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## Political Trust and Civic Engagement During the Crisis

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## Political Trust and Civic Engagement During the Crisis

### Abstract

This policy brief highlights findings on a specific topic from Eurofound's European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) that is of particular interest from a policy perspective. It brings together results from the analysis of EQLS data and evidence from other sources to formulate a number of policy pointers. The focus of this policy brief is findings on trust in national and European political institutions and on civic engagement during the economic crisis.

### Keywords

European Union, political institutions, economic crisis, public trust

### Comments

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# Foundation Findings

Political trust and civic engagement during the crisis

EQLS policy brief



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

### **EQLS policy briefs**

This policy brief highlights findings on a specific topic from Eurofound's European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) that is of particular interest from a policy perspective. It brings together results from the analysis of EQLS data and evidence from other sources to formulate a number of policy pointers. The focus of this policy brief is findings on trust in national and European political institutions and on civic engagement during the economic crisis.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency, whose role is to provide knowledge in the area of social and work-related policies. Eurofound was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1365/75, to contribute to the planning and design of better living and working conditions in Europe.

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## Policy context



Life in the European Union has changed since the onset of the economic crisis in 2008. While life satisfaction continues to be rated highly, the crisis nevertheless has affected a great proportion of the European population. It has left millions of people unemployed, and in several countries youth unemployment is so high that the many young Europeans who are now out of work are already being referred to as a 'lost generation'. For those in work, conditions are also worsening: the pattern is one of less work, reduced overall working time, less overtime, rising job insecurity, less choice for workers, wage freezes and wage cuts. The crisis has widened inequalities not just between people but also between countries, with increasing differences in quality of life evident in the EU. With the burden of debt expected to last for years to come, the social and economic costs of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are borne by society at large and by the EU as a whole.

In trying to emerge from the crisis and return to pre-crisis levels of growth and employment, national governments have been confronted with the challenge of having to address public debt and budget imbalances without losing sight of the well-being and social protection of their citizens. The EU's challenge is to ensure that recovery is shaped in a way that brings Europe back on the path of smart, sustainable

and inclusive growth, as expressed in the Europe 2020 strategy. In addition to policy efforts to stabilise financial markets, foster economic growth and tackle the fast-rising rate of unemployment among young Europeans, the European Commission launched the Social Investment Package in 2013 as the EU's social policy response to the crisis (European Commission, 2013a).

As part of the package, the Commission calls for well-designed welfare systems that combine social investment with protection and stabilisation to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of social policies, while ensuring continued support for a fairer and more inclusive society. To enable people to actively participate to the best of their abilities in society and the economy, activation measures are given a more prominent role, and the case is made that support should be better targeted at those in need when they need it (European Commission, 2013a, p. 3).

It will take time to see the effect of those measures, but meanwhile the debate on what will happen to European integration and the future of the European project cannot be postponed. In times of economic downturn, trust in political institutions weakens as citizens become disenchanted with the political system. Unemployment appears to have had a stronger negative impact on trust of national governments than on trust of EU

institutions – at least in the EU15<sup>1</sup> countries (Roth et al, 2011) – but the EU as a supranational collective of sovereign states faces the additional challenge of increased nationalism and support for protectionism within those states.

Throughout its history, the EU has relied on dialogue with its stakeholders to ensure that the Union is built on cooperation. In light of decreasing trust levels, and to ensure that citizens are directly included in the debate on Europe's future, the designation of 2013 as the European Year of Citizens is a timely endeavour. To quote Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission, 'We cannot build the European Union without citizens, we can only build the EU with the people it is made for and based on their ideas' (European Commission, 2013b, p. 1). Clearly, the aim of the European Year is not only to engage with the public and to talk about what has been achieved so far and where the EU should be in 10 years' time, but also to discuss how to continue strengthening the legitimacy of the EU. And to ensure this legitimacy, citizens must know that their voice counts in the EU. To promote awareness and to tackle political disenchantment, the European Year seeks to highlight the European dimension by raising awareness of the rights of EU citizens and the positive developments relating to those rights to date.

The focus of the European Year is even timelier considering that, in June 2014, EU citizens will elect a new European Parliament. Trusting citizens are important for voter turnout. Turnout at the 2009 elections was the lowest ever (43%), but the concern is that it will be even lower this time around.

## Policy challenges and issues

This policy brief examines the challenges that the EU faces when it comes to trust and civic engagement during the crisis. The first issue is the problem of increased political disenchantment during a difficult economic time. Political disenchantment is a complex issue that has several dimensions and that varies between countries and between different

groups of Europeans. As will be highlighted in this paper, the EU is not, as portrayed in a recent paper from the Pew Research Center (2013), the only 'sick man of Europe'; the crisis in confidence affects national governments just as much, if not more. However, the risk for Europe is that it is blamed solely by some politicians and media for the problems that the economic crisis has created for European citizens. Thus the first challenge for the EU is to raise awareness of what it does and convince citizens that its institutions are trustworthy.

The second issue concerns efforts to let Europeans know that their voice counts in the EU. The ability of Europeans to participate in the decision-making process goes beyond traditional mechanisms. In addition to democratic elections held every four years, European citizens have for many years had the right to petition the European Parliament on issues that come within the scope of the Union's activities. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty established the right for citizens to help set the EU agenda and influence EU policy through the European citizens' initiative. By calling upon the European Commission to make a legislative proposal, this form of direct political participation allows EU citizens to have a say in the development of EU policies. Awareness of this right is on the rise – Flash Eurobarometer 365 from November 2012 showed that 73% of Europeans knew of their right to launch citizens' initiatives, up from 68% in March 2010 (European Commission, 2013d). However, only 14 such initiatives have been set up so far.<sup>2</sup>

The third issue is the relationship between trust and forms of active participation such as volunteering. A recent study shows that people encounter well-functioning institutions through volunteering (in fields where public sector and voluntary organisations have common interests), and that this experience increases their institutional trust (Sivesind et al, 2013). This paper, therefore, also looks at the extent to which Europeans volunteer and what opportunities exist to boost citizen participation, including voting, increased awareness, self-expression and volunteering.

<sup>1</sup> The 15 EU Member States prior to enlargement in 2004.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the European citizens' initiative, see <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome>.



## Key findings

- In most countries trust in both national and European political institutions has eroded substantially since the onset of the economic crisis.
- On average in Europe, trust in the EU used to be at a considerably higher level than trust in the national government or parliament. In recent years, this 'surplus' of trust diminished to an unprecedented low of 34% in November 2011.
- National differences in trust patterns between countries exist, but individuals tend to exhibit congruence in trust levels: they either tend to trust both the EU and the national institutions, or tend to lack trust in both. This requires policy actions that address trust both at the national and supranational level.
- While the rates of traditional forms of participation (such as attending a meeting or contacting a politician) are decreasing the new online forms of political expression, such as electronic petitions, are on the rise. This confirms the relevance of an existing European citizens' initiative, and points to a need for further development of the potential for citizen involvement.
- Trust in institutions is positively related to satisfaction with the economic situation in one's country and negatively related to perceived corruption, yet it is most strongly related to citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services. This should direct research towards a more thorough as well as broader monitoring of institutional performance.
- The future dynamics of trust in national and European political institutions may be affected by how successful EU policy packages are in promoting public service delivery, as well as institutional performance more generally, in ways that are appreciated by the public.



# Exploring the issue



## Dynamics of political trust during the crisis

This overview of empirical evidence draws on the following cross-sectional European surveys.

- **Eurobarometer:** This is the European Commission's public opinion-monitoring tool and covers a wide variety of topical issues relating to the EU and its policies. The Eurobarometer consistently monitors levels of political trust by asking EU citizens if they tend to trust or not to trust certain institutions.<sup>3</sup>
- **European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS):** The EQLS explores issues pertinent to the quality of life of European citizens, including trust in public institutions and civic participation. The EQLS is an increasingly important contribution by Eurofound to the policy and academic debate.<sup>4</sup>
- **European Social Survey (ESS):** The ESS is an academically driven social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations.<sup>5</sup>

## Falling trust levels

There has been an overall downward trend among Europeans regarding the extent to which they trust national governments, national parliaments and the EU since 2009 (Figure 1). While trust in the EU was and remains higher than trust in national institutions, its decline is more persistent over time and has come closer to the level of trust in national institutions than ever before.

Although the EU still has larger credits of trust than national institutions – on average, 34% of EU citizens trust the EU, compared with 24% who trust their national government – this is not the case everywhere. In Austria, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, citizens are less likely to trust the EU than their national institutions. However, even before the crisis, some of these countries had large Eurosceptic populations. At the same time, there are many countries where the EU is still more widely trusted than the national government. This includes the countries hardest hit by the crisis; for instance, in Greece 29% trust the EU compared with 8% who trust the national government.

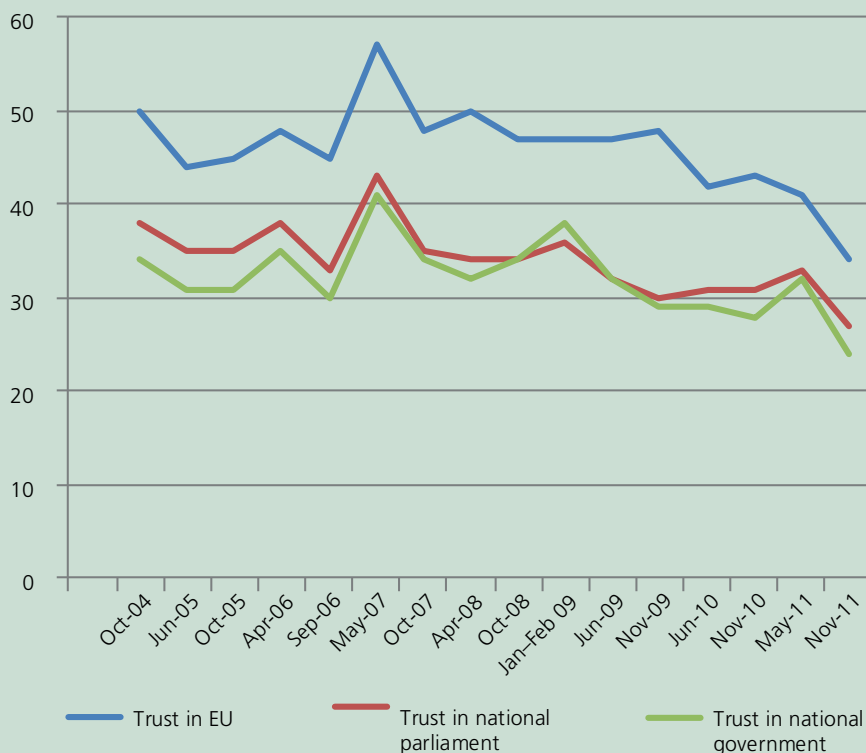
<sup>3</sup> More information about the Eurobarometer can be found at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the EQLS, see <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/eqls/index.htm>

<sup>5</sup> More information about the ESS can be found at <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>



**Figure 1: Percentage of Europeans who trust their national parliament, national government and the EU, 2004–2011 (%)**



Source: Eurobarometer 76, European Commission, 2011

The EQLS shows that trust in the national government fell significantly between 2007 and 2011 in 20 of the 27 Member States<sup>6</sup>, with the largest drops in average trust levels recorded in Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain (see the annex for details).<sup>7</sup> Only in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Sweden does the survey point to significant increases in trust, although the magnitude of the increase is much smaller than the decreases in trust recorded in countries like Greece and Spain. The Eurobarometer, although it uses a different question and answer scale,<sup>8</sup> shows a similar picture, with significant drops

in the proportion of respondents trusting their national government in 24 of the 27 Member States between 2007 and 2011, with the largest declines noted in Cyprus, Greece and Spain.

Regardless of whether the national institutions or the EU is trusted more, the direction of change – in most cases, diminishing trust – seems to take place in parallel. Evidence of this type is provided by the ESS, which measures trust in national parliaments and in the European Parliament in 18 Member States of the EU (see Figure 2).

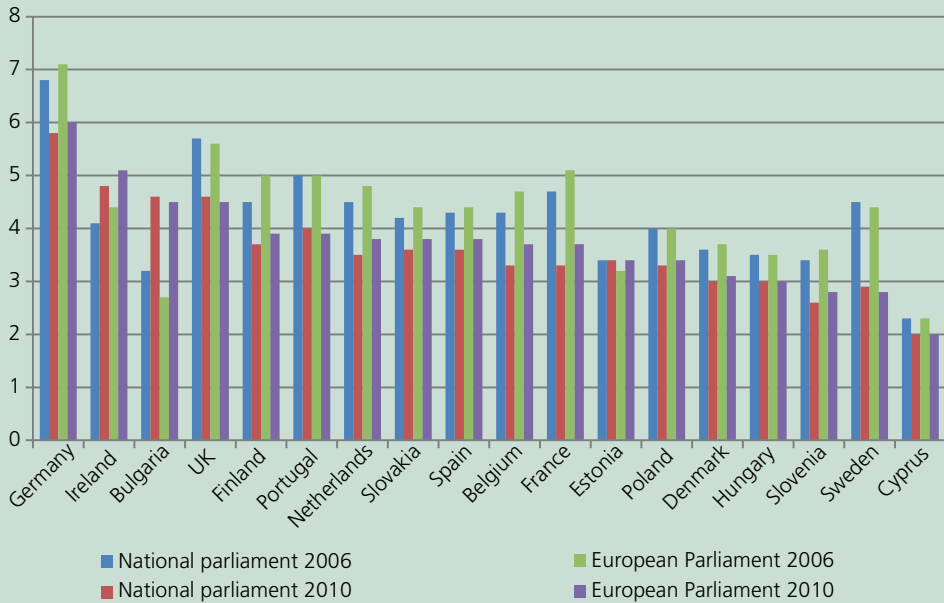
<sup>6</sup> The EU comprised 27 Member States at the time of analysis; Croatia was a candidate country at the time.

<sup>7</sup> EQLS Q28 asks 'Please tell me how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. Please tell me on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means that you do not trust at all, and 10 means that you trust completely?' a. The [nationality] parliament, e. The government

<sup>8</sup> Eurobarometer 76 QA10 asks 'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?' 6. The [nationality] Government, 7. The [nationality] parliament], 8. The European Union.



**Figure 2: Level of trust in national parliaments and the European Parliament, selected EU Member States, 2006 and 2010**



Note: Scale: 0–10  
Source: ESS, 2006 and 2010

The 2006 and 2010 ESS show that in most instances declines in trust affected both the national parliament *and* the European Parliament. Equally, in the two countries where trust in the national parliament increased (Ireland and Bulgaria) or remained stable (Estonia and Cyprus), a similar development is observed for the European Parliament.<sup>9</sup>

In summary, the evidence from all three surveys is that in most countries trust in political institutions is eroding. However, since the figures point to faltering trust in political institutions in general, rather than singling out the European Union, the more sensible response would seem to seek appropriate policy action to restore trust both at the national and supranational level.

### Which groups of Europeans require particular attention?

Economic recession generates widespread anxiety even among individuals who do

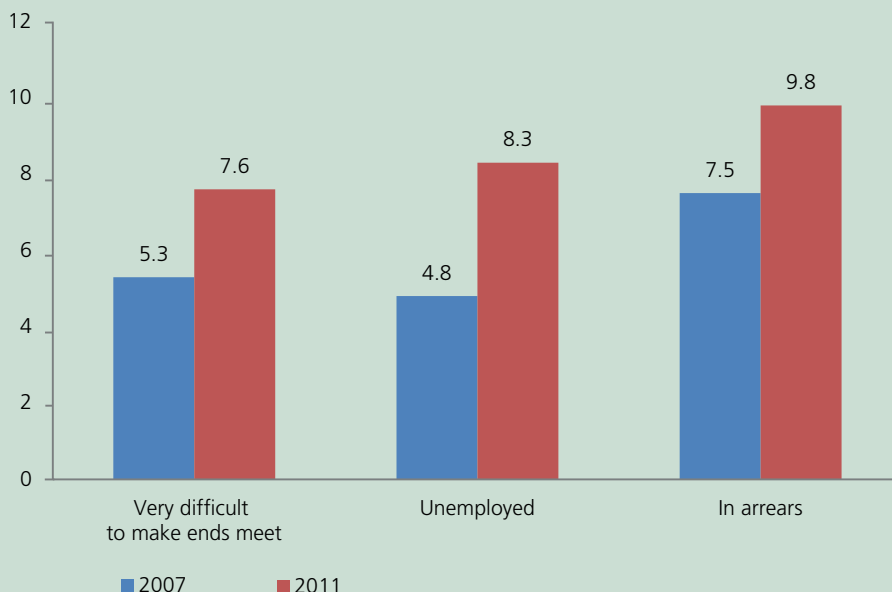
not experience economic hardship directly (Polavieja, 2013). Yet, policy responses are most needed to address those groups of Europeans who are most likely to lack trust.

One consequence of the crisis is that the number of people facing economic hardship has increased considerably since 2007, adding further pressure on governments to retain the confidence of their electorate (Figure 3). The EQLS shows that trust in national governments is particularly low among Europeans living in financially precarious situations (Figure 4).

Distrust in the EU is also particularly widespread among Europeans living in precarious financial situations. Eurobarometer 76 shows that 65% of people who report having difficulties paying bills most of the time say they tend not to trust the European Union, an opinion that is shared by 61% of unemployed Europeans (European Commission, 2011). The propensity to distrust

<sup>9</sup> The ESS asks ‘Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.’ B4 [country’s] parliament, B9 the European Parliament.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Europeans facing economic hardship, EU27, 2007 and 2011**



Source: EQLS, 2007 and 2011

the EU is equally high among Europeans who feel they don't know how the EU works and those who feel that their voice doesn't count (63% and 64%, respectively, lack trust in the EU).

### Which groups of Europeans require particular attention?

Muñoz et al (2011) have analysed the relationship between trust in national and European parliaments by testing the hypotheses of congruence versus compensation. ESS data indicates that in countries where the governance quality of national institutions is lower, trust in the European Parliament is higher – in this way, the EU institutions are expected to 'compensate' for shortcomings in the national political context. In a small number of countries, where the quality of governance as well as trust in national institutions is at relatively high levels, the European Parliament is trusted less than its national equivalent. However, at individual level, support for the national parliament and support for the European Parliament are positively related, or congruent. It is worth noting, however, that this study was based on pre-crisis survey data.

Further examination of the interaction between national and the European levels of trust in institutions by Arnold et al (2012) using Eurobarometer data from 2005 to 2010 by and large confirmed the findings of congruence at individual country level and compensation when country differences in governance are accounted for. However, their results also point out that more thorough research is needed to better account for the impact of various components of the quality of national governance.

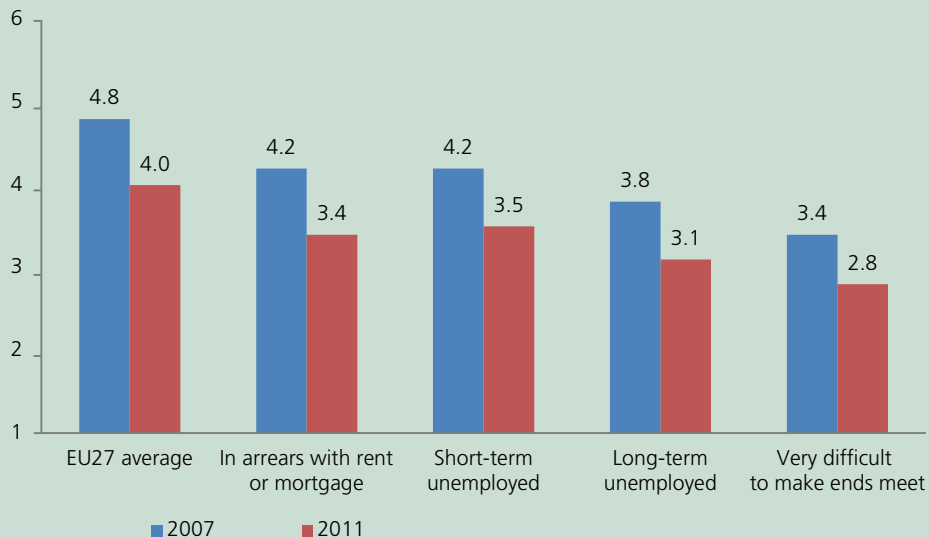
By examining the data further, this study proposes that new factors are possibly shaping trust in national and European political institutions. These are:

- the debates surrounding the measures to tackle the crisis, mainly the problems of national public debt and the role of the EU in this process;
- the overall performance of a broad set of public institutions – not solely the parliament or government.

One specific effect of the crisis on political trust is related to the increased attention of



**Figure 4: Levels of trust in national governments, by socioeconomic circumstance, EU27, 2007 and 2011**



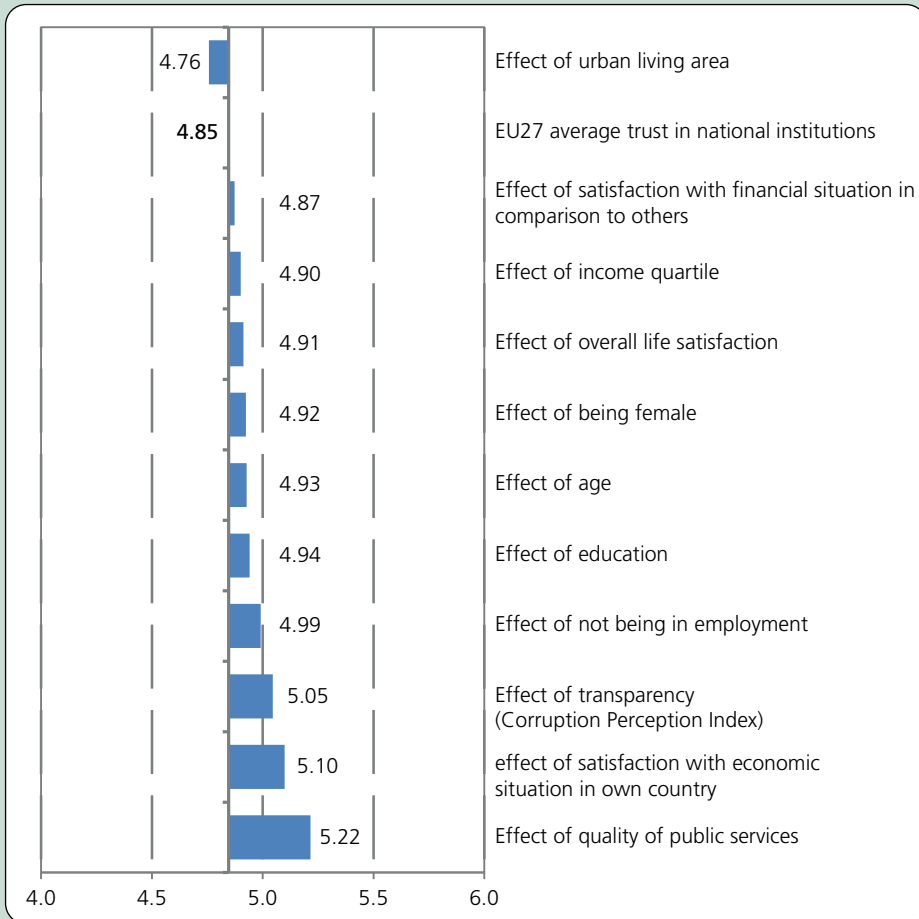
Note: Scale 1–10  
Source: EQLS, 2007 and 2011

the public to the changing economic climate and its extensive impact. As already noted, unemployment and the ratio of public debt to GDP were key factors related to declining trust in national parliaments and governments in the EU15 in the period of crisis (Roth et al, 2011). Further research to will shed light on how EU involvement in public debt management (via the European Central Bank) affected political trust: whether and where the EU gained more trust in compensation for the troubled national institutions, and whether and where there was just a ‘congruent’ downward trend in trust levels (as simple descriptive statistics suggest). National differences in perceptions of the crisis and the role of the EU in tackling it may require new approaches to research on trust in political institutions since ‘Eurosceptical mindsets ... have become more pronounced in all of the member countries during the crisis, albeit in each country for different and rather polarizing reasons’ (Habermas, 2013, p. 2).

A more extensive analysis of the EQLS has found that the quality of governance influences average trust in national public

institutions (parliament, government, legal system and police) in Europe insofar that trust is negatively affected by perceived corruption (Eurofound, 2013). In addition, as Muñoz et al (2011) claimed, trust is positively affected by satisfaction with the economic situation in one’s country, reinforcing the findings of the econometric analysis by Roth et al (2011). However, the biggest effect comes from citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services. Measured on a scale of 1 to 10, the average trust in national institutions in the EU27 is 4.85, but a 1-point increase in satisfaction with public services raises the trust in those institutions from 4.85 to 5.22 (Figure 5). This importance of public services should direct research towards a more thorough as well as broader monitoring of institutional performance. The future dynamics of trust in national and European political institutions may be affected by how successful EU policy packages are in promoting public service delivery, as well as institutional performance more generally, in ways that are appreciated by the public.

**Figure 5: Determinants of trust in national public institutions, EU27**



Note: In this grand-mean-centred model, the grand mean is an average of trust on a scale of 1 to 10 in four public institutions: national parliament, national government, legal system and police. The quality of public services is an average of quality ratings given by the respondents on a scale of 1 to 10 to each of the following: health services, education system, public transport, childcare services, long-term care services and state pension system.

Source: EQLS, 2011 (see Eurofound, 2013)

## Towards rebuilding trust in Europe's political institutions

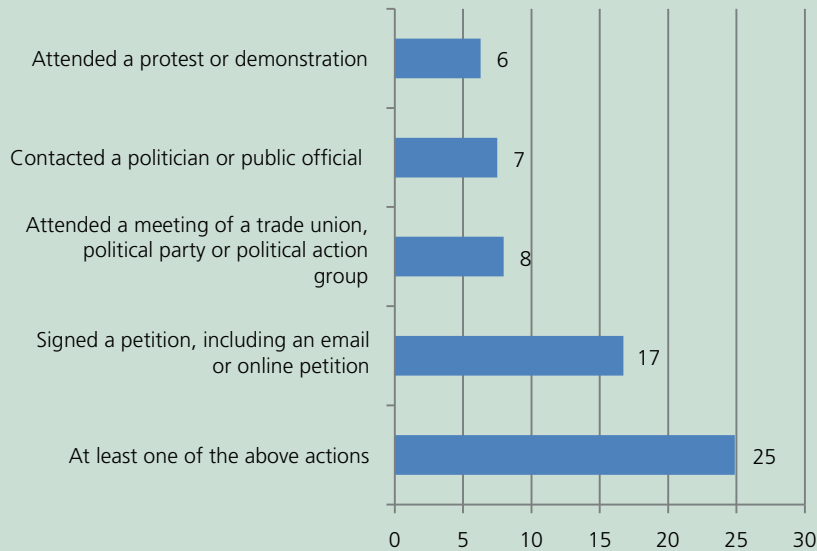
### Boosting awareness

In a recent comparative analysis of the relationship between political trust and forms of political participation in Europe, it was found that voter participation is boosted not only by political trust but by a combination of trust and awareness (Hooghe and Marien, 2013). Europeans consistently voice interest in

receiving more information about the EU, and there is broad agreement among the European electorate that turnout at European elections would be higher if more information were provided about the elections, the impact of the EU on their daily life, and the programmes and objectives of candidates and parties in the European Parliament (European Commission, 2013c).



**Figure 6: Rate of participation in civic and political activities, EU27 (%)**



Source: EQLS, 2011 (see Eurofound, 2012, p. 89)

Yet, despite concerted efforts from the European Commission and the European Parliament, awareness of EU issues remains low. What is even more disconcerting in this context is the persistent feeling that one's voice does not count in the EU. As was noted for trust, economically vulnerable Europeans are most negative in this regard: the view that one's voice doesn't count is held by 75% of Europeans for whom making ends meet is very difficult and by 70% of unemployed people, compared with an EU average of 65% (European Commission, 2011).

### New forms of citizen self-expression

The data on forms of civic and political involvement from the EQLS 2007 and 2011 show the increasing rates of Europeans who engaged in political action by signing petitions, including electronic or online petitions. On average, one in every four Europeans had expressed their civic or political concerns at least once, as measured by the 2011 EQLS (see Figure 6). While participation in traditional forms of engagement that require personal interaction (such as attending a meeting or an event, or contacting a politician or an official) is in single digits and has dropped by

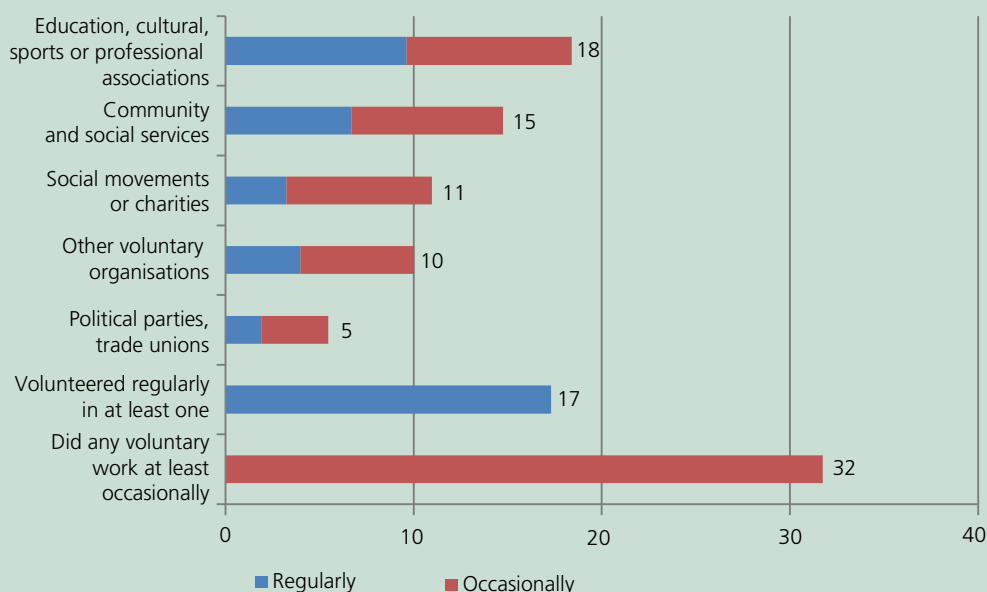
a few percentage points since 2007, the rate of petition signatories has increased.

Expressing one's opinion through petitions is positively related to use of the internet for purposes other than work: three-quarters of petition signatories are daily internet users. The proportion of petition signatories among daily internet users is 27%, compared with 5% of non-users. This suggests that the petitions signed by survey respondents were by and large online petitions (Eurofound, 2012, p. 90).

While there may be some reservations as to the content and level of the commitment of the online community, these new data still bring positive messages. First, they confirm the current and future relevance of the citizens' initiative mechanism introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. Second, there is a gender balance among the petition signatories, which signifies a change from the traditional forms of involvement, all of which are characterised by slightly higher rates of participating men than women.

However, a lower representation of groups with lower educational attainment and lower income is apparent among those expressing themselves,

**Figure 7: Rate of participation in voluntary work, by type and frequency, EU27 (%)**



Source: EQLS, 2011

in particular through online means. This should not be ignored, and a framework for various forms of involvement should be fostered both for the sake of democracy and for the sake of reducing exclusion in the context of the crisis.

### Trust and volunteering

The EQLS shows that Europeans who volunteer are more likely to trust their national government than those who do not and that the act itself is more important than the frequency with which they volunteer. People who volunteer on a monthly basis for social organisations or political parties or trade unions are most trusting of their national government, scoring 4.8 on a scale of 1 to 10, while trust is lowest, at 3.9, among respondents who never volunteer for any kind of organisation.

As Figure 7 shows, one in three Europeans (32%) carried out some type of unpaid voluntary work in the past year. On average, 17% do it regularly – every week or every month. Most people volunteer through educational, cultural, sports or professional associations (18%),

followed by community services (15%), social movements or charities (11%) and other types of organisations that may include religious ones (10%), and political parties and trade unions (5%). While most regular volunteers (that is, doing unpaid voluntary work every week or every month) are involved in a particular type of organisation, 5% of those who do regular voluntary work do so with more than one type of organisation.

In terms of the social profile of people involved in voluntary work, education and income play an important role, in line with findings in most of the literature. Almost half (48%) of those with tertiary education did some voluntary work in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with less than a third (29%) of those with secondary education. There are nearly twice as many regular volunteers among people with tertiary education (29%) than there are among those with secondary education (15%). While education has an impact on income at individual level, the extent to which income differentiates frequency of voluntary



work differs within countries. By and large in the EU12,<sup>10</sup> the proportion of volunteers in the lowest income quartile is half that of the highest income quartile (15% as against 30%). Corresponding figures for the lowest and highest income quartiles in the EU15 group of countries are 28% and 42%.

In the context of the effect of volunteering and trust (Sivesind et al, 2013), it is interesting to note that a significant proportion of Europeans hold the view that non-governmental

organisations (NGOs) can influence decision-making at European level, with even higher proportions thinking that they can exert an influence at the national level (European Commission, 2013e). However, it is important to note that volunteering is not only about individual motivation, but also about framework conditions and infrastructure; therefore, the role of NGOs and opportunity structures for individual participation differ between Member States.

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<sup>10</sup> The 12 EU Member States that joined in 2004 and 2007.





# Policy pointers



Trust in political institutions has fallen sharply since the onset of the economic crisis. Unsurprisingly, this erosion of trust is most intense in those countries and among those people that have been most strongly hit by the crisis. What has been highlighted in this paper is that the crisis is affecting people's trust in national governments just as much as it is affecting public confidence in the European Union, if not more so.

Unfortunately, the economic forecast does not show any significant improvements in the year up to mid-2014, which puts extra pressure on the EU to restore trust ahead of the European elections in June 2014. In line with research that shows that civic engagement and voting is linked to a combination of trust and awareness, the EU is currently stepping up efforts through the European Year of Citizens to engage with the public and to listen to it. This dialogue should be used to debate the action the EU should take, and a number of directions are suggested below.

In order to regain the trust of citizens in the European project through trust in key institutions of the European Union, the EU's response to the recent declines in political trust should be twofold.

**Firstly, the message of what has already been done at European level to help national institutions deal with the effects and causes of the crisis needs to be strengthened.** There is a need for communication activities to refute the portrayal of falling trust as a problem for the EU institutions alone and to make it clear that the EU has initiated a wide array of actions, such as the Social Investment Package, to help national governments get out of the crisis. The European Year of Citizens offers a means and a platform to highlight EU actions to help citizens combat the crisis. This need for communication activities is urgent, particularly in light of the forthcoming European Parliament elections in 2014, where there is a risk that anti-European and populist parties will gain ground by blaming Europe for the crisis.

**Secondly, measures that increase national trust need to be supported.** In terms of practical steps towards supporting recovery of trust in national institutions, the following points are important.

→ Improving the situation of vulnerable groups that tend to have lower political trust, such as the unemployed and those in financially precarious situations, can help to reduce the societal base of disenchantment. The

recent departure from austerity policies to a stronger focus on stimulating employment should help, particularly in stabilising trust among those Europeans most affected by the crisis. Using the Europe 2020 framework, the EU is in a position to facilitate Member States in learning from each other about what measures work best to stimulate growth, create jobs and reduce social exclusion.

- To maintain or raise the political trust of citizens, attention should not be limited to politics and political institutions alone; the good performance of a set of key public services should be ensured. It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean higher spending but may require improving equality in access, transparency in management, and other aspects of overall institutional performance.
- To target the development of institutional capacities and improve public service delivery, a more thorough monitoring of institutional performance is necessary since trust in political institutions may be related to performance of a broader set of public institutions delivering key services to society.

New ways of interacting with citizens must be developed to gain the support of the public, which in turn will strengthen the legitimacy of EU institutions.

- The increasing accessibility of information and communication technologies for civic and political self-expression suggests that boosting citizen engagement, including voter participation, requires looking at new ways of listening to citizens. It is no longer only the youngest Europeans who express their views on public issues through the internet

and social media. However, it should be remembered that social media is also a popular avenue for voicing anti-European opinions; the content of the message and the value of the reasoning counts as much as the medium itself.

- In addition to exploring and exploiting modern communication channels and new forms of political participation, the research presented in this policy brief points to the potential benefits of direct involvement, such as volunteering, when it comes to raising awareness. Furthermore, research also shows that through volunteering people encounter well-functioning institutions (in fields where public sector and voluntary organisations come together), and this experience increases their institutional trust. The EU could gain by developing policies that improve opportunities for people to engage in dialogue and action, including volunteering.
- European NGOs can play a role in supporting and developing new forms and mechanisms of consultation and engagement across European countries. Numerous voluntary organisations operate across Europe in social policy sectors, such as Coface in the field of family welfare, Eurochild in the area of child well-being or Cecodhas in the area of housing. These organisations exchange knowledge and share best practices across Member States, call for greater cooperation between Member States and promote awareness of EU policy in their respective fields. By being involved in these types of organisations, volunteers become aware of the role of the EU and the functioning of its institutions, which, according to the research, should have a positive impact on trust and consequently on political engagement.



## Further reading

All Eurofound publications are available at [www.eurofound.europa.eu](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu)

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# Annex

**Table A1: Trust in national government and in the EU by country**

Country	EQLS		Eurobarometer			
	Average trust in national government (1–10)		Percentage tending to trust their national government		Percentage tending to trust the EU	
	2011	Difference 2007	2011	Difference 2007	2011	Difference 2007
Greece	2.09	-2.68	8%	-33	29%	-34
Spain	3.67	-1.79	16%	-36	30%	-35
Romania	2.52	-1.78	10%	-9	50%	-15
Cyprus	3.64	-1.77	29%	-35	47%	-14
Slovakia	3.17	-1.73	21%	-21	48%	-18
Slovenia	2.83	-1.38	12%	-24	38%	-30
Portugal	3.19	-1.09	24%	-22	31%	-34
Estonia	4.47	-1.02	49%	-17	51%	-21
Austria	4.75	-1.01	46%	-11	34%	-12
France	4.02	-1.01	21%	-15	30%	-21
Lithuania	2.98	-0.96	18%	-8	50%	-15
Ireland	3.91	-0.94	22%	-19	24%	-30
Denmark	5.71	-0.93	42%	-25	50%	-15
Italy	3.01	-0.88	12%	-25	32%	-26
Belgium	4.46	-0.60	34%	-28	50%	-23
Netherlands	5.40	-0.54	45%	-28	42%	-27
Finland	6.11	-0.52	56%	-19	44%	-17
Malta	4.95	-0.48	27%	-24	41%	-25
Czech Republic	3.27	-0.43	15%	-12	38%	-23
Luxembourg	6.52	-0.23	68%	2	47%	-15
Poland	3.46	-0.03	28%	10	47%	-21
UK	4.35	0.01	21%	-14	17%	-19
Germany	4.90	0.06	32%	-17	30%	-26
Croatia*	4.19	0.16	30%	-10	51%	-15
Hungary	3.55	0.22	26%	-1	47%	-14
Sweden	6.04	0.30	61%	6	43%	-13
Bulgaria	3.55	0.34	38%	16	59%	5
Latvia	3.05	0.46	19%	-1	40%	-7

\* EQLS 2012; the EQLS was conducted in the 27 EU Member States in 2011 and in seven of the nine countries engaged in the enlargement process in 2012, including Croatia, which subsequently became a Member State in July 2013.  
Note: Figures shown in red indicate the lowest level of trust or the greatest decline in trust in the EU.

'I cannot emphasise this enough: citizens will not be convinced with rhetoric and promises only, but only with a concrete set of common achievements. We have to show the many areas where Europe has solved problems for citizens. Europe is not the cause of problems, Europe is part of the solution.

**José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, State of the Union address, 2013**

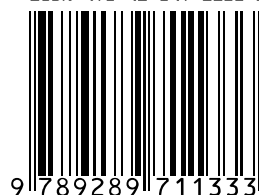
Foundation Findings provide pertinent background information and policy pointers for all actors and interested parties engaged in the current European debate on the future of social policy. The contents are based on Eurofound research and reflect its autonomous and tripartite structure.



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