RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY
PUBLIC OPINION ONE YEAR INTO THE PANDEMIC
Ten Key Takeaways

1. Tightening purse-strings: More than half see impact on their personal finances
31% of Europeans have already seen their personal income affected during the Covid-19 pandemic and 26% expect such an impact in the future.

2. Health benefits of restrictions seen as more important than economic damage
A majority of citizens say that the health benefits of restriction measures in their country are greater than the economic damage they have caused (58%).

3. There is hope, yet uncertainty prevails and frustration grows
When asked about their feelings a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, Europeans mention uncertainty (45%), hope (37%), frustration (34%) and helplessness (30%).

4. EU actions against Covid-19 are well known, but not fully approved
Eight in ten EU citizens say they are aware of EU measures or actions to fight the crisis. Among those who are aware, 48% are satisfied and 50% are not satisfied with the measures taken.

5. Asymmetric satisfaction with solidarity between EU Member States
44% of Europeans are satisfied with solidarity in the EU, with the lowest rates found in Spain (35%), Germany (35%), France (34%) and Belgium (31%).
6. Despite current criticism, the image of the EU remains at its most positive since 2008
A majority of Europeans have a positive image of the EU (48%), a proportion that has been steadily increasing over time despite short-term variations.

7. Something needs to give: 50% of Europeans want reforms
A near quarter (23%) support the EU ‘as it has been realised so far’, while 47% ‘are in favour, but not the way it has been realised until now’.

8. Power up: EU to have more competences to cope with crises such as Covid-19
Three-quarters of EU citizens (74%) want the EU to have more competences to better manage crises like this one. Highest figures are observed in Portugal (96%), Malta (91%), Sweden (90%), Finland (89%) and Ireland (87%).

9. Jabs first ...
Ensuring rapid access to vaccines (39%) and investing more money for the development of treatments and vaccines (29%) are the first two priorities the EU should focus on, in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

10. ... Jobs second
Looking at policy priorities for the EP, half of citizens (49%) put public health as their first priority, followed by measures to fight poverty and social exclusion (39%) support the economy and create new jobs (39%).
IN A NUTSHELL

The European Parliament’s Spring 2021 Eurobarometer looks at how citizens view the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the actions taken by the EU to tackle them. The personal and financial impact over the past year is becoming more visible, with some countries hit harder than others. Awareness of the EU’s crisis management role is high and combined with significant expectation levels for the EU to deliver effective action to tackle the pandemic’s fallout.

The health crisis has actually reinforced citizens’ support for the EU in general, with the EU enjoying its highest approval levels in over a decade. However, results show ‘asymmetric satisfaction’, results mitigated by various factors, with both EU measures - and solidarity between Member States - when it comes to fighting the pandemic.

In a nutshell, results suggest robust support for the European Union, specifically in times of crisis. There is broad consensus among Europeans that global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic are best tackled at the EU level. People expect solidarity and efficient joint action - they are critical when they are not delivered upon.

PERSONAL PURSE STRINGS ARE TIGHTENING - BUT BROAD DIFFERENCES REMAIN AMONG COUNTRIES AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Thirty-one percent of Europeans have already seen personal income affected negatively during the pandemic and 26% expect this to happen in the future. While 57% of respondents represent a clear majority on EU average, important national variations within the EU must be taken into account. In some countries, very large majorities do not expect the pandemic to affect their income at all, while in other EU countries the situation seems quite the opposite. Data from this survey suggest a north/south divide in this regard: large proportions of respondents in Greece (50%), Bulgaria (48%), Italy (45%) and Cyprus (43%) already claim an impact on their personal income while in Denmark (76%), the Netherlands (67%), Sweden (64%) and Finland (62%) most do not see or expect it. In socio-demographic terms, the crisis has also had a stronger financial bearing on the working age population, as well as on Europeans who are self-employed, unemployed or say that they encounter difficulties paying bills. This last indicator, however, has not increased proportionately during the pandemic: a relatively stable third of Europeans say they encounter difficulties paying bills often (7%) or sometimes (24%). If one compares and contrasts this result with findings from the Parliament’s 2020 ‘Public Opinion in Times
of Covid-19’ (September-October 2020) survey, one notes that in the autumn of 2020, EU citizens were already feeling the financial impact of the pandemic. Respondents said, at the time, they encountered difficulties paying bills, rent or bank loans, while others referred to a loss of income, to using their savings sooner than planned, or to having to ask family or friends for financial help. A look at this development over the past year suggests no major impact on citizens’ ability to pay their bills so far - while serving as a warning sign that such problems may well continue to build up over time.

THE EXPECTED HEALTH BENEFITS OF LOCKDOWN MEASURES NOW OUTFEIGH PERCEIVED ECONOMIC DAMAGE

Despite the financial impact of the pandemic, a majority of respondents (58%) said in March/April 2021 that the health benefits of restriction measures in their country outweigh the economic damage they might have caused. This opinion is shared in most countries and suggests an attitude reversal in contrast with results of Parliament’s ‘Public Opinion in Times of Covid-19’ online surveys in 2020. The three waves of that survey had shown a declining emphasis on health benefits in relation to economic damage, in parallel to declining infection figures across Europe during the summer of 2020. The current survey’s results suggest that Europeans have again become more supportive of the health benefits of the restrictions, as infection levels in European countries increased again during the winter months of 2020/21. This leads to an important finding in this survey: despite ongoing concern about finances and the economy, public health is now seen as the top priority for the EU and the European Parliament in particular.

THERE IS HOPE - YET UNCERTAINTY DOMINATES, WITH FRUSTRATION AND HELPLESSNESS FOLLOWING SUIT

A year into the pandemic, Europeans predominantly feel uncertainty (45%), hope (37%), frustration (34%) and helplessness (30%). In line with the results of the 2020 ‘Public Opinion in Times of Covid-19’ series: uncertainty and hope remain the most-mentioned feelings in most EU countries. However, frustration now moves to the top among respondents in Ireland, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden. Results show a clear link between Europeans’ positive or negative emotions and how they are affected by personal income. Those who have already experienced an impact on their personal financial situation are more likely to feel negative emotions such as ‘uncertainty’ (51%), ‘frustration’ (41%), ‘helplessness’ (37%) and ‘anger’ (31%). Those who have not experienced it are more likely to describe positive emotions such as ‘hope’ (41%), ‘calm’ (27%) and ‘confidence’ (19%). It is noteworthy

1 The European Parliament commissioned a series of three online surveys in 2020 to measure the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. A direct comparison of those results with the current Spring 2021 Special Eurobarometer survey (EB 95.1) is not possible due to the different survey method used, as well as the differences in age coverage. For more information on methodology, please refer to the Technical Specifications at the end of this report.
though a majority of Europeans are satisfied with the life they lead (79%) - and that about two in three citizens say they are optimistic about the future of the EU.

**I KNOW WHAT EU DID SINCE LAST SUMMER**

Citizens are well aware of European Union’s efforts to fight the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences: eight in ten Europeans have heard, seen or read about measures or actions initiated by the EU to respond to the pandemic - and nearly half of all citizens (48%) know what these measures are. This demonstrates a higher level of awareness than what was observed in the last wave of ‘Public Opinion in Times of Covid-19’ surveys, conducted from September to October 2020.

Out of those who are aware of EU actions geared towards fighting the pandemic, 48% are satisfied with the measures and 50% are not. Satisfaction is higher among citizens who also know what these measures are (50%) compared to those who are aware, but do not know what they are (46%). It is noteworthy that the EU 48% satisfaction low average value is due to a number of large EU Member States with a majority of dissatisfied citizens (i.e. Italy, Spain, Germany and France). Whereas a majority in 19 Member States overall are satisfied with these measures, going up to 81% in Denmark, 74% in the Netherlands, 73% in Malta and 71% in Sweden.

**ASSORTED SATISFACTION WITH INTRA-EU SOLIDARITY**

Only a minority of citizens in the EU overall (44%) are satisfied with the solidarity shown between EU Member States in fighting the pandemic, despite the fact that a majority of citizens in thirteen countries are satisfied. The lowest proportions are observed in Spain (35%), Germany (35%), France (34%) and Belgium (31%). However, in contrast with the findings observed in the ‘Public Opinion in Times of Covid-19’ series, we observe that only around a third of EU citizens were satisfied with the solidarity shown among EU Member States in the third wave of that survey, suggesting that attitudes have become more positive since last year. Variations between countries are quite similar to those seen in relation to satisfaction with EU measures aiming to fight the pandemic. On both questions, countries such as Hungary, Malta, Lithuania and Poland show the most positive results, while in Belgium, France, Spain, Germany and Greece they are the most negative. This could suggest that the two issues are connected in the minds of EU citizens – the response of the EU as a whole and the way in which Member States have worked together.

**BETTER TOGETHER: EU IMAGE REMAINS AT HIGHEST LEVELS FOR OVER A DECADE**

Thanks to a slight adjustment, positive ratings for the EU’s image remain at one of their highest levels in over a decade (48% positive; 35% neutral; 17% negative). This confirms the robustness of the long-term trend of an increasingly positive image of the EU overall, despite short-term variations. In all Member States, Europeans are more likely to hold a positive rather than a negative view of the EU, and in nearly all countries, the prevailing opinion is positive rather than neu-
tral, with Austria being the only exception (39% neutral, 34% positive). When asked how their view of the EU has evolved over the past year, we see a noteworthy development: while a majority say that it has rather stayed the same (56%, -3 pp), the proportion saying it has turned negatively increases by 10 points to 34% overall, while the proportion saying it has improved decreases by seven points to 9%. This finding further supports the suggestion that the EU’s image is indeed subject to short-term variations, but that over a longer timeframe, the positive trend has been steadily increasing and has remained strong despite the pandemic and its consequences on European citizens’ lives.

YES TO EUROPE, YES TO REFORM - BUT ONLY A QUARTER WANT TO ‘JUST CARRY ON’

Looking at the ‘EU reform’ indicator recently introduced in Parliament’s Eurobarometer surveys, 70% of respondents state they are generally in favour of the EU. Twenty-three percent, a decrease of 4 points since November/December 2020, are in favour of the EU ‘as it has been realised so far’, while the proportion of citizens saying that they are ‘in favour, but not the way it has been realised until now’ increases by 3 points to 47% overall. Around a quarter (28%) hold more negative views, including a stable 23% who say they are rather sceptical of the EU, but could change their opinion if radical reform were brought about. Five percent say they are opposed to the idea of the EU in general.

Altogether, these results confirm the fundamental support for the European Union, but at the same time, the clear and present call for reform. In other words, only about a quarter of Europeans support a ‘just carry on’ approach.

In all Member States, an absolute majority declares itself to be in favour of the EU, with the highest proportions located in Portugal (91%), Ireland (87%), Estonia, Luxembourg (both 81%) and the Netherlands (80%). These results are dependent on socio-demographic criteria such as age (younger Europeans are more likely to be in favour of the EU as it has been realised so far) and personal finances (those who have difficulties paying their bills are more likely to be sceptical of the EU).

BETTER EU TOOLS TO TACKLE THE CRISIS? THREE QUARTERS OF EUROPEANS SAY, ‘YES’

Seventy-four percent of Europeans agree that the EU should gain more competences in order to deal with crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, including 28% who ‘totally agree’. This is a similar result, with only a slight fall in agreement (-3 pp) compared to October-November 2020. On a national basis, some major variations are observed in Slovenia (72%, -15 pp), Romania (71%, -10 pp) and Croatia (75%, -8 pp), in contrast with Malta (91%, +14 pp), Greece (77%, +8 pp) and Denmark (59%, +8 pp). Citizens with a positive image of the EU are more likely to agree that the EU should gain more competences to deal with such crises. In addition, 86% agree to grant more competences among those who are in favour of the EU as it has been realised so far, in comparison with 43% of those opposed to the idea of the EU in general.
When asked about what they feel the EU’s priorities should be in tackling the pandemic, Europeans identify ensuring rapid access to safe and effective vaccines for all EU citizens as most important (39%). This is followed by investing more money to develop treatments and vaccines (29%), establishing a European strategy for facing similar crises in the future (28%) and prioritising the development of a European health policy (25%). These findings are in line with the fact that public health is a citizen top priority for the European Parliament, as described below. The fifth priority is a global response to the pandemic to ensure universal access to a vaccine or treatment (23%) and sixth is enabling EU Member States to support businesses and workers affected by the pandemic, as mentioned by 22% of Europeans. Across Member States, the main priority for the EU in its response to the pandemic should be to ensure rapid access to safe and effective vaccines to all EU citizens. In Cyprus, Bulgaria and Greece, citizens want the EU to focus primarily on supporting businesses and workers affected by the pandemic. Spain, Italy and Croatia see investing more money to develop treatments and vaccines as most important, while Romania has developing a European health policy as a first priority among its citizens. The ranking of EU priorities seems also to depend on citizens’ personal experiences in the pandemic: those who say it has already impacted their personal income are more likely to call for priority on economic measures while they are less likely to opt for ensuring rapid access to safe and effective vaccines to all EU citizens.

Public health is also the top priority expressed by citizens for the European Parliament to tackle, mentioned by around half of Europeans (49%), and clearly leading all other policy topics. Next in importance comes the fight against poverty and social exclusion (39%), measures to support the economy and create new jobs (39%) as well as action against climate change (34%). Public health continues to be a major concern, while the economy and environment also remain important priorities for the European Parliament, the three of them being the most mentioned items by eleven, seven and six Member States respectively. In Croatia, measures to fight poverty and social exclusion are seen as the highest priority, while in Czechia, the main priority is the future of Europe.

This Spring Eurobarometer for the European Parliament also included two questions on the use of online social networks, which are widespread across the EU. More than half of Europeans say they have used WhatsApp (60%) or Facebook (56%) in the last seven days, while around half have used YouTube (49%), followed by Messenger (32%) and Instagram (31%). The use of online social networks varies considerably by age, with younger Europeans more likely to use the various networks. The main reason for using online social networks is to send direct messages to friends and family (mentioned by 78%), followed by watching photo and video content (57%) and following the news and current events (53%).
This Eurobarometer survey 95.1 was conducted for the European Parliament by KANTAR. The survey examines Europeans’ views on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the actions taken by the EU to tackle them. Questions on citizens’ personal perception of their personal situation during the pandemic and their expectation towards the European Union during the pandemic, with a special focus on the EU reform and priority policies, complete this survey together questions on the media use.

The fieldwork took place between 16 March and 12 April 2021 in all 27 EU Member States. 26,669 respondents, drawn as a representative sample from the general population aged 15+, were interviewed face-to-face in most of the countries. Due to Covid-19 restrictions in force during the fieldwork, face-to-face interviews were completed in Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Slovenia with online interviews. For the same reason, in a number of countries (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Sweden) all interviews had to be conducted online.