

WHAT DO FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS MEAN FOR PEOPLE IN THE EU?

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS SURVEY



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Foreword

Do human rights matter in our European societies? A decade or so ago, such a question would almost have been unthinkable. But across the EU and beyond, human rights systems have since been under steady threat – dismissed as political correctness gone too far, as serving only the elite, and as inconvenient barriers to swift action.

FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey reached out to almost 35,000 people in the EU and North Macedonia to ask them about a range of issues linked to their human – or fundamental – rights. This report presents a small selection of the results.

The survey shows that human rights clearly matter to people. Almost 9 in 10 participants say that human rights help create fairer societies. Yet there is little reason for complacency: many also think that not all benefit equally from them, and that some take unfair advantage of rights protection.

Those who struggle to make ends meet, and those with lower education levels, are more likely to hold such views. People with disabilities or long-term health issues, as well as those aged 65+, also tend to be sceptical about rights in practice.

People do clearly value democratic principles, particularly free and fair elections. But their views on other aspects of our societies vary widely. The importance of protecting the rights of minority groups splits opinion the most between countries. Meanwhile, the young – those aged between 16 and 29 – find all aspects related to the functioning of our societies covered in the survey less important than older respondents do.

Sometimes the lack of trust is glaring. Many believe mainstream parties and politicians do not care about them – including a staggering 73 % of those who find it difficult to make ends meet. A majority of people also think that getting a job is linked to belonging to the political party in power. A quarter believe that judges in their country only rarely, or never, escape government influence.

Direct experiences with corruption are thankfully low overall, but vary among countries. The results on corruption in health services make for especially tough reading amidst a pandemic: in some Member States, over 60 % say that a little gift or other favour is necessary to get better treatment at public hospitals.

The corrosive long-term effect of such realities is clear: one in four find it acceptable to resort to such low-level bribery to expedite a pending matter. The nonchalance among the young is perhaps most unsettling: almost half say they would be willing to engage in such behaviour.

We hope the findings presented in this report serve as a wake-up call for policymakers – and prompt wide-ranging efforts to ensure that fundamental rights deliver real benefits to everyone.

Michael O'Flaherty
Director



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Country codes

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

FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey

FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey collected data from 35,000 people about their experiences, perceptions and opinions on a range of issues that are variously encompassed by human rights – including awareness of rights, crime victimisation, discrimination and equality of treatment, and data protection and privacy.

This is the first report based on a small selection of questions from the survey. It focuses on selected findings with respect to respondents' opinions about human rights (or 'fundamental rights' as they are referred to in the internal context of the EU), their views and perceptions on the functioning of democratic societies – as a pillar on which human rights can flourish, and on their thoughts on and engagement with public services that have a duty to enforce human rights law and to protect people's rights.

Note on terminology

'Fundamental rights' is the term used for 'human rights' in the internal context of the EU. In the survey questionnaire, some questions used the term 'human rights' because this was found to be more readily understandable by members of the public who responded to the questionnaire. Hence, this report uses the two terms interchangeably.

FRA will publish further results from the survey in 2020–2021, both in report format as well as through an interactive online data explorer. The data explorer – which will be launched on FRA's website at the end of 2020 and will include results presented in this report – offers the opportunity to browse results by question, country by country, and disaggregated by key socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and education. Selected results from the survey will also be communicated on other occasions to feed into policy debates at the EU and national level. FRA will also make the anonymised survey data set (microdata) available for organisations and researchers who are interested in carrying out further analysis of the results after publication of the survey's relevant reports.



The Fundamental Rights Survey is the first survey FRA has carried out on the general population of the EU with respect to how they understand and experience fundamental rights, and on their interaction with public authorities that have a duty to protect them. The agency has undertaken only one other general population survey, which collected EU comparable data on the specific area of women's experiences of violence. To date, FRA's survey research has concentrated on specific groups in society that are particularly vulnerable to rights abuses, and

for which there are limited data. These include ethnic minority and immigrant groups, the Roma, the EU's Jewish population, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people.

Fundamental Rights Survey: key facts

The Fundamental Rights Survey collected data in 29 countries – 27 EU Member States, the United Kingdom (an EU Member State at the time of data collection), and North Macedonia (the only non-EU country with an observer status to FRA at the time the survey was designed). In each country, a representative sample of respondents – ranging from some 1,000 in most countries to some 3,000 people in France and Germany – participated in the survey. The survey interviews, which took place between January and October 2019, resulted in a total sample of 34,948 respondents (see [Table 1](#)).

The results are representative at the EU level as well as for each country in terms of people who are 16 years old or older and have their usual place of residence in the country where they took part in the survey.

Information concerning the technical implementation of the survey is included in Annex II of this report. Further details concerning survey development, fieldwork implementation and outcomes will be published in a dedicated technical report, which will be available on FRA's website in the second half of 2020.

WHY IS THIS REPORT NEEDED?

What do 'fundamental rights' mean to people?

The EU is founded on the values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. However, these values can seem remote in people's daily lives. The subject of this report, 'fundamental rights' – which, in itself, is a particular term for 'human rights' in the internal context of the EU, and therefore difficult to explain to non-experts – is an abstract term for most people.

The European Union is founded on its strong commitment to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which is underpinned in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. These commitments are reinforced in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union – the EU's legally binding 'bill of rights'.

Discussions on fundamental rights – at the level of EU Institutions and Member States – do not necessarily reflect what ordinary citizens understand by them or how they experience them in their everyday lives, nor do they necessarily reflect what people are most concerned about. With this in mind, this report explores the field of 'fundamental rights' as it relates to what people understand, know and experience with respect to their engagement with rights in practice.

Using straightforward terms and questions, FRA collected the views and experiences of 35,000 people in an EU-wide 'Fundamental Rights Survey'. The survey examines people's understanding of and adherence to the EU's foundational values. For example, it looks at whether and how human rights continue to enjoy the support of people in the EU, whether they feel courts and civil society organisations are able to function free from political intimidation, and the role of public services as a point of contact for people when exercising their rights and seeking information. The data in this report complement existing data sources, such as the European Commission's 2019 Eurobarometer survey on the rule of law.¹ The report provides new evidence of people's broader experiences of and opinions about 'fundamental rights'.

¹ European Commission (2019), [Special Eurobarometer 489: Rule of law](#), Report, July 2019.

EU Member States and international human rights commitments

Data from FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey, reported here and in further outputs from the survey, can support Member States to see whether they are meeting their international human rights commitments in practice. The data provide comprehensive and comparable evidence on what the general population thinks about, and how they experience, certain rights.

All EU Member States are bound by international human rights law,² which is embedded in the founding treaties of the European Union and Member States' constitutions. To fulfil these human rights commitments, EU Member States need to adopt laws, policies and programmes, to set up institutions and services, and to assign them sufficient resources to operate. Public institutions and services are tasked with ensuring that people can access and enjoy their rights in practice – by providing information, creating ways to report fundamental rights abuses, and making sure that cases are processed fairly and in a reasonable time, thus enabling effective access to justice.



YOUR RIGHTS

Tell us what matters to you!

By adding the 'bottom-up' perspective from people in the EU on a range of issues that are relevant to human rights, the data from the Fundamental Rights Survey bring something new to the pool of existing information that is available from human rights sources both within and outside the EU. These include the Council of Europe (CoE) and its various bodies, such as the CoE's Commission for the

Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) which collects data from national governments on the efficiency and functioning of their justice systems, or the Venice Commission which issues expert legal opinions and recommendations on draft national laws and their compliance with rule of law standards.

In turn, EU institutions can draw on the survey data when assessing the situation in the Member States for fundamental rights compliance.³ The survey provides data on what the public think and experience, with respect to their enjoyment of specific rights in practice, at EU Member State level.

At the global level, the United Nations has adopted the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to realise human rights for all. Selected results from the Fundamental Rights Survey, included in this report, are also relevant to the SDGs – in particular, Goal 16 to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". In setting this goal, the 2030 Agenda recognises "the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights [...], on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions"⁴ – areas that are addressed, in part, in this report and future reports of the Fundamental Rights Survey.

² FRA has developed an online data hub – the '**European Fundamental Rights Information System**' or **EFRIS** – outlining Member States' commitments to international human rights law.

³ European Commission (2019), **Strengthening the rule of law within the Union: A blueprint for action** (COM(2019) 343 final), 17 July 2019.

⁴ United Nations, General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (**A/RES/70/1**), 21 October 2015.

Who is the report for?

The results of the survey are primarily intended to inform EU institutions, Member State governments and institutions – including National Human Rights Institutions, Equality Bodies and Ombuds Institutions – alongside human rights defenders and civil society organisations, about the place of fundamental rights in EU societies – based on what people think and experience. The findings provide an evidence base to inform action on fundamental rights, which – ultimately – can be used to achieve an impact on fundamental rights in practice and to ensure the effective implementation of fundamental rights obligations.

Throughout the report the results are broken down to illustrate some key differences between Member States and between different socio-demographic groups. Herein, core findings with respect to gender, age, income and educational level – to name some examples – are reported where the results are of particular note.

The evidence from the survey is essential reading for those who believe in evidence-based policymaking that is ‘bottom up’. In this regard, it is hoped that those whose work encompasses fundamental rights make use of the data to inform and also to challenge their own assumptions about what the public thinks and experiences.

Better understanding of fundamental rights requires knowing more about what people think and experience with regard to everyday life, which can also assist in how we communicate on fundamental rights to different audiences. In this regard, there has been some reflection among institutions working in the human rights field about how to better communicate on human rights – with the Fundamental Rights Agency paving the way in this field.⁵ Given that robust evidence is key to understanding and communicating about rights, FRA set out – through the survey – to capture ordinary people’s understanding and experience of fundamental rights in ways that are not remote from everyday life.

This report presents findings based on 35,000 people’s responses to questions about fundamental rights – covering all EU Member States, the United Kingdom, and North Macedonia.

⁵ FRA (2018), **10 keys to effectively communicating human rights**, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union (Publications Office).

Notes on quotes and presentation of survey results

Quotes in the report

At the end of the survey, which was based on a series of questions with pre-defined response options, respondents were invited to share any thoughts about their rights with respect to the country where they live. Some of these comments have been used anonymously in the report to illustrate certain challenges or particular situations people face.

In addition, FRA carried out 32 focus group discussions in eight EU Member States to collect in more detail people's views on some of the topics covered in the survey. Each focus group discussion involved 6 to 10 participants and was led by a moderator. Participants could share their own views as well as discuss with other participants the situation in their country concerning the general topics of personal safety and concerns, tolerance and equality, and data protection and privacy. The discussions were recorded and the anonymised transcripts have been used in the report as a source of illustrative quotes, to complement and contextualise the quantitative survey findings.

It should be noted, however, that unlike the quantitative survey results, the quotes – both from the survey and the focus groups – should not be interpreted as being representative of the general situation in a given Member State.

Presentation of results

The survey data collection took place in 2019, when the United Kingdom was still a Member State of the European Union. In this report, the EU aggregate results have been calculated to reflect the new situation, since 1 February 2020, since when the United Kingdom is no longer part of the EU. The EU aggregate results presented in this report refer to the current 27 EU Member States, denoted as 'EU-27'. Figures that present results by country also present the results for the United Kingdom and North Macedonia, in addition to the average for the EU-27 and the results for each EU Member State.

Key findings and FRA opinions

What people think and know about human rights

- ★ Nearly 9 in 10 people (88 %) in the EU think that human rights are important for creating a fairer society in their country. This ranges from from a 'low' of 76 % in Hungary to a 'high' of 96 % in Malta. In addition, almost two thirds (64 %) disagree with the statement "human rights are meaningless to me in everyday life". This shows that people in the EU widely believe that human rights can play a useful and meaningful role in their lives.
- ★ At the same time, almost 7 in 10 Europeans (68 %) think that some take unfair advantage of human rights. One third (33 %) agrees with the statement "the only people who benefit from human rights are those who don't deserve them – such as criminals and terrorists".
- ★ The results indicate a link between people's income and education levels, and their views on human rights. People who say they struggle to make ends meet on their household income (that is, have difficulties to pay for the things they need), and those whose highest completed level of education is lower secondary education or less, are less likely to feel that everybody in their country enjoys the same human rights. Meanwhile, they also feel that some people take unfair advantage of human rights.
- ★ For example 44 % of people who find it difficult to make ends meet agree with the statement that "the only people to benefit from human rights are those who don't deserve them, such as criminals and terrorists". By comparison, 27 % of people who are coping very easily with their current income do so. In addition, 38 % of older people – those aged 65+ – agree with this statement, compared with 27 % of people aged 16–29. Meanwhile, 43 % of persons who experience severe long-standing limitations in their usual activities – such as people with disabilities or long-term health problems – agree with the statement, compared with 32 % of those who experience no such limitations.
- ★ In 11 out of 27 EU Member States, 50 % or more agree or strongly agree that human rights abuses are not really a problem in their country, but instead are something that happens 'elsewhere'.

Breaking down the results by socio-demographic characteristics reveals that people who are able to make ends meet with 'difficulty' or 'great difficulty' are less likely to agree (or strongly agree) that human rights abuses are not really a problem in their country: 43 % do so, compared with 54 % of people who make ends meet 'easily' or 'very easily'. Men are also more inclined to express this view (52 %) than women (44 %).

In line with the new strategic agenda for the EU for 2019–2024⁶, building a fair and social Europe through the implementation of the European Pillar of

⁶ European Council (2019), [A new strategic agenda 2019-2024](#).

Social Rights⁷ – alongside the ‘just transition’ to a green sustainable future⁸ – is a core priority for the EU. In view of these commitments, being unemployed and living in conditions of poverty and social exclusion are detrimental to the full enjoyment of rights.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is directly relevant when implementing EU law, and several rights set out in the Charter will be difficult to meet with respect to the most socially and economically marginalised groups in the EU, which is reflected in the results to several survey questions. A number of Charter rights are relevant. These include human dignity (Article 1); the freedom to choose an occupation and the right to engage in work (Article 15); equality between women and men (Article 23); non-discrimination (Article 21); social security and social assistance (Article 34); healthcare (Article 35); and freedom of movement and of residence (Article 45), to name a few.

Most people think human rights are important for creating a fairer society, but the socially disadvantaged are less likely to feel that human rights benefit them.

The right to access justice (Article 47 of the Charter) is also relevant when looking at the survey’s results. Access to justice is compromised when people – especially those in marginalised groups, such as those who are unable to financially ‘make ends meet’ – perceive a system’s checks and balances as being ‘alien’ to their daily lives, which is compounded by lack of knowledge about rights and how to access them.

- ★ One in two people (53 %) have heard of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Fewer people have heard of the Charter than of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This finding is perhaps to be expected given that the European Convention on Human Rights is over seventy years old, whereas the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU is comparatively ‘young’, having been adopted twenty years ago. However, the data do indicate that the gap between people’s awareness of the Charter and the ECHR is smallest in those countries that joined the Council of Europe in the 1990s, and where the ECHR has been applied for a shorter time.

⁷ European Parliament, Council of the European Union, European Commission, **Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights**, Brussels, 13 December 2017, OJ C 428. The **European Pillar of Social Rights** covers 20 principles delivering new and more effective rights for EU citizens. It has 3 main key areas: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; and social protection and inclusion (Principle 3, on equal opportunities, declares that everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public).

⁸ See European Commission (2020), **Launching the Just Transition Mechanism – for a green transition based on solidarity and fairness**.

FRA OPINION 1

The EU and its Member States should undertake targeted measures to ensure that those struggling ‘to make ends meet’, who are more likely to think that everybody does not enjoy the same basic human rights, are effectively informed about their rights and how to claim them. They should also implement actions to help improve rights awareness for people who have lower levels of education. EU Member States implementing such measures at national level should consider using the available EU funding mechanisms and engaging relevant national actors, in particular National Human Rights Institutions, Equality Bodies and Ombuds Institutions.

Such measures should include efforts to communicate, promote and make accessible fundamental rights to which people are entitled. Member States could explore different forums and channels for effective communication on rights, targeting specific social groups and using social media alongside conventional media, in close cooperation with civil society organisations.

- ★ People with lower levels of education are less likely to have heard of any of the three international human rights instruments that were asked about in the survey – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.
- ★ In addition to people's education, other socio-demographic characteristics associated with a lower awareness of the human rights instruments asked about include difficulties with making ends meet with the current household income, higher age (65+ years), and being unemployed or retired.

Knowledge about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is lower than for other international human rights instruments, and depends on people's level of education.

FRA OPINION 2

Following up on the 2019 conclusions by the Council of the EU on the Charter, EU Member States should consider how best to provide 'accessible information' to the public on the fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter. This would also support national human rights actors in their efforts to promote awareness and improve the implementation of the Charter.

When promoting the Charter, the EU should support a regular exchange between EU Member States on practices and lessons learned to achieve higher levels of awareness and knowledge about the Charter, especially in Member States where the Fundamental Rights Survey shows lower levels of awareness. This could be done as part of the existing commitment at the level of the Council Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens' Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP) to conduct an annual dialogue on the Charter.



The Charter is one of the most modern and comprehensive legally binding human rights instruments. It has the same legal value as the Treaties of the European Union. Article 51 of the Charter requires the EU and Member States – when acting within the scope of EU law – to respect the rights, observe the principles and promote the application of the Charter's provisions. The **2019 conclusions of the Council of the EU on the Charter** call on the Member States to increase awareness-raising and training activities on the Charter among key human rights actors – while acknowledging the role of FRA in this regard. The Council conclusions also emphasise the importance of providing accessible information about the rights enshrined in the Charter to the 'general public'.

Young people attach a lower level of importance than older age groups to various aspects of the functioning of democratic societies asked about in the survey.

Views on the functioning of democratic society and political participation

- ★ 86 % of people believe that free and fair elections are very important for democracy. Overall, three in five people or more attach high importance to each of the six elements of democracy asked about in the survey. The results range from 60 % to 86 %, depending on the aspect asked about. For a list of exact questions asked, see the box on 'What did the survey ask' in **Section 2.1**).
- ★ Young people in the age group 16–29 years consistently attach a lower level of importance to the six aspects of democracy asked about in the survey, compared with older age groups. For example, young people (58 %) attach less importance to issues such as the freedom of opposition parties to criticise the government than older age groups do (70 % of people aged 54–64 years and 69 % of people aged 65 or older).

Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU requires the Union to take action to encourage young people's participation in democratic life in Europe. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, the framework for EU youth policy cooperation, fosters the participation of young people in democratic life while also supporting their social and civic engagement. Moreover, the **European Parliament Resolution of 15 January 2020 on the Conference on the Future of Europe** believes that ensuring youth participation will be an essential part of the long-lasting impacts of the Conference, and requests specific youth events to be organised in this context.



FRA OPINION 3

To enhance young people's engagement in the functioning of democratic society, as a key pillar for the enjoyment of fundamental rights, the European Commission and Member States should take account of the survey findings – which show that 16-29-year-olds attach lower levels of importance to key aspects of democracy – when implementing the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. That strategy, at the EU level, includes 'stepping up youth participation in democratic life, including access to quality information validated by trusted sources, and promoting participation in European and other elections'. It is important that young people are directly engaged in this process.

The EU and its Member States should consider the evolving patterns of youth political engagement and explore new ways of engaging and communicating effectively with young people across Europe.

People believe in democratic principles – but too many feel ‘left behind’ by mainstream politics and politicians.

FRA OPINION 4

To improve political participation in the EU, concerted efforts are required to address the survey finding that the majority of people feel that ‘mainstream parties and politicians don’t care about people like me’, which is also reflected in the finding that people feel that their employment chances are reduced if they don’t belong to the political party in power. The EU and Member States need to pay particular attention to those groups in society who feel most detached from democratic processes – such as people who are struggling on their current incomes.

‘Citizens’ dialogues’, and related consultations, are an established engagement tool in the EU to try and reach out to different groups in society with respect to important policy issues. However, these tools require significant re-thinking in order to reach out to those who are economically disadvantaged and in an effort to engage with them systematically.

A vibrant civil society, alongside an independent, pluralist and responsible media – underpinned by freedom of expression – need support at the EU and Member State levels for the role they play in enhancing democratic engagement as a means of upholding fundamental rights.

- ★ The majority of people in the EU (60 %) agree or strongly agree that mainstream parties and politicians do not care about them.
- ★ The sense that “mainstream parties and politicians don’t care about people like me” is heightened among people who struggle to make ends meet with their household income, those who have completed at most lower secondary education, as well as people who face severe long-standing limitations in their usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems). For example, 73 % of people who find it difficult or very difficult to make ends meet with their current household income agree with this statement. By comparison, 45 % of those who make ends meet easily or very easily do so.
- ★ 63 % think that people have better chances of being hired if they belong to the political party that is in power. The results show large variations between EU Member States in terms of the extent to which people think this is the case. Notably, such views are more common among people who are struggling to make ends meet.

Democracy is, along with human rights and the rule of law, one of the three pillars that anchor the European Union, and all three are among the foundational values of the Union, as set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union. The separation of powers, political freedoms, transparency and accountability are internationally recognised principles of a well-established and well-functioning democracy. Human, or similarly, fundamental rights – as referred to in the internal context of the EU – are key for the good functioning of democratic societies in the EU.

The EU’s **Europe for Citizens Programme**, which sets out to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation of citizens at EU level, is an important part of the EU’s toolbox for fostering democratic engagement. The **Conference on the Future of Europe** is a major pan-European democratic exercise that sets out to engage more effectively with EU citizens. It is

another mechanism whereby the EU tries to engage with citizens with respect to democratic processes – aligned with the principles set out in the Charter concerning citizens’ rights, such as the right to vote and stand as a candidate at elections to the European Parliament (Article 39), and the right to vote and stand as a candidate at municipal elections (Article 40).

A quarter of people think the judiciary are not independent, and one in five think that NGOs and charities are never free of government intimidation.

- ★ One in four people (27 %) in the EU think that, in their country, judges are ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ able to do their job free from government influence. The results range from 47 % in Croatia to 11 % in both Denmark and Finland.
- ★ 37 % of people in the EU think that NGOs and charities are most of the time or always able to do their work free from government intimidation. Meanwhile, 34 % think that this is the case some of the time. One in five (21 %) believe that this is never the case or is rarely possible.

In line with Article 47 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial), independent courts are essential for guaranteeing the effective judicial protection of fundamental rights. Effective judicial protection, which is both a fundamental right and a general principle of EU law, is a “concrete expression” of the rule of law, as underlined by the Court of Justice of the European Union in its case law under Article 19 (1) of the TEU – for example, in case C-64/16, **Associação Sindical dos Juizes Portugueses** (judgment of 27 February 2018, para. 32).

No democracy can thrive without an active civil society either, as outlined in the Commission’s Communication on *Strengthening the rule of law within the Union* – published in July 2019. In this context, the Charter includes rights to freedom of assembly and of association (Article 12), and freedom of expression and information (Article 11). These apply to EU Member States when they are acting within the scope of EU law and are of particular importance in how they pertain to civil society organisations in the EU.



FRA OPINION 5

The finding that just over one in four EU citizens think that judges in their country cannot do their job free from government influence – which is as high as one in two people in some Member States – indicates that concrete measures are necessary to improve public trust in the independence of the judiciary. Without such trust, key democratic principles and fundamental rights, such as the right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial, as well as the right to equality and to good administration, are undermined.

Given that the survey’s findings show that one in five people think that NGOs and charities are never free from government intimidation, it is essential that Member States uphold the freedoms and rights of civil society actors.

The EU and its Member States should systematically collect independent and robust data on public opinion concerning judicial independence, as well as on the ability of NGOs and charities to operate free from government influence. This will provide the Commission and other EU institutions, as well as Member States, with an additional evidential basis for formulating follow-up action. Such data can also inform important initiatives, such as the Commission’s annual assessment of the rule of law in Member States.

Those most in need of good service provision by public administration – such as people with long-term health problems – indicate that they face particular challenges.

FRA OPINION 6

EU Member States should ensure that information on people's rights with respect to public services are delivered in good time and are accessible to all. They should place a particular focus on groups who may be most in need of such services – such as people with long-term health problems or disabilities, including older people.



Good administration and corruption in public services

- ★ In terms of problems when dealing with public administration and local authorities, people most often mention that their matter took a long time to process, and that they faced difficulties finding relevant information.
- ★ People who face long-standing limitations in their usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems), as well as people with lower education or limited economic means, find it more difficult to find information on services provided by public administration and local authorities.
- ★ One in ten people (11 %) perceive that they were not treated equally to others by public administration.

For example, 17 % of people who make ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty believe they were not treated equally to others by public administration or local authorities. By comparison, 8 % of people who make ends meet easily or very easily believe this.

- ★ People who experience severe long-standing limitations in usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems) are more likely to face problems with respect to services provided by public administration and local authorities: 54 %, compared with 39 % for people without limitations. Similarly, people who struggle to cope with their household's income are more likely to face such problems: 48 %, compared with 39 % of people who make ends meet fairly or very easily.

However, people with high education also indicate a higher rate of problems with services provided by public administration and local authorities, compared with people who have completed at most lower secondary education. This finding that may reflect higher expectations of service provision among the more educated.

The right to good administration, as expressed in Article 41 of the Charter, is a fundamental right forming an integral part of the EU legal order. As a general principle of EU law, it also binds Member States when they are acting within the scope of EU law. General national obligations also stem from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and related case law of the European Court of Human Rights – related to the concept of good governance in particular. According to these minimum standards, every person has the right to have their affairs handled impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by public authorities. Other related aspects include transparency and access to information, which are crucial tools in national checks and balances.

The role of public administration and local authorities in making information accessible and easy to understand – an essential service in normal circumstances – becomes of paramount importance in exceptional situations, such as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic of 2020.

Corruption is a problem in some Member States more than others, and particularly affects the health sector. Half of young people consider low level bribery to be acceptable.

- ★ Only few people (4 %) in the EU have experienced a public official or civil servant asking or expecting a favour, such as a gift or a donation, in exchange for a particular service. However, in some EU Member States this is more common, rising to nearly one in five people experiencing this form of corruption in some countries.
- ★ Corruption in relation to health services is considered to be a particular problem. In Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and Latvia, over 60 % of people say that one has to, at least sometimes, give a gift or do someone some other type of favour to get better treatment in public hospitals.
- ★ However, one in four people (24 %) believe that it would sometimes or always be acceptable to give a gift to a public official or a civil servant to expedite matters in urgent cases. Over 50 % of people in Slovakia, Czechia and Croatia would at least sometimes consider it acceptable to give a gift to or do a favour for a public official or a civil servant to have them react more quickly to an urgent request. By comparison, 20 % or fewer hold this view in Sweden, Malta, Finland and Portugal.
- ★ Notably, 48 % of people in the age group 16–29 years would find it acceptable to give a gift or do a favour, compared with under 35 % in other age groups.

Corruption affects fundamental rights under the Charter, the ECHR, and other international human rights instruments. In particular, it breaches the principles of equality and non-discrimination (Article 20 and 21 of the Charter). Depending on the sector – ranging from employment to healthcare – it then breaches other rights as well.

In practice, social rights are most often affected. Corruption in the health sector affects the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of health (Article 35 of the Charter). In the education sector, the right to education (Article 14 of the Charter) is at issue. On the other hand, corruption in the judicial sector violates the right to a fair trial and to an effective remedy (Article 47 of the Charter), which are instrumental in the enforcement of all other human rights and in preventing impunity. Moreover, the absence of an independent judiciary fosters distrust in public institutions, undermining respect for the rule of law and democracy.



FRA OPINION 7

The link between high prevalence or acceptance rates for corruption and their resulting impact on people's core rights – such as equality of access to government services – needs to be acknowledged and addressed directly by public administrations across the EU. This can be done by focusing on workers in certain key sectors – such as healthcare – where there is a high prevalence of corruption, and on parts of the population – such as the young – where acceptance of some forms of bribery appears to be higher, by underlining the illegality of corruption and of people's right to good administration and equality in this regard.

For those Member States where the survey indicates that the actual prevalence or acceptance of corruption may be more common, government bodies – supported by civil society – need to make every effort to bring down these rates. One way to address this is by ensuring that in the disbursement of EU funds, in particular European Structural and Investment Funds, the proposed enabling conditions include reference to Article 41 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights on the right to good administration. This should be systematically monitored by the relevant EU bodies, such as the Court of Auditors and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

Given that corruption constitutes a significant systemic obstacle to the realisation of fundamental rights, it should become a permanent aspect for monitoring as part of the new European rule of law mechanism – based on robust and comparable evidence. This can serve to support the EU's role with respect to existing bodies working to fight corruption, in particular the Council of Europe group of states against corruption (GRECO).



1

WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK AND KNOW ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS?

KEY FINDINGS

- ★ Nearly 9 in 10 people (88 %) in the EU think that human rights are important for creating a fairer society in their country. This ranges from a 'low' of 76 % in Hungary to a 'high' of 96 % in Malta. In addition, almost two thirds (64 %) disagree with the statement "human rights are meaningless to me in everyday life". This shows that people in the EU widely believe that human rights can play a useful and meaningful role in their lives.
- ★ At the same time, almost 7 in 10 (68 %) think that some people take unfair advantage of human rights. In addition, one third of people (33 %) in the EU agree with the statement that "The only people who benefit from human rights are those who don't deserve them – such as criminals and terrorists".
- ★ 54 % of people who are employed – including self-employed – agree or agree strongly with the statement that everybody in their country enjoys the same basic human rights. By contrast, 36 % of people who are unemployed agree or strongly agree with this statement. These results reflect the impact of financial strain and, on the other hand, lack of recognition on the part of those who are financially better off about how those with lower incomes may experience society. Namely, 65 % of people who are employed and make ends meet 'easily' or 'very easily' think that everyone in their country enjoys the same basic rights. In contrast, 41 % of people who are employed but make ends meet with 'difficulty' or 'great difficulty' think this is the case.
- ★ The results indicate a link between people's income and education, and their views on human rights. People who struggle to make ends meet with their household income, and those whose highest completed level of education is lower secondary education or less, are less likely to feel that everyone in their country enjoys the same human rights.
- ★ 44 % of respondents who find it difficult to make ends meet agree with the statement that "the only people to benefit from human rights are those who don't deserve to, such as criminals and terrorists". Meanwhile, 27 % of those who are coping very easily with their current income hold this view. The results also show that 38 % of older people – those aged 65+ – agree with this statement, compared with 27 % of people aged 16–29. So do 43 % of persons who experience severe limitations in their usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems), compared with 32 % who are in no way limited.
- ★ In 11 out of 27 EU Member States, 50 % or more agree or strongly agree that human rights abuses are not really a problem in their country, but instead are something that happens 'elsewhere'. Breaking down the results by socio-demographic characteristics reveals that people who are only able to make ends meet with 'difficulty' or 'great difficulty' are less likely to agree (or strongly agree) with this statement – 43 % do so, compared with 54 % of people who make ends meet 'easily' or 'very easily'. Men are also more inclined to express this view (52 %) than women (44 %).

Human rights issues feature in the media, political debates and in discussions people have every day – though we may not label or recognise these issues as being about ‘human rights’. Sometimes these discussions may be coloured by different understandings of human rights, such as views on who is ‘deserving’ and who is not, or who is seen as taking advantage of certain rights at the expense of others. For example, articles under ‘Title VI – Justice’ of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU guarantee rights to an effective remedy and fair trial, the presumption of innocence, the right to defence, principles of legality and proportionality in relation to criminal offenses and penalties, and the right to not be tried or punished twice in criminal proceedings for the same offence. These ‘justice’ rights are important for everyone. They are essential safeguards in democratic societies where the power of the State needs to be kept in check. However, as the results show, many people do not see the issue this way.

To better understand what human rights mean to people, and to recognise issues that may stand in the way of communicating about rights and adopting policies that help reinforce and protect rights, the survey asked respondents to consider to which extent they agree or disagree with selected statements concerning human rights. Respondents were also asked whether or not they are aware of some of the key international human rights instruments that exist to protect their human rights – the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

1.1. VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

People in the EU overwhelmingly feel that ‘human rights are important for creating a fairer society’. 88 % of people in the EU-27 ‘strongly agree’ or ‘tend to agree’ that human rights are important for creating a fairer society in the country where they live (**Figure 1**). On average, in the EU-27, this high agreement is shared by people irrespective of their gender, age, education or job status. Compared with other countries, the lowest levels of agreement with the statement are found in Hungary (76 %), Czechia (80 %), Romania and Poland (both 81 %) – however, even in these countries, some four in five people ‘strongly agree’ or ‘tend to agree’ that human rights are important for creating a fairer society. The highest levels of agreement with the statement are found in Finland (95 %) and Malta (96 %).

What did the survey ask?

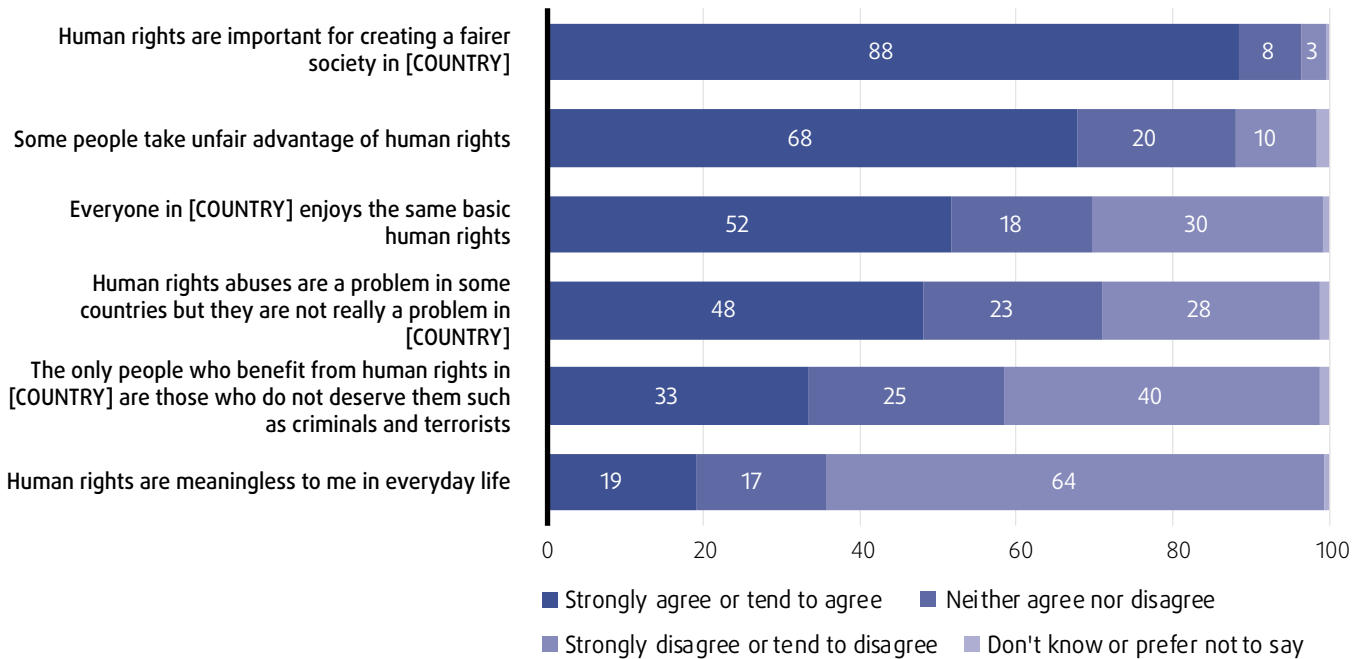
Can you please indicate how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- Human rights are important for creating a fairer society in [COUNTRY]
- Some people take unfair advantage of human rights
- Everyone in [COUNTRY] enjoys the same basic human rights
- Human rights abuses are a problem in some countries but they are not really a problem in [COUNTRY]
- The only people who benefit from human rights in [COUNTRY] are those who do not deserve them such as criminals and terrorists
- Human rights are meaningless to me in everyday life

Answer categories: Strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer “prefer not to say” or “don’t know”.

Note: The statements were shown to survey respondents in a random order to minimise any impact that a particular order could have on the results.

FIGURE 1: VIEWS ON SELECTED ASPECTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS (EU-27, %)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

Notes: Out of all respondents in the EU-27 (n = 32,537); weighted results.

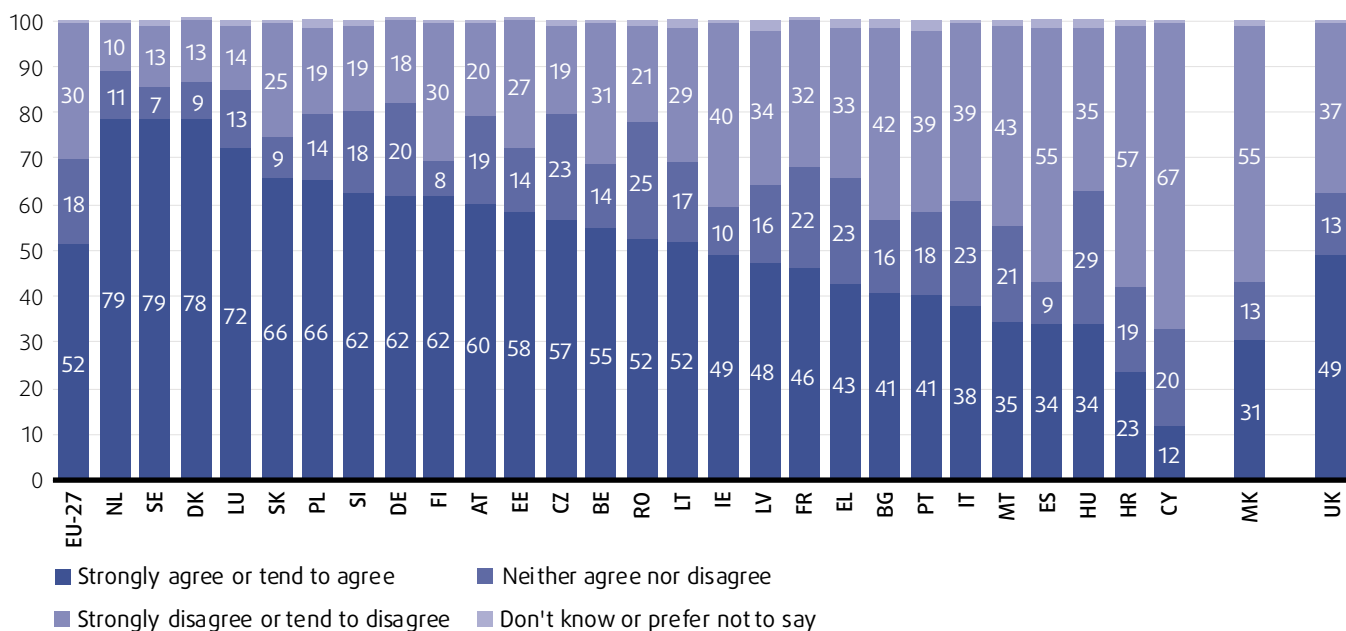
Nonetheless, some two in three people (68 %) in the EU ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement ‘Some people take unfair advantage of human rights’. Agreement ranges from 90 % in Malta, 82 % in Croatia and 81 % in Bulgaria, to 57 % in Italy, 60 % in Denmark, and 61 % in Luxembourg, Romania and Sweden. At the country level, high levels of agreement with the statement ‘some people take unfair advantage of human rights’ are reflected in those same countries by fewer people agreeing that ‘human rights abuses are a problem in some countries but they are not really a problem in [this country]’⁹. This could mean that, in some of the countries where people consider human rights abuses to be a problem closer to home (and not only something that happens in other countries), they may also be aware of examples of ‘misuse’ of human rights, leading to the sense that some people take unfair advantage of human rights.

“Human rights are losing their importance, we must not forget that they are the foundations of our democracy.”
(Woman, between 30 and 44 years old, survey respondent, France)

When asked whether ‘everyone in their country enjoys the same basic human rights’, about half (52 %) of people in the EU-27 ‘strongly agree’ or ‘tend to agree’ that this is the case. However, the results differ markedly between EU Member States (Figure 2). Highest levels of agreement with this statement can be found in the Netherlands and Sweden (both 79 %), Denmark (78 %) and Luxembourg (72 %). The lowest agreement is found in Cyprus (12 %), Croatia (23 %), Hungary and Spain (both 34 %), and Malta (35 %).

⁹ At the country level, comparing the percentage of people who ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with each of the two statements, the results are negatively correlated (r = -.560).

FIGURE 2: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “EVERYONE IN [THIS COUNTRY] ENJOYS THE SAME BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS”, BY COUNTRY (%)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

- People’s economic situation seems to affect the extent to which they feel that everyone enjoys the same basic human rights (Figure 3).
- Regardless of whether they are employed or unemployed, of those whose income allows them to ‘easily’ or ‘very easily’ make ends meet, 62 % believe that everyone in the country enjoys the same basic human rights, compared with 39 % of people who indicate they make ends meet with ‘difficulty’ or ‘great difficulty’.

It is also possible to observe a difference in views both between people who are employed and those who are unemployed, as well as between people who are employed but face different levels of difficulties in terms of ‘making ends meet’. This difference can probably partly be attributed to the impact of relative financial strain and, in parallel, the lack of appreciation by those financially better off of how those on lower incomes may experience society – and hence the application of rights in practice – as unequal.

Namely, 54 % of people who are employed (including those who are self-employed) agree or agree strongly with the statement that everybody in their country enjoys the same basic human rights. Meanwhile, only 36 % of people who are unemployed agree or strongly agree with this statement.

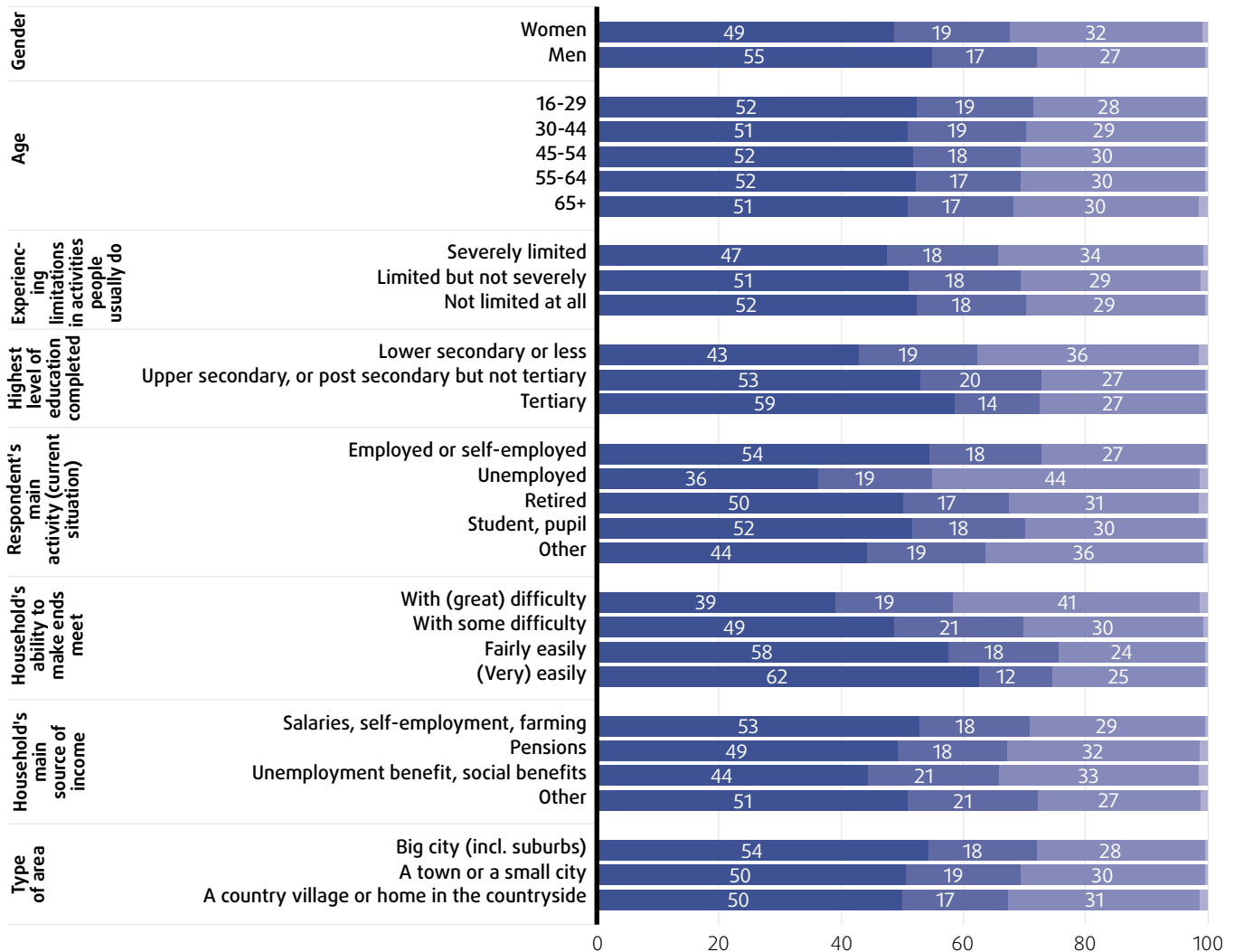
Similarly, among people who are employed and make ends meet ‘easily’ or ‘very easily’, 65 % think that everyone in their country enjoys the same basic rights. By comparison, 41 % of people who are employed but make ends meet with ‘difficulty’ or ‘great difficulty’ have this view. The latter group could include people working in jobs that don’t pay enough for them to make ends meet easily, or who have to work part-time or irregular hours that do not provide the same income as full-time work.

Overall, 55 % of men and 49 % of women agree or strongly agree with the statement that everyone in the country enjoys the same basic rights.

Notes: Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia (n = 34,948); weighted results.

“In practice, basic human rights do not apply to all citizens equally and there exist first and second class citizens.”
 (Woman, between 45 and 54 years old, survey respondent, Croatia)

FIGURE 3: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “EVERYONE IN [THIS COUNTRY] ENJOYS THE SAME BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS”, BY SELECTED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (EU-27, %) ^{a,b}



■ Strongly agree or tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Strongly disagree or tend to disagree ■ Don't know or prefer not to say

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

▲ Notes:

a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 (n = 32,537); weighted results.

b For details concerning the socio-demographic variables used in the analysis see Annex I.

In 2021, the European Commission will deliver an action plan to turn the rights and principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights into reality. Outlining the roadmap to developing the action plan, the Commission notes that “[t]oo many still struggle to make ends meet or face barriers due to inequalities” and that “[i]nequality is a break on growth and threatens social cohesion”.¹⁰ The Commission communication on establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights notes the role of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as a part of the EU ‘social acquis’, which the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission have strengthened by establishing the European Pillar of Social Rights.¹¹

¹⁰ European Commission (2020), *A strong social Europe for just transitions. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2020) 14 final)*.

¹¹ European Commission (2017), *Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2017) 250 final)*.

That everyone enjoys the same basic human rights may be true on paper – on the basis of EU Member States’ human rights commitments and non-discrimination legislation. However, evidence shows that this is not the case in practice, as evidenced by FRA’s survey research on some of the most marginalised groups in Member States, such as the Roma and certain ethnic minority and immigrant groups. A high level of agreement by the general population (52 %) with the statement that everybody in the country enjoys the same basic human rights (Figure 2) could indicate a high level of trust in the functioning of society, while not recognising that certain groups in society face particular problems in terms of realisation of their rights in practice.

For example, in FRA’s 2016 EU-wide survey of immigrants and ethnic minorities, one in four respondents indicated that they had felt discriminated against in the 12 months before the survey because of their ethnic or immigrant background.¹² According to FRA’s second survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people, one in three respondents in the survey (33 %) always or often feel the need to avoid certain places or locations for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed because of being LGBTI.¹³ In this regard, it should also be noted that, as shown in Figure 2, 30 % of people in the EU strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the statement that everybody in the country enjoys the same basic human rights.

In some of the countries with the highest shares of people believing that everyone in the country enjoys the same basic rights, a particularly high percentage also say that human rights abuses happen elsewhere – that they are a problem in some countries but not really a problem in their country. The highest percentage of people in the EU who ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with this statement is in Denmark and Luxembourg (both 67 %), followed by Austria (61 %), Sweden and Poland (both 54 %) (Figure 4). Quite different results can be found in other countries – 68 % of people in Cyprus, 62 % in Malta and 47 % in Latvia ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that human rights abuses are not really a problem in their country.

Notably, people who make ends meet only with ‘difficulty’ or ‘great difficulty’ are less likely to agree (or strongly agree) that human rights abuses happen mainly elsewhere and not in their own country – 43 % do so, compared with 54 % of people who make ends meet ‘easily’ or ‘very easily’. In this particular instance, people who face financial strain find it more easy to accept that people’s human rights might also be compromised in their own country and not only elsewhere. While 44 % of women agree or strongly agree with this statement, 52 % of men think that human rights abuses are a problem in some countries but not really a problem in their country.

“I have been heartened by recent referenda regarding same-sex marriage, abortion and divorce [...] and I feel proud to be a citizen and part of positive cultural change.”
(Woman, between 30 and 44 years old, survey respondent, Ireland)

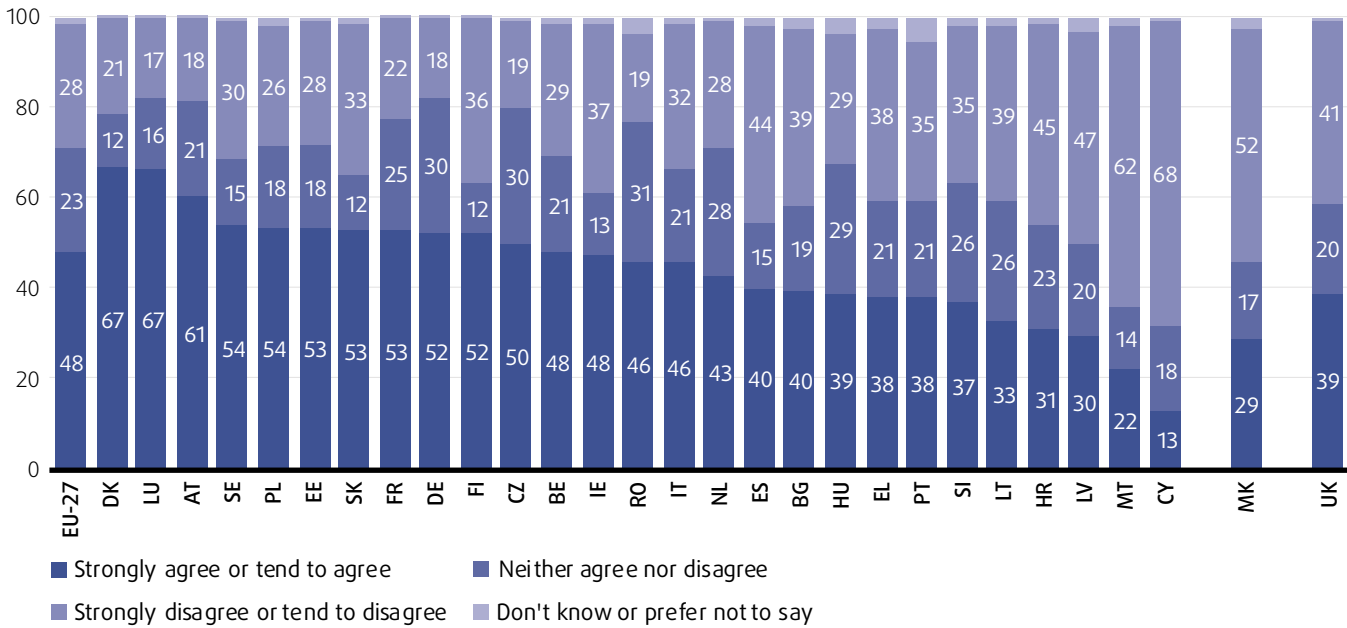
“Estonia is generally a country where human rights are respected, but the problem is, in my opinion, that it is hard to cope for people with low incomes (pensioners, people with disabilities).”
(Man, between 16 and 29 years old, survey respondent, Estonia)



¹² FRA (2017), *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey – Main results*, Luxembourg, Publications Office.

¹³ FRA (2020), *A long way to go for LGBTI equality*, Luxembourg, Publications Office.

FIGURE 4: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES ARE A PROBLEM IN SOME COUNTRIES BUT THEY ARE NOT REALLY A PROBLEM IN [THIS COUNTRY]”, BY COUNTRY (%)

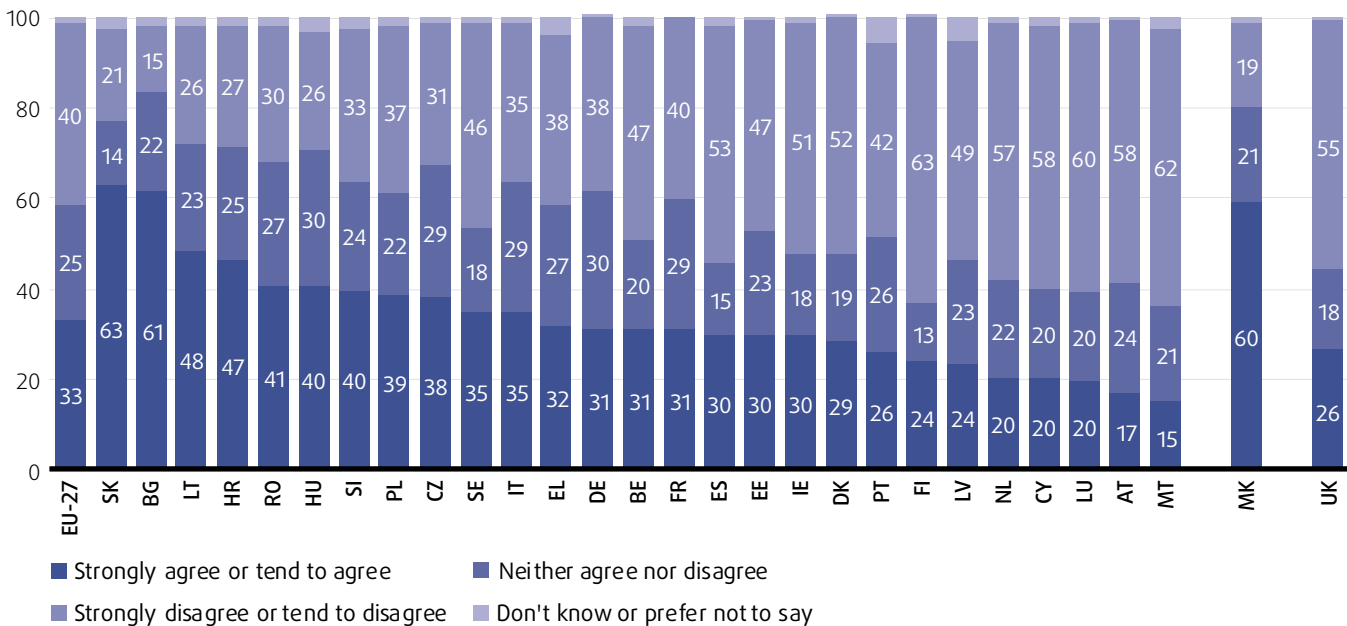


Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

Notes: Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia (n = 34,948); weighted results.

The statement ‘The only people who benefit from human rights in [this country] are those who do not deserve them such as criminals and terrorists’ elicits some of the biggest differences, both between countries as well as people with different socio-demographic characteristics. Over 60 % of people in Bulgaria and Slovakia think that only people such as criminals and terrorists benefit from human rights, compared with 20 % or fewer in Austria, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO BENEFIT FROM HUMAN RIGHTS IN [THIS COUNTRY] ARE THOSE WHO DO NOT DESERVE THEM SUCH AS CRIMINALS AND TERRORISTS”, BY COUNTRY (%)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

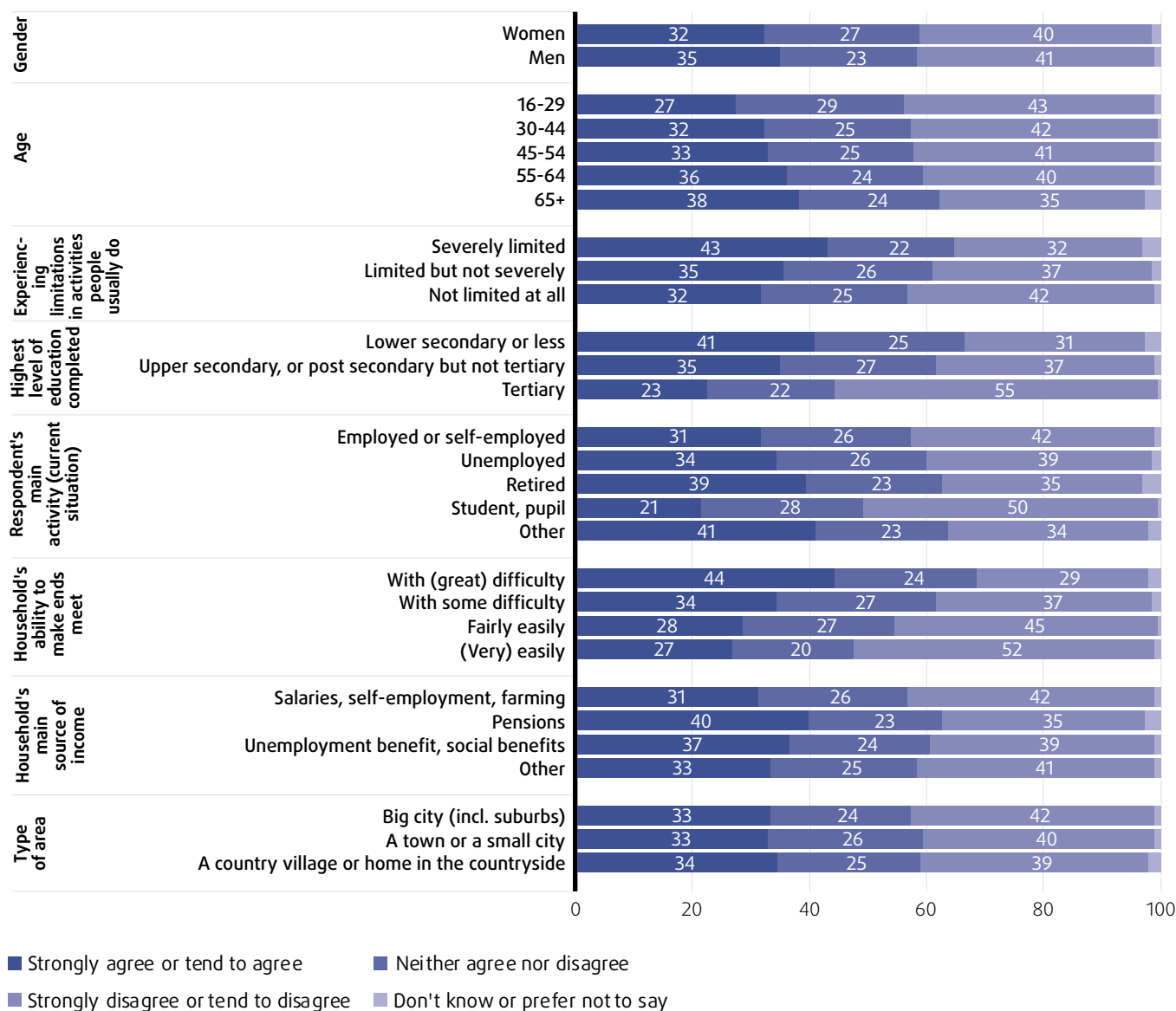
There are few differences between people based on their socio-demographic characteristics and their views concerning the statement “some people take unfair advantage of human rights”. By contrast, the stronger statement concerning human rights only benefitting people such as criminals and terrorists shows some marked differences between people in terms of their socio-demographic profile (Figure 6).

- 44 % of people who indicated having ‘great difficulty’ or ‘difficulty’ in making ends meet agree with the statement that the only people who benefit from human rights in their country are undeserving criminal and terrorists, compared with 27 % of people who make ends meet ‘easily’ or ‘very easily’.
- Other socio-demographic characteristics are associated with higher agreement with this statement. They include higher age: 38 % of people 65 years old and older strongly agree or tend to agree with the statement, compared with 27 % of 16-29-year-olds. They also include

Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 (n = 32,537); weighted results.
- b For details concerning the socio-demographic variables used in the analysis, see Annex I.

FIGURE 6: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO BENEFIT FROM HUMAN RIGHTS IN [THIS COUNTRY] ARE THOSE WHO DO NOT DESERVE THEM SUCH AS CRIMINALS AND TERRORISTS”, BY SELECTED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (EU-27, %) ^{a,b}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

lower education: among those with a lower secondary or less, 41 % strongly agree or tend to agree, compared with 23 % of those with tertiary education. Experiencing long-standing limitations in usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems) is also relevant: 43 % of those with severe long-standing limitations strongly agree or tend to agree, compared with 32 % of people with no limitations. ‘Long-standing limitations in usual activities’ refers to responses to the question on activity limitations, which is part of Eurostat’s Minimum European Health Module. For more details, see [Annex I](#). Data on activity limitations are also used as a proxy measure of disability.

- People’s views concerning this statement do not differ notably in terms of their gender.

When presented with the negative statement “Human rights are meaningless to me in everyday life”, one in five people in the EU-27 said that they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘tend to agree’. Meanwhile, 64 % ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with the statement. Agreeing with this statement is much more common in some EU Member States – 39 % in Slovakia, 33 % in Romania, and 32 % in both Latvia and Denmark. The lowest percentage of people who strongly agree or tend to agree with the statement is found in Cyprus (7 %), Malta (10 %), Portugal, Spain and Sweden (14 % in each). In terms of people’s characteristics such as gender, age, education and ability to make ends meet, there are only small differences between various groups with respect to this statement, compared to much bigger differences that can be seen when analysing other statements on human rights included in the survey.

What did the survey ask?

Have you heard of any of the following? Just respond with the first thing that comes into your head.

- The European Convention on Human Rights
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

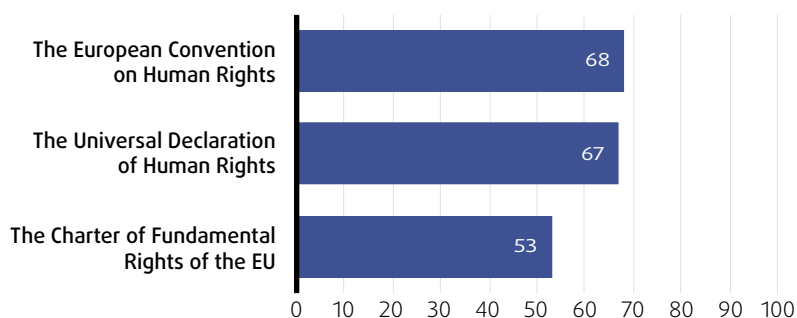
Answer categories: ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ for each instrument. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer “prefer not to say” or “don’t know”.

1.2. AWARENESS OF KEY HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

The survey asked respondents whether they are aware of three international human rights instruments – the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Council of Europe European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Charter). Out of these three, the Charter is less well known than the other two. However, it should be borne in mind that the Charter is also the ‘youngest’ of the three, legally binding only since 2009. The ECHR has been in force since 1953, and the Universal Declaration was adopted in 1948. Some two in three people in the EU have heard of the ECHR (68 %) or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (67 %), compared with about half of all people who have heard of the Charter (53 %) (Figure 7).



FIGURE 7: AWARENESS OF KEY HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS (EU-27, %)



◀ Notes: Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 24,354); weighted results.

Source: FRA, *Fundamental Rights Survey 2019* [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

Altogether, four in five people (80 %) in the EU-27 have heard of at least one of the three human rights instruments (78 % of women and 82 % of men). Awareness varies depending mostly on people's education – 93 % of people with tertiary education (ISCED categories 5–8) have heard of at least one of the three human rights instruments, compared with 65 % of people who have completed at most lower secondary education (ISCED 0–2). Other characteristics associated with lower awareness of the human rights instruments include difficulties with making ends meet with the current household income, higher age (65+ years), and being unemployed or retired.

Taking the ECHR as a benchmark, the Charter is less well known in practically all EU Member States (Figure 8). Focusing on the 14 countries where the differences in the awareness of the ECHR and the Charter is the smallest (under 20 percentage points), 9 of the 14 countries joined the Council of Europe and ratified the ECHR in the 1990s.¹⁴ This means that there is less of a difference between the period of application of the ECHR compared with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. On the other hand, the gap in the awareness of the ECHR and the Charter is the biggest in some of the countries that ratified the ECHR in the 1950s.

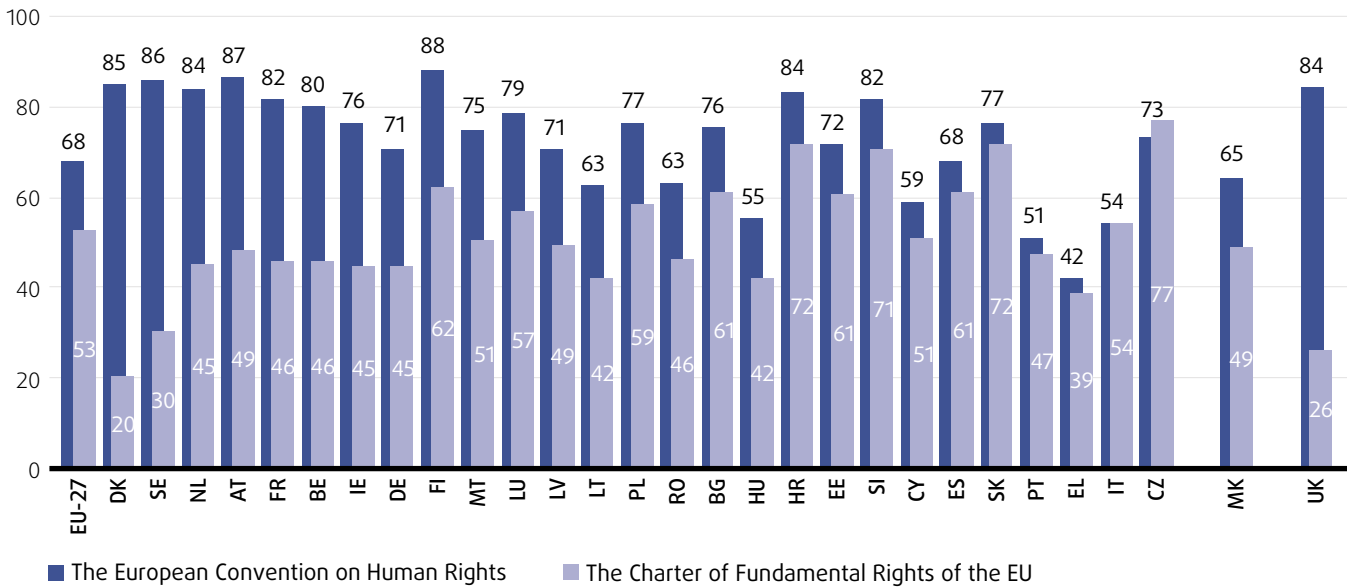
While people's awareness of the Charter of Fundamental Rights is compared here with the ECHR, it is important to note that the Charter has an added value in the EU context and its merits are worth promoting – particularly as it introduces new 'modern' standalone rights, such as data protection and consumer protection. FRA's *Fundamental Rights Report 2020* outlines the distinct contribution of the Charter to protecting the rights of people in the EU. The report also notes the lack of awareness of the Charter, which applies not only to the general population but also to professionals who have a key role to play in promoting and implementing Charter rights in practice, such as lawyers, judges, and representatives of National Human Rights Institutions.¹⁵



¹⁴ See [Chart of signatures and ratifications of the Statute of the Council of Europe](#) [accessed on 26 March 2020]. See also [Chart of signatures and ratifications of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) (European Convention on Human Rights) [accessed on 26 March 2020].

¹⁵ FRA (2020), *Fundamental Rights Report 2020*, Luxembourg, Publications Office.

FIGURE 8: AWARENESS OF THE EU CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, BY COUNTRY (%)^{a,b}



▲ Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.
- b In the figure, EU Member States are sorted based on the size of the gap, in percentage points, between awareness of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]



2

VIEWS ON THE FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

KEY FINDINGS

- ★ 86 % of people consider it of high importance to democracy that elections are free and fair. Overall, three in five people or more attach high importance to each of the six characteristics of democracy asked about in the survey.
- ★ Young people aged 16–29 consistently attach a lower level of importance to the characteristics of democracy asked about in the survey, compared with other age groups.
- ★ The majority of people in the EU (60 %) agree or strongly agree that mainstream parties and politicians do not care about 'people like me'. This proportion is higher among people who struggle to make ends meet with their household's income, those who have completed at most lower secondary education, as well as people who are facing severe long-standing limitations in usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems).
- ★ One in four people (27 %) in the EU think that, in their country, judges are 'never' or 'rarely' able to do their job free from government influence. The results range from 47 % to 11 % across EU Member States.

Honouring human rights commitments through legitimate implementing measures requires that people feel that democracy works – that people are represented, empowered to speak up and heard by decision makers – and that decisions made in the public interest are fair and equitable. A functioning democracy also requires that people are free to point out deficiencies in the way things are done and to suggest improvements, without feeling intimidated. This includes the freedom to decide who to vote for in elections, without feeling coerced. Another key element of democracy is an independent court system.



The European Commission Communication “Strengthening the rule of law within the Union. A blueprint for action”¹⁶ notes that “[n]o democracy can thrive without independent courts guaranteeing the protection of fundamental rights and civil liberties, nor without an active civil society and free media ensuring pluralism”.

In addition, the OSCE, which also covers the Member States of the EU, helps governments become more responsive, accountable and representative. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) works with government institutions, political parties and parliaments, and assists civil society to improve the participation of women and youth in politics, and to strengthen the work of parliaments and multi-party political ‘landscapes’.¹⁷ Moreover, ODIHR observes elections to assess how they respect fundamental freedoms, alongside equality, universality, political pluralism, confidence, transparency and accountability.

2.1. VIEWS ON DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

Political participation in our modern democracies helps ensure that policies and measures necessary to implement human rights commitments enjoy the support of society. Lack of political participation could indicate that people are losing faith in the effectiveness of the political system. This can threaten the legitimacy of democratic political power, a cornerstone of European society.

The survey asked respondents about various aspects of the way democracy works and how important they consider these to be. The results show that people’s answers vary across a range of socio-demographic characteristics. The questions included in the survey concerning the important elements of democracy is a shortened, adapted set of questions based on the special module of the European Social Survey, wave 6, which collected data on understandings and evaluations of democracy in 29 countries in 2012–2013 (including 20 of the 27 EU Member States; the module was also implemented in the United Kingdom).¹⁸



Legal context

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by all EU Member States, provides for the right ‘to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections [...]’.

In the EU, Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states that “the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees the right of every citizen of the Union to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament, under the same conditions as country nationals (Article 39), alongside the right of citizens to vote and stand as a candidate at municipal elections in the EU Member State where they reside (Article 40).

¹⁶ European Commission (2019), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strengthening the rule of law within the Union: a blueprint for action*, COM(2019) 343 final.

¹⁷ See the OSCE’s [webpage on ODIHR](#).

¹⁸ ESS (2014) *Europeans’ Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy: Topline Results from Round 6 of the European Social Survey*.

What did the survey ask?

How important do you think the following things are for democracy?

- That elections are free and fair
- That voters discuss politics with other people before deciding how to vote
- That opposition parties are free to criticise the government
- That the reporting by the media is free from government influence
- That the rights of minority groups are protected
- That citizens have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums

Respondents could answer each item by selecting a value from a scale, ranging from '1 – Not at all important' to '7 – Extremely important'. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know".

Overall, people in the EU place the most importance on elections being free and fair, followed by having media reporting that is free from government influence (Figure 9). People do not attach the same high importance to discussing politics with other people before making a decision on how to vote, or having a final say on important political issues through referendums. However, 60 % of people or more consider each aspect of democracy listed in the survey as being of high importance.

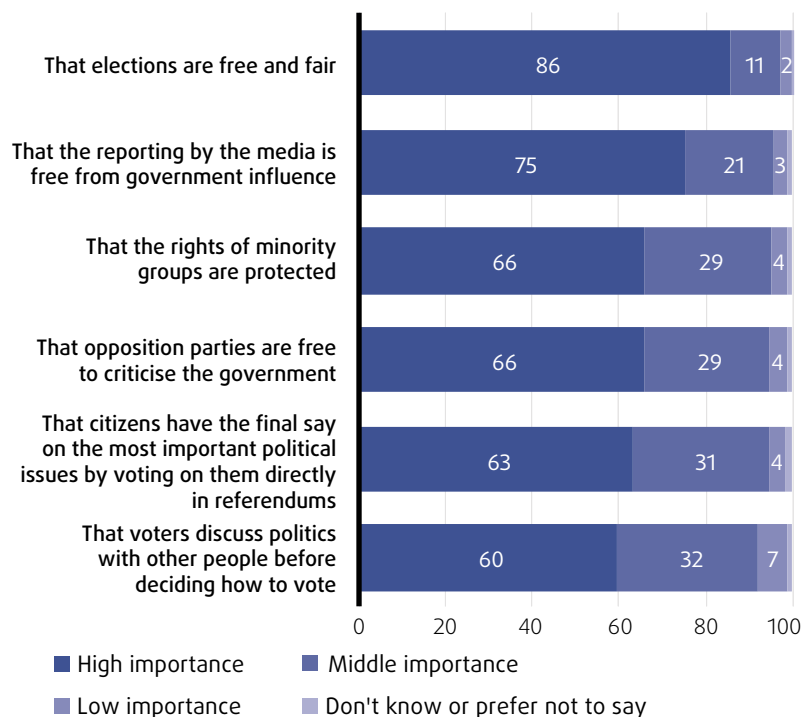
In addition to free and fair elections being consistently given the highest importance out of the six aspects of democracy asked about in the survey, it was the issue with the smallest gap in terms of views by country – from 97 % of people in Portugal considering it of high importance, to 67 % of people in Romania and Slovakia doing so (a difference of some 30 percentage points).

Examining the results by country, out of the six items asked about, the item concerning the protection of the rights of minorities results in some of the biggest differences between countries. The survey shows that two in three people in the EU-27 (66 %) give a high importance to democracy protecting the rights of minority groups. This is considered of high

► Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 24,354); weighted results.
- b Respondents could answer each item by selecting a value from a scale, ranging from '1 – Not at all important' to '7 – Extremely important'. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were provided the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know". Above, category 'High importance' includes respondents who selected values 6 or 7, 'Middle importance' corresponds with values 3 to 5, and 'Low importance' refers to values 1 and 2 on the seven point scale.

FIGURE 9: VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF DEMOCRACY (EU-27, %) ^{a,b}



“The Netherlands is mainly doing okay with protecting human rights, but would do well to continue to focus on a more transparent and more citizen-oriented democracy.”
(Man, between 16 and 29 years old, survey respondent, the Netherlands)

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

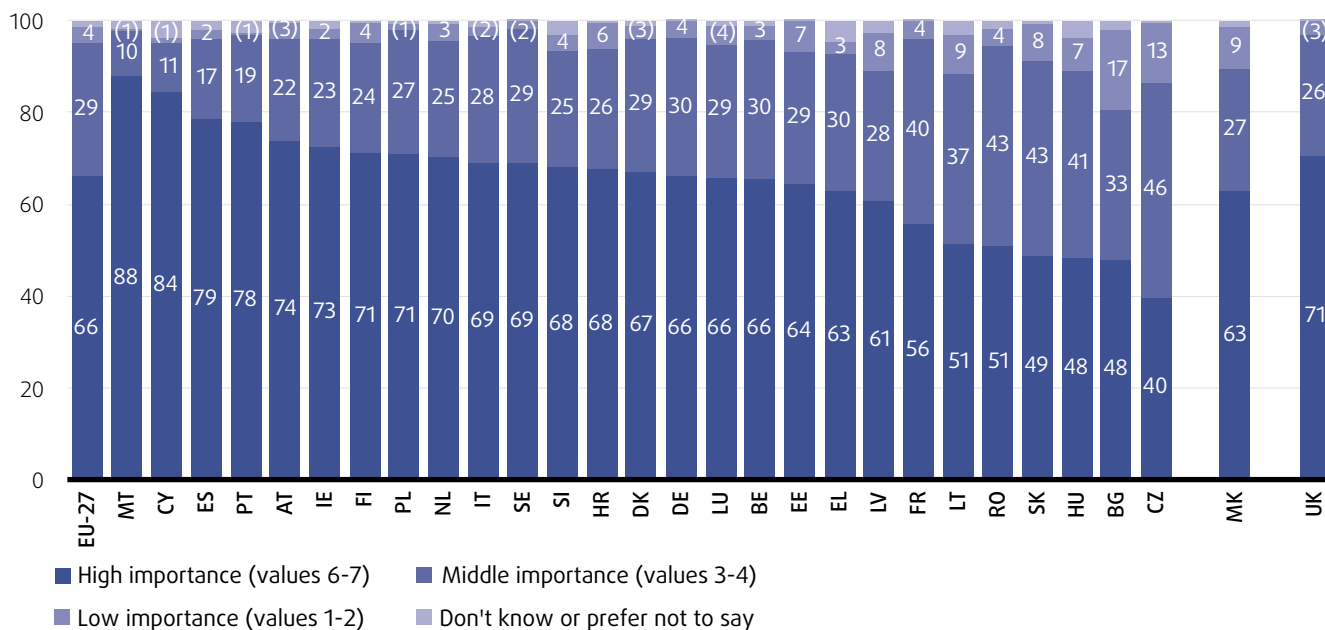
importance by 88 % of people in Malta, and more than three in four people in Cyprus, Portugal and Spain. By contrast, 40 % of people in Czechia consider the protection of the rights of minority groups as being of high importance for democracy – meaning there is a difference of 48 percentage points between the results in Czechia and Malta (Figure 10).

Other countries where less than half of people consider the protection of rights of minorities as being of high importance for democracy are Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia. Yet, as FRA's survey research on the experience of Roma – the main ethnic minority group in Czechia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia – has shown, experiences of discrimination and harassment are high among Roma in these four countries. Therefore, as underlined in the results and opinions sections of previous FRA survey reports, which have focused on minorities' experiences of discrimination, it is essential that policymakers are committed to protecting the rights of minorities. It is also vital that this is recognised as an important principle of democracy among the general population. Protecting minority rights is understood as part of a 'fairer society' – which, as shown in

Legal context

Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits any discrimination based on sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation, and – within the scope of the application and provisions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – nationality.

FIGURE 10: IMPORTANCE TO DEMOCRACY THAT THE RIGHTS OF MINORITY GROUPS ARE PROTECTED, BY COUNTRY (%) ^{a,b,c}



▲ Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.
- b Respondents could answer each item by selecting a value from a scale, ranging from '1 – Not at all important' to '7 – Extremely important'. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were provided the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know". Above, category 'High importance' includes respondents who selected values 6 or 7, 'Middle importance' corresponds with values 3 to 5, and 'Low importance' refers to values 1 and 2 on the seven point scale.
- c Results based on a small number of responses are statistically less reliable. Thus, results based on 20 to 49 unweighted observations in a group total or based on cells with fewer than 20 unweighted observations are noted in parentheses. Results based on fewer than 20 unweighted observations in a group total are not published.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

FRA ACTIVITY

Focusing on experiences of minorities

FRA has carried out a number of dedicated, large-scale surveys to collect data on the experiences of different minority groups. Focused data collection on minorities has been an essential part of the agency's activities, since these data are often not available from any other sources. This continues to be the case despite commitments such as the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, which contains a call to collect disaggregated data – by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location or other characteristics – and monitor that no-one is left behind.

Relevant FRA surveys have provided ample evidence of challenges that minorities can face in their everyday lives, ranging from discrimination when looking for work and in other situations, as well as hate-motivated harassment and violence. The results of the Fundamental Rights Survey, based on interviews with the general population concerning their experiences and views, can help contextualise FRA's survey findings concerning the experiences of minorities.

FRA surveys with data on the experiences of minorities include:

- European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey – EU-MIDIS (2008, 2016)
- Roma and Travellers Survey (2011, 2019)
- LGBTI Survey (2012, 2019)
- Survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews (2012, 2018)

The publications presenting results from these surveys are available on FRA's [website](#).

Chapter 1, is a principle that is widely supported by the general population across the EU.

Views concerning the statements that “voters discuss politics with other people before deciding how to vote”, “opposition parties are free to criticise the government”, and “citizens have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums” also show large differences between countries. For each sentence, the responses show a gap of over 40 percentage points between the country with the highest percentage of people considering these issues as being of high importance for democracy, and the country with the lowest percentage considering these issues as being of high importance.

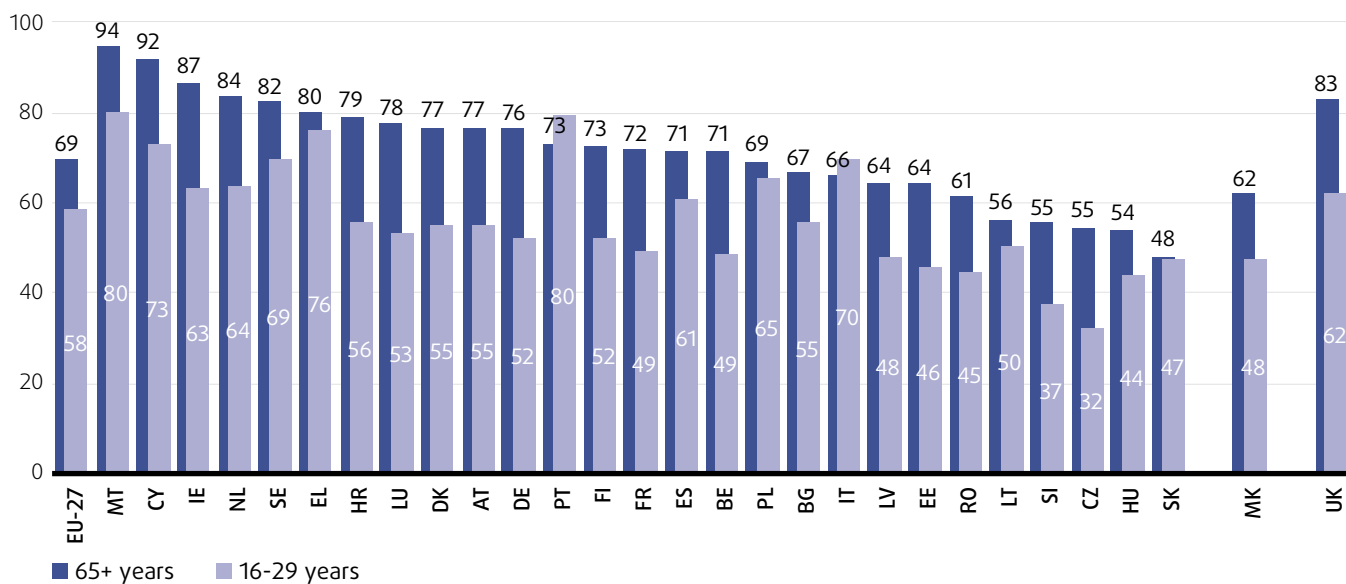
In some countries, people consistently attach a high importance to all items asked about in the survey. Notable exceptions to this include the Netherlands, where 93 % of people consider free and fair elections of high importance, but only 38 % give high importance to having a final say – through referendums – on the most important political issues. In Finland and Sweden, 93 % and 95 % of people, respectively, attach high importance to free and fair elections, but only 39 % in Finland and 44 % in Sweden consider it important to discuss politics before voting.

“So what I think is important, everybody always says that we can't change anything anyways, but it is at least a small start to go to vote, I mean how many youths don't go to vote at all anymore. And then they ultimately get upset about the ones who are still there.”

(Woman, between 18 and 29 years old, focus-group participant, Germany)

Young people (aged 16–29 years) consistently attach a lower importance to the six elements of democracy asked about in the survey, compared with older age groups. An illustration of this can be seen in **Figure 11**, which presents the results for the youngest and oldest age groups in the survey with respect to their views concerning the importance of opposition parties being free to criticise the government. In most countries surveyed, older people attach greater importance to the freedom of the opposition to criticise the government compared with young people. In this case, the gap between the views of the youngest and oldest age group is the biggest in Luxembourg, Germany and Ireland.

FIGURE 11: CONSIDERING FREEDOM OF OPPOSITION PARTIES TO CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT TO BE OF HIGH IMPORTANCE, PEOPLE AGED 16–29 YEARS AND 65 YEARS AND OVER, BY COUNTRY (%)^{a,b}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

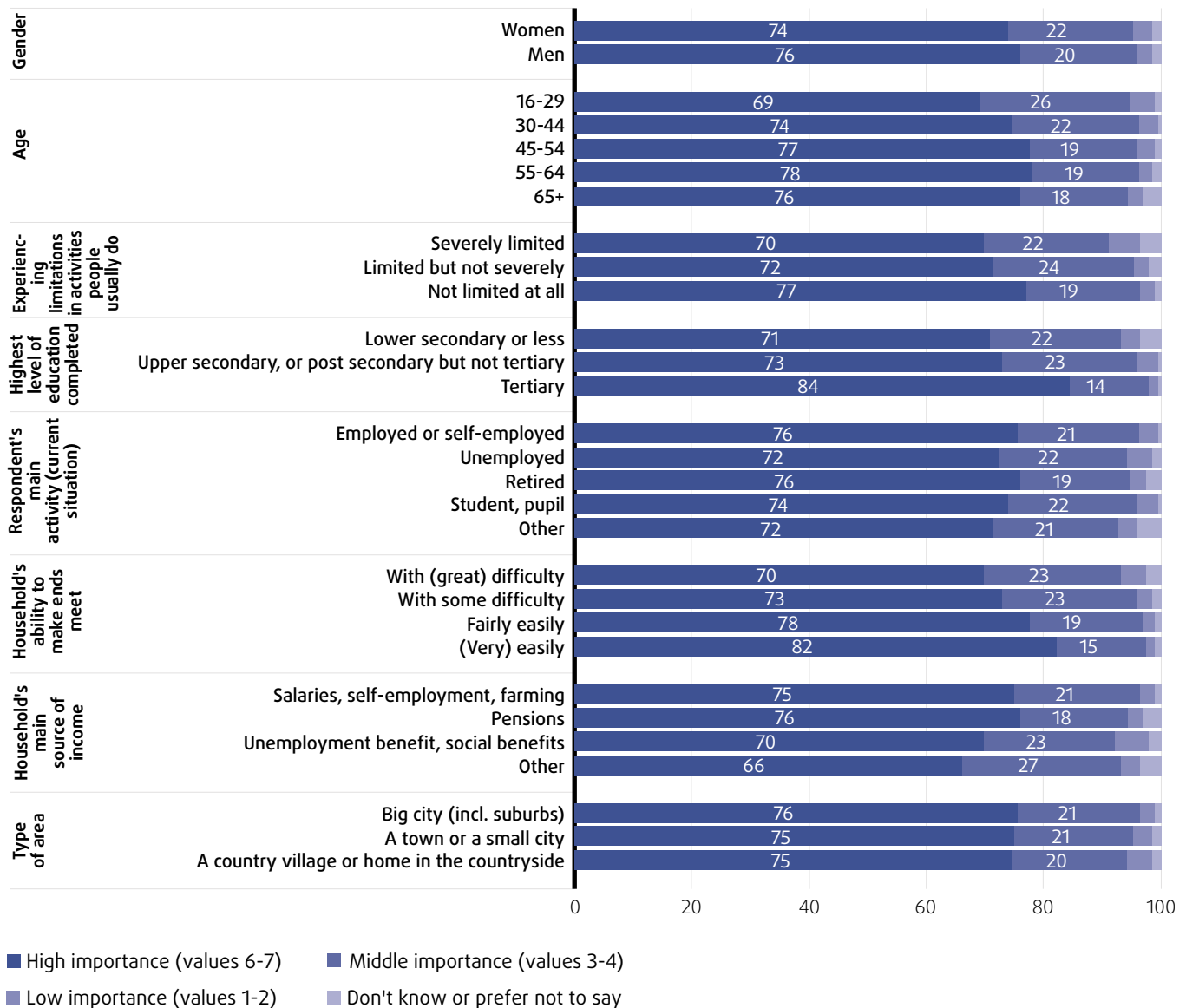
Overall, the survey results suggest that young people do not attach as much importance to traditional forms of politics, and that further attention is needed across EU Member States to educating – or, rather effectively engaging – young people about key elements of democracy and their importance in ensuring that people’s rights are protected. Some notable exceptions exist with respect to this age distribution – namely, in Portugal and Italy more young people than other age groups consider it important that opposition parties are free to criticise government. Some young people also opt for alternative ways of political engagement, outside traditional party politics, to challenge governments on issues such as environmental policy and climate change (for example, the #FridaysForFuture movement).

At the level of the EU-27 – apart from age – notable differences appear as regards education and households’ ability to make ends meet, in particular concerning views on the importance of media reporting being free from government influence (Figure 12). A higher percentage of people with tertiary education (84 %) attach high importance to this item than people with lower secondary education or less (71 %).

▲ Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section ‘Rights awareness & responsibilities’ of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.
- b Respondents could answer each item by selecting a value from a scale, ranging from ‘1 – Not at all important’ to ‘7 – Extremely important’. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were provided the option to answer “prefer not to say” or “don’t know”. The results above are based on respondents selecting values 6 or 7 on the seven point scale.

FIGURE 12: VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE TO DEMOCRACY OF REPORTING BY MEDIA THAT IS FREE FROM GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE, BY SELECTED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (EU-27, %) ^{a,b}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

▲ Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 24,354); weighted results.
- b Respondents could answer each item by selecting a value from a scale, ranging from '1 - Not at all important' to '7 - Extremely important'. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were provided the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know". Above, category 'High importance' includes respondents who selected values 6 or 7, 'Middle importance' corresponds with values 3 to 5, and 'Low importance' refers to values 1 and 2 on the seven point scale. For details concerning the socio-demographic variables used in the analysis see Annex I.

A difference can also be observed between people who have difficulties (including great difficulties) to make ends meet, compared with people who make ends meet easily or very easily – 70 % and 82 %, respectively, consider that media reporting that is free from government influence is important for democracy. On the other hand, there is no notable difference in these results based on people's gender (women – 74 %, men 76 %).

2.2. VIEWS ON WHETHER POLITICIANS CARE ABOUT 'PEOPLE LIKE ME'

Target 16.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the UN 2030 agenda includes an indicator (16.7.2) on the 'proportion of the population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group'. The results of this survey show that much remains to be done to reach this target. On average, the majority of people in the EU (60 %) 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "mainstream parties and politicians do not care about people like me" (Figure 13). The results are almost the same for women (59 %) and men (60 %). In the survey, this view comes across most often in Croatia, France, North Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia. On the other hand, Denmark, Finland and Sweden have the lowest shares of people who 'agree' or 'agree strongly' with this statement.

The perception that mainstream parties and politicians don't care is more pronounced among people with certain socio-demographic profiles – particularly people who experience long-standing limitations in their usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems), those with lower educational levels, people who are unemployed, and those who find it difficult or very difficult to make ends meet (Figure 14).

What did the survey ask?

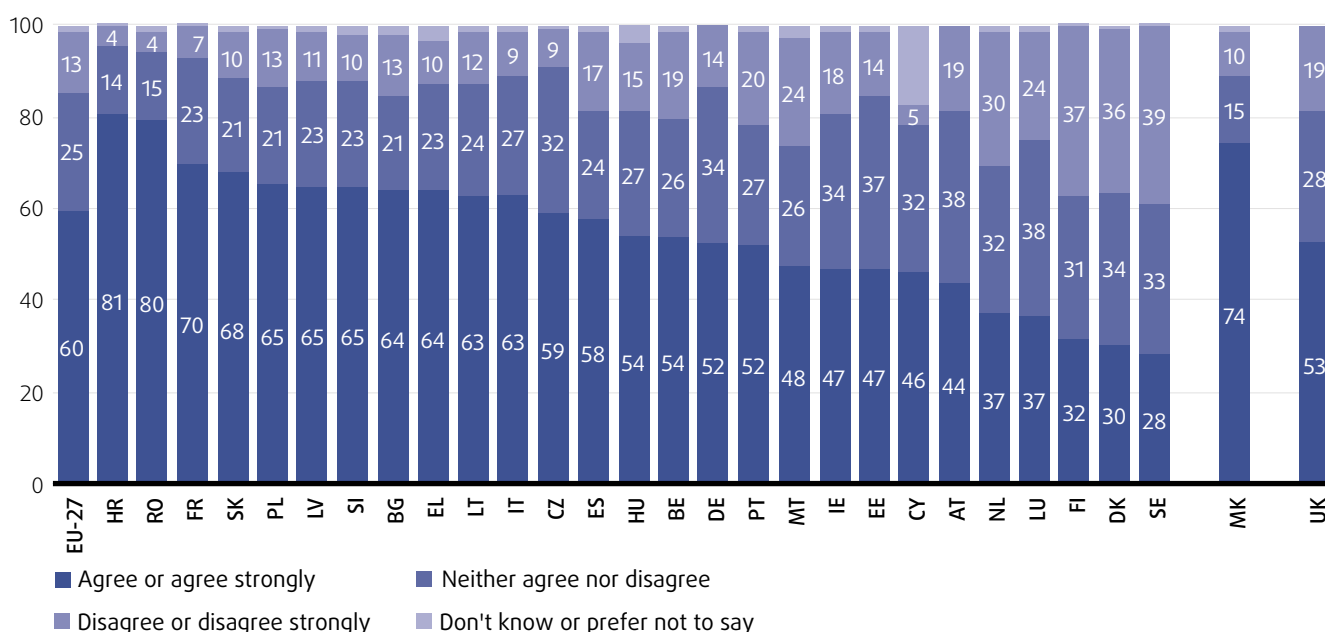
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

- Mainstream parties and politicians don't care about people like me

Answer categories: Agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, disagree strongly. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were provided the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know".

Notes: Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.

FIGURE 13: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT 'MAINSTREAM PARTIES AND POLITICIANS DON'T CARE ABOUT PEOPLE LIKE ME', BY COUNTRY (%)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

“Human rights are followed when one has political contacts. The common person is unprotected.”

(Woman, 65+ years old, survey respondent, Spain)

Notes:

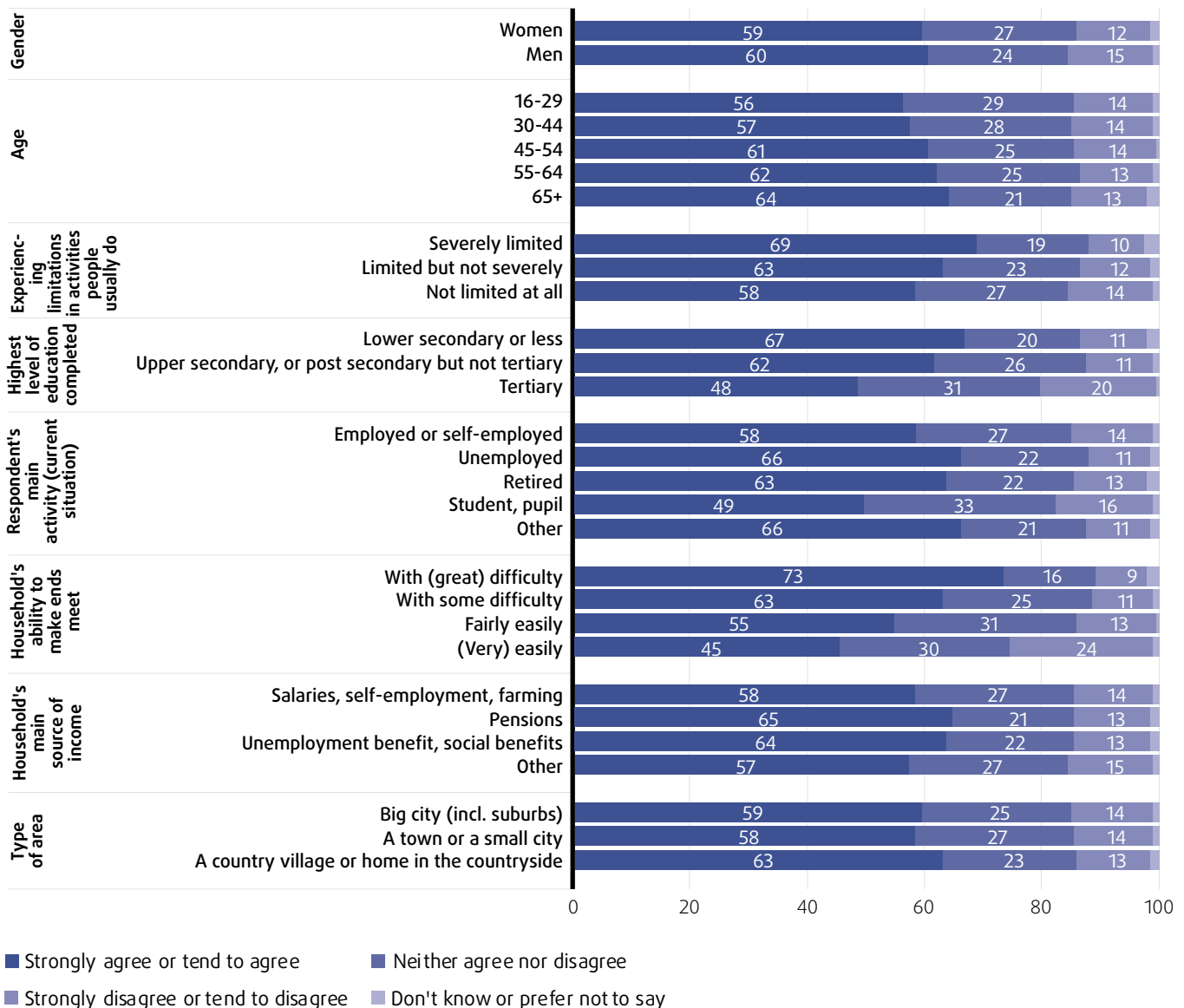
a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Rights awareness & responsibilities’ of the survey (n = 24,354); weighted results.

b For details concerning the socio-demographic variables used in the analysis, see Annex I.

The results for the EU-27 do not differ based on gender (women – 59 %, men 60 %), and examined at the country level, the differences between women and men are small in most countries. Notable exceptions from this are Denmark and Finland, where a higher percentage of men say that mainstream parties and politicians don’t care about ‘people like me’. In Denmark, 36 % of men have this view, compared with 24 % of women, while the results in Finland are 38 % for men and 26 % for women.

Overall, 73 % of people who make ends meet with difficulty or with great difficulty agree with the statement that mainstream parties and politicians don’t care about them, compared with 45 % of people who make ends meet easily or very easily.

FIGURE 14: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “MAINSTREAM PARTIES AND POLITICIANS DON’T CARE ABOUT PEOPLE LIKE ME”, BY SELECTED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (EU-27, %) ^{a,b}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

2.3. CONCERNS ABOUT POLITICAL INTIMIDATION, AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY

The survey asked three questions relating to political intimidation and undue government influence with respect to (1) non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society, (2) intimidation by political parties during elections, and (3) independence of the judiciary.

Non-governmental organisations and charities free from government intimidation

Civil society organisations bring a range of different issues, often related to human rights, to the attention of policymakers. To do this, they need to operate freely and without any intimidation.

However, the survey shows that 37 % of people in the EU-27 think that NGOs and charities are able to do their work free from government intimidation most of the time or always; 34 % think that this happens some of the time; and one in five (21 %) believe this never or rarely to be the case (Figure 15).¹⁹

- Among the EU Member States, the perception that NGOs and charities are never or only rarely able to operate free from government influence is the most widespread in Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Romania and Latvia – with one in four people or more thinking that this is the case.
- Of all countries in the survey, North Macedonia has the highest percentage of people who believe NGOs and charities never or rarely work free from government intimidation: close to half (47 %) believe this to be the case.

What did the survey ask?

In [this country], are non-governmental organisations and charities able to do their work free from government intimidation if they oppose the current government's policies?

Answer categories: Never, rarely, some of the time, most of the time, always. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know".

During election campaigns in [this country], how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation by political parties or organisations?

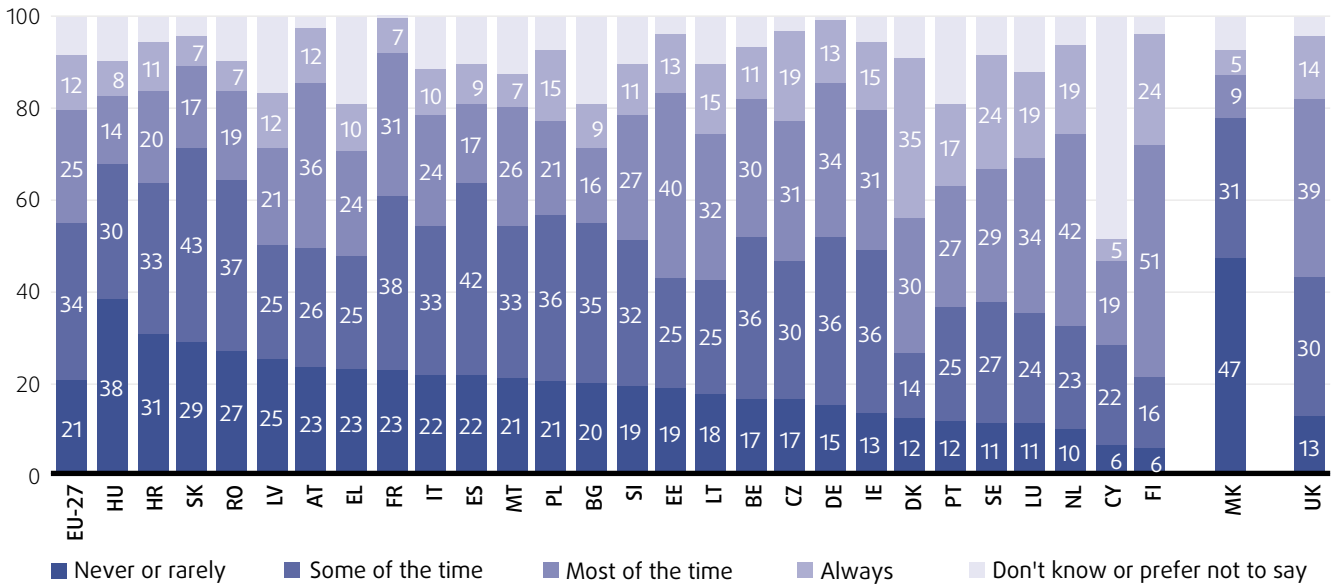
Respondents could answer each item by selecting a value from a scale, ranging from '1 – Extremely fearful' to '7 – Not at all fearful'. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know".

Do you think that judges in [this country] can do their job free from government influence?

Answer categories: Never, rarely, some of the time, most of the time, always. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know".

¹⁹ It should be noted that, compared with many other questions in the survey, a higher percentage of respondents answered "Don't know" to the question concerning the ability of NGOs and charities to operate free from government intimidation. This indicates that some respondents may have found it difficult to assess the situation that NGOs and charities are facing in their country.

FIGURE 15: PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING THE ABILITY OF NGOS AND CHARITIES TO DO THEIR WORK FREE FROM GOVERNMENT INTIMIDATION, BY COUNTRY (%)^{a,b}



▲ Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.
- b The answer categories used in the survey were 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Some of the time', 'Most of the time', 'Always', 'Prefer not to say' and 'Don't know'. In the figure, some of the original answer categories have been combined, as indicated in the category labels.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

FRA ACTIVITY

Focus on civil society

FRA's report *Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU* examines the limitations that civil society organisations can face in terms of the regulatory environment, financing and funding, right to participation, and the challenges that some civil society organisations encounter with respect to having a 'safe space' in which to operate free from government intimidation.

For the report, FRA consulted the organisations participating in its Fundamental Rights Platform. Over 700 civil society organisations participate in the Fundamental Rights Platform, which FRA established on the basis of Article 10 of the agency's founding regulation. The Platform is a channel through which FRA cooperates and exchanges information with civil society organisations operating at the local, national, European or international level.

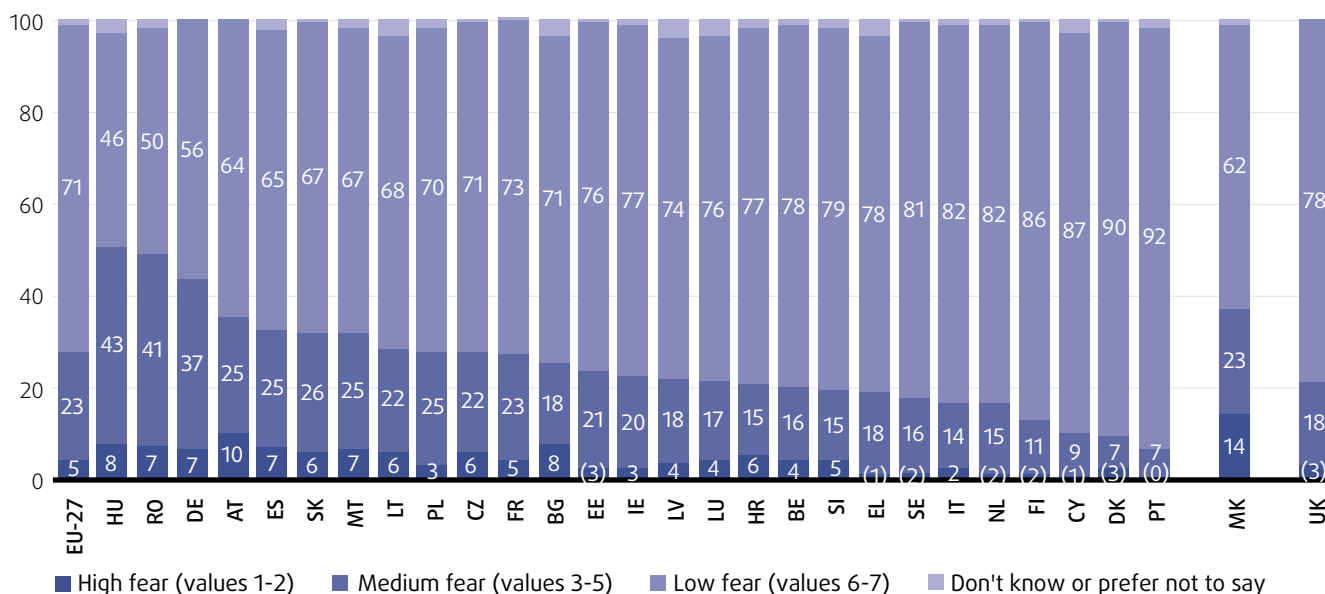
Through the regular consultations that FRA carries out, the organisations participating in the platform can share information concerning the challenges they face in their day-to-day work, ranging from access to resources and legal obstacles, to threats and attacks against the people working for the organisations or against the organisations' premises.

The report on civil society is available on FRA's [website](#). More information concerning the Fundamental Rights Platform is available on FRA's [webpage on the FRP](#).

Fearing intimidation by political parties during election campaigns

Only few people – 5 % in the EU-27 – fear to a great extent (values 1 or 2 on a seven-point scale) that they personally would be intimidated by political parties or organisations during election campaigns in their country. The answers of a majority of people (71 %) suggest most people in the EU are not themselves affected by political intimidation during election campaigns (Figure 16). Considering also those who selected a value in the middle of the seven-point scale measuring concern – that is, looking at those Member States where a large number of people indicate a 'medium' level of concern – Hungary, Romania and Germany stand out in this regard. The lowest concern for political intimidation is indicated in Portugal, Denmark and Cyprus. An analysis of socio-demographic characteristics – such as gender and age – does not show major differences between various socio-demographic profiles in terms of fearing political intimidation.

FIGURE 16: FEAR OF BECOMING A VICTIM OF POLITICAL INTIMIDATION BY POLITICAL PARTIES OR ORGANISATIONS DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, BY COUNTRY (%) ^{a,b,c}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

Independence of the judiciary

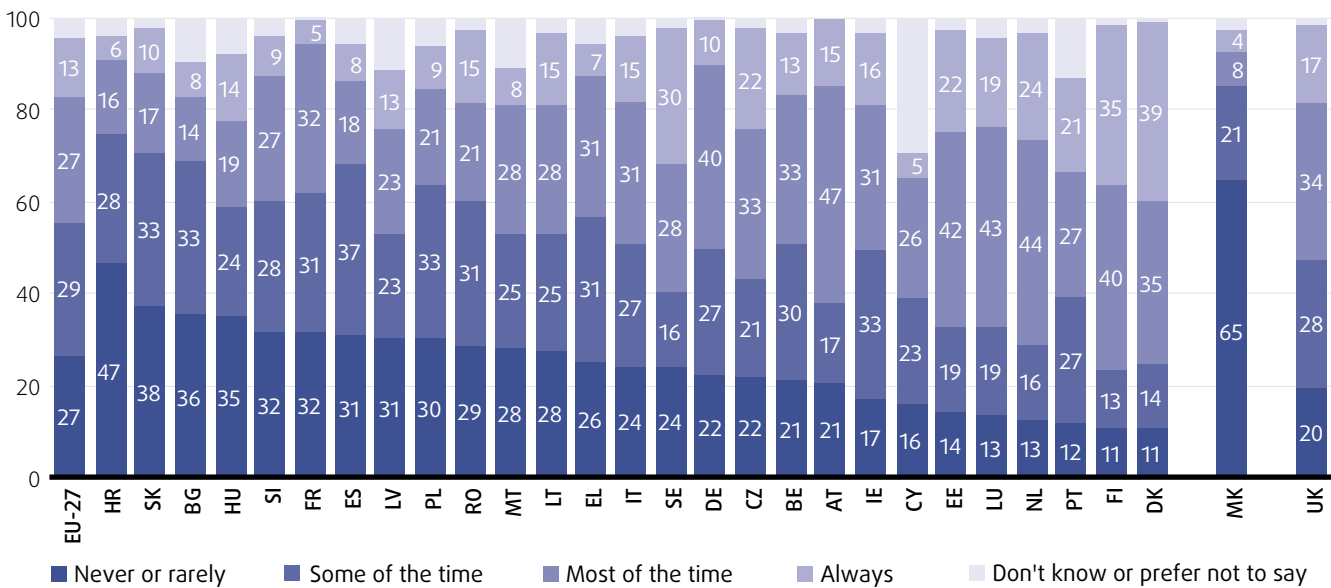
Independence of the judiciary – essential for courts to ensure an objective assessment of the law – is crucial to ensure the rule of law. One element of an independent judiciary is the ability to carry out their work free from government influence. Some one in four people in the EU (27 %) believe that, in their country, judges are never able to do their job free from government influence or they can do so only rarely (Figure 17). This perception is most widespread in North Macedonia (65 %), and among EU Member States in Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary, with more than one in three people in each country thinking that judges never or only rarely can do their job without government influence. Examined from a different perspective, the results show that in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, 30 % of people or more in each country think that judges are always able to do their job without government influencing them.

▲ Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section ‘Rights awareness & responsibilities’ of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.
- b In the figure, the results of EU Member States are presented in descending order based on the sum of categories ‘High fear (values 1–2)’ and ‘Medium fear (values 3–5)’. In the survey, respondents could select their answer using a scale with values ranging from 1 ‘Extremely fearful’ to 7 ‘Not at all fearful’.
- c Results based on a small number of responses are statistically less reliable. Thus, results based on 20 to 49 unweighted observations in a group total or based on cells with fewer than 20 unweighted observations are noted in parentheses. Results based on fewer than 20 unweighted observations in a group total are not published.



FIGURE 17: PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING THE ABILITY OF JUDGES TO DO THEIR JOB FREE FROM GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE, BY COUNTRY (%)^{a,b}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

▲ Notes:

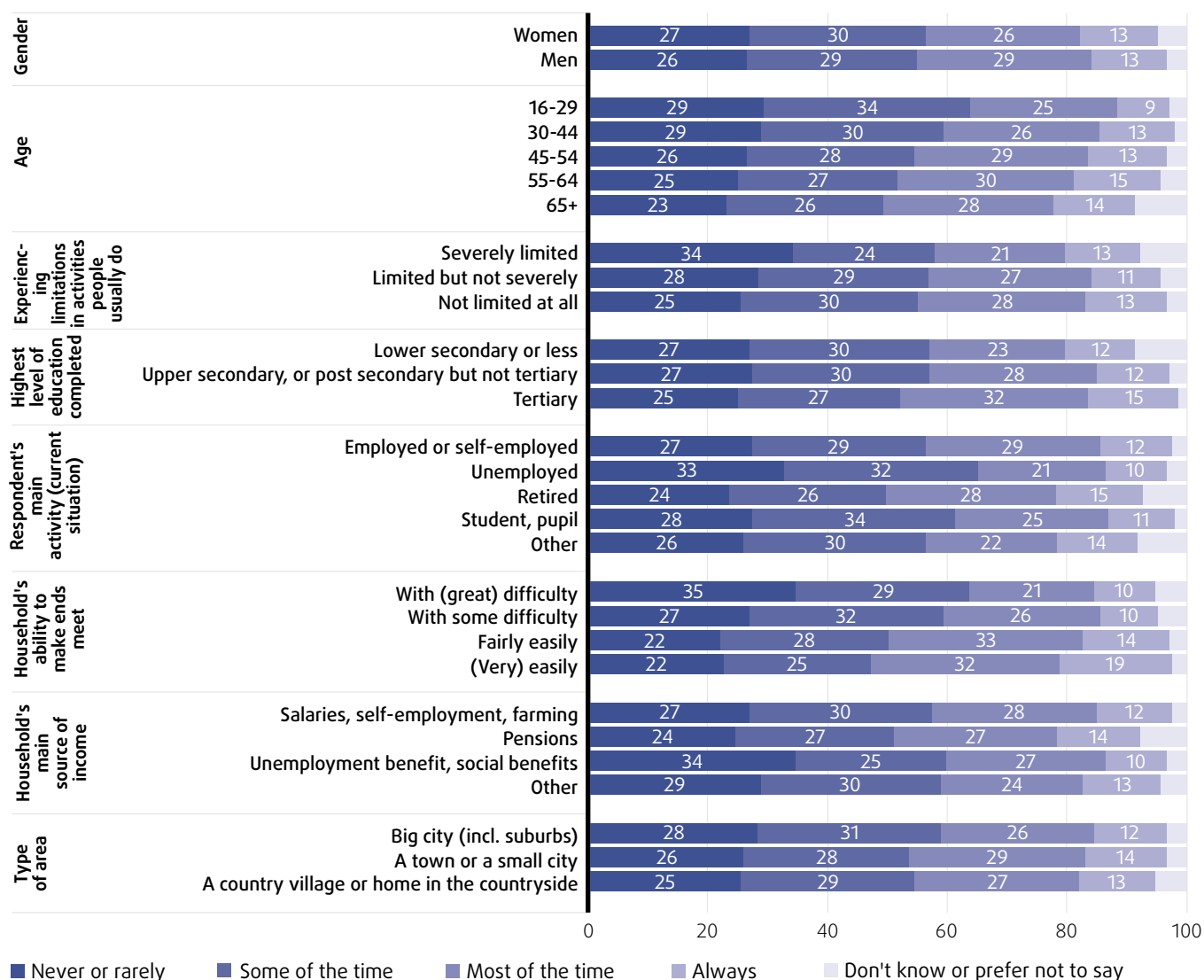
- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.
- b The answer categories used in the survey were 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Some of the time', 'Most of the time', 'Always', 'Prefer not to say' and 'Don't know'. In the figure, some of the original answer categories have been combined, as indicated in the category labels.

The results show differences according to certain socio-demographic characteristics with respect to the view people have concerning the ability of judges to work free from government influence, while there is no difference based on other characteristics, such as gender (Figure 18). The ability for a household to make ends meet with their current income is a factor: 35 % of people from struggling households (making ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty) believe that, in their country, judges never or only rarely can work without government influence, compared with 22 % of people who make ends meet easily or very easily. Other socio-demographic profiles more likely to doubt judges' ability to work free from government influence include those whose main income is unemployment benefits or social benefits, and people who experience severe long-standing limitations in usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems).

“Judges must not be interfered with, we must let them do their job. And then I think we’ll have a good judicial system.”

(Man, 65+ years old, focus-group participant, Greece)

FIGURE 18: PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING THE ABILITY OF JUDGES TO DO THEIR JOB FREE FROM GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE, BY SELECTED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (EU-27, %) ^{a,b}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

While the Fundamental Rights Survey asked people whether they think that judges can do their job free from government influence, the issue can also be approached from a different perspective, such as asking about the importance people attach to the independence of the judiciary or focusing on the need for improvement. In 2019, the results of the European Commission's Eurobarometer survey on the rule of law showed that 65 % of people in the EU consider it 'essential' to them personally that judges are independent and not under the influence of politicians or economic interests, while a further 29 % consider this 'important'.²⁰ When asked whether, in their country, there is a need to improve the situation in terms of the statement "judges are independent and are not under the influence of politicians or economic interests", 51 % of people in the EU answered 'yes, definitely' and 31 % answered 'maybe, somewhat'.

▲ Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 24.354); weighted results.
- b For details concerning the socio-demographic variables used in the analysis, see Annex I.

²⁰ European Commission (2019), **Special Eurobarometer 489: Rule of law**, Report, July 2019.

Legal context

Article 21 (1) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights forbids discrimination on the basis of 'political or any other opinion'.

"You need connections to be appointed a judge in the first place, so the influence begins even at this stage."

(Woman, between 45 and 54 years old, focus-group participant, Bulgaria)

Notes:

Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section 'Rights awareness & responsibilities' of the survey (n = 26,045); weighted results.

Impact of one's political views on chances of being hired or promoted

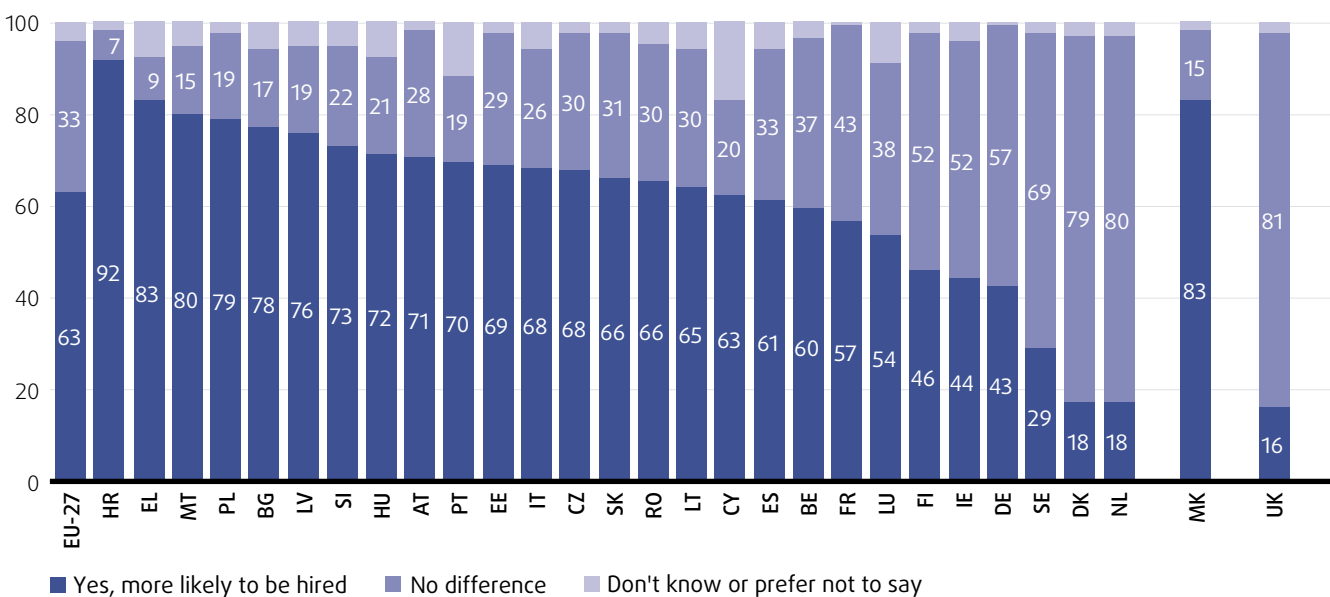
Trust in public services can be eroded by the perception that people are not treated equally when deciding who gets hired and promoted, including situations where certain candidates and jobholders are preferred based on their political views.

People in Denmark and the Netherlands show the lowest levels of such concern in the EU, with just under one in five believing that a person who belongs to the political party in power would have better chances of being hired or promoted (Figure 19). The lowest percentage expressing this opinion is in the United Kingdom (16 %), which as of 2020 is in the process of

leaving the EU. On the other hand, belonging to the party that is in power is seen to improve the chances of being hired or promoted by more than three in four people in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Malta, North Macedonia and Poland.

Overall, people's views differ the most depending on their financial situation, an analysis of socio-demographic characteristics shows. In the EU, 53 % of people who make ends meet easily or very easily think that people who belong to the political party in power are more likely to be hired or promoted, compared with 71 % of people who make ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty. These results suggest that experiencing financial hardship can lead people to question the fairness of society with respect to political membership. There is no difference between women and men in terms of their views on this statement.

FIGURE 19: VIEWS CONCERNING THE STATEMENT 'IN [THIS COUNTRY], ARE PEOPLE MORE LIKELY OR NOT TO BE HIRED OR PROMOTED IF THEY BELONG TO THE POLITICAL PARTY THAT IS IN POWER?', BY COUNTRY (%)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]



3

ACCESS TO AND INFORMATION ABOUT RIGHTS – ROLE OF AND TREATMENT BY PUBLIC SERVICES, INCLUDING CORRUPTION

KEY FINDINGS

- ★ In terms of problems when dealing with public administration and local authorities, people most often mention that their matter took a long time to process, and that they faced difficulties finding relevant information. One in ten people (11 %) believe that they were not treated equally to others.
- ★ People who experience severe long-standing limitations in their usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems) are more likely to face problems with respect to services provided by public administration and local authorities, as do people who struggle to make ends meet with their household income. However, people with high education levels also indicate a higher rate of problems with services provided by public administration and local authorities, compared with people who have completed at most lower secondary education.
- ★ Few people (4 %) in the EU have experienced corruption by public officials or civil servants (asking or expecting a favour, such as a gift or a donation, in exchange for a particular service), but the results vary significantly between EU Member States.
- ★ While personal experiences of corruption by public officials and civil servants are rare in most EU Member States, one in four people (24 %) believe that it would sometimes or always be acceptable to give a gift to a public official or a civil servant to expedite matters in cases of urgency.

In exercising their rights, people often depend on public administration and local authorities that provide essential services or help safeguard rights. In essence, states' human rights commitments, and political decisions on how to implement them, are in practice implemented by public services at national, regional or local levels that function as points of information and contact for people who want to exercise their rights. The role of public administration and local authorities in making information accessible and easy to understand – an essential service in normal circumstances – becomes of paramount importance in exceptional situations where people's rights are impacted, such as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic of 2020.

This chapter examines to what extent people in the EU feel that public administration and local authorities are informing them about their rights in an easy, accessible way. Respondents could answer the question with respect to the services provided by public administration and local authorities in their area, while examples given in the survey (under an 'Info' button) included services such as housing, waste management, care for the elderly, childcare and applying for permits. Respondents were also asked about how they experience using public services, including any negative experiences such as public officials or civil servants asking for or expecting gifts or favours in exchange for better service, which is related to corruption.

The role of public services has been recognised as part of the UN 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Attached to goal 16, the UN member states – which includes all countries in the EU – have adopted target 16.1 (“Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”) and indicator 16.6.2 (“Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services”).

In the EU, the European Foundation on Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) has examined the relationship between public services and life satisfaction and feelings of trust and insecurity.²¹ Eurofound’s research shows that perceived quality of public services contributes towards higher trust in institutions. The study also concludes that, over time, people’s assessments concerning the quality of public services such as health care and childcare services have improved.

3.1. ACCESS TO INFORMATION THROUGH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

To make informed decisions, people should have access to information about their rights as well as accessible procedures for making applications and complaints. Decisions made by public administration and local authorities have an impact on people’s everyday lives. In order to raise concerns and take part in decision making, people need access to information about decisions and processes that concern them. This could include a variety of issues that have an impact on people’s daily lives, such as provision of housing, childcare facilities and care for the elderly, waste management, or applying for permits.

Legal context

At EU level, Article 41 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees the right to good administration in terms of affairs handled by institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union. However, people often contact their local authorities in connection with various everyday matters, and the right to good administration is also an expectation at this level.



“I think we have to look up too much ourselves about our rights. We do not get informed enough.”
(Woman, 65+ years old, survey respondent, Belgium)

²¹ See Eurofound (2019), **Challenges and prospects in the EU: Quality of life and public services**, 22 October 2019.

What did the survey ask?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Public administration/ local authorities:

- Provide information for people in a simple, easy-to-ready way
- Provide people with information about their rights and entitlements
- Provide easy ways for making formal complaints
- Make information easy to find online
- Make information easy to find without using the internet – such as using leaflets or posters

Answer categories: Agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, disagree strongly. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer “prefer not to say” or “don’t know”.

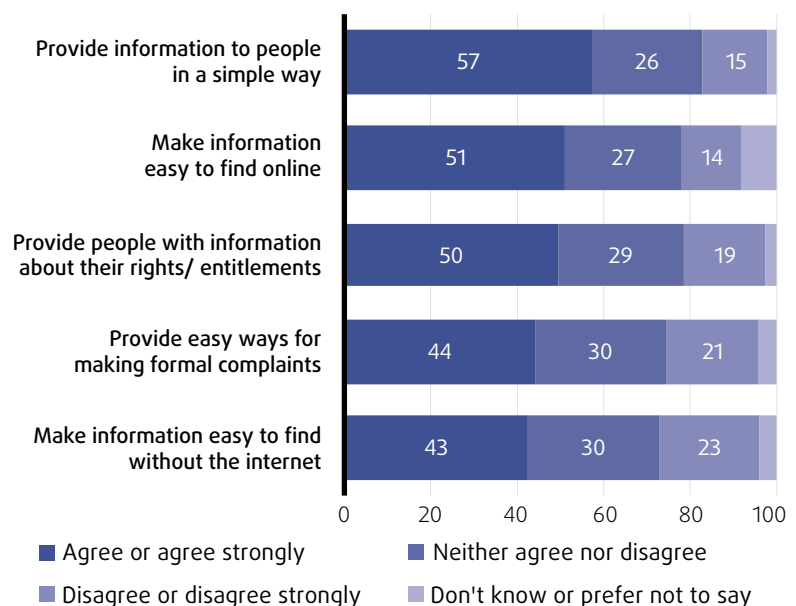
In the EU-27, some three in five people (57 %) believe that public administration and local authorities provide information in a simple way (Figure 20). More people think that this information is easy to find online (51 %), compared with finding information without the internet (43 %). Half of people (50 %) agree or agree strongly with the statement that public administration and local authorities provide people with information about their rights and entitlements. Meanwhile, one in five (19 %) disagree (or disagree strongly) that public administration and local authorities do so.

People may decide to lodge a formal complaint, seeking to overturn a decision made by public authorities/local administration, or to register an incident where their rights have not been respected, or decisions have been made without a proper legal basis. As **Figure 21** shows, there is significant variation between countries in terms of agreement with the statement that public authorities/local administration provide easy ways for making formal complaints – ranging from 64 % in Slovakia to 13 % in Cyprus.

Notes:

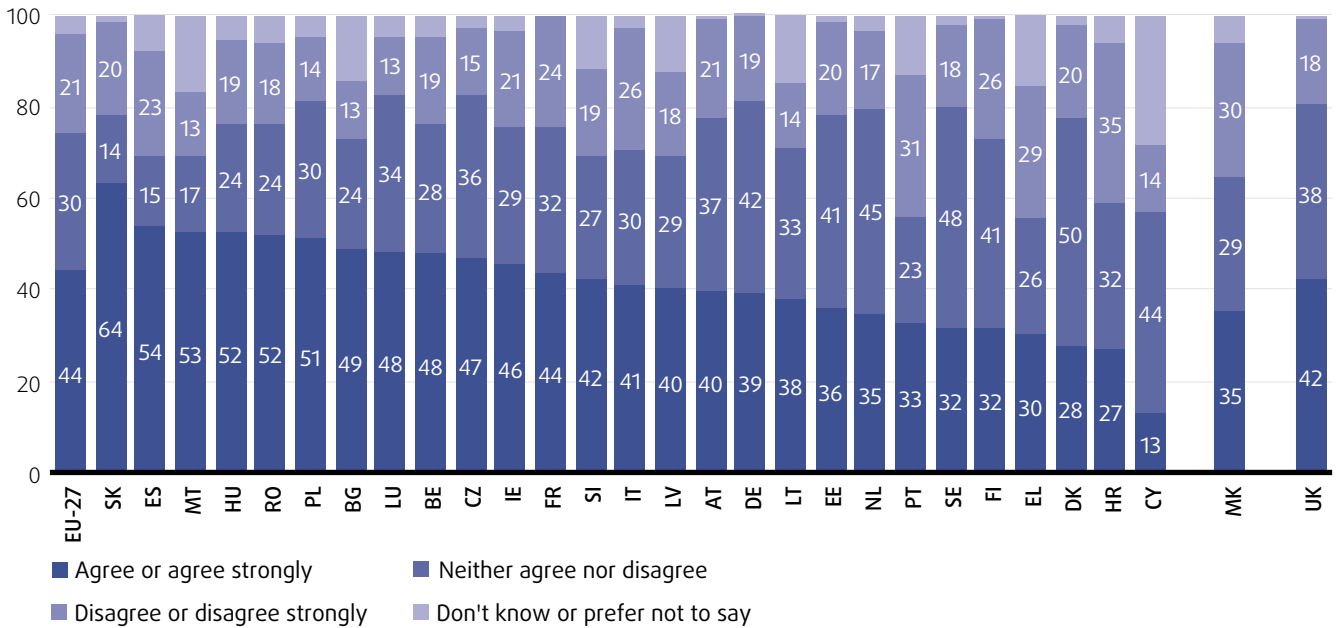
Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Everyday life experiences’ of the survey (n = 26,493); weighted results.

FIGURE 20: VIEWS ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION/ LOCAL AUTHORITIES MAKE INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE, INCLUDING WAYS TO MAKE FORMAL COMPLAINTS (EU-27, %)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

FIGURE 21: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “PUBLIC AUTHORITIES/LOCAL ADMINISTRATION PROVIDE EASY WAYS FOR MAKING FORMAL COMPLAINTS”, BY COUNTRY (%)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

Across the set of questions asked, people who make ends meet with ‘difficulty’ or ‘great difficulty’ indicate a lower degree of agreement with statements about public administration and local authorities informing people about their rights and providing information in a simple way, compared with people who make ends meet ‘easily’ or ‘very easily’.

The analysis of socio-demographic characteristics does show, at the EU level, notable differences in people’s agreement with respect to the statement that public administration and local authorities make information easy to find on the internet. Older people, people with severe long-standing limitations in usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems), people with less education and people who have difficulties or great difficulties making ends meet indicate less agreement with the statement that public administration and local authorities are making information easy to find online (Figure 22). Again, the results show a divide between the more and less ‘privileged’ in society.

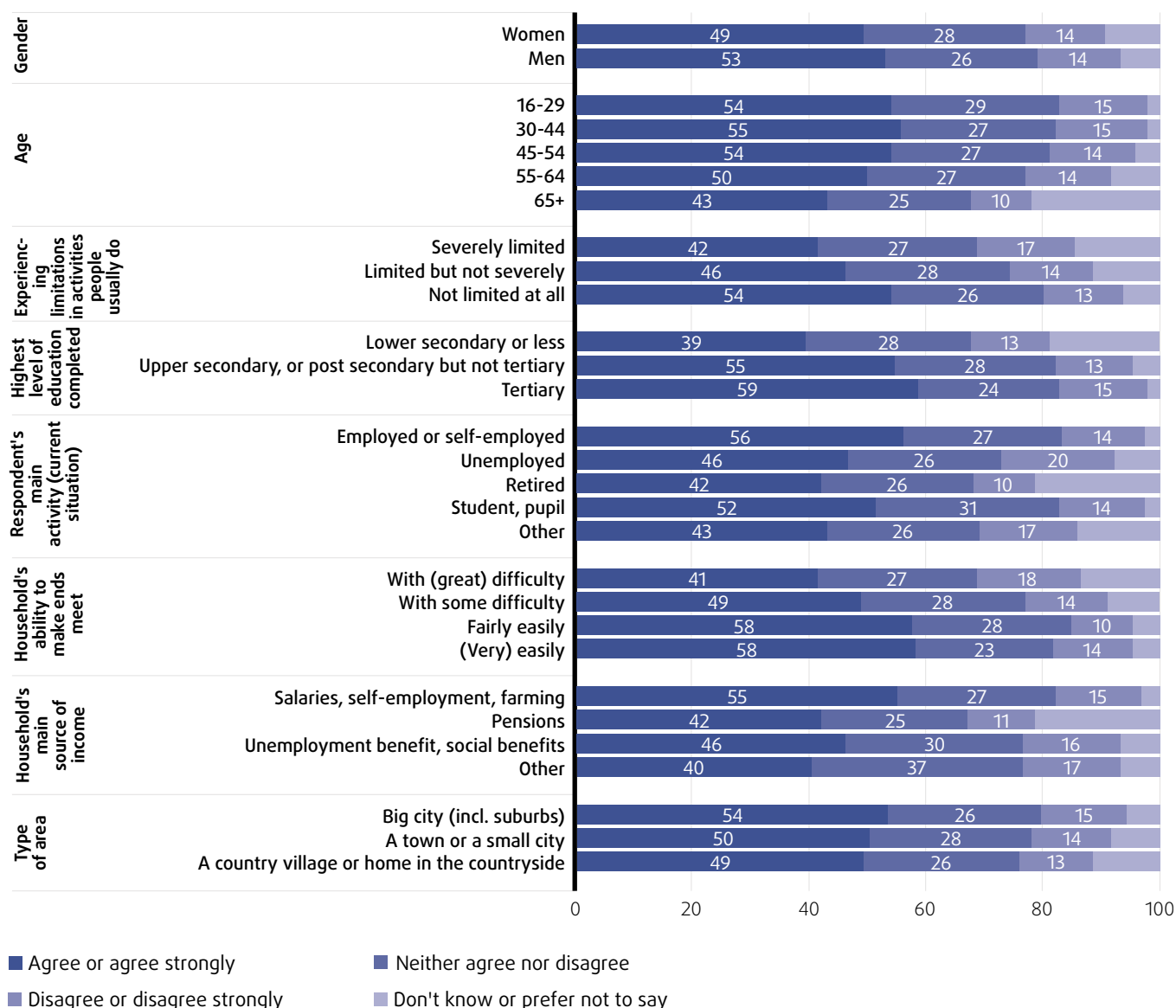
▲ Notes:

Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia who were asked to complete the section ‘Everyday life experiences’ of the survey (n = 28,240); weighted results.

“As a mother of a disabled child, it is appalling to experience how little help and guidance you get in relation to rights, opportunities etc.”
(Woman, between 30 and 44 years old, survey respondent, Denmark)



FIGURE 22: VIEWS ON THE STATEMENT “PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION/LOCAL AUTHORITIES MAKE INFORMATION EASY TO FIND ONLINE”, BY SELECTED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (EU-27, %) ^{a,b}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

▲ Notes:

a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Everyday life experiences’ of the survey (n = 26,493); weighted results.

b For details concerning the socio-demographic variables used in the analysis, see Annex I.

Overall, 49 % of women and 53 % of men agree or agree strongly that public administration and local authorities make information easy to find online.

3.2. DEALING WITH AND TREATMENT BY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The survey asked whether respondents experienced certain problems when in contact with public administration/local authorities in the five years²² before the survey. The results show that, in the EU-27, a large majority of people have not faced any of the listed problems. However, some one in five people had experienced a matter that in their opinion took too long to process (21 %), or where they had difficulties finding the necessary information (also 21 %), or where people identified as a problem that the required service or information was not available online (18 %).

One in ten people (11 %) mentioned a case where they believed that they were not treated equally to others. Further exploration of the survey data could help clarify whether lack of equal treatment is perceived to be higher among people with different socio-demographic characteristics in a Member State. For example, 17 % of people who make ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty believed they had not been treated equally compared with others by public administration or local authorities, compared with 8 % of people who make ends meet easily or very easily.

Women and men are equally likely to have the view that they have not been treated equally (both 11 %).

Furthermore, one in ten people (11 %) indicated that the service provided by the public administration/local authorities had been too expensive. While the high cost of services was mentioned less frequently than other problems listed in the survey, in some countries this was mentioned as a problem more than in others – 22 % in Germany, and 17 % of people in Estonia, the Netherlands and North Macedonia considered it a challenge that public administration or local authorities' services had been too expensive.

In terms of the most often mentioned problem – the long time taken to process matters – the percentage of people concerned about this is highest in France, Germany, Austria and Luxembourg. Meanwhile, in Latvia, Malta and Bulgaria, the long processing times were seen as a problem to a lesser extent, compared with other countries. In the survey, respondents could answer this question based on their own perception concerning the appropriate processing time,

What did the survey ask?

In the past 5 years, have you had any problems with public administration/local authorities for the following reasons?

- You were not treated respectfully
- Your matter took a long time to process
- The service was too expensive
- It was difficult to find information
- The service or information that you needed was not available online
- You were not treated equally compared with others

Answer categories: Yes, no. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know".

Thinking about the past 5 years, has the public administration/local authorities in [this country] ever denied an application or request you submitted without explaining why it was denied?

Answer categories: Yes, once; Yes, more than once; No, never; I did not submit an application or request in the past five years. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer "prefer not to say" or "don't know".

"I would like public authorities to guarantee and defend my rights and the rights of other people and that the laws should work equally for all."

(Woman, between 45 and 54 years old, survey respondent, Lithuania)

²² In this question, respondents were asked to focus on experiences that had taken place in the five years before the survey. This reference period was chosen so that the experiences collected in the survey would not be very old and therefore not reflect the current situation. At the same time, the reference period had to be long enough to capture experiences from as many respondents as possible, to enable a robust statistical analysis within the available sample size in each country.

“An application I made to a national authority was rejected without explanation. I made a complaint and wait the response for 6 months... is a matter of health...”

(Man, 65+ years old, survey respondent, Cyprus)

“I find it very difficult to obtain information regarding, for example, pension conditions, etc., since the French state and the Danish state do not necessarily work together. It can be seen as a major obstacle to the free movement of EU countries.”

(Man, between 54 and 64 years old, survey respondent, Denmark)

“The public administration works too slowly, it sometimes takes weeks to receive a response to requests, and when it does, the information is so cluttered that it cannot be understood.”

(Man, 65+ years old, survey respondent, Germany)

and it is possible that their views are influenced by expectations of what constitutes a ‘long time’ in certain countries.

Examining the second most often mentioned problem – difficulty to find information – shows that in this regard people were most critical concerning public administration and local authorities in France, Estonia and Finland, and least critical in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta.

Overall, 42 % of people in the EU-27 have experienced at least one of the six listed problems in terms of public administration and local authorities in the five years before the survey (40 % of women and 44 % of men). Comparing the results concerning problems that people have faced with public administration and local authorities with a mean score of trust in public services based on Eurofound’s 5th European Quality of Life Survey²³ suggests that higher levels of trust in public services is reflected in higher expectations regarding the quality of these services. That is, in many of the countries where people indicated, in the Fundamental Rights Survey, that they had faced one or more problems when dealing with public administration and local services – meaning that their expectations with respect to the quality of service had not been fulfilled – people on average also have a high degree of trust in public services.²⁴

People who experience long-standing limitations in their usual activities (due to disability or long-term health problems), as well as people in households where the main source of income is unemployment benefits or social benefits, and people in households that make ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty, are more likely to indicate that they have experienced problems (one or more of the six problems listed in the survey) when dealing with public administration and local authorities.

Specifically, 54 % of people with long-standing limitations in usual activities have experienced one or more problems with public administration and local authorities, compared with 39 % of people without long-standing limitations (Figure 23). One in two people (52 %) whose main household income is unemployment benefits or social benefits has experienced such problems, compared with 35 % of people whose main source of household income is pension payments. Depending on people’s ability to make ends meet, the results range from 48 % of people with (great) difficulties experiencing problems with public administration and local authorities, compared with 39 % among people who make ends meet (very) easily.

However, in terms of the highest level of education achieved, people with tertiary education show a higher percentage of problems with public administration and local authorities (50 %), compared with people who have completed at most lower secondary education (36 %). This could be related to differences in expectations with respect to public services, similar to the results comparing countries in terms of trust in public services and the percentage of people who have encountered problems. In other words – with higher standards of available public services, and the higher the level of education of people requesting a service, come higher expectations regarding that service.

²³ Eurofound, 5th European Quality of Life Survey 2016, [data explorer](#), variable “Average satisfaction with public services”.

²⁴ At the country level, the correlation between trust in public services (mean score) and the percentage of people who have faced one or more problems when dealing with public administration or local authorities is .471. In the Fundamental Rights Survey, the percentage of people who have faced problems with public administration and local authorities in Malta is 18 %, which is the lowest value of all countries in the survey and can be considered an outlier. If the result for Malta is excluded, the correlation between trust and problems faced is even stronger at .691.

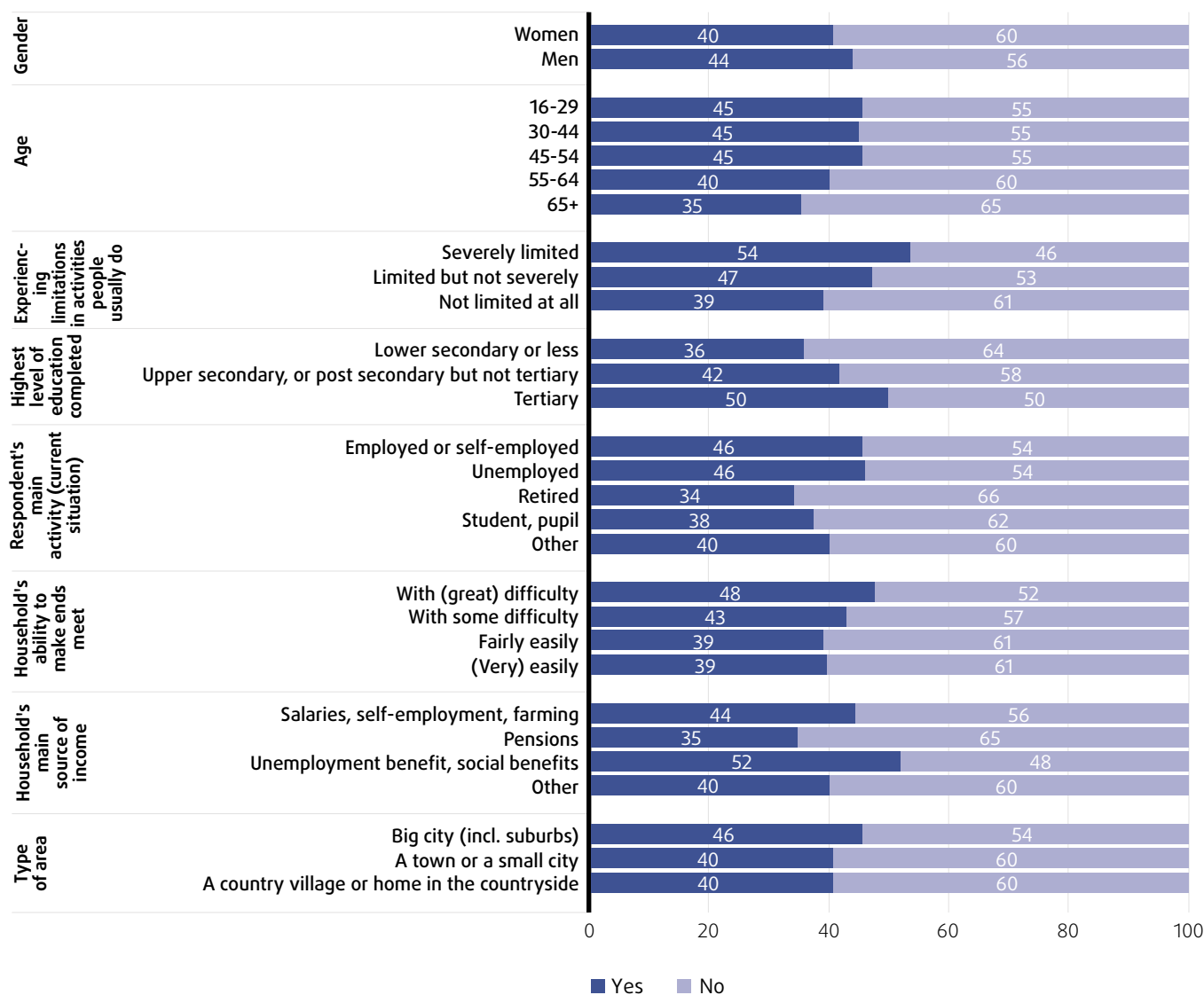
Out of people who, in the five years before the survey, had submitted an application or a request to public administration or local authorities, 13 % experienced their application or request being denied without an explanation as to why. In most cases this involved an application or a request made to a local or regional authority (62 %), followed by applications and requests made to a national authority (26 %) or another authority (11 %).

Specifically, the perception of not being treated respectfully by public administration or local authorities is more common among people who experience long-standing limitations in usual activities (due to disability or long-standing health problems) – 22 % can think of an incident where they were not treated respectfully by public administration or local authorities, compared with 12 % of people without long-standing activity limitation. Not being treated respectfully is more often mentioned by people who receive unemployment benefits or social benefits (20 %), which may be related to these groups depending more directly than others on decisions made by public administration and local authorities concerning the benefits and support they receive.

Notes:

- a Out of all respondents in the EU-27 who were asked to complete the section 'Everyday life experiences' of the survey (n = 26,493); weighted results.
- b Category 'Yes' shows the proportion of people who have experienced at least one of the six problems listed in the survey with respect to public administration and local authorities.
- c For details concerning the socio-demographic variables used in the analysis, see Annex I.

FIGURE 23: EXPERIENCING ONE OR MORE PROBLEMS WHEN DEALING WITH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION/LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE FIVE YEARS BEFORE THE SURVEY, BY SELECTED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (EU-27, %) ^{a,b,c}



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

3.3. EXPERIENCES OF AND VIEWS ON CORRUPTION WHEN IN CONTACT WITH PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND CIVIL SERVANTS

What did the survey ask?

If you needed something really urgently from a public official or a civil servant, to what extent do you think it is acceptable to do the following things?

- To give them a gift
- To do a favour for them

Answer categories: Always acceptable, sometimes acceptable, never acceptable. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer “prefer not to say” or “don’t know”.

Do you think that people in [this country] often have to give a gift, or make a donation or a payment without an invoice, or do some other kind of favour when doing the following things?

- To register their ownership of land or property
- To obtain a driver’s licence
- To receive better treatment in a public hospital

Answer categories: Never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, always. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer “prefer not to say” or “don’t know”.

In the past 5 years, did any public official or civil servant in [this country] ask you or expect you to do a favour (such as give a gift or donation) for a particular service?

Answer categories: Yes, no. In addition, respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were given the option to answer “prefer not to say” or “don’t know”.

Corruption committed by officials in public administration and local authorities can diminish people’s trust in the services they provide and discourage people from seeking information or making a complaint. The consequences of corruption can be manifold. As noted by the Council of Europe anti-corruption body (GRECO – group of states against corruption), corruption “threatens the rule of law, democracy and human rights, hinders economic development and hampers growth” and also “endangers the stability of democratic institutions, undermines trust in public institutions as well as the moral foundations of society”.²⁵

The survey examined this both in terms of people’s personal experiences of being asked for money or a favour in exchange for certain services, as well as their perception concerning the extent to which this is taking place in their country. Under the UN’s 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, UN member states have set target 16.5 to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms. This is monitored through indicator 16.5.1 – proportion of persons who had at least one contact with public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months.

The percentages of those who said that they experienced corruption committed by a public official or a civil servant (asking or expecting them to do a favour, such as give a gift or make a donation, in exchange for a particular service in the past five years) vary significantly across EU Member States. Overall, the percentage who have experienced this in the EU-27 is only 4 %. However, rates are much higher in certain EU Member States – the highest prevalence is found in Greece (18 %), Romania (13 %) and Lithuania (11 %) – and in North Macedonia (12 %).

²⁵ See the brochure on GRECO available on the Council of Europe’s [website](#).

The survey asked whether people think it is common that a person needs to give a gift or do someone some other type of favour in three situations – to register their ownership of land or property, to obtain a driver’s licence, or to receive better treatment in a public hospital. Out of the three situations, people in the EU think gifts or favours are most often given in relation to healthcare, with 35 % saying that this happens at least sometimes in order to get better treatment. By comparison, 24 % say this regarding registering the ownership of land or property, and 16 % regarding obtaining a driver’s license.

- In Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and Latvia, over 60 % of people say that people in the country at least sometimes have to give a gift or do someone some other type of favour to get better treatment in public hospitals.

Consistently with these results, when asked about the person involved in the most recent incident where money or favours had been asked or expected, 45 % mentioned that it was a doctor or a nurse, followed by a teacher (12 %), an inspector (11 % – for example, this could include somebody assessing food quality, adherence to health standards or construction rules), or a police officer (9 %).

In terms of overall acceptability, one in four people in the EU-27 (24 %) consider it sometimes or always acceptable to give a gift to a public official or a civil servant to expedite matters in cases of urgency. One in three people (32 %) would accept doing someone some type of favour.

- In particular, 48 % of people in the age group 16–29 years would find it acceptable to give a gift or do someone a favour, compared with under 35 % in other age groups.

- Over 50 % of people in Slovakia, Czechia and Croatia would at least sometimes consider it acceptable to give a gift to or do a favour for a public official or civil servant to have them react more quickly to an urgent request. By comparison, 20 % or fewer have this view in Sweden, Malta, Finland and Portugal (Figure 24).

“Public hospital doctors always expect a gift in order to take better care of you.”

(Man, between 16 and 29 years old, survey respondent, Cyprus)

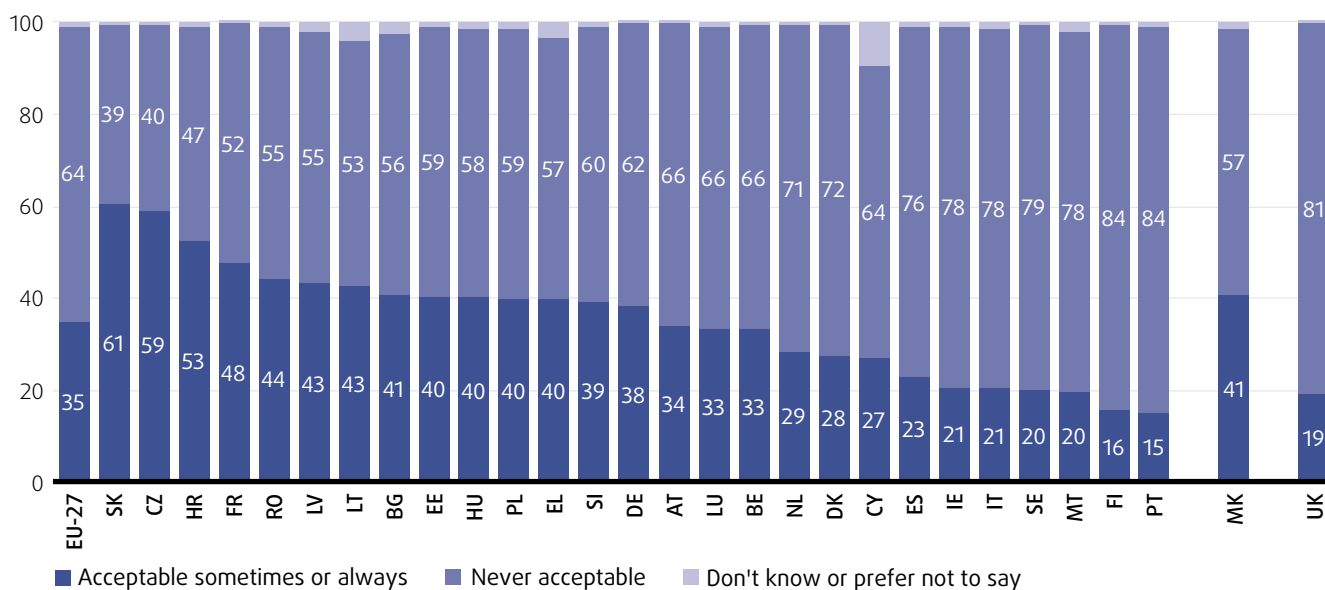
“For example when you have to pay heavy money to the gynaecologist so that you will be treated as a human being in the hospital – and that’s absolutely general, there’s nothing unusual about it.”

(Woman, between 30 and 44 years old, focus-group participant, Hungary)

Notes:

Out of all respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia (n = 34,948); weighted results.

FIGURE 24: VIEWS ON ACCEPTABILITY OF GIVING A GIFT TO OR DOING A FAVOUR FOR A PUBLIC OFFICIAL OR CIVIL SERVANT IF NEED SOMETHING URGENTLY FROM THEM, BY COUNTRY (%)



Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019 [Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT)]

Accepting the use of gifts or favours to receive quicker, preferential treatment may on some occasions present itself to individuals as a convenient or the only way to resolve issues when they urgently need public officials or civil servants to prioritise their matters. However, this behaviour erodes trust in public institutions operating in an unbiased way, and it may further increase existing inequalities in terms of cost of and access to public services, making the services less responsive to some of the people who need them the most. In this regard it is of particular concern that people aged 16–29 years are particularly open to using such methods, as people in this age group will play an important role in shaping public services for many years to come. Information outlining what corruption is, and the harm it can inflict on democracies, needs to be made more available to younger people in countries where seemingly ‘small’ acts of corruption – which may not necessarily be thought of as such – are seen as acceptable everyday acts.



Concluding remarks

At the time of drafting this report (April 2020), the Covid-19 pandemic has shown all too clearly that the functioning of societies – grounded in respect for fundamental rights – depends on public administrations that are able to provide everyday services for all members of society, and in particular those who are socially and economically disadvantaged. Guidance and measures by public authorities are likely to be more effective when people have trust in authorities to provide certain services. One way to ensure a high level of trust is by taking steps to guarantee that public services ‘work’ for people – that they provide people with the necessary information concerning rights, offer effective complaint mechanisms to make sure that decisions are made in compliance with laws, and that public authorities function efficiently, transparently and free from corruption. The standards set in international human rights commitments, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, form the backbone of standards which are reflected at the national and local level. However, the risk remains that if human rights don’t enjoy the necessary awareness, popular support and recognition among the population, countries may end up backing away from their commitments.

On the one hand, the survey results provide evidence of strong support for human rights among people in the EU. This support is not equally shared by all in society, however, which can reflect the feeling of being left behind. Those who have difficulties in making ends meet, the unemployed, as well as those with lower education – are some of the people who, according to the survey, sometimes doubt whether everyone enjoys the same human rights, and perceive that there are people who take unfair advantage of human rights. To ensure continued support for human rights, it is necessary to inform people in all segments of society about how human rights are important for them – not as abstract concepts, but in relation to their daily lived realities.

At the same time, the results stress the need to ensure transparency and reliability of public services, so that people can see that services are provided in an equitable and non-discriminatory way – that is, without some people receiving preferential treatment due to their wealth or political connections. In terms of participation in democratic processes, the survey also shows that there is a need to further encourage the participation of young people, while also informing them why it is important for everybody to contribute to ‘traditional’ democratic processes such as elections, in parallel with other ways of participation, such as through the work of civil society organisations.

Annex I: Socio-demographic characteristics considered in the analysis

This report examines the survey results with respect to the following socio-demographic characteristics. Apart from gender and age, in each question respondents were also offered the possibility to answer 'Don't know' or 'Prefer not to say'. These answers are not shown when results are disaggregated by socio-demographic characteristics due to the low number of respondents selecting these answers.

GENDER

Respondents were asked whether they would describe themselves as male, female, or in another way. In total, 32 respondents in the EU-27, United Kingdom and North Macedonia selected the answer category 'in another way' (between zero and six respondents per country), making this group too small for a robust statistical analysis of their experiences. Therefore, the category 'in another way' is not shown when survey results are disaggregated in this report by socio-demographic characteristics.

AGE

Persons who were 16 years old or older were eligible to take part in the survey.

ACTIVITY LIMITATIONS

The survey incorporated the questions of the Minimum European Health Module developed by Eurostat to collect data on self-perceived health. The module includes the following question:

"For at least the past six months, to what extent have you been limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do? Would you say you have been... [Answer categories: Severely limited, Limited but not severely, Not limited at all, Prefer not to say, Don't know]"

According to Eurostat, the question can be used as a measure of long-standing limitations related to physical or mental health problems, illness or disability.²⁶

EDUCATION

In each country where the survey took place, the respondents were presented with a list of levels of education, in the local languages and using the names of the educational institutions. The list was based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) to ensure that the local education categories can be coded back to a set of standard categories for EU-level comparative analysis of the results.

²⁶ Eurostat (2013), **European Health Interview Survey (EHIS wave 2) – Methodological manual**, Luxembourg, Publications Office, pp. 16-17.

SELF-DECLARED MAIN ACTIVITY

Respondents were asked to select the category that best describes their current situation, based on the following list.

- Employed
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Unable to work due to long-standing health problems
- Student, pupil
- Fulfilling domestic tasks
- Compulsory military or civilian service
- Other

In the analysis presented in this report, the answer categories 'employed' and 'self-employed' have been combined. Answer categories 'Unable to work due to long-standing health problems', 'Fulfilling domestic tasks', 'Compulsory military or civilian service' and 'Other' have been combined under the category 'Other'.

ABILITY TO MAKE ENDS MEET

Respondents were asked to assess the ability of their household to make ends meet with their household's total income, using a scale of six answer categories, ranging from 'with great difficulty' to 'very easily'. In this report, the results are presented in four categories: 'With (great) difficulty' (combining answer categories 'With great difficulty' and 'With difficulty'), 'With some difficulty', 'Fairly easily', '(Very) easily' (combining answer categories 'Easily' and 'Very easily').

MAIN SOURCE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Respondents were asked about the main source of income in their household using the following answer categories:

- Wages or salaries
- Income from self-employment (excluding farming)
- Income from farming
- Pensions
- Unemployment/redundancy benefit
- Other social benefits or grants
- Income from investment, savings, insurance or property
- Income from other sources

In the analysis, the first three listed answer categories have been combined into the category 'Salaries, self-employment, farming'. The categories 'Unemployment/redundancy benefit' and 'Other social benefits or grants' have been combined into 'Unemployment benefit, social benefit', and the last two answer categories from the list have been combined into the category 'Other'.

TYPE OF AREA

The survey asked respondents to describe the area where they live, using the following answer categories:

- A big city
- The suburbs or outskirts of a big city
- A town or a small city
- A country village
- A farm or home in the countryside
- Other

The analysis presented in this report combines the first two of the listed answer categories into 'Big city (incl. suburbs)'. Answer categories 'A country village' and 'A farm or home in the countryside' are combined into 'A country village or home in the countryside'. The answer category 'Other' is not shown because of the low number of respondents who selected this category.

Annex II: Methodology

This annex summarises the implementation and data collection outcomes of the Fundamental Rights Survey. A detailed description of the survey methodology and fieldwork outcomes will be available in a technical report, which will be published in the second half of 2020. The technical report will also describe the pre-test study FRA carried out in 2015–2016 to develop the survey questionnaire, and the piloting that took place in 2017 to help inform the design of the final survey, which was conducted in 2019.

POPULATION AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

People who were 16 years of age and older and had their usual place of residence in the survey country were eligible to take part in the survey. The results are representative of this population at the EU-level as well as for each individual country included in the survey.

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE AND SAMPLING

The survey was carried out in the 27 EU Member States, the United Kingdom (an EU Member State at the time the data collection took place), and North Macedonia (as the only non-EU country with an observer status to FRA at the time the survey was designed).

In each country, available sampling frames were assessed before mainstage data collection. The frames that offered nationwide, close to 100 % coverage of the population were selected for use in the survey, to draw a random probability sample of respondents and to contact them. These sample frames could include sources such as population registers or registers of addresses. In countries where such sample frames do not exist, or national authorities did not give access to the frames, the sample was selected in a multi-stage selection procedure, as commonly used in surveys. The addresses of the population were enumerated in a random selection of areas within the countries (partially including random route methods). This method allowed for a selection of a representative sample of people based on the enumerated addresses.

In the context of the survey, it was not possible to access existing sample frames or to use enumeration of addresses in Germany and France. In these two countries, the data collection used existing online panels.

In all cases, irrespective of the sample frame used, the published results have been adjusted through weighting so that the key respondent characteristics of the sample replicate the distribution of key population characteristics in accordance with official statistics (see the section on 'Weighting' in this annex).

FIELDWORK TEAMS

The mainstage data collection was carried out by Ipsos MORI, with partner agencies implementing the survey activities in each country. The feasibility study and pre-test, which preceded the mainstage data collection, was implemented by TNS Kantar. Both contractors were selected as a result of open and competitive EU-wide tendering procedures.

In three countries FRA cooperated closely with national statistical authorities and registers in implementing the survey, in order for the survey fieldwork to benefit from population register data that otherwise would not have been available for FRA or its survey contractor Ipsos MORI. In Austria, the mainstage data collection was implemented by Statistics Austria (Statistik Austria). In Luxembourg, the sampling and contact with respondents was managed by the Centre des technologies de l'information de l'État (CTIE). In the Netherlands, Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek – CBS) provided sampling and weighting services.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

FRA started developing the Fundamental Rights Survey by first testing whether data collection could be carried out online in some EU Member States. Online data collection is used increasingly in surveys, including by national statistical institutes. It can offer a more flexible way for respondents to complete the survey – at their own time and pace – and online data collection can in some cases help reduce the costs of the surveys. To ensure representative samples in online surveys, FRA conducted a feasibility assessment in 2015–2016. The assessment started by identifying suitable sample frames in each country that could be used for a representative online survey. In the next stage, FRA carried out pilot surveys, which confirmed that online data collection would be well placed for data collection in a number of EU Member States.

Based on the results of the pilot, the full-scale Fundamental Rights Survey was carried out online in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In other countries the respondents were contacted in person by an interviewer. The default approach to contacting the respondents in the online countries was through a letter sent by mail to a representative, random sample of recipients. The letter contained instructions how they can fill in the survey online – either using a computer, tablet computer, a smartphone or another device, at home or elsewhere. Respondents who initially did not complete the survey were sent additional letters as a reminder.

In France and Germany, the survey was carried out with a quota sample of people participating in online survey panels. Quotas ensured that the samples followed the structure of the total population in each of the two countries in terms of age, gender, employment status, education and region. In all other countries, a representative probability sample of respondents was selected from sources typically used for social surveys – depending on the availability of data sources in each country, this includes population registers and address registers, or sampling by following an enumeration of addresses (including in some cases the use of random route procedures).

In the countries where the survey was administered by interviewers who contacted respondents in person (19 of 29 countries in the survey), interviewers asked the respondents to complete parts of the questionnaire autonomously, using the laptop or tablet computer supplied by the interviewer. This approach helps to ensure comparability across countries and data collection modes (online mode vs. face-to-face mode). Having an interviewer ask the questions

can have an impact on the answers respondents give, particularly if the questions concern topics that may be considered sensitive or the answers could be interpreted as less socially desirable. The self-completion mode was used in the survey specifically in sections that could be considered sensitive. This ensured better quality of data, given that the user experience of answering the questions was similar and respondents provided their answers directly using a device such as a laptop or a tablet.

SAMPLE SIZE

In total, the final survey data set contains the answers of **34,948 respondents** in the EU-27, the United Kingdom and North Macedonia. The survey set out to complete 1,000 interviews in each country. To achieve this, a larger gross sample size was determined for each country, based on available estimates of likely response rates. In most cases, the final response rate exceeded the initial estimates. In only few cases was the final number of completed interviews slightly below the target of 1,000 respondents, as shown in Table 1.

In France and Germany, where the data collection was based on online panels, the sample size was increased to ensure that an adequately large sample is available to examine the representativeness of the data and weight the data to adjust for any divergence compared with available official statistics concerning the composition of the population.

Before starting the analysis of the survey results, a small number of cases was deleted from the final data set as a result of the data checks that were put in place to ensure the high quality of the data. While all survey data were checked for quality and consistency, the checks were of particular importance for assessing the data collected online – for example, to exclude cases where the survey was completed in a very short time, making it unfeasible for a respondent to fully consider their answers.

TABLE 1: NET SAMPLE SIZE, FIELDWORK PERIOD AND DATA COLLECTION MODE, BY COUNTRY

Country	Number of respondents (net sample size)	Fieldwork period	Data collection mode
Austria	1,233	2 Apr-9 May 2019	Online
Belgium	1,047	15 Jun-21 Oct 2019	Face-to-face
Bulgaria	1,016	15 Feb-23 Apr 2019	Face-to-face
Croatia	1,019	18 Mar-4 Jul 2019	Face-to-face
Cyprus	1,005	6 Feb-22 Jun 2019	Face-to-face
Czechia	1,074	22 Mar-6 Jun 2019	Face-to-face
Denmark	1,173	14 Mar-7 May 2019	Online
Estonia	1,067	25 Mar-21 May 2019	Online
Finland	1,048	14 May-3 Sep 2019	Online
France	2,987	21 Jun-27 Aug 2019	Online (panel)
Germany	2,972	21 Jun-27 Aug 2019	Online (panel)
Greece	1,001	30 Mar-12 Jun 2019	Face-to-face
Hungary	993	29 Mar-2 Jul 2019	Face-to-face
Ireland	1,006	14 Mar-1 Aug 2019	Face-to-face
Italy	1,013	22 Mar-18 Oct 2019	Face-to-face
Latvia	1,034	7 May-2 Aug 2019	Face-to-face
Lithuania	1,008	23 Apr-8 Aug 2019	Face-to-face
Luxembourg	966	13 May-23 Sep 2019	Online
Malta	1,004	18 Jan-28 Jul 2019	Face-to-face
Netherlands	1,626	16 Jan-20 Mar 2019	Online
Poland	1,000	19 Feb-8 Jun 2019	Face-to-face
Portugal	1,001	25 Feb-27 May 2019	Face-to-face
Romania	999	11 Feb-21 Jun 2019	Face-to-face
Slovakia	1,081	4 Feb-29 Aug 2019	Face-to-face
Slovenia	1,007	3 May-28 Jun 2019	Face-to-face
Spain	1,002	6 Mar-7 Jul 2019	Face-to-face
Sweden	1,155	18 Apr-13 Jun 2019	Online
<i>Total EU-27</i>	<i>32,537</i>		
United Kingdom	1,384	26 Mar-23 May 2019	Online
North Macedonia	1,027	15 Mar-15 May 2019	Face-to-face
<i>Grand total</i>	<i>34,948</i>		

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey questionnaire was developed in English and translated into the national language(s) of each country using a multi-stage workflow consisting of an initial translatability assessment, two independent translations, adjudication of the two translations and agreement on the final version, followed by final proofreading. The final questionnaire consisted of the following sections:

- Introduction
- Personal security & safety
- Tolerance & equality
- Rights awareness & responsibilities
- Personal discrimination
- Respondent characteristics
- Everyday life experiences
- Technology
- Closing

In countries where data collection took place face to face, the respondents were asked to complete several sections of the survey autonomously using the tablet or laptop computer of the interviewer, so that respondents read the questions on the screen and entered their answers directly on the device.

In countries where the survey was carried out online, respondents were assigned randomly into two groups, and certain sections of the survey were administered either to group 1 or group 2, but not both, while other sections were administered to all respondents. This was done to shorten the overall length when completing the survey online, when it can be more challenging to motivate respondents to complete long surveys, compared with having interviewers present to motivate respondents. The median time for completing the online survey was 26 minutes, while the face-to-face survey took 36 minutes to complete (median time). Depending on the country, respondents were also offered a small incentive to thank them for taking part in the survey.

SAMPLING ERROR

All sample surveys are affected by sampling error, given that the survey interviews only a fraction of the total population, with the aim to draw conclusions concerning the population at large on the basis of the sample. Therefore, all results presented are point estimates, with statistical variation. Small differences of a few percentage points between groups of respondents have to be interpreted as remaining within the range of statistical variation, and only more substantial differences between population groups should be considered as actual differences in the total population. Results based on small sample sizes are statistically less reliable and are flagged in graphs and tables – for example, numbers shown in graphs are put in brackets to indicate this. These include statistics that are based on samples between 20 and 49 respondents in total. Results based on fewer than 20 respondents are not shown. Results based on cell sizes with less than 20 persons are flagged as well.

WEIGHTING

The results presented in this report have been weighted, to make the key respondent characteristics of the sample closely reflect the respective population characteristics in each country, in accordance with official statistics. First, design weights are used to reflect the probabilities of selection, taking into account the multi-stage, clustered sample design in countries using the face-to-face data collection mode as well as in the United Kingdom. In Austria design weights are used to adjust for the increased sampling rate among persons with only compulsory schooling, estimated to have lower response rate.

Second, differences between the sample and the population are addressed via post-stratification or calibration weights, based on key population characteristics. In all countries, respondents' age, gender, education as well as information concerning the region where the sampling unit is located and its and degree of urbanity were taken into account when calculating the weights.

In France and Germany, where respondents were selected from online panels, the sample was additionally adjusted based on household size. In Austria, where Statistics Austria selected the sample from their proprietary population register, weight could also take into account respondent's employment status and citizenship. In the Netherlands, the weights were calculated by Statistics Netherlands, which was able to use register information concerning respondents' age, gender, household income, marital status, migration background, household composition and degree of urbanity.

Finally, weighting has been used to ensure that the aggregate results for the EU-27 take into account the population size of each country. This means that countries with larger population have a larger influence on the aggregate results compared to smaller countries, in line with their respective population sizes.

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PROMOTING AND PROTECTING YOUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS ACROSS THE EU —

FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey collected data from 35,000 people about their experiences, perceptions and opinions on a range of issues that are variously encompassed by human rights. This report presents a small selection of the survey results. It focuses on findings with respect to respondents' opinions about human – or fundamental – rights; their views and perceptions on the functioning of democratic societies – as a pillar on which human rights can flourish; and on their thoughts on and engagement with public services that have a duty to enforce human rights law and to protect people's rights.

The results are primarily intended to inform EU institutions, Member State governments and institutions – including National Human Rights Institutions, Equality Bodies and Ombuds Institutions – alongside human rights defenders and civil society organisations, about the place of fundamental rights in EU societies – based on what people think and experience. The findings provide an evidence base to inform action on fundamental rights, which – ultimately – can be used to achieve an impact on fundamental rights in practice and to ensure the effective implementation of fundamental rights obligations.

FRA will publish further results from the survey in 2020–2021, both in report format as well as through an interactive online data explorer.



Access to justice



Equality



EU Charter of
Fundamental Rights



Non-discrimination



Rule of law

FRA – EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Schwarzenbergplatz 11 – 1040 Vienna – Austria

T +43 158030-0 – F +43 158030-699

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