

Europe's Future | June 2019

Local infrastructure and economic opportunities: What do Europeans think about their neighbourhood?

In a recent *eupinions* survey, we set out to explore what people in Europe think about their neighbourhood, the quality of local infrastructure and of economic opportunities in their area. Overall, the results show a generally high degree of satisfaction with living conditions “on the ground”, but satisfaction levels differ for example between respondents living in rural and those living in urban areas. What stands out however is the pessimistic judgement of economic opportunities for young people.

We take a bus to work, have an appointment with a local doctor or unwind in a public park. All such services or activities that are part of local infrastructure are essential for our daily (work) routines and key to ensuring a certain quality of life. Whether the goods and services provided by local infrastructure are good, affordable and accessible thus becomes immediately tangible in people's daily lives. Hence learning more about what people in Europe think about the local infrastructure in their neighbourhood could be an important ingredient for a better understanding of their everyday hopes and needs and the role that public provision – and by extension the efficiency

of local authorities – may have. This is why we dedicated a special section of our *eupinions* poll to find out what people across Europe think of the quality, access to and affordability of their local infrastructure.

Moreover, as good local infrastructure is assumed to increase mobility, employment opportunities and chances of participation in the labour market, we also asked people in the same survey if they think that their area offers economic opportunities. In particular, we wanted to know about young people's perceived ability to find a job close to their home, which might in turn

affect their decision to stay in their area or move away.

So how do people in Europe feel about their neighbourhood? How do they judge the quality of local infrastructure and the economic opportunities in their area? Let us take a closer look.

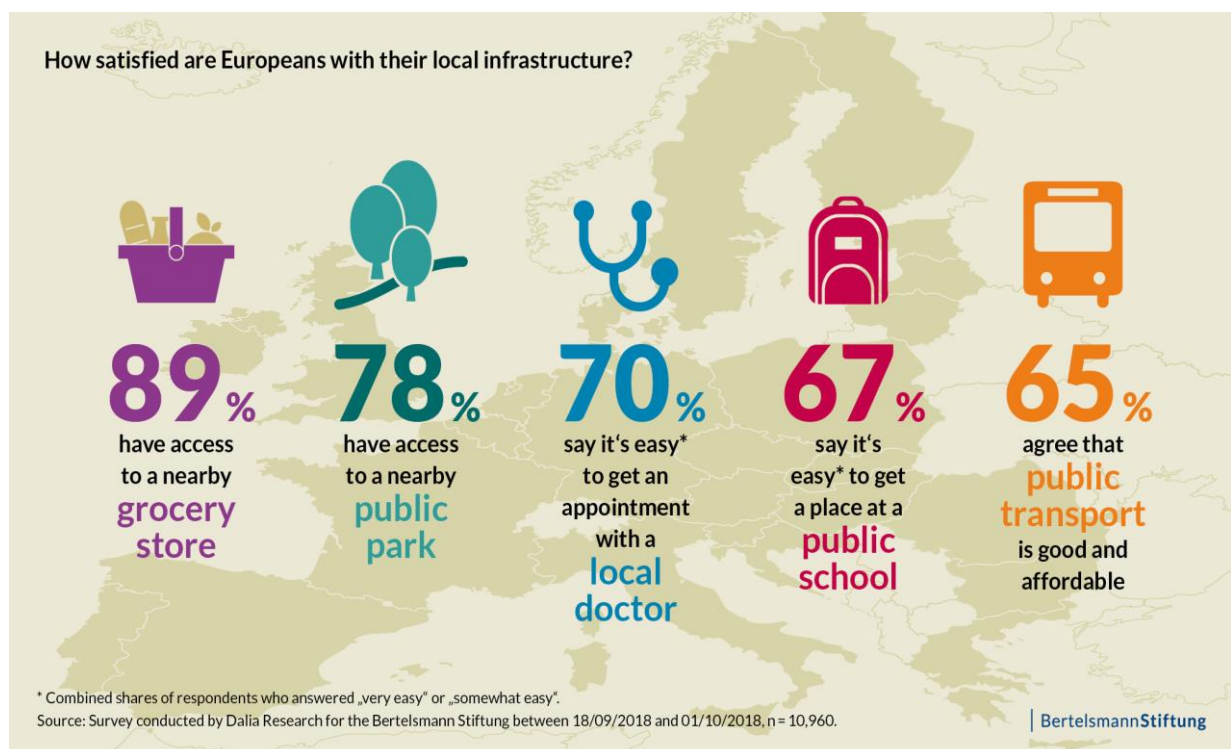
Good news: An overwhelming majority of Europeans think their neighbourhood is a good place to live

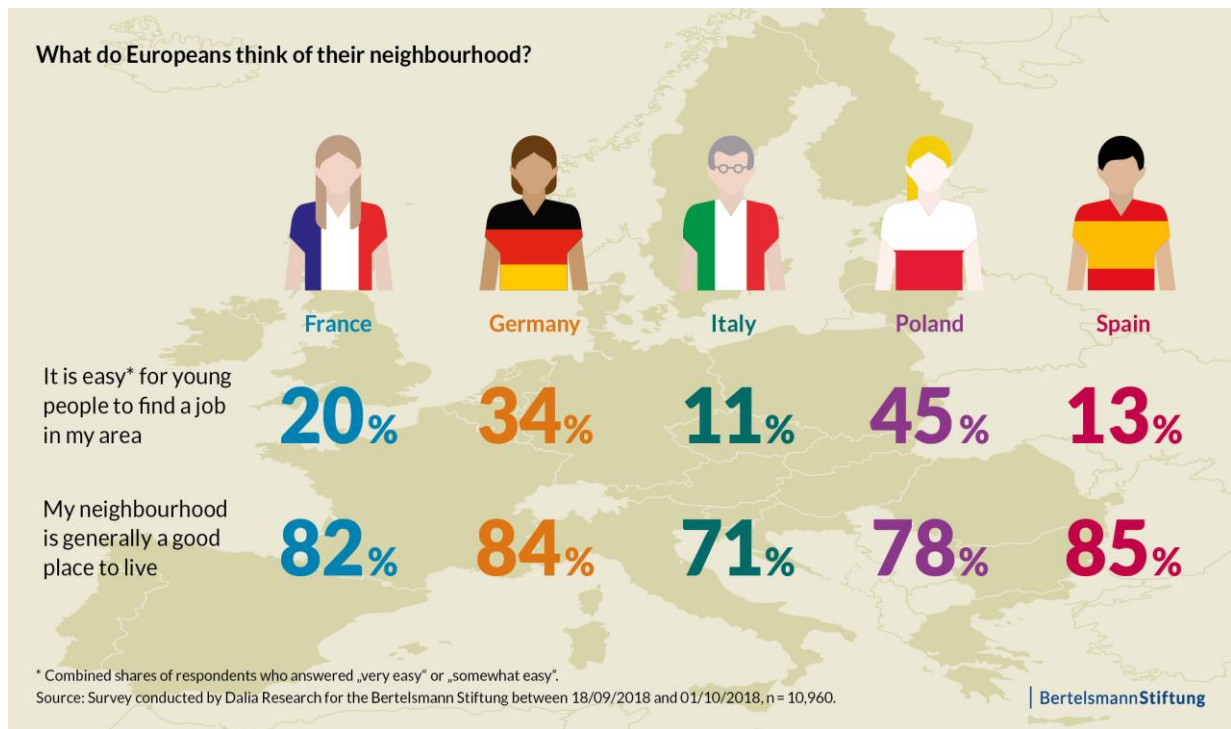
According to the *eupinions* poll, **81 percent of Europeans think that their neighbourhood is generally a good place to live**. The results are almost the same for Europeans living in rural (82 percent) as in urban areas (81 percent). Yet they show some variation between EU member states: while for example more than eight out of ten respondents in Spain (85 percent), Germany (84 percent) and France (82 percent) agree that their area is generally a good place to live in, this proportion is slightly lower in Poland (78 percent) and only applies to 71 percent of Italian respondents.

The poll also shows that Europeans are overall satisfied with the local infrastructure in their

neighbourhood. Yet here there are big variations among different kinds of goods and services that local infrastructure supplies. For example, almost nine out of ten Europeans confirm that they have access to a nearby supermarket to fulfil their daily needs (89 percent). When it comes to spending their leisure time, a bit less than eight out of ten respondents confirm that they have access to a nearby park (78 percent). While as many as seven out of ten Europeans say they have easy access to a local doctor (70 percent), access to public transport or educational infrastructure produces the lowest numbers: less than seven out of ten respondents in Europe agree that it is easy for them to get a place at a nearby public school (67 percent) or that public transport in their area is good and affordable (65 percent).

While the overall satisfaction with local infrastructure is high, **differences exist between respondents living in rural and urban areas**. Interviewees in rural areas, for instance, are considerably more dissatisfied with their access to local economic infrastructure: eight out of ten respondents (80 percent) confirm access to a nearby grocery store while this applies to more than nine out of ten respondents in urban areas (92 percent). This gap grows larger when it comes to having access to a public park: 83 percent of respondents in urban areas agree, but





only 64 percent of respondents in rural areas. The gap grows even larger with regard to public transport: while slightly more than seven out of ten respondents in urban areas confirm to have good and affordable access to public transport (71 percent), less than five out of ten respondents in rural areas agree (48 percent).

Yet there is only a small difference between urban (71 percent) and rural (69 percent) respondents about access to a local doctor, and in one area we tested rural Europeans' levels of satisfaction exceed those of Europeans living in urban areas: 71 percent of respondents in rural areas are happy with their access to education, compared to 66 percent of urban respondents.

Warning: Europeans are unhappy with local economic opportunities

The overall positive results about Europeans' local neighbourhood and the provision of local infrastructure are however in sharp contrast to people's perception of the local economy: **less than three out of ten respondents consider it easy for young people to find a job in their area (28 percent)**. The proportion is even lower for female respondents: only 24 percent consider the economic opportunities in their area to be good, compared to 32 percent of male respondents. Moreover, there is a significant

disparity between respondents with high and low levels of education: among the former, more than three out of ten consider economic opportunities for young people in their area to be good (32 percent), while this is the case for only two out of ten respondents with low education levels (20 percent). In this special *eupinions* section, we did not survey the reasons behind such low results, yet this certainly merits further research.

Within this overall bleak outlook, **respondents in some countries are even more disillusioned with local economic opportunities than in others**: only about one in ten Italian (11 percent) and Spanish (13 percent) respondents and two out of ten respondents in France (20 percent) consider the local employment conditions for young people in their area to be good. These figures are clearly higher in Germany (34 percent) or Poland (45 percent). These subjective perceptions are confirmed by macroeconomic data: the Italian economy for example still struggles with lagging growth, and unemployment rates are still comparatively high in both Italy and Spain. While unemployment across the EU averaged at 6.4 percent in April 2019, unemployment among EU members was the third highest in Italy at 10.2 percent and second highest in Spain at 13.8 percent (Eurostat). Moreover, and this might be especially important, unemployment is particularly and persistently high among the

young. In 2018, youth unemployment in Italy still stood at 32.2 percent and in Spain at 34.3 percent or the third and second highest rates across the EU after Greece. The EU as a whole recorded a youth unemployment rate of 15.2 percent in 2018. In comparison, youth unemployment rates in Poland (11.7 percent) and Germany (6.2 percent) were below EU average.

Conclusion

While this report cannot assess the actual quality of infrastructure, it nonetheless gives insights into how people *perceive* local infrastructure around them as part of their day-to-day-lives as well as the quality of their neighbourhood. Despite the overall high degree of satisfaction with living conditions “on the ground”, the results show that for example people living in rural areas are less satisfied with their local infrastructure in most of the tested infrastructure areas, a finding

that connects to the larger debate on rural-urban divergences showing up within EU member states.

What stands out however is the poor assessment of the local labour market situation, particularly for young Europeans. The low satisfaction rates with economic opportunities for young people emerge strongest in Italy and Spain – two countries not only hit hard by the economic crisis, but also still suffering from high and prolonged rates of youth unemployment. Germany for example had the lowest youth unemployment rate across the EU in 2018. Even so, only a minority of German respondents stated that economic opportunities for young people in their area were good. In a similar vein, also the number of highly educated respondents who think it is easy for young people in their area to find a job is rather low. Given that youth unemployment remains an important issue in several EU countries, the fact that respondents to this survey judge economic opportunities for young people rather pessimistically raises a serious note of concern.

About the report

eupinions is an independent platform for European public opinion. It collects, analyses and comments on what the European public thinks about current political issues and megatrends. Every quarter, *eupinions* collects samples from each EU member state in 22 languages. Studies and trending data published by *eupinions* can be found on www.eupinions.eu.

This report presents an overview of a study conducted by Dalia Research for the Bertelsmann Foundation between 18/09/2018 and 01/10/2018 on public opinion across 28 EU member states. The sample of n=10,960 was drawn across all 28 EU member states, taking into account current population distributions with regard to age (16-65 years), gender and region/country. In order to obtain census representative results, the data were weighted based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics. The target weighting variables were age, gender, level of education (as defined by ISCED (2011) levels 0-2, 3-4, and 5-8), and degree of urbanization (rural and urban). An iterative algorithm was used to identify the optimal combination of weighting variables based on sample composition within each country. An estimation of the overall design effect based on the distribution of weights was calculated at 1.53 at the global level. Calculated for a sample of this size and considering the design-effect, the margin of error would be +/-1.2 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent. Representative country data is not available for all EU member states but only for France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain.

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William Murphy, Footbridges Across The Liffey At Sunset / Flickr - CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>



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