

# EUROBAROMETER SURVEY ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION 2009



European Commission

## **EUROBAROMETER SURVEY ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION | 2009**

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## INTRODUCTION

Solidarity is one of the guiding principles of the European Union, meaning that all citizens should be able to share in the benefits of prosperous times, while also sharing the burden of times of difficulty. Yet nearly 80 million Europeans live below the poverty line, and many face serious obstacles in accessing employment, education, housing, social and financial services.

Ten years after Heads of State and Governments committed to a major drive against poverty in the EU, 2010 will mark the **European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion**. Its goals cover four broad objectives and guiding principles:

- a recognition of the right of those living in poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity, and play an active part in society;
- a shared responsibility for and participation in the fight against poverty, with an emphasis on both collective and individual action;
- the promotion of cohesion, highlighting the advantages of the eradication of poverty, and greater social inclusion, for all members of society;
- political commitment and concrete action to eradicate poverty and social exclusion at all levels of governance, as well as a commitment to these goals within societies.

This brochure presents an overview of the most notable findings from a Eurobarometer survey on poverty and social exclusion released in October 2009.

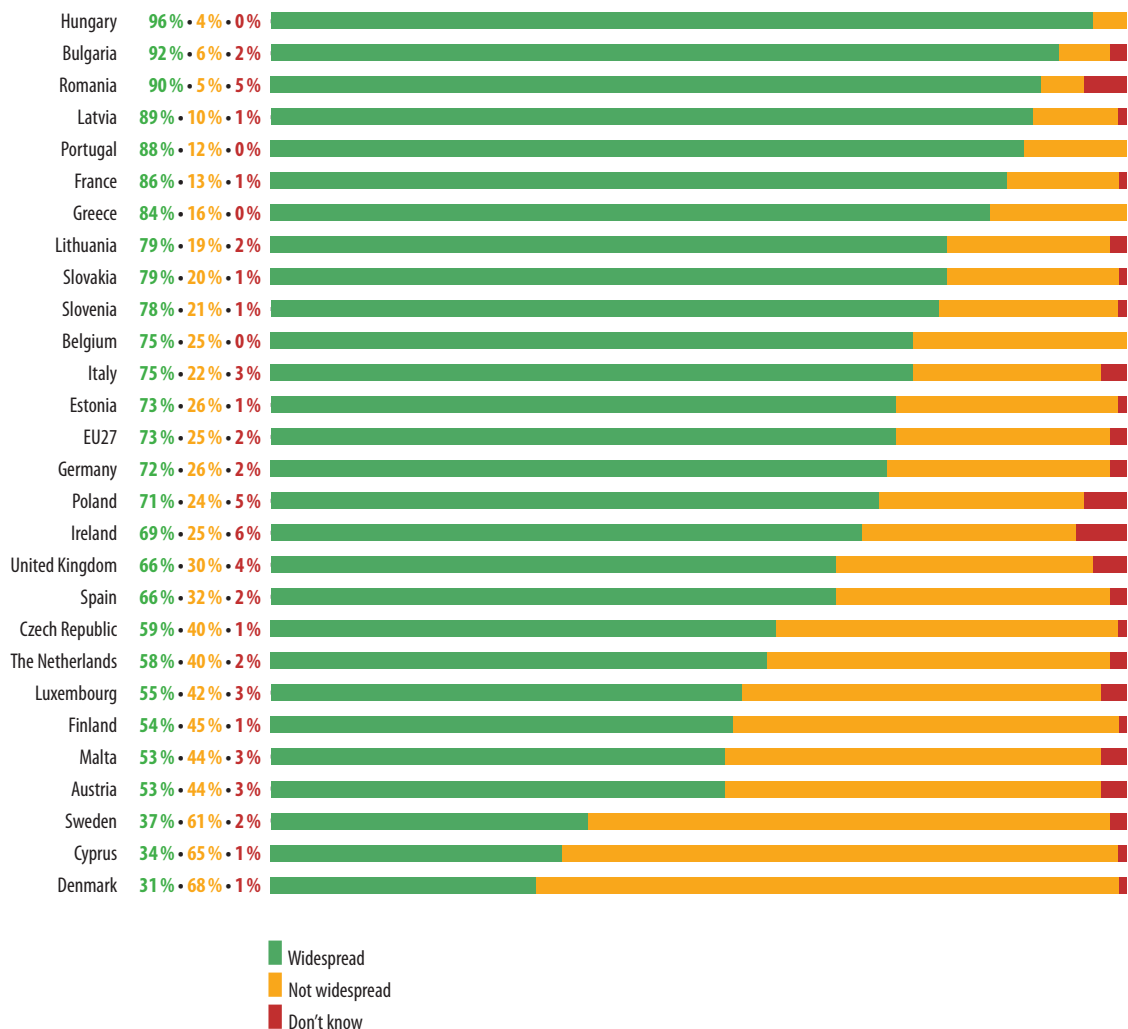
The survey was commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and was conducted between 28 August and 17 September 2009 by the *TNS Opinion & Social network*. A technical note on the manner in which interviews were conducted by the Institutes within the *TNS Opinion & Social network* will be appended as an annex to the full report, together with the results tables.

## 1. THE PERCEIVED EXTENT OF POVERTY IN THE EU

Nearly 80 million people in the EU, or 16% of its total population, live below the poverty line. According to the survey, Europeans have different ways of understanding poverty. For around a quarter (24%), people are poor when their resources are so limited that they cannot participate fully in the society they live in. A further 22% of people surveyed see poverty as not being able to afford the basic goods one needs to live, while 21% view it as having to depend on charity or public subsidies. A sizeable minority (18%) believes that people are poor when they have less than the poverty threshold per month to live on.

Nearly three quarters (73%) feel that poverty in their country is widespread. However, the extent to which poverty is seen as widespread differs greatly from country to country.

### And would you say that poverty in (OUR COUNTRY) is ...?

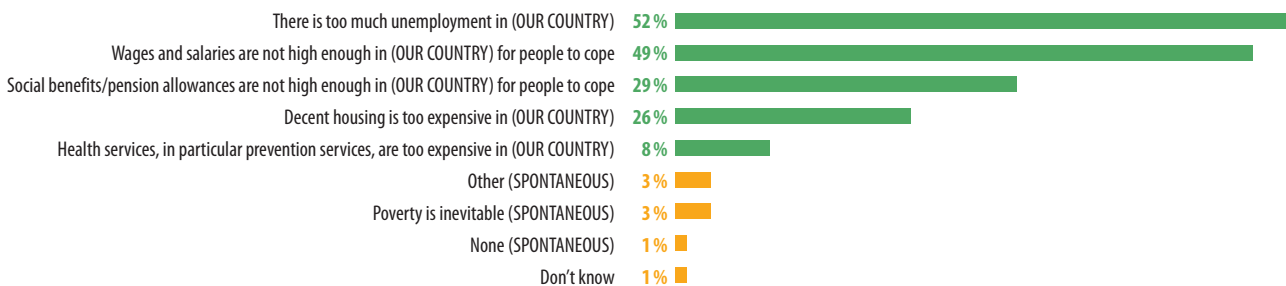


Over eight in ten Europeans (84%) think that poverty has increased in their country in the last three years. More than half of citizens in Hungary (64%), Latvia (62%) and Greece (54%) believe that poverty has 'strongly increased'.

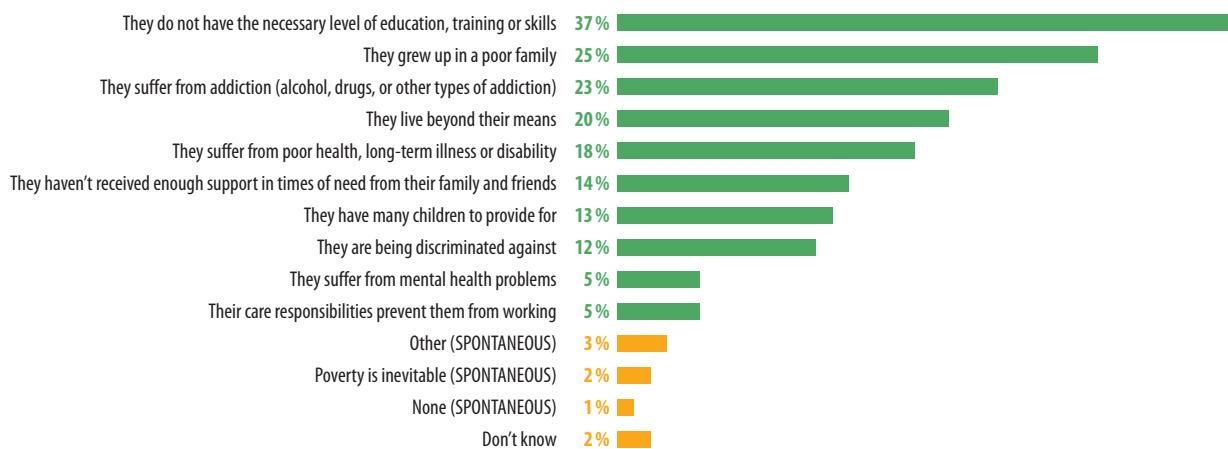
## 2. PERCEIVED REASONS FOR POVERTY

Poverty can be explained by both ‘societal’ and ‘personal’ factors. High unemployment, insufficient wages and salaries are the most widely perceived ‘societal’ explanations for poverty, together with insufficient social benefits and pensions and the excessive cost of decent housing, whereas a lack of education, training or skills, as well as ‘inherited’ poverty and addiction are the most widely perceived ‘personal’ reasons behind poverty.

**In your opinion, which two of the following social factors in society might best explain why people are poor?**



**Thinking now about poor people themselves, in your opinion, which two of the following reasons best explain why they are poor? (ROTATE – MAX 2 ANSWERS)**



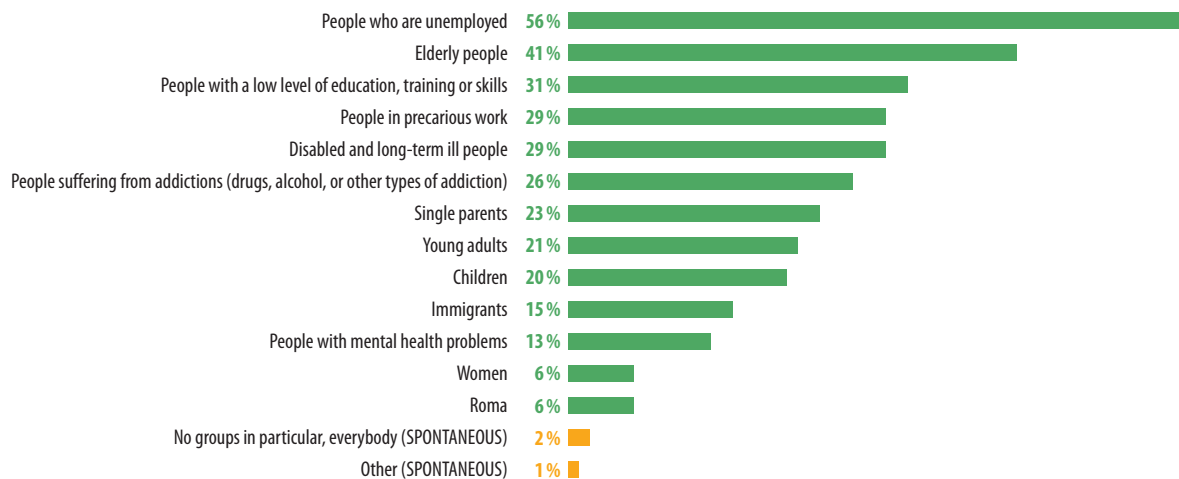
Inadequate education, training or skills are seen as reasons for poverty by 53% of people surveyed in the Netherlands, and 51% in both Denmark and Germany. In Southern Europe – and particularly in Cyprus (44%) – poverty is seen primarily as an ‘inherited’ problem. Southern Europeans also place a stronger emphasis on family and community ties (e.g. 32% of respondents in Portugal believe that people are poor because they do not receive enough support from their family or friends).

In many countries, poverty is believed to be linked to the high cost of housing: 67% of Europeans consider decent housing to be too expensive. This opinion is particularly common in the Czech Republic and Cyprus (each 89%), as well as Luxembourg, Malta (each 86%) and Slovakia (84%).

### 3. WHO IS CONSIDERED MOST AT RISK OF POVERTY?

Over half of Europeans (56%) believe that the unemployed are most at risk of poverty. Meanwhile, 41% believe that the elderly are most vulnerable, and 31% see those with a low level of education, training or skills as most at risk. Other social categories considered most vulnerable by Europeans are people in precarious employment situations, people with disabilities, and those suffering from some form of long-term illness.

**In your opinion, among the following groups of the population in (OUR COUNTRY), which are those most at risk of poverty?**



The survey also shows that age plays an important role in shaping public opinion about the vulnerability of the elderly: far fewer very young Europeans (aged 15-24) than 'older' Europeans (aged 55 and over) think that the elderly are most at risk of poverty (33% vs. 45%, respectively).

## 4. WHICH EUROPEANS BELIEVE THEY ARE PERSONALLY AT RISK?

While poverty is perceived to be widespread and on the increase, most Europeans do not think of themselves as being at risk of poverty.

According to a number of 'risk assessment checks' – such as being able to make ends meet and the ability to pay bills, feeling at risk of being over-indebted, expecting to stay in work (or not) and the perceived risk of becoming homeless – it appears that most Europeans are confident about their own personal situation.

**A household may have different sources of income and more than one household member may contribute to it. Thinking of your household's total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet...?**

	Easy	Middle	Difficult	Don't know		Easy	Middle	Difficult	Don't know
EU27	30%	56%	12%	2%	IT	24%	61%	13%	2%
DK	57%	37%	5%	1%	MT	24%	65%	9%	2%
SE	53%	41%	4%	2%	SK	24%	63%	13%	-
NL	50%	40%	8%	2%	CY	23%	54%	23%	-
LU	47%	46%	5%	2%	PL	21%	59%	17%	3%
DE	45%	45%	9%	1%	PT	21%	62%	15%	2%
AT	43%	50%	6%	1%	EE	20%	65%	13%	2%
FI	43%	53%	3%	1%	LT	20%	60%	18%	2%
BE	38%	50%	11%	1%	CZ	17%	69%	13%	1%
UK	35%	54%	8%	3%	LV	12%	56%	30%	2%
SI	33%	54%	13%	-	EL	11%	54%	35%	-
IE	30%	54%	10%	6%	RO	9%	63%	24%	4%
ES	28%	60%	10%	2%	BG	5%	52%	40%	3%
FR	25%	62%	12%	1%	HU	5%	61%	34%	-

The perceived risk of poverty among the unemployed is much stronger than the EU average:

- They are nearly twice as likely to feel at risk of being over-indebted (50% vs. EU average of 27%).
- They are more than twice as likely to have constant difficulties in keeping up with bills and credit commitments (46% vs. 21%).
- They find it nearly three times as difficult for their household to make ends meet (31% vs. 12%).
- They believe they are twice as likely to become homeless (16% vs. 7%).

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