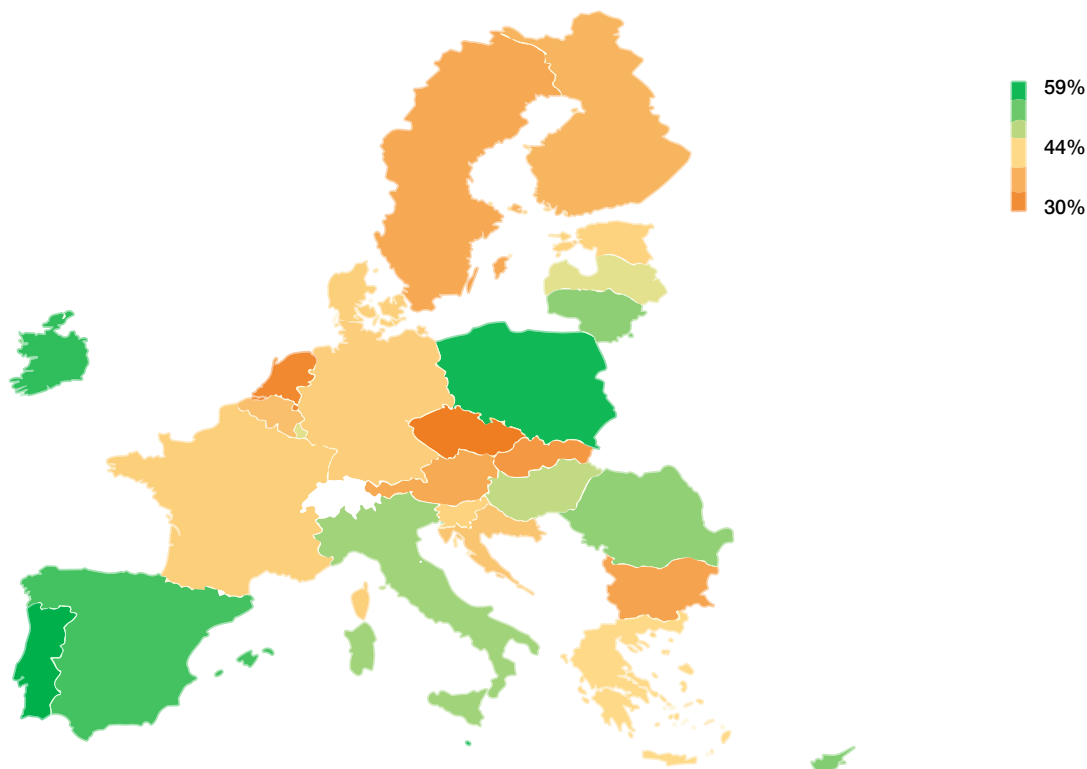

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about your outlook on life?' The statement was, 'The European Union and the United States of America should be close allies and act together on the international scene to counter authoritarian powers like China and India'. The map illustrates the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' by country.

Figure 16 Citizen support for European integration, by country

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about your outlook on life?' The statement was, 'I support European integration and believe in a strong European Union'. The map illustrates the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' by country.

The above maps show that there is a group of member states that is clearly pro-West and pro-US, and that these states are mostly on the periphery of the EU. Citizens in these countries are more often in search of closer integration and wish to form a single front on the world stage.

At the same time, the citizens of another group of countries have a more inward-looking stance. This group consists of long-standing EU members in Western Europe, but also several countries from Eastern Europe. Among the latter, Traditionalists form a large proportion of the population, and citizens there in general hold particularly deeply rooted traditional values. The political and cultural influence of Russia might also explain why people in some Eastern European countries partly oppose the European integration agenda.

Finding a middle ground is thus not a straightforward task, but informed decisions can be made if these are tailored to country-specific contexts. In the past the centre–right has been successful in finding the common ground in Europe on many topics. In the currently turbulent world, doing so is of profound importance. In the following section we attempt to place ourselves in the shoes of citizens and look for solutions that take citizens' needs and priorities into account.

Solutions

Thinking about Europe's future

Understanding the past is key to shaping a better future

By now it should be clear that Europeans are not just disappointed by and critical of the current state of affairs in Europe, but that they also have high expectations and specific visions of how to move forward to make Europe stronger and more resilient. We have added an extra layer to this by examining people's visions on a more abstract and ideological level. We have done so by proposing a wide range of concepts and asking people not only to judge Europe's past development, but also to indicate their preference as to the direction they wish to see Europe take.

According to the respondents, three of the five words that best fit the development of European society in the last few years are negative—namely insecurity, unfairness and egoism. However, cooperation and freedom are also present in the top five. The concepts that are among the least mentioned include courage, care, tradition, perseverance and inclusivity. Europe's development in the past few years has undoubtedly been a success on many fronts, such as in the economic development of relatively new member states and the free flow of ideas and (human) capital. However, for part of society it has been a less positive experience, possibly exacerbated by the negative developments of the past two years.

Figure 17 Word cloud showing popularity of words describing the development of European society over past 30 years according to citizens

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Which five words from the list below do you think best fit the development of European society in the past 30 years?'. A larger font size denotes a higher frequency of mention by respondents on the EU level.

Negative aspects are mentioned much more often by the lower (middle) classes. These include insecurity, unfairness, egoism, fear and oppression. The picture is very different among the upper (middle) classes, as this group tends to associate the last 30 years in Europe much more often with freedom, cooperation, diversity and safety.

Citizens envisage a safer, more just and more cooperative Europe

Europe has reached a milestone in its history, and public support is more crucial than ever. In this regard, it is important to know how citizens themselves would like to see the Union evolve. Freedom and cooperation remain paramount to realising Europe's full potential, but in turbulent times people value safety and stability above everything else. Equality, justice and respect are also values that people would like to see become more prominent in the future, especially in the context of widening economic inequalities. This is especially crucial for people in the lower social strata, who have faced the greatest difficulties and have become more alienated, as the following section will explain.

When it comes to the future, the different social classes have their own distinct ways of looking at the characteristics that they consider necessary to overcome challenges. However, in general, the differences are not very big. Table 11 shows the typical characteristics that each class considers important for addressing future challenges in Europe.

Table 11 Respondents' desired qualities for European society in the next 30 years in order to overcome threats and challenges

	Lower class (1–3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5–6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8–10)	EU average
Cooperation	26%	26%	26%	31%	23%	26%
Safety	25%	25%	27%	26%	22%	25%
Justice	23%	24%	22%	21%	19%	21%
Stability	19%	20%	19%	18%	18%	19%
Solidarity	15%	16%	19%	17%	16%	17%
Respect	16%	15%	15%	16%	16%	15%
Freedom	18%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Shared norms and values	13%	14%	14%	13%	13%	13%
Equality	15%	14%	13%	11%	13%	13%
Progress	13%	15%	13%	13%	13%	13%
Courage	10%	9%	11%	12%	14%	11%
Independence	10%	10%	10%	9%	12%	10%
Tolerance	9%	10%	9%	10%	12%	9%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'What do you think should be the three most important qualities of European society in the next 30 years in order to overcome threats and challenges?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. The options are ranked based on the percentage mentioned on the EU level. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

The lower (middle) classes place slightly more emphasis on hoping that there will be a greater focus on (restoring) justice, as they are in the most disadvantaged position to begin with. Ensuring safety and operating in a climate of cooperation are also important values to stress overall.

In the following sections we look more closely at how citizens envisage the European future from the perspective of economic solutions and geopolitics. We also propose ways in which the centre–right can become a major driving force in the years to come, by offering solutions that resonate with people's needs and expectations.

Economic solutions

The survey findings illustrate radically different visions of how to improve countries' economies among people from different classes. Those who are positioned lower on the social ladder place greater emphasis on financial aspects that directly impact income. As we move higher up the social ladder, priorities change to encompass more structural changes that aim to promote entrepreneurship and a more laissez-faire economic approach.

Table 12 Appeal of possible solutions to improving the economy in respondents' countries

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Higher wages	47%	44%	38%	31%	29%	37%
Lower taxes on income from work	33%	35%	34%	32%	29%	33%
Less bureaucracy for small and medium-sized companies	18%	19%	23%	23%	20%	21%
More investments in education	16%	18%	21%	24%	24%	21%
Lower taxes for vulnerable people	28%	22%	20%	17%	15%	20%
Increasing tax on multinational (big) companies	20%	21%	20%	21%	17%	20%
Higher social security payments and pensions	23%	17%	16%	14%	14%	16%
More secure employment contracts	14%	16%	15%	12%	15%	15%
Making it easier for people to start their own business	12%	14%	14%	15%	15%	14%
Supporting adults who want to retrain/upskill	13%	14%	13%	14%	15%	14%
More investments in infrastructure (e.g. digital, transport)	9%	13%	13%	17%	14%	13%
More affordable and accessible childcare	8%	9%	10%	11%	12%	10%
Higher taxes on non-earned income (stocks, property and other investments)	11%	10%	9%	10%	11%	10%
Allowing more foreign investments in [country]	6%	9%	10%	11%	11%	10%
Less state intervention in the economy	7%	8%	9%	10%	12%	9%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'What do you see as possible solutions to improving the economy in your country?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. The options are ranked based on the percentage mentioned on the EU level. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Table 13 Top-ranked solutions, by EU member state

	Higher wages	Lower taxes on income from work	Less bureaucracy for small and medium-sized companies	More investment in education	Lower taxes for vulnerable people	Increasing tax on multinational (big) companies
Austria	1	2	4	5	7	3
Belgium	3	1	10	5	7	2
Bulgaria	1	5	4	3	13	11
Croatia	1	2	3	6	13	9
Cyprus	1	3	9	7	2	15
Czechia	1	3	4	6	5	2
Denmark	8	2	4	5	3	1
Estonia	1	3	5	2	6	7
Finland	1	3	5	8	2	4
France	1	2	4	5	8	3
Germany	1	3	2	4	9	6
Greece	1	2	10	6	3	8
Hungary	1	2	15	4	5	6
Ireland	1	2	10	8	3	4
Italy	1	2	3	5	7	9
Latvia	3	1	2	4	5	7
Lithuania	1	2	5	4	6	10
Luxembourg	5	2	8	4	3	1
Malta	1	3	9	2	4	8
Netherlands	2	1	7	5	4	3
Poland	1	2	3	12	4	11
Portugal	1	2	6	5	3	8
Romania	1	2	5	4	8	7
Slovakia	1	2	3	7	6	5
Slovenia	1	2	3	12	8	10
Spain	1	8	4	7	3	5
Sweden	3	2	4	6	1	5
EU-level ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'What do you see as possible solutions to improving the economy in your country?' The top six solutions on the EU level are shown, with the numbers indicating their ranking. The top three solutions for each country are highlighted in green.

Future of Europe Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges

On a broader level, socio-economic transformations are needed according to citizens, in order to better utilise human capital and make European economies more resilient for the benefit of all. Low fertility in the ageing European population has been a challenge for years, but citizens do recognise that there are potential solutions.

**Table 14 Citizens' views on how to address ageing European societies**

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Encourage retraining of unemployed people	34%	37%	34%	34%	30%	33%
Promote flexible retirement and part-time work for pensioners	32%	34%	33%	36%	31%	32%
Create conditions for more women to be able to work	24%	27%	25%	23%	24%	24%
Use public money to boost fertility	21%	25%	24%	21%	21%	22%
Accept that the population will shrink and the country's economy will stop growing	18%	17%	16%	18%	19%	17%
Increase immigration to fill vacancies and skills gaps	8%	10%	10%	14%	15%	11%
Increase robotisation	7%	8%	9%	10%	9%	9%
Increase the state pension age by at least two years	4%	5%	6%	9%	11%	7%
I do not know	21%	14%	17%	14%	11%	18%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The survey asked respondents to select their preferred options in response to the following: 'European societies are rapidly ageing due to low fertility levels and increasing life expectancy. To address this problem, my government should:' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. The table shows the proposed solutions, ranked by average percentage on the EU level. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

When it comes to becoming personally involved, it is notable that only 30% of citizens are open to paying more taxes to fund better public services. More than half are not willing to do so.
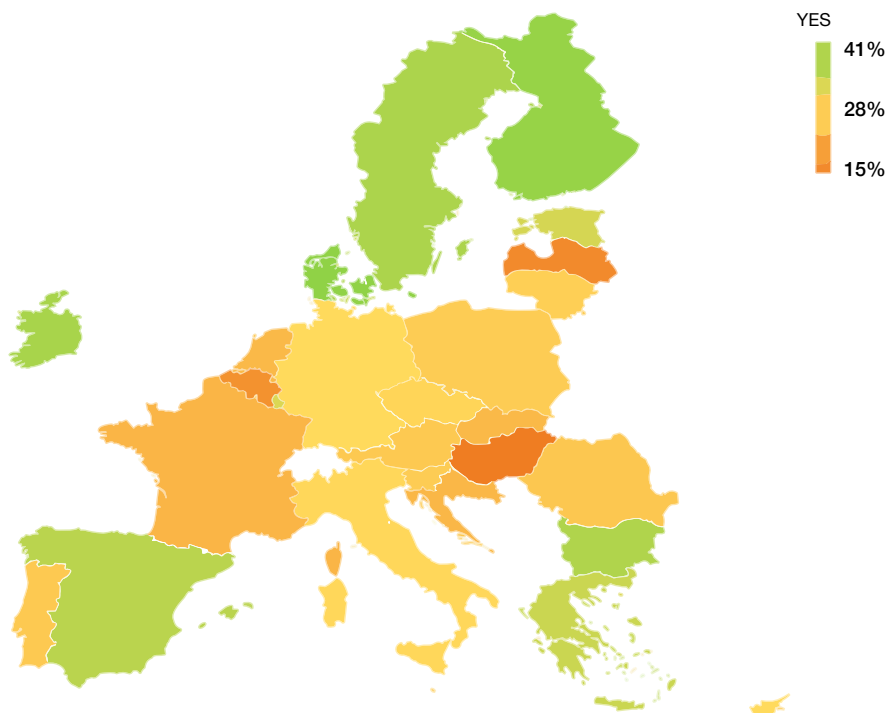
Figure 18 Willingness to pay higher taxes to fund better public services
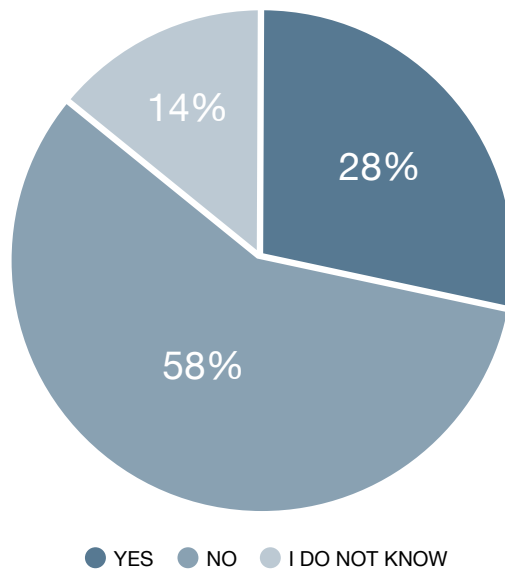
YES • NO • I DO NOT KNOW

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Would you agree with paying higher taxes to fund better public services (health, education etc.)?'

Figure 19 Willingness to pay higher taxes to fund better public services by country

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Would you agree with paying higher taxes to fund better public services (health, education etc.)?' The map illustrates the share of those who responded 'Yes'.

As noted before, finances are, after health, the most important priority for citizens. When presented with possible solutions for improving their economic situation, the most popular options are the provision of higher wages and imposing lower taxes on income from work. EU citizens believe less in increasing the state pension age or bringing in immigrant workers from other EU countries or from outside the EU as solutions.

Imposing lower taxes on income from work is by far the most popular solution for providing financial security, followed by better-paid jobs for people depending on their educational level and more affordable housing. Only 6% say that these solutions are not applicable, as they are already financially secure.

Table 15 Citizens' views on proposed solutions to help them feel more financially secure

	Lower class (1–3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5–6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8–10)	EU average
Lower taxes on my income from work	28%	36%	36%	39%	30%	34%
More affordable housing	38%	34%	30%	27%	25%	30%
Better paid jobs for people with my educational level	34%	31%	30%	26%	24%	29%
Less expensive (or free) social services (e.g. education and health)	24%	24%	22%	21%	21%	22%
Lower interest rates for loans	15%	14%	17%	19%	18%	17%
More secure employment contracts	11%	13%	11%	11%	13%	11%
Increased flexibility for part-time work	9%	9%	9%	10%	12%	9%
Making it easier and cheaper to start my own business	7%	8%	8%	9%	12%	8%
Financial support for lifelong learning and reskilling courses	7%	7%	7%	9%	11%	8%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'Which two of the proposed solutions below would help you feel more financially secure?' The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. The table shows the proposed solutions by social class, ranked by EU average. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Responding to the Ukraine crisis and futureproofing Europe

Economy and security are two aspects that repeatedly emerge as important from the above analyses. The fallout from the war in Ukraine has had a lasting impact on people's views on security and economic threats. An extension of the security issue is that of the future energy supply of the EU. In this regard, people favour renewable energy sources over fossil-fuel dependence, but are also looking for (more) trustworthy energy suppliers. This is an encouraging message for the EU's Green Deal.

However, another important finding is that a relatively large share of those interviewed do not know what EU member states should do. They seem to be in need of more guidance. While this is a potential threat, it is also an opportunity for the EU to step up and work together with civil society and national governments to shape and implement policies to safeguard the EU's future energy needs.

Table 16 Citizen support for possible solutions to the energy crisis

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Invest heavily in renewable energy deployment	32%	35%	34%	36%	30%	33%
Prioritise security of energy supply from trusted partners	15%	19%	19%	19%	18%	18%
Re-evaluate the EU decarbonisation agenda and Green Deal ambitions	9%	9%	9%	10%	11%	10%
Focus on improving gas imports from the Russian Federation	10%	8%	7%	6%	11%	8%
Tax oil/gas companies more heavily	7%	7%	7%	8%	10%	7%
Use more coal and explore options for shale gas extraction, if available	5%	6%	5%	6%	7%	5%
I do not know	22%	17%	19%	15%	12%	19%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The survey asked respondents to select their preferred options in response to the following: 'The war in Ukraine caused an energy crisis for European citizens and businesses in 2022. As a response, EU member states should...'. The table shows the proposed solutions by social class, ranked by EU average. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

On a broader level, citizens also have distinct ideas about how the Common Security and Defence Policy should unfold in order to make Europe more resilient in ways beyond energy. Overall, the upper (middle) classes appear somewhat more engaged in this topic, while the lower classes are less so.

Table 17 Citizens' views on the purpose of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Crisis management and/or peacekeeping within the EU's territory (e.g. tackling irregular migration flows)	21%	24%	23%	24%	20%	22%
Europe's territorial defence and the formation of an integrated EU army	15%	19%	18%	20%	19%	18%
Protecting Europe against hybrid and cyber-attacks	10%	11%	12%	12%	13%	11%
Crisis management and/or peacekeeping outside the EU's territory	11%	11%	11%	10%	12%	11%
Boosting the competitiveness of Europe's defence industry	8%	7%	8%	8%	11%	8%
Providing training and boosting the capacities of the EU's international partners (e.g. Ukraine)	5%	7%	6%	8%	10%	7%
I do not know	29%	21%	23%	17%	15%	23%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The survey asked respondents to select their preferred options in response to the following: 'The European Union has a common security and defence policy. In your opinion, the main purpose of this policy should be:'. The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that selected each option. The table shows the main purpose by social class, ranked by EU average. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

When proposing concrete solutions, ensuring protection of what has been labelled 'Fortress Europe' and maintaining territorial integrity are mentioned by a sizeable part of society. However, many citizens also do not know how the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy should work. This is especially the case among the lower classes. This is an opportunity to formulate and communicate clear and decisive solutions to (re)gain citizens' trust in a safe and secure Europe and the European project.

The agency of political parties

Addressing disenchantment with politics and widespread pessimism

Overall, 44% of citizens say that they are interested in politics. This share is 42% among the lower middle class, 43% among the middle class and 49% among the upper middle class. There are also geographic variations, as people in Germany and Austria appear more interested in politics, while those in the Netherlands, Belgium, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus are less so.

Figure 20 Interest in politics by country
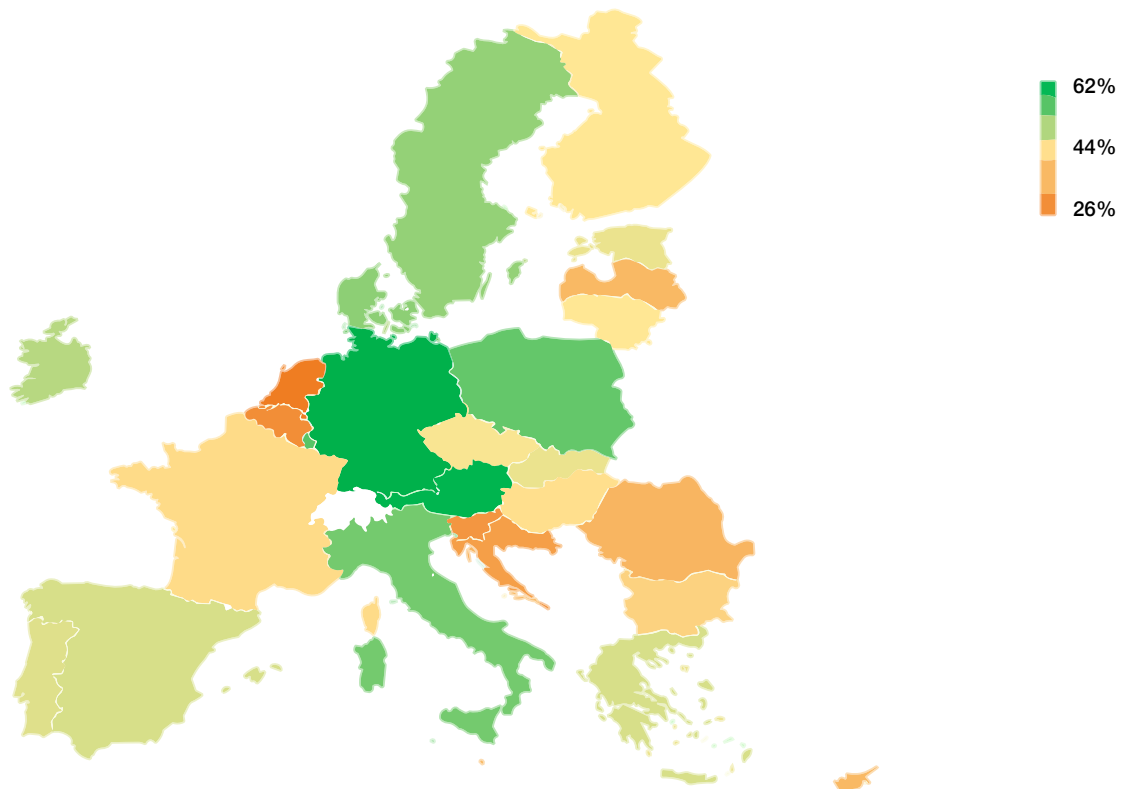
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about your outlook on life?' The statement was, 'I am interested in politics'. The map illustrates the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

The countries and classes in which people feel more disenchanted with politics are often the same as those where people more often say that they feel let down by society. A general feeling of disillusionment with society could understandably result in a lower interest in politics in general. The lower class feels especially abandoned, followed by the lower middle class. This particularly applies to citizens in Southern and South-Eastern Europe, especially Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Italy.

Figure 21 Dispersion of citizens feeling let down by society

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about your outlook on life?' The statement was, 'I feel let down by society'. The map illustrates the sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

Another notable finding of this socio-cultural analysis is that the vast majority of citizens demand smaller income differences. This is something that applies irrespective of class or location. In combination with feelings of disenfranchisement and concerns about the cost of living crisis, this creates the momentum for social change. Further analyses revealed that citizens as a whole are at least somewhat open to change. However, the speed of change does matter. In a world where technological changes and information flows have been intensifying, people in many Southern and Central European countries feel that things may be changing too fast. This also applies to people in the lower social strata, who are already struggling in many ways. Considering European diversity in terms of its values landscape and class structure is crucial for communicating and implementing new policies on the EU level. It is now time to look at potential agents of change in the form of entities that citizens trust to solve problems.

Solving problems in a cooperative manner

When it comes to who should help to address the problems in the economy, the lower classes generally appear to be more detached, as was observed above in Table 8. This is not surprising, given their greater distrust of institutions, pessimism and overall level of concerns. The lower

classes clearly do not feel represented or heard. At the same time, it was also observed that the middle classes have faith in civil society, as well as in the EU, to solve problems. The upper classes were found to have the clearest preferences overall, as they envisage the engagement of a mix of different actors to solve the economic challenges.

Reflecting on the above findings, the challenge for European policymakers is to find a middle ground and, most importantly, to place themselves in the citizens' shoes. This report has highlighted that there are major challenges to overcome. These are often economic in nature, but security concerns are also evident. However, Europe has proven than it can be resilient, and citizens take this view as well. The centre–right parties are well positioned to be influential in reinforcing the link between EU citizens and the European project by providing answers to their most pressing concerns and worries.

Appendix: research methodology

Approaches to defining the middle class

At the beginning of the report we explained why we selected the social-ladder approach to define classes in this study. In this section we explain the various alternative approaches that have been used in academia, and how these relate to the social-ladder approach.

Middle class in monetary terms

Economists often use class definitions that are based on financial indicators, notably *income*. This is partly for convenience, since data on income are widely available. It is also partly because income tends to be highly correlated with facets of a person's social class, such as education levels, economic security and lifestyle.

In this research we experimented with various definitions of social class. We considered defining social class in terms of net household income, but part of the sample (the exact percentage differed by country) would have had to be excluded. This is because a small part of the sample in each country selected 'I would rather not say' when asked about their income. Since it is a sensitive question, we also did not weigh the sample based on income for this reason. As described above, we decided to use the social-ladder approach instead, which has the added benefit of the fact that the distribution in each country on the social-ladder scale is somewhat similar and balanced, and is therefore advantageous for analysis. When looking at the relationship with income (see Table 18) it becomes clear that the social-ladder approach correlates well with income quintiles. This, in itself, is a good validation of the robustness of the social-ladder scale.

Table 18 Income quintiles by social class

	Lower class (1–3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5–6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8–10)
Lowest income quintile	38%	20%	18%	11%	17%
Second lowest income quintile	26%	28%	20%	16%	16%
Middle income quintile	19%	24%	22%	21%	18%
Second highest income quintile	11%	20%	22%	22%	20%
Highest income quintile	5%	9%	19%	30%	30%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'What is the net monthly income of your household (after taxes and other deductions)?' To determine the quintiles, we excluded citizens who responded 'I do not know' and 'I would rather not say', then assigned the remaining respondents to five roughly equal groups of approximately 20% each (based on best effort). Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Middle class in terms of credentials

There is a real possibility that people see class as being about more than money. After all, status is defined not just by cash or wealth, but by one's credentials such as occupation and education. People may intuitively rank a professor with a Ph.D. differently from a plumber with a certificate from a vocational school, even if their incomes are similar.

For many scholars, especially sociologists, *occupation* is 'the most powerful single indicator of levels of material reward, social standing and life chances'.[24] Social standing is primarily about how we are viewed in society, and in this regard occupations are much more visible than income. Furthermore, we know that a not-negligible part of society considers their work their life. After all, it is commonplace to open a conversation with, 'What do you do?'

Occupational and *educational credentials* tend to go hand in hand. This is because entry into occupations of a certain class status depends on acquiring certain skills or qualifications. Education is also viewed by people as a strong marker of class status. The possession of a university degree often serves as the threshold for determining class position. The social-ladder approach that we employed in this study correlates with education level as well.

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[24] R. Connelly, V. Gayle and P. S. Lambert, 'A Review of Occupation-Based Social Classifications for Social Survey Research', *Methodological Innovations* 9/2016, doi:10.1177/2059799116638003.

Table 19 Education level by social class

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU total
Low education	22%	16%	14%	10%	12%	15%
Mid-level education	60%	60%	56%	48%	46%	54%
High education	18%	24%	30%	43%	42%	32%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'What is the highest level of education you have completed?' The list of education options was country-specific. Assigning education categories to education levels was done during the weighting process, to reflect census data as much as possible. The education quotas per country are based on the latest available census data. Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Middle class as a mindset

Definitions of class based on income or credentials rest largely on 'hard' tangible measures. However, it has been argued that class can also be a state of mind.[25] Rather than looking at bank balances or credentials, class may also be a manifestation of aspirations and attitudes, self-perception, behavioural norms, preferences and tastes. Bourdieu has also spoken about classes as being collective environments where people of the same habits come together and coexist.[26]

An extension of the aspirational approach to defining class relates to *how people actually live*. People's living environment is an indication of class as well, and once again we observe a correlation in the study.

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[25]   A. S. R. Manstead, 'The Psychology of Social Class: How Socioeconomic Status Impacts Thought, Feelings, and Behaviour', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 57/2 (2018), 267–91, doi:10.1111/bjso.12251.

[26]   *Sociology Group,* 'What Is Bordieu Theory of Cultural Capital?' (18 June 2019), accessed at https://www.sociolo-gygroup.com/bourdieu-theory-cultural-capital/ on 10 July 2023.

Table 20 Residence area by social class

	Lower class (1-3)	Lower middle class (4)	Middle class (5-6)	Upper middle class (7)	Upper class (8-10)	EU average
Lower class	25%	7%	3%	2%	4%	7%
Lower middle class	38%	41%	21%	11%	11%	22%
Middle class	26%	44%	62%	61%	47%	52%
Upper middle class	4%	4%	8%	21%	28%	12%
Upper class	1%	1%	1%	1%	6%	2%
I do not know	6%	3%	5%	3%	4%	6%

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The question posed was, 'When thinking about the place/area where you live, how would you consider the area in terms of socio-economic status?' Green text indicates a percentage above the EU average; orange indicates a percentage below the EU average.

Our approach to understanding different types of members of the middle class

Putting policymakers in citizens' shoes with the Glocalities values segmentation

Values are people's deep convictions with regard to social relations, society, technology, work and leisure. These values are established during one's formative years, up until approximately the age of 25. After this age, one's values tend to stay stable throughout life. If you know someone's basic values, suddenly a lot of human behaviour and attitudes become more understandable. Someone who identifies themself as a global citizen likely has more trust in the EU. Someone who is fearful of change likely opposes sweeping new government policies. Values also come in clusters, for instance, someone who identifies as a global citizen is often generally more open to change.

The Glocalities segmentation model that is used in this study was originally developed in 2013 by the Dutch research agency Motivaction, the sister company of Glocalities. Motivaction has over 25 years of experience in building values segmentation models in the Netherlands and abroad. In the Netherlands, the Mentality segmentation is well known. It is used by numerous clients in the commercial sector, by NGOs and by government agencies, both national and local.

The international Glocalities segmentation model is unique, because it adopts an integral and

international approach and is based on values in everyday life. This is in contrast to many other segmentation models, which are mainly based on socio-demographic indicators or on behavioural aspects such as product usage in a specific market. The Glocalities segmentation model has so far been validated in over 63 countries and territories, with research utilising responses from more than 300,000 citizens. Our values-based insights are very relevant for policymakers in the EU and beyond and have already been used in multiple EU-related projects in the last few years.

During multiple workshops with EU professionals who completed our survey, we found that a large majority belongs to the values segment of Creatives. These people are open-minded idealists who believe in the concepts of self-development and culture. This values bias among people working for the EU is understandable and logical; values bubbles are everywhere. Our values segmentation, however, helps to make policymakers more aware of themselves, and of the other values segments in international and national society. In this way, they can develop better policies that align with the values of the various groups in European society, many of which are underrepresented in EU organisations.

Figure 22 The Glocalities values segmentation model
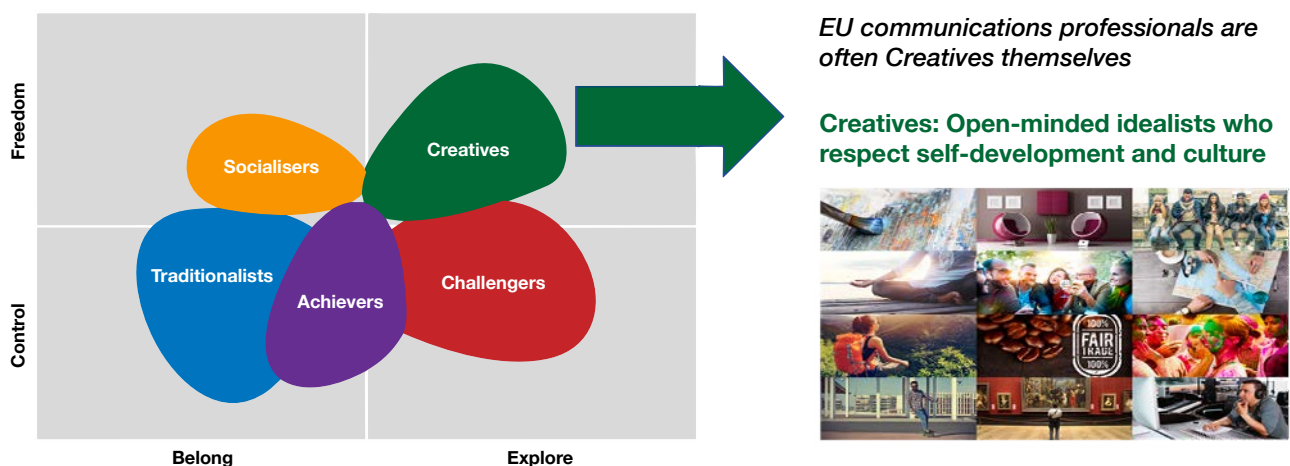
Source: *Glocalities*, 'Values Segmentation - Our Research Methodology', accessed at https://glocalities.com/whatwedo/whatweoffer/methods on 25 July 2023.

The following sentences describe the worldview of each Glocalities values segment in a few words:

- Challengers: competitive and risk-seeking careerists who are fascinated by money and adventure;
- Traditionalists: family-oriented people who value traditions, etiquette and an organised life;
- Socialisers: sociability seekers who love entertainment, freedom and family values;
- Creatives: open-minded idealists who seek self-development and cultural participation;
- Achievers: entrepreneurial networkers who focus on family and community life.

Construction of the Glocalities segmentation

To construct the Glocalities segmentation,[27] we use a list of values statements that are applicable around the globe. These statements are the result of an extensive two-day workshop with international experts. During the workshop we integrated several early outcomes of an international Mentality research project conducted in 2004. We also developed a detailed hypothetical global segmentation model which we tested on the data collected from the first wave of Glocalities fieldwork, which took place in 20 countries (in December 2013/January 2014).

The Glocalities segmentation is based on a set of 50 statements from the survey. We used latent class analysis to build the Glocalities segmentation. This resulted in five segments that share similar values, are present around the globe and differentiate optimally from each other. During the process, we analysed the characteristics of the values segments based on other information available in the survey (e.g. socio-demographics, lifestyles, favourite personalities, trends, music styles etc.). The segmentation proved to differentiate well and be robust. We mapped the segments geographically around the globe and created film clips expressing their values and lifestyles visually.

Since the first fieldwork wave in 2014, we have conducted another seven fieldwork rounds (in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023). Over the course of time, the Glocalities segmentation model has proven to be a stable representation of the values of the international population as well as of segments within countries.

We have conducted several research projects in which we have carried out fieldwork and/or analyses focusing on multiple EU member states. In this study, the Glocalities segmentation proved to be very useful, as it revealed cultural cleavages between regions. Figure 23 illustrates the share of each Glocalities values segment at the EU level.

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[27]   *Glocalities*, 'Values Segmentation – Our Research Methodology for Customer Segmentation Models', accessed at https://glocalities.com/whatwedo/whatweoffer/methods on 9 July 2023.

**Figure 23 The sizes of the Glocalities values segments on the EU level**
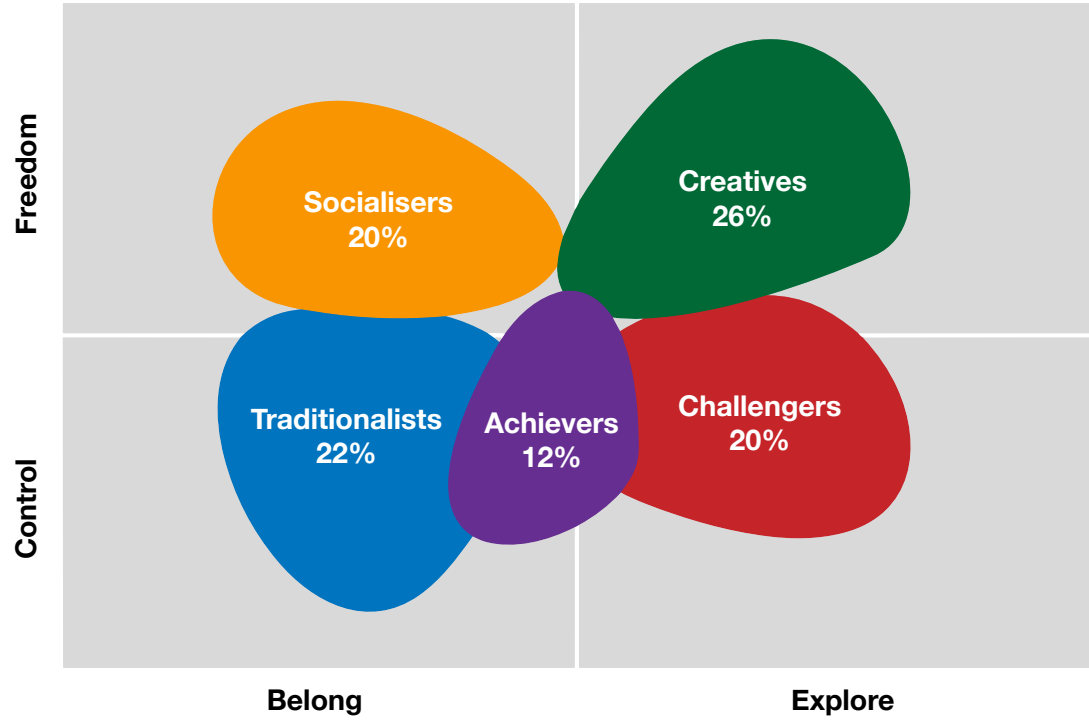
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Note: The values segments were calculated from answers to 50 Glocalities statements. The question posed was, 'To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about your outlook on life?'

Figures 24 to 28 illustrate the share of each Glocalities values segment in each country of the EU, as of April 2023.
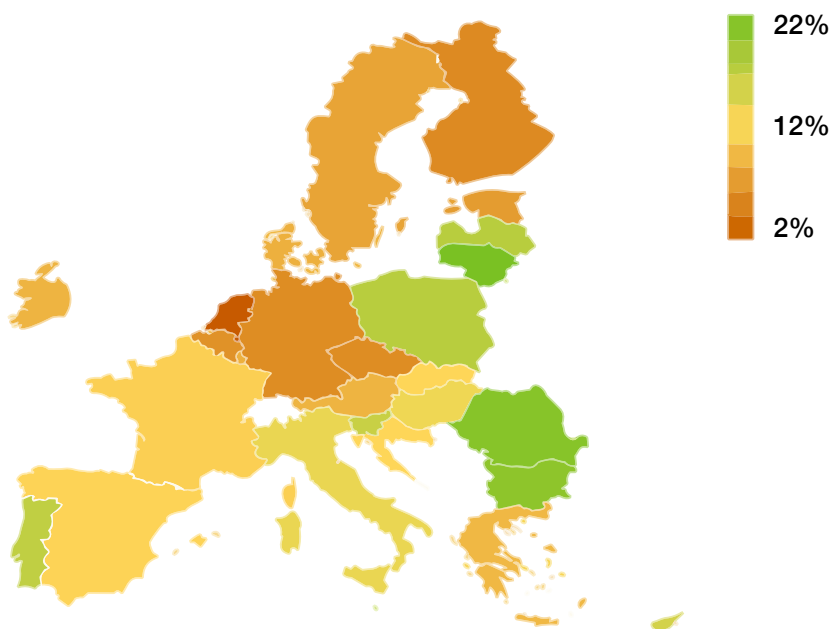
Figure 24 Prevalence of Traditionalists across the EU
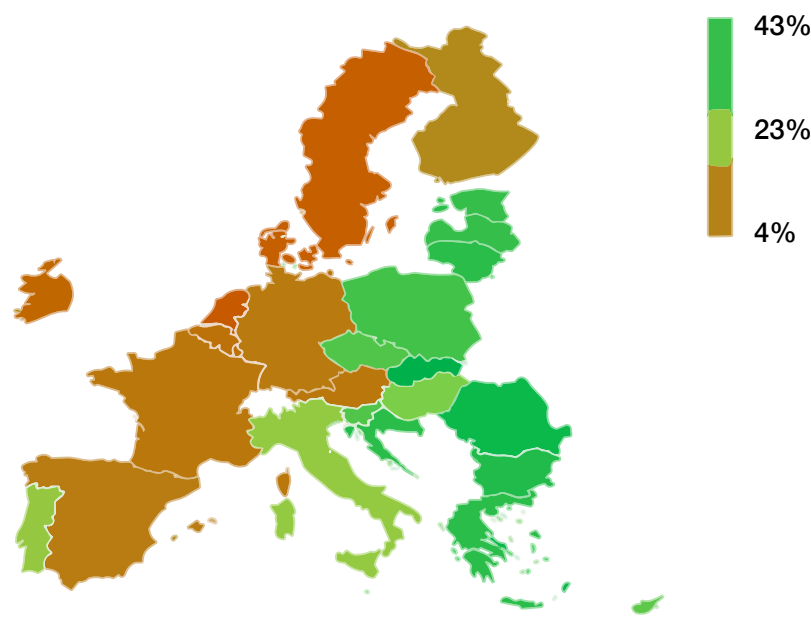
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Figure 25 Prevalence of Creatives across the EU

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Figure 26 Prevalence of Achievers across the EU

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Figure 27 Prevalence of Socialisers across the EU
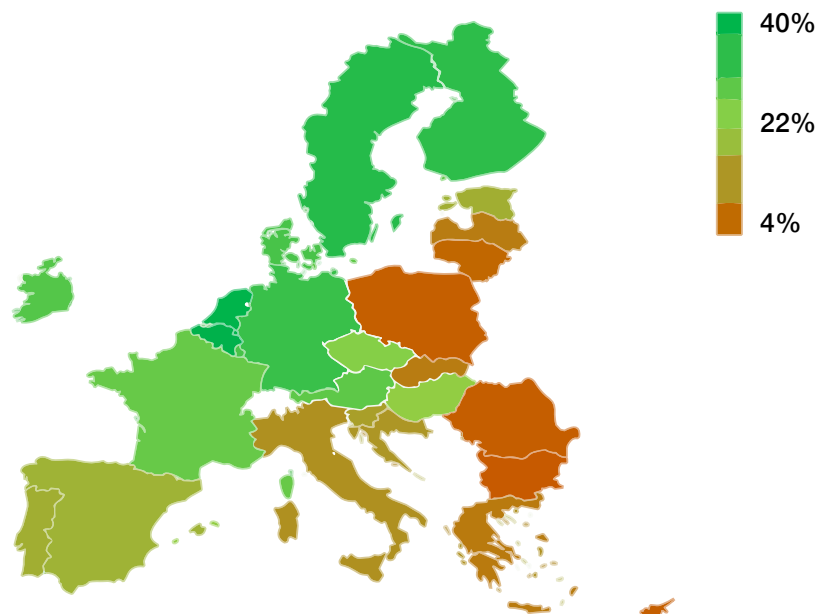
Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

Figure 28 Prevalence of Challengers across the EU

Source: Data from Glocalities survey, April 2023.

About this research

The fieldwork took place in March and April 2023 in all EU member states. We conducted the fieldwork by means of an online survey[28] of approximately 25–30 minutes' duration. Respondents

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[28] In Malta and Cyprus we complemented the online sample with computer-assisted telephone interviews using a somewhat shorter questionnaire. This is due to the limitations of online sampling in these countries. We worked with accredited fieldwork provider Dynata in all countries, except for the Netherlands. In the latter country, we sampled citizens from the Stempunt panel of Motivaction International.

could complete the survey on their smartphones, tablets or laptop/desktop computers. The sample size per country can be seen in Table 21.[29]

Table 21 Fieldwork specifications by country

Country	Weighted sample	Unweighted sample	Questionnaire language(s)	Household Internet penetration[30]
Austria*	515	527	German	93%
Belgium*	515	521	Dutch, French	94%
Bulgaria	515	764	Bulgarian	87%
Croatia*	515	523	Croatian	86%
Cyprus	515	523	Greek	94%
Czechia*	515	540	Czech	91%
Denmark	515	526	Danish	95%
Estonia	515	770	Estonian	92%
Finland*	515	520	Finnish	98%
France*	515	526	French	93%
Germany*	515	521	German	91%
Greece	515	532	Greek	85%
Hungary*	515	528	Hungarian	91%
Ireland	515	766	English	94%
Italy*	515	529	Italian	91%
Latvia	515	765	Latvian	91%
Lithuania	515	785	Lithuanian	88%
Luxembourg	515	768	French, Luxembourgish	98%
Malta	515	530	English	93%
Netherlands*	515	539	Dutch	98%
Poland*	515	527	Polish	93%
Portugal*	515	525	Portuguese	88%
Romania*	515	527	Romanian	89%
Slovakia	515	525	Slovakian	91%
Slovenia	515	525	Slovenian	93%
Spain*	515	526	Spanish	96%
Sweden*	515	525	Swedish	94%
TOTAL	**13,905**	**15,683**		

[29] In countries marked with an asterisk, we started by recontacting citizens from the existing Glocalities database. In order to reach the total sample size, we had to recruit new respondents to some extent.

[30] *Eurostat*, 'Digital Economy and Society Statistics – Households and Individuals' (December 2022), accessed at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals on 14 July 2023.

We set fieldwork quotas for age, gender, education level and region based on census data from each country. Subsequently, we weighted the data based on national census data. The data is therefore nationally representative with regard to age (18–70 years), gender, education level[31] and region.

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[31] During the weighting process, low and mid-level education was merged in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Poland and Romania. This is due to the limited presence of less-educated people in online panels in these countries. In Estonia, we merged highly educated and mid-level educated respondents due to the small number of highly educated people in the online sample.

About the authors

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Future of Europe

Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges
A Data-Driven Study from a Centre–Right Perspective

MARTIJN LAMPERT, PANOS PAPADONGONAS AND FEDERICO OTTAVIO REHO

Credits