

# Active Ageing

## SUMMARY

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# **Special Eurobarometer 378**

## **ACTIVE AGEING**

Conducted by TNS Opinion & Social at the request of  
Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and  
Inclusion.

Survey co-ordinated by Directorate-General  
Communication

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## NOTE

In this summary, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations used in this report correspond to:

| ABBREVIATIONS |   |
|---------------|---|
| EU27          | European Union – 27 Member States   |
| EU15          | First 15 European Member States: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom |
| NMS12         | 12 New Member States: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Republic of Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia                                       |
| DK/NA         | Don't know / No answer  |
| BE            | Belgium   |
| BG            | Bulgaria  |
| CZ            | Czech Republic  |
| DK            | Denmark   |
| DE            | Germany   |
| EE            | Estonia   |
| EL            | Greece  |
| ES            | Spain   |
| FR            | France  |
| IE            | Ireland   |
| IT            | Italy   |
| CY            | Republic of Cyprus  |
| LT            | Lithuania   |
| LV            | Latvia  |
| LU            | Luxembourg  |
| HU            | Hungary   |
| MT            | Malta   |
| NL            | The Netherlands   |
| AT            | Austria   |
| PL            | Poland  |
| PT            | Portugal  |
| RO            | Romania   |
| SI            | Slovenia  |
| SK            | Slovakia  |
| FI            | Finland   |
| SE            | Sweden  |
| UK            | The United Kingdom  |
| HR            | Croatia   |
| IS            | Iceland   |
| MK            | The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)*  |
| NO            | Norway  |
| TR            | Turkey  |

\* Provisional code which does not prejudge in any way the definitive nomenclature for this country, which will be agreed following the conclusion of negotiations currently taking place at the United Nations.

## EUROBAROMETER SURVEY ACTIVE AGEING

On the occasion of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (European Year 2012), the European Commission has carried out an extensive survey on active ageing in order to understand citizens' views and attitudes towards older people, the contribution of older people in the workplace and society, and how to best promote the active role of older people in society<sup>1</sup>.

### 1. Why is active ageing important?

The EU population is living longer and in better health. Since 1960, life expectancy has climbed by eight years, and demographic projections foresee a further five-year increase over the next four or five decades. Together with the low birth rates of the last decades, this implies that Europe's population is ageing fast, something that is happening all over the world, the poorest countries excepted.

Population ageing presents a number of challenges for the welfare systems and public finances to overcome. The EU Member States spend, on average, more than a quarter of their GDP on social protection, most of it for the benefit of older people in the form of pensions, health and long-term care. The economic crisis has left Member States with large public deficits and an important public debt burden at a time when the large cohorts of the post-war baby-boom are entering their sixties and are starting to retire from the labour market. The EU should be proud of the level of social protection it has achieved for its elderly population, although there is still need for improvement in a number of countries. The key question is how to secure good social protection in an increasingly challenging economic and demographic context.

Even though ageing is considered as a threat by many, it should be considered as one of the greatest achievements of our societies. The growing number of older people is sometimes seen as a burden on the working-age population. However, these fears underestimate the fact that a growing number of older people are in good health, have valuable skills and experience and are willing to make a significant contribution, from which young people can benefit. Allowing older people to remain active and independent as they grow older and to continue contributing to society is the key to tackling the challenge of demographic ageing.

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Active ageing is not just about the participation of older workers in the labour market, it is also about older workers actively contributing to society through voluntary work, including as family carers, or living independently thanks to adapted housing and infrastructure.

## 2. What are the key results of the Eurobarometer survey?

- The majority of Europeans (71%) are aware of the fact that the population is getting older, but this is a concern for only 42 % of them.
- Definitions of 'old' and 'young' differ across countries. On average, Europeans believe that people start being considered as old just before 64 years and are no longer considered young from the age of 41.8 years.
- Most of Europeans consider that older people play a major role in society and especially within their families (82%), in politics (71%), in the local community (70%), or in the economy (67%)
- Only one in three Europeans actually believe that the official retirement age will have to increase by 2030.
- 61% of Europeans support the idea that people should be allowed to continue working once they have reached the official retirement age, and 53% reject the idea of a compulsory retirement age.
- According to Eurostat, the average exit age from the labour market is 61.5 years. However, 42% of Europeans believe that they would be capable of carrying out their current work till the age of 65 or beyond, whilst an additional 28% think that they would be capable of carrying on their current work until the age of 60-64.
- One third of Europeans state that they would like to continue working after they reach the age when they are entitled to a pension.
- Part-time work combined with a partial pension would be more appealing than full retirement, to two thirds of Europeans.
- 27% of Europeans aged 55 and over engage in activities and voluntary work in a variety of organisations and devote on average 14 hours per month to such activities.
- 36% of Europeans aged 55 and over have, over the past 12 months, informally provided support to other people not belonging to their household. 15% are

currently taking care of an older family member, and another 42% have done so in the past.

































- The majority of Europeans believe that their country and local area are 'age-friendly'.
- Older people's organisations and other NGOs, as well as religious organisations and churches, play the most important role in tackling the challenges of ageing populations, according to Europeans.

### 3. Being old...when does it begin?


























**63.9** is the average **age at which one starts being regarded as old**, but there is a difference of more than 10 years between countries – 70.4 years in the Netherlands and 57.7 years in Slovakia. Perceptions of old age vary according to the age of the respondents; as the age of an individual increases, so does his/her views about when old age begins. Individuals within the age range of 15-24 believe that old age begins at the age of 59.1 whilst individuals aged 55 and over consider that old age begins at the age of 67.1. Women feel that old age begins slightly later than men (65 years versus 62.7 years).



QB2 In your opinion, thinking about the age when one starts to be regarded as "old", at what age would you say that happens?

|  | Moyenne/Average |
|--|-----------------|
|  EU27 | 63,9            |
|  NL   | 70,4            |
|  CY   | 68,5            |
|  BE   | 67,9            |
|  PT   | 67,9            |
|  IT   | 67,6            |
|  SE   | 66,6            |
|  SI   | 66,4            |
|  FR   | 65,9            |
|  EL   | 65,7            |
|  ES   | 65,5            |
|  LT   | 65,3            |
|  MT   | 65,2            |
|  FI  | 65,2            |
|  DK | 64,3            |
|  IE | 64,2            |
|  BG | 63,8            |
|  LU | 63,7            |
|  PL | 62,8            |
|  EE | 62,4            |
|  AT | 61,9            |
|  UK | 61,9            |
|  LV | 61,5            |
|  RO | 60,5            |
|  DE | 60,1            |
|  CZ | 59,5            |
|  HU | 58,0            |
|  SK | 57,7            |
|  IS | 64,8            |
|  HR | 62,9            |
|  MK | 61,0            |
|  TR | 58,4            |

QB3 And thinking about the age when one stops being regarded as "young" at what age would you say that happens?

|  | Moyenne/Average |
|--|-----------------|
|  EU27 | 41,8            |
|  CY   | 50,8            |
|  EL   | 50,5            |
|  ES   | 47,6            |
|  LT   | 47,0            |
|  IT   | 46,6            |
|  SI   | 46,6            |
|  BE   | 45,5            |
|  HU   | 45,5            |
|  RO   | 44,4            |
|  NL   | 43,1            |
|  BG   | 42,9            |
|  LV   | 42,1            |
|  EE  | 41,9            |
|  FR | 41,7            |
|  LU | 40,4            |
|  CZ | 40,0            |
|  AT | 39,9            |
|  IE | 39,0            |
|  SK | 38,9            |
|  DK | 38,7            |
|  FI | 38,7            |
|  PL | 38,6            |
|  DE | 38,3            |
|  UK | 37,0            |
|  SE | 36,9            |
|  PT | 36,8            |
|  MT | 36,7            |
|  HR | 42,3            |
|  IS | 39,7            |
|  MK | 38,7            |
|  TR | 37,6            |

Across the EU citizens believe that **a person is no longer regarded as being 'young' at the age of 41.8 years**. There are wide country variations, with over a decade between the highest and lowest national averages. In Malta, Portugal and Sweden a person is no longer regarded as young just under the age of 37, whilst in Greece and Cyprus people would continue to be regarded as young up to almost 51 years.

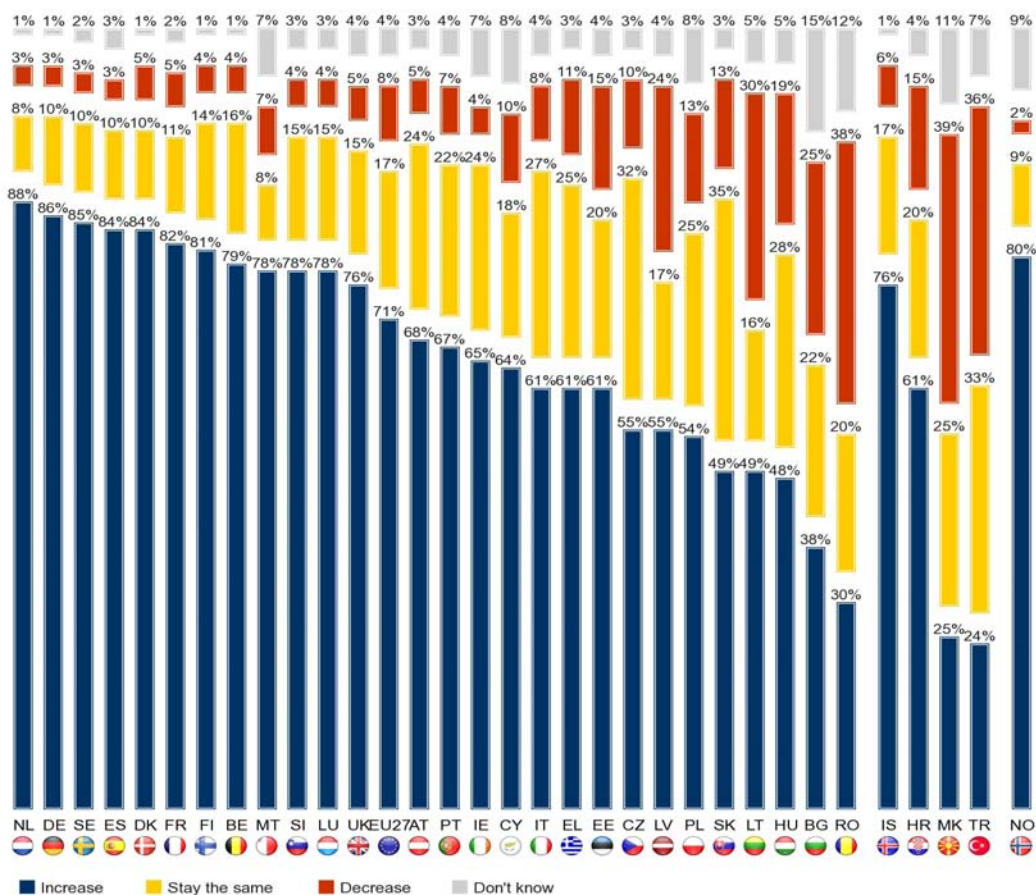
The older the respondents, the higher the ages they would stop considering as young. For the 15-24 year olds, 35.1 years is the age at which one would stop being considered as young, whereas respondents aged 55 and over believe that it is 46.3.

#### 4. The population is getting older. Are citizens really concerned?

Most **Europeans are aware of demographic ageing**, but, unlike experts and policy makers, they **are not overly concerned about it**.

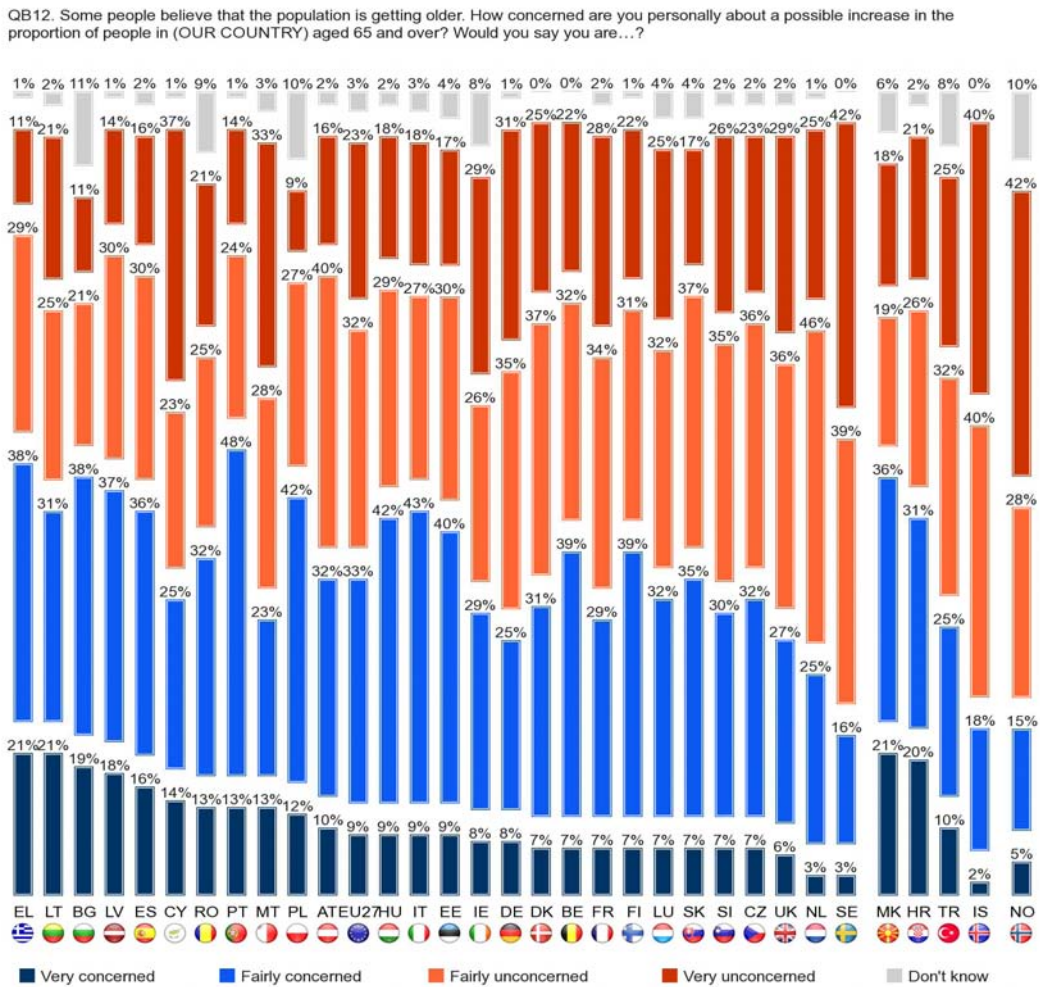
More specifically, 71% of Europeans believe that, over the next 20 years, the proportion of people aged 65 and over in their country will increase. Over 80% of citizens in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Denmark, France and Finland expect that the population is ageing (eight out of ten respondents) whereas, at the other end of the spectrum, citizens in Romania and Bulgaria do only 30% and 38% thinking so.

QB11. I would now like you to think about people aged 65 and over. Over the next 20 years, do you think the proportion of people aged 65 and over in (OUR COUNTRY) is going to...?



Although the majority of respondents actually believe that the population is ageing, only 42% are concerned by this trend. Citizens in Portugal, Greece and Bulgaria seem to feel more concerned than other Europeans, whereas people in the Netherlands and Sweden seem to be least concerned, with only 28% and 19% feeling concerned. 40% of

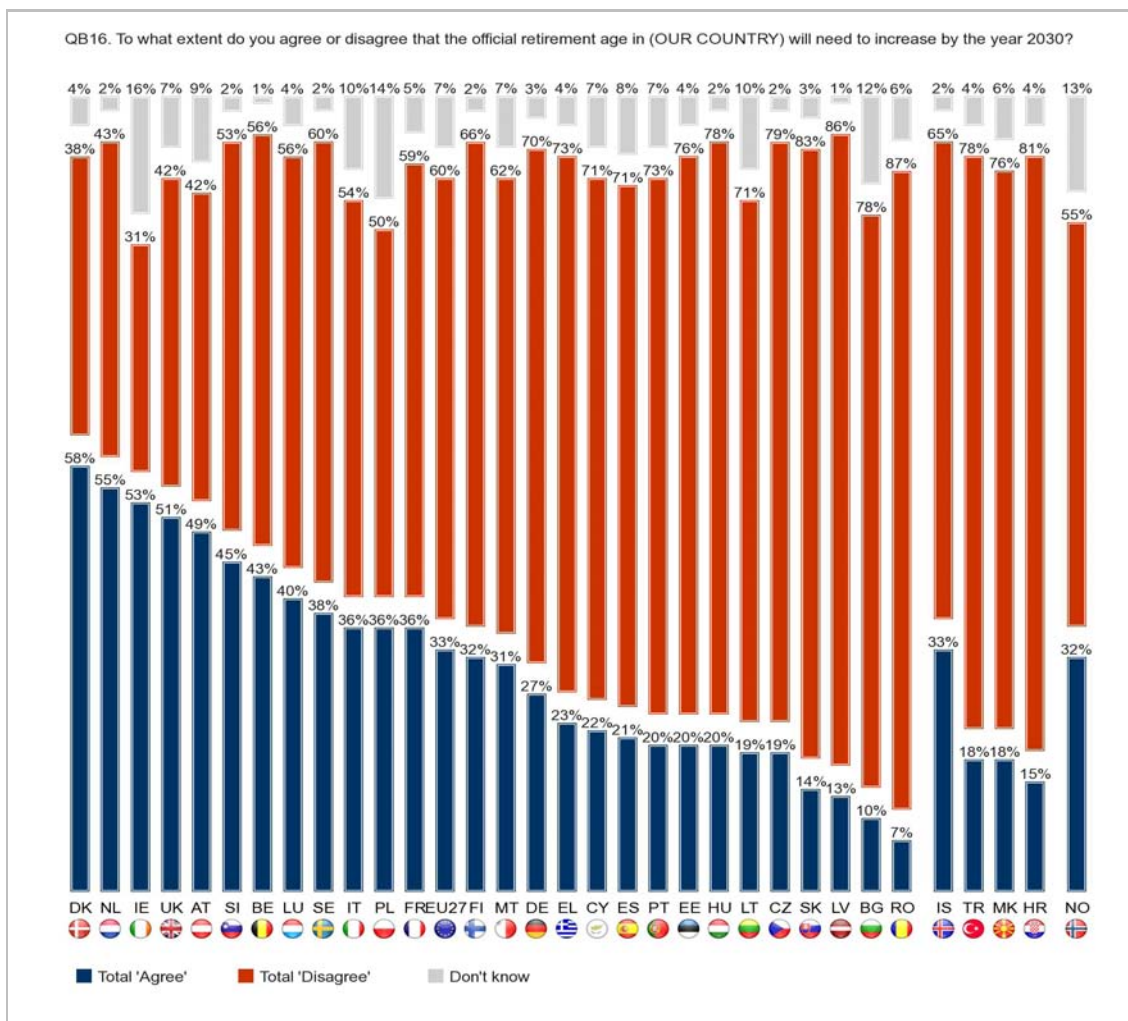
Europeans in the old Member States (EU-15) seem to be concerned in contrast to 49% in the new Member States (EU-12).



### 5. Do Europeans agree with an increase in retirement age?

Overall, **six out of ten Europeans reject the idea that the retirement age needs to increase by 2030**. The level of agreement with this idea tends to be higher amongst men, people aged 55 and over and the well-educated.

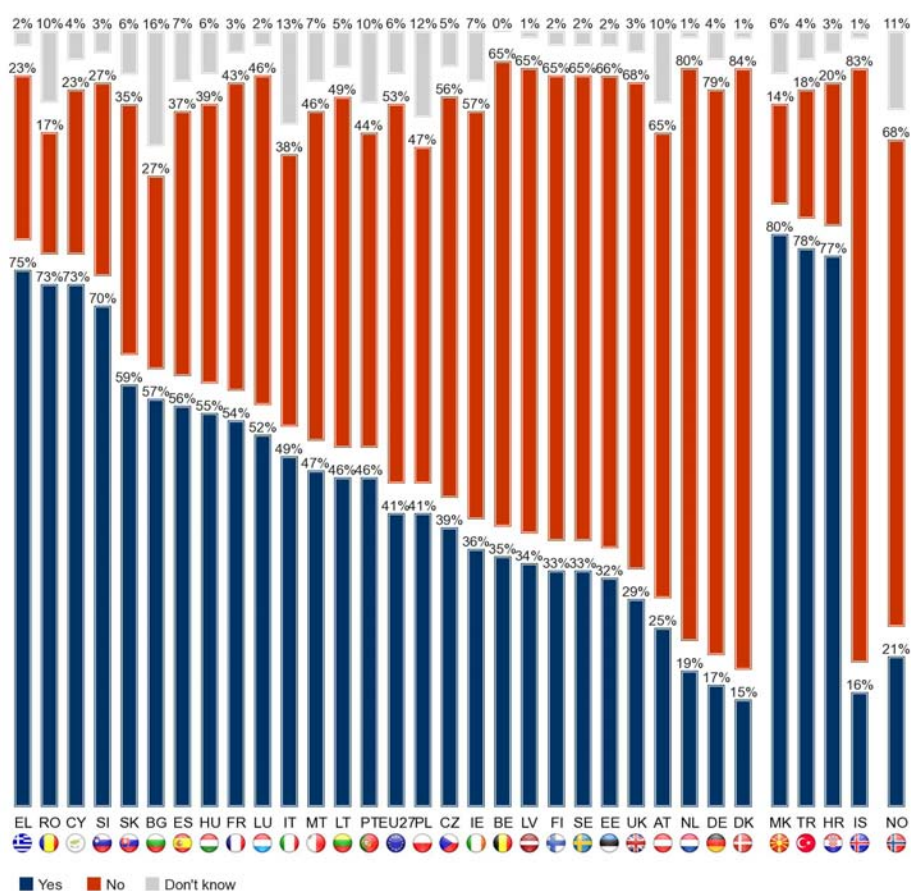
The vast majority of the respondents in Romania (87%), Latvia (86%), Slovakia (83%) and Croatia (81%) disagree that the retirement age will need to increase in the future. By contrast, respondents in Denmark (58%), the Netherlands (55%), Ireland (53%), the UK (51%) and Austria (49%) recognised the need for the official retirement age to go up.



### 6. Should people be obliged to retire at a certain age?

Only a **minority of Europeans actually believe that it should be compulsory for people to stop working at a certain age (41%)**. However, in some countries, a clear majority are in favour of compulsory retirement: in Greece, Romania, Cyprus and Slovenia with 75%, 73%, 73% and 70% respectively in favour. By contrast, around 80% of respondents in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany, reject the idea of a compulsory retirement age.

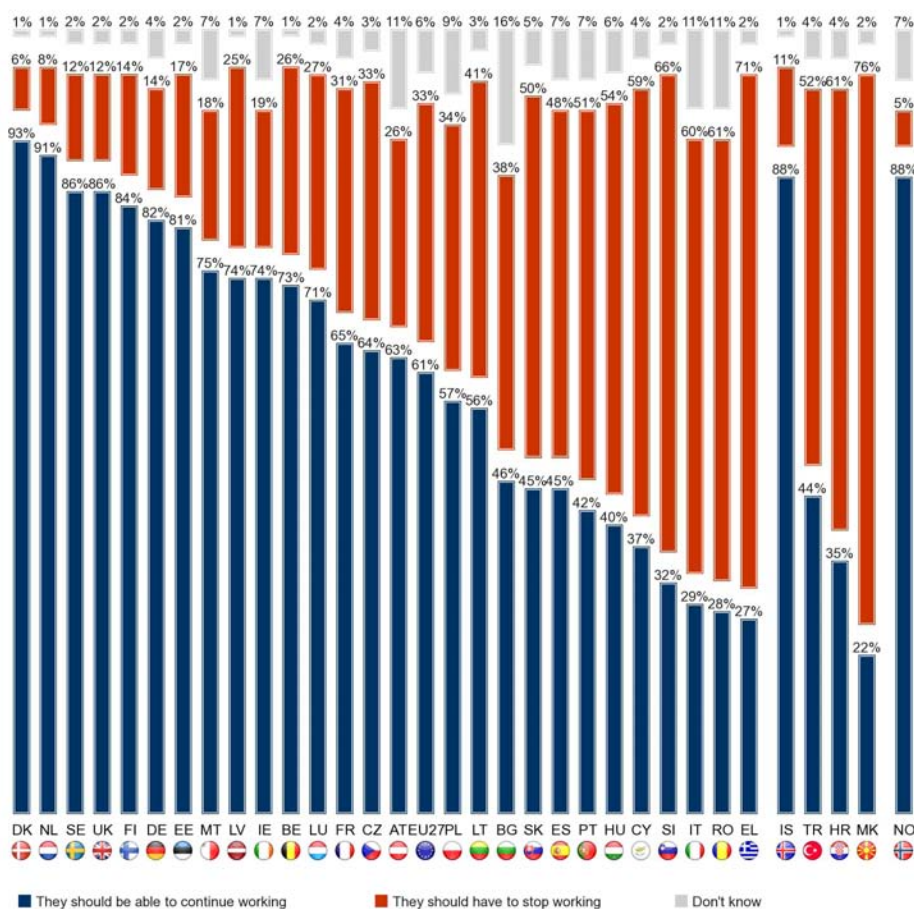
QB21. Regardless of the official retirement age in (OUR COUNTRY), should there be an age when it is compulsory for people to stop working?



Moreover, **almost two thirds of Europeans believe that they should be allowed to continue working beyond the official retirement age.** There are interesting variations across Member States. At one extreme, nine out of ten respondents in Denmark and the Netherlands believe that they should be able to do so, whilst at the other end of the scale only three out of ten respondents believe so in Greece, Romania, Italy and Slovenia.



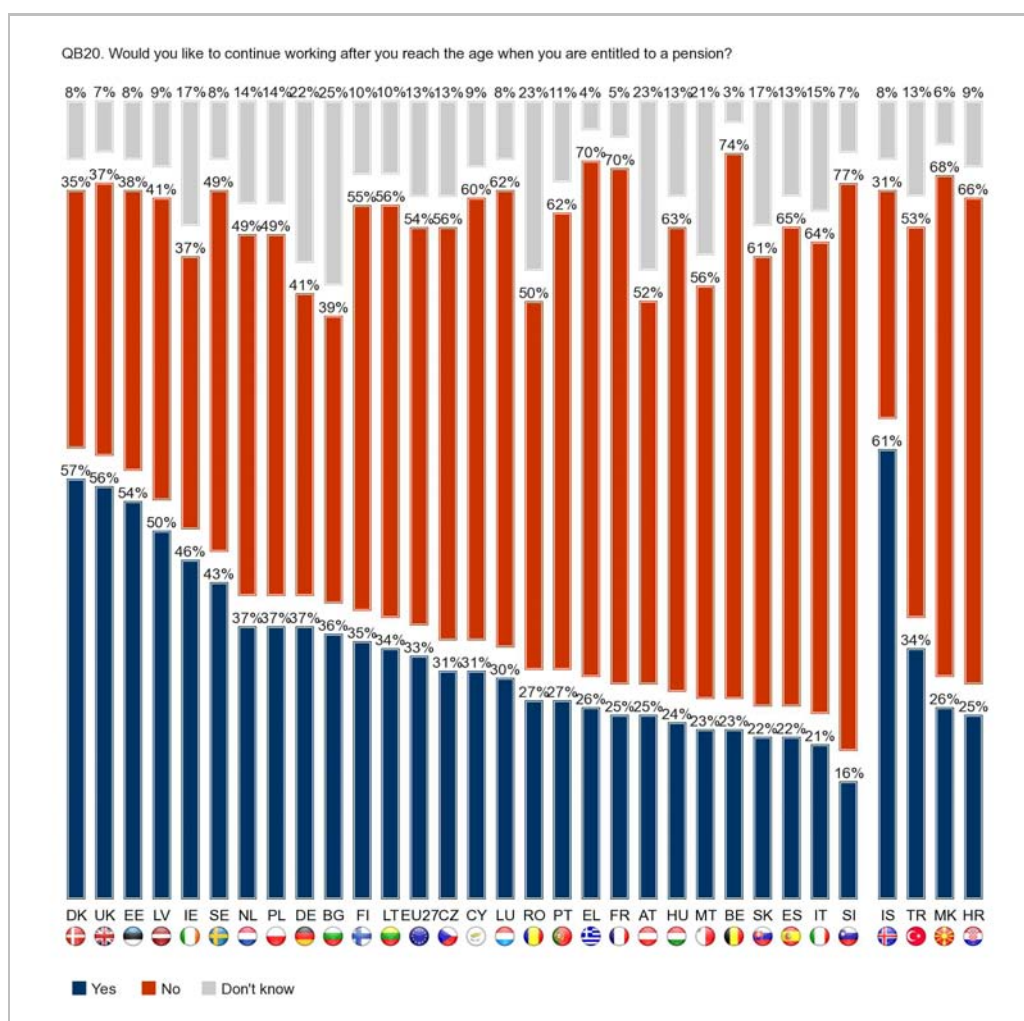
QB19. Would you say that people should be allowed to continue working once they have reached the official retirement age, or should they have to stop working?



### 7. Do Europeans want to continue working after the official retirement age?

One **third** of Europeans currently in work say that they would like to continue working after they become entitled to a pension. This proportion ranges from over half of the respondents in Denmark, the UK, Estonia and Latvia to just over 20% in Spain and Italy and 16% in Slovenia.

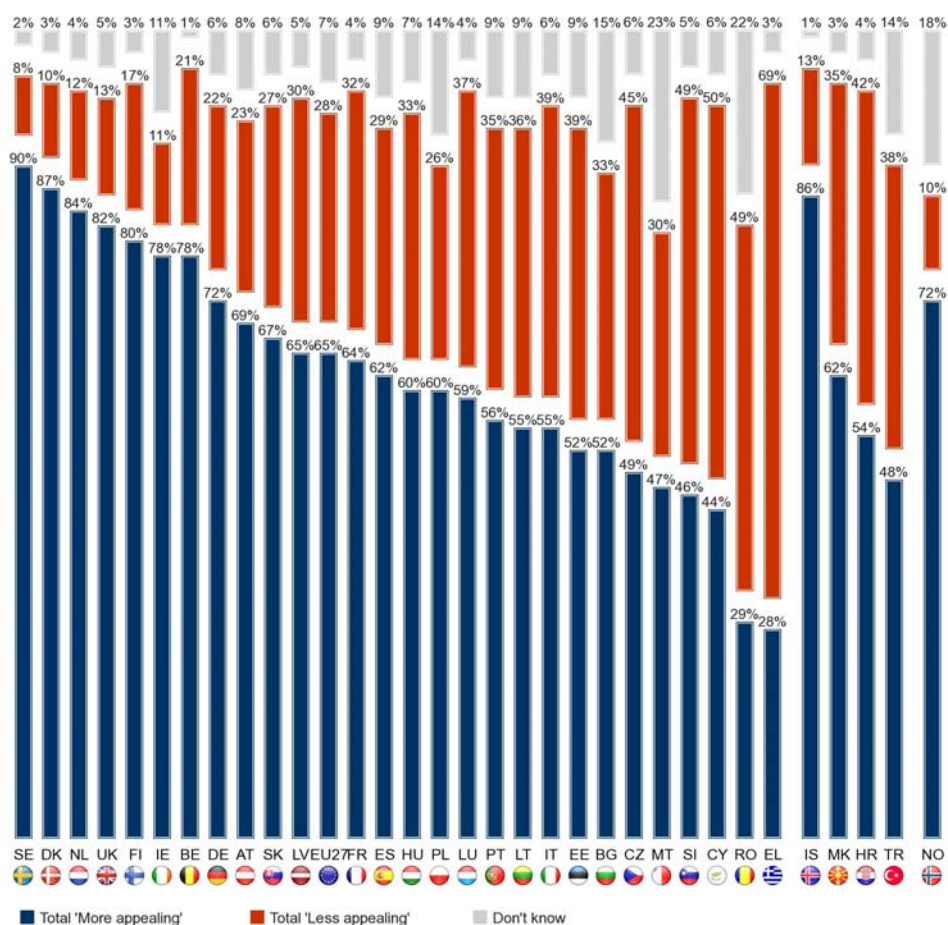
Moreover, **the older they get, the more people are likely to want continue working longer**: 41% of people aged 55 and over tend to be keener on working beyond the age at which they are entitled to a pension, in contrast to younger respondents (ranging between 30% to 33%).



## 8. What would encourage Europeans to work after the official retirement age?

Some arrangements **would encourage people to work longer: in particular, the idea of combining part time work and a partial pension** seems more appealing than full retirement, to almost two thirds of Europeans. Many Europeans consider that the lack of gradual retirement options hinders longer careers. More Europeans (69%) in the 15 Member States which joined the EU first (EU-15) find the idea of a combined part-time work and partial pension more appealing than full retirement –compared with 52% of those in the NMS12. This idea appeals most in Sweden (90%), Denmark (87%), the Netherlands (84%), UK (82%), Finland (80%), Ireland (78%) and Belgium (78%). Respondents in Greece seem least attracted to this idea, with only 28% finding it more appealing and 69% finding it less appealing.

QB23. If it was possible to combine a part-time job and partial pension instead of full retirement, how appealing would this be to you?



### 9. Are Europeans involved in voluntary work?

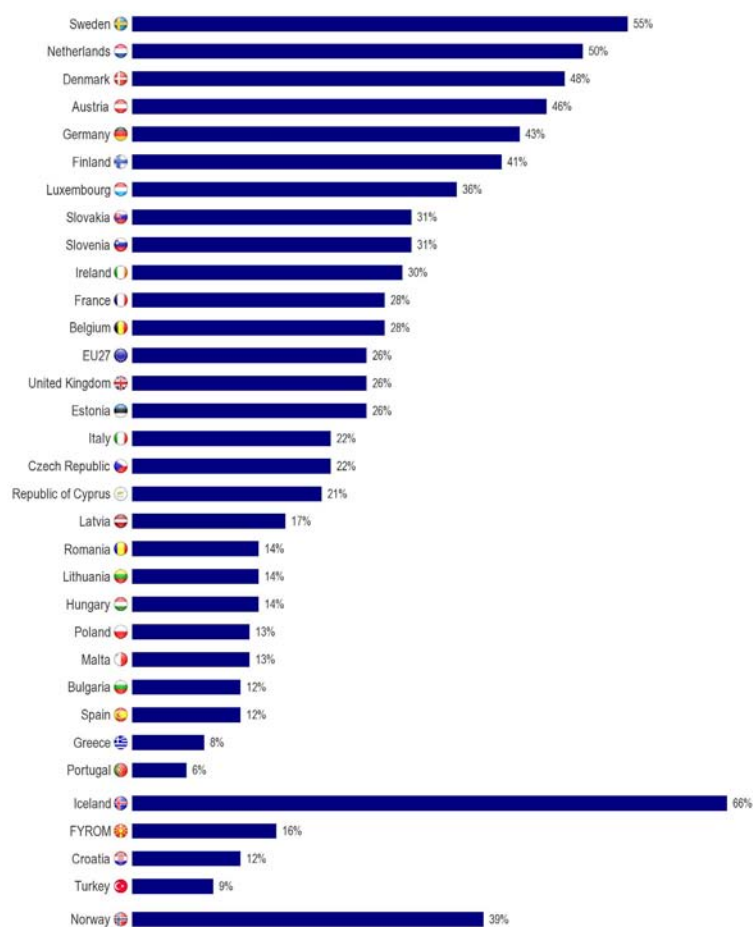
One in four Europeans engage in an organised way in voluntary work. Citizens in certain countries seem to be more prone to engaging in voluntary work than in others, for example in Sweden (55%) and the Netherlands (50%). In other countries like Portugal (6%) and Greece (8%), organised volunteering could also be less embedded in the culture.

Men aged 40-54 and 55 and over seem to engage more in volunteering than other groups. On average, people say they devote 14 hours per month to such activities.



Question: QB25 Do you currently participate actively in or do voluntary work for one or more of the following organisations?

Answers: Total 'Does voluntary work'



Although 74% are not doing voluntary work per se, **67% of Europeans have performed some sort of 'unofficial' voluntary work during the last 12 months.** Only a third of citizens have not helped someone else. This support includes emotional support during difficult times, help with housework, helping someone move or decorate their home, child care or babysitting, doing someone's shopping or banking, providing financial support, healthcare or hygiene. Providing emotional support is the most common area where people seem to help.

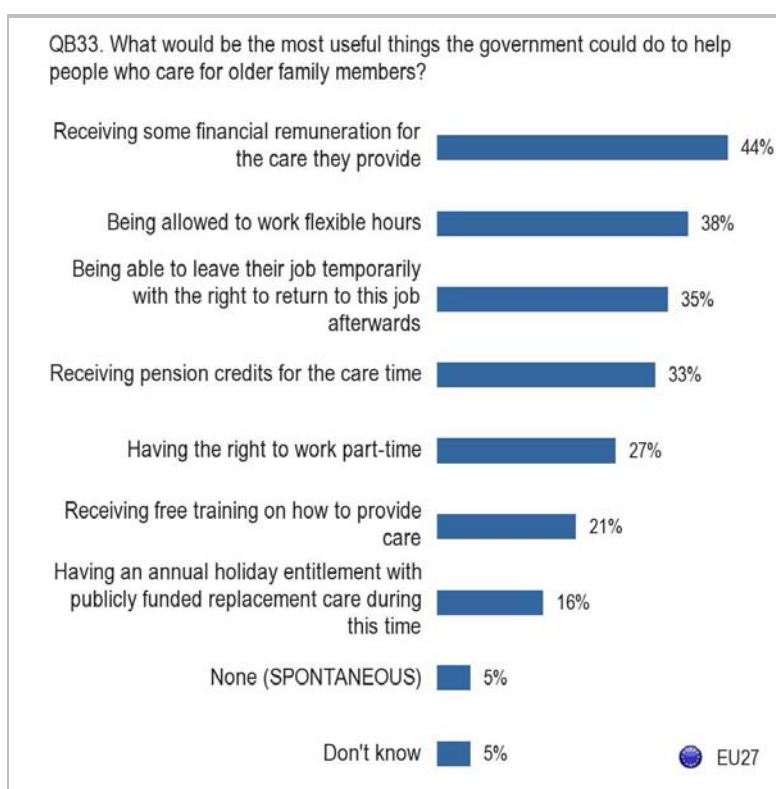
The specific types of activities through which people help or support others vary according to their age. Younger people (15-24 and 25-39 years) would tend to help someone move/ decorate their home or help with the housework, for example, while 40-54 year olds would help others with their shopping/banking or to provide emotional support. Those aged 55 years and older often provide financial support or take care of a family member.

15% of Europeans take personally care of an older member of a family and 27% have done so in the past, but over a half (57%) have never done so.

Women and those who are aged 55 are more likely than others to have looked after older family members.

## 10. What should governments and society do to help people take care of elderly?

Many Europeans believe that governments can do more to support carers, notably by helping them financially (44%), by offering the possibility of working flexible hours (38%), through carer's leave (35%) and by offering pension credits for care time (33%).



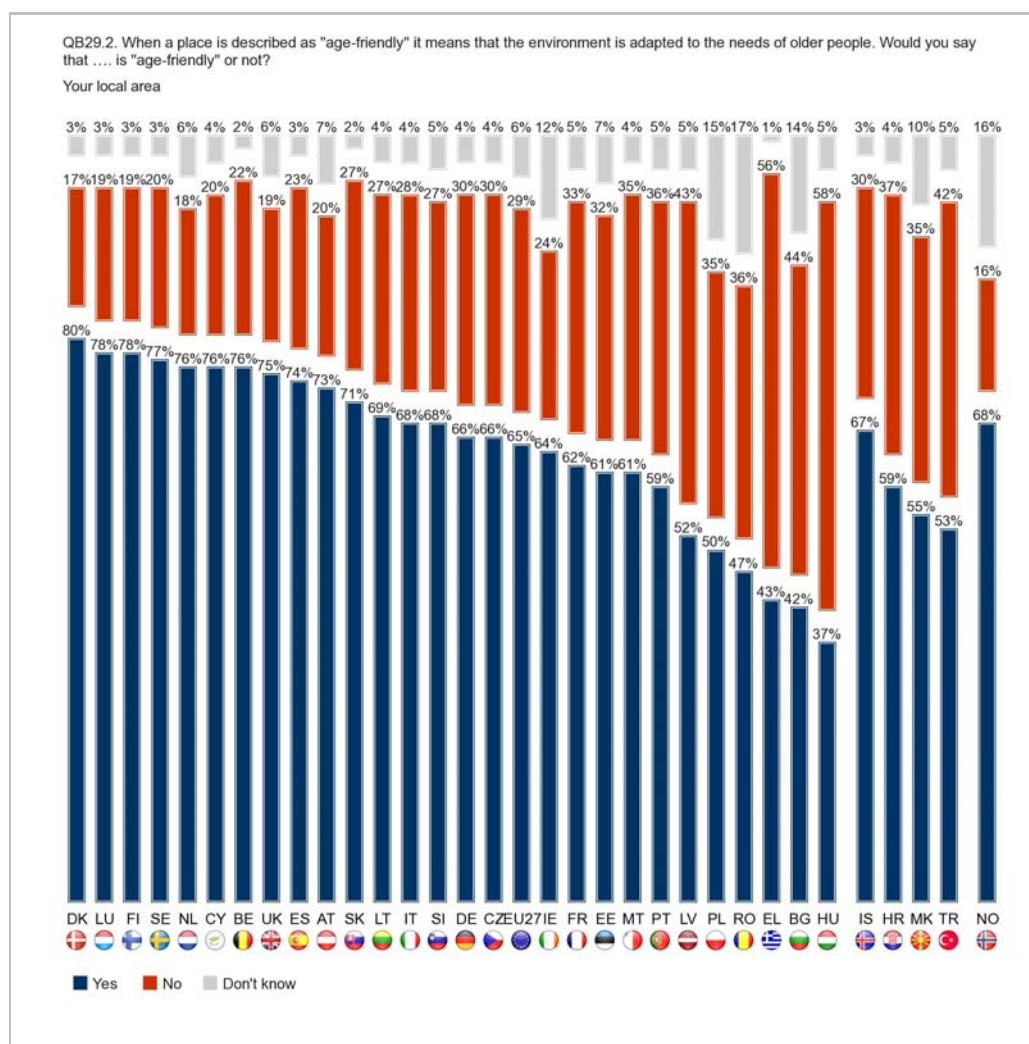
Remuneration of carers was most frequently mentioned in Slovakia (65%) and Sweden (61%). Flexible working hours was cited by over half of the respondents in Iceland (57%), Denmark (56%), Cyprus (53%) and the Netherlands (52%). Most people in Denmark feel that being able to leave one's job temporarily would be useful (55%).

Financial remuneration is more likely to be mentioned by women (46%) than men (43%). Training is more likely to be mentioned by younger respondents (28% of those aged 15-24 and 24% of those aged 25-39) than by older respondents (19% of those aged 40-54 and 55 and over).

### 11. How 'age-friendly' is our environment?

**More than half of Europeans (57%) feel that their country is 'age-friendly' and almost two thirds (65%) believe so as far as their local area is concerned.**

In total, 69% of Europeans in the EU15 Member States feel that their local area is "age-friendly" compared to 52% in EU-12. Younger people tend to feel more positively about the 'age-friendliness' of their countries than older people (60% of those aged 15-24 compared to 55% of those aged 55 and over). Those who live in rural areas describe their local area as 'age-friendly' more often than those who live in large towns.



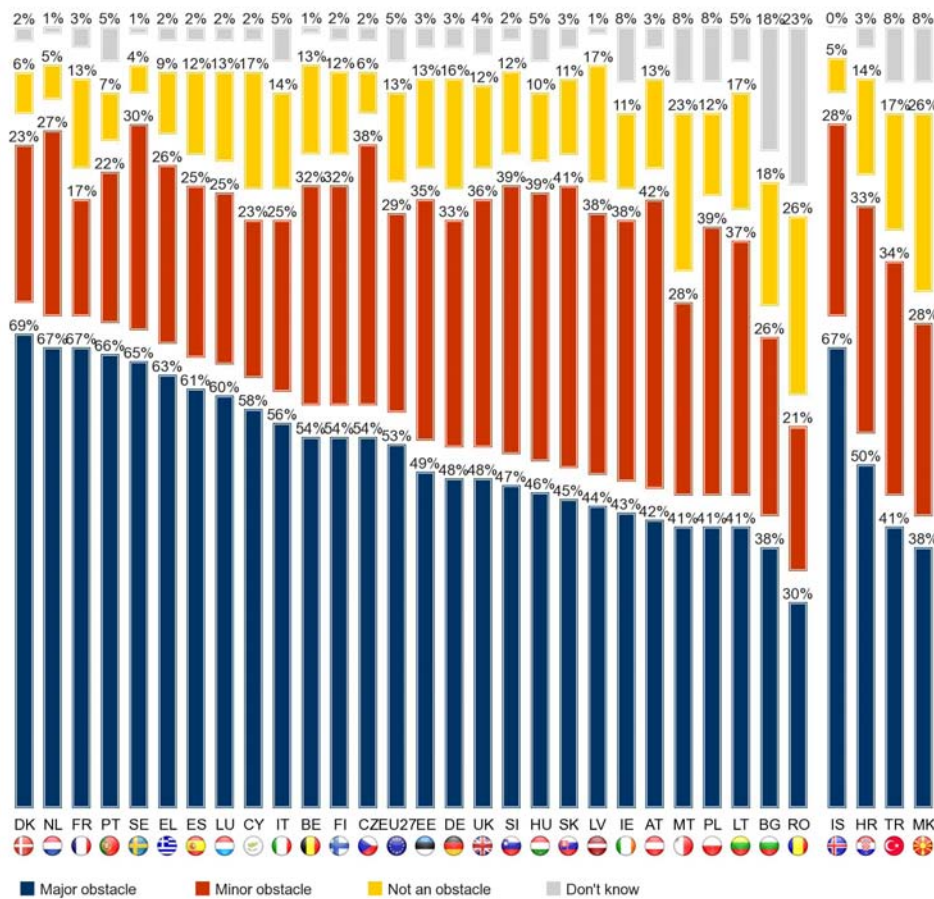
Improvements are needed in several areas. Those most frequently mentioned are facilities for older people to stay fit and healthy (42%), better public transport (40%) and roads and road safety (31%). Public areas such as parks (25%), commercial premises (17%) and public buildings (15%) seem to be regarded as less problematic.

## 12. Is technology an obstacle for older people when interacting with public services and businesses?

The use of information technologies by public services and businesses to interact with the public is a major obstacle for older people according to 53% of Europeans. People aged 40-54 and 55 and over believe this more than others (56%).

Nine out of ten of citizens in Sweden, in the Netherlands, in Denmark and in the Czech Republic perceive technology as an obstacle, whilst only five out of ten feel the same in Romania.

QB34. These days, many public services and other organisations use technology such as the Internet or mobile phones to interact with their customers instead of traditional means such as meeting in person. In your opinion, do you think this is a major obstacle for older people, a minor obstacle or not an obstacle?

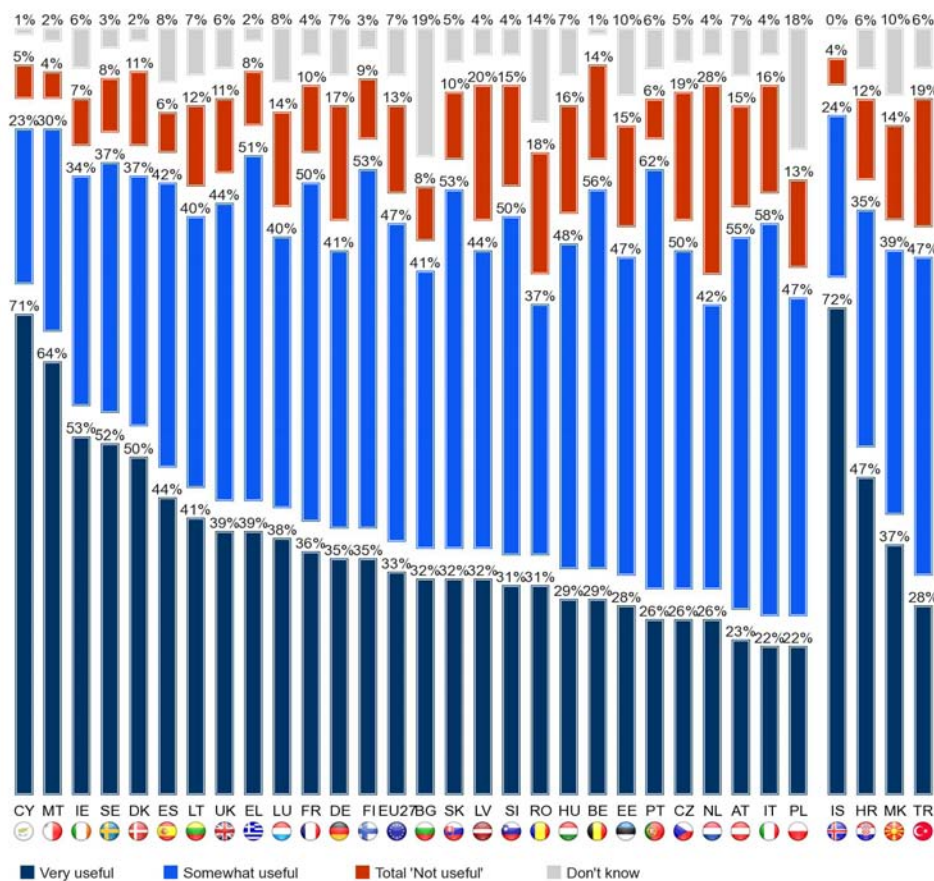


### 13. How useful would be special committees of older people, to be consulted by local authorities?

The majority of citizens (80%) feel that it would be useful for local authorities to set up special committees of older people to consult before making decisions on issues that relate to them in the local community. The strongest support for this idea can be observed in Malta and Cyprus where more than nine out of ten feel it would be useful. By contrast, the highest proportion of respondents who would not find this useful (28%) can be found in the Netherlands.

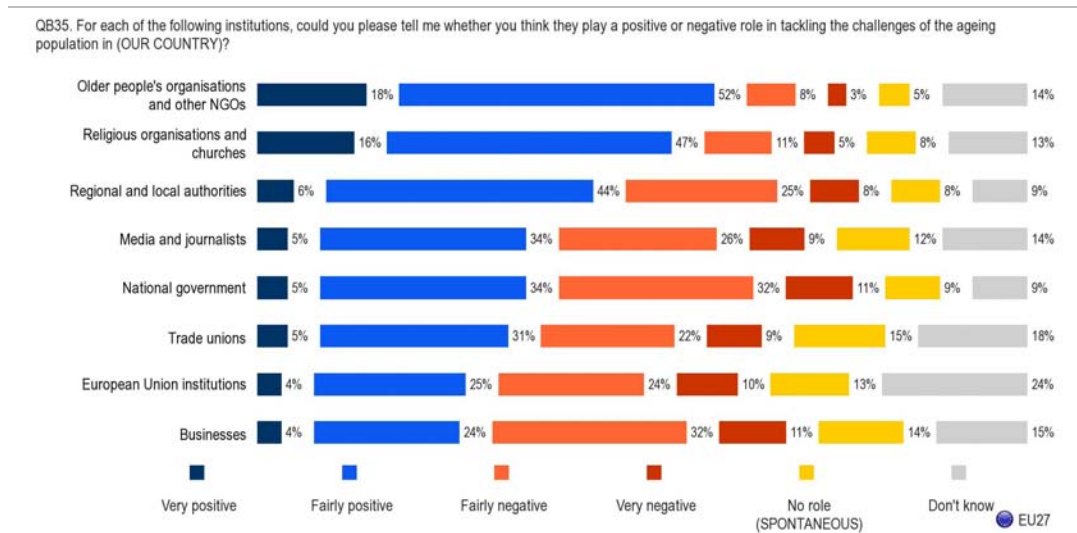
Older people are more likely than younger people to feel that special committees of older people would be very useful (37% of those aged 55 and over compared to 27% of those aged 15-24 and 29% of those aged 25-39).

QB31. How useful or not do you think it would be for local authorities to set up special committees of older people to consult, before deciding on issues relating to what they face in the local community?



### 14. Who has a role to play in active ageing?

Older people organisations and religious ones, as well as, regional and local authorities, media, national governments and trade unions are considered as having the most important role in tackling the challenges of the ageing population.



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*For more information, see also: IP/12/16*

*Special Eurobarometer 378: Active Ageing (Report and Factsheets)*

*Flash Eurobarometer report (April 2009) on attitudes to intergenerational solidarity*