

# Racism and Xenophobia in Europe

Eurobarometer Opinion Poll no 47.1

First results presented at the Closing Conference  
of the European Year Against Racism  
Luxembourg, 18 & 19 December 1997



**A** European Union-wide survey carried out in Spring 1997 shows a worrying level of racism and xenophobia in Member States, with nearly 33% of those interviewed openly describing themselves as "quite racist" or "very racist".

Dissatisfaction with their life circumstances, fear of unemployment, insecurity about the future and low confidence in the way public authorities and the political establishment worked in their country were the main characteristics of those who put themselves at the top of the racist scale and who were more likely to agree with negative stereotypes on immigrants and minorities.

Many of the declared racists were in fact xenophobic, as the "minorities" who were the target of racist feeling in each country, varied according to its colonial and migration history and the recent arrival of refugees.

The survey results show the complexity of the phenomenon of racism. Feelings of racism co-exist with a strong belief in the democratic system and respect for fundamental and social rights and freedoms. A majority felt society should be inclusive and offer equal rights to all citizens, including those from immigrant and minority groups.

But the more detailed the questions became as to which rights should apply under all circumstances, the more opinions were divided. Many agreed to limiting the rights of those who were considered "problem" groups, that is immigrants who are in the European Union illegally, those involved in crime and those who are unemployed.

Respondents considered that the European Institutions should have a more important role to play in combating racism.

## The survey

This Opinion Poll was carried out between 26 March and 29 April 1997 in the fifteen Member States at the request of the Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs Directorate (DGV) of the European Commission within the framework of Eurobarometer 47.1. It involved 16,154 people. It was commissioned as part of the European Year Against Racism and coordinated by INRA (Europe). The last poll of this kind was taken in 1988. The data were analysed under the responsibility of Jeanne

Ben Brika and Gérard Lemaire (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris),

and James S. Jackson (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan).

In accordance with normal practice for this type of survey, the European Commission disclaims all responsibility for the questions, results and commentaries.

## Important numbers describe themselves as "racist"

Only one in three of those interviewed said they felt they were "not at all racist". One in three declared themselves "a little racist" and one third openly expressed quite or very racist feelings.

Nearly 9% of interviewees put themselves at the top of the racist scale saying they were "very racist". Belgium led with a large 22% openly stating they were "very racist". France (16%) and Austria (14%) followed. The same three countries led when the "quite racist" score is added to the "very racist", giving a total of 55%, 48% and 42% respectively. The countries with the lowest number of declared "very racists" were Spain and Ireland (4% in each), Portugal (3%), Luxembourg and Sweden (2% each).

Just over 5% of those interviewed said they themselves belonged to a racial, cultural or religious minority. Over half said they had no friends from minority groups and 17.5% said they had a

parent or grandparent of a nationality, race, religion or culture other than their own.

## Low confidence in institutions

Although 82% of the interviewees agreed that democracy was the best political system, wide national variations emerged as to how satisfied they were with the functioning of their country's institutions and political establishment.

Nearly half of those who declared themselves as quite or very racist were dissatisfied with the political working of their country. This may contribute to explaining the Belgian findings, where confidence in the country's authorities was the lowest in Europe, probably as a result of events in 1996 and 1997.

The dissatisfaction with the authorities needs to be seen in conjunction with the findings on the most worrying social and political issues. Unemployment, insecurity, poverty and drug abuse were seen as more worrying than the rise of racism.

Degree of expressed racism (distribution by country) (in percents, non responses excluded)

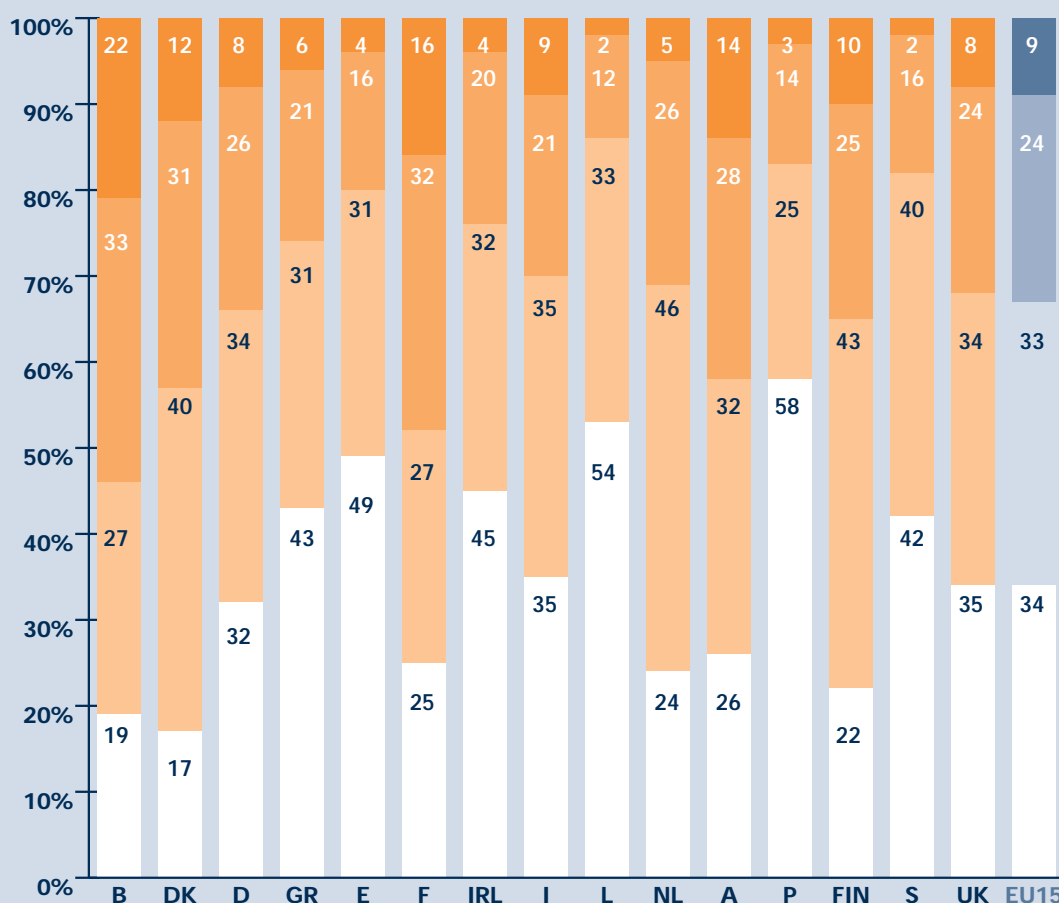
### Question:

"Some people feel they are not at all racist. Others feel they are very racist. Would you look at this card and give me the number that shows your own feelings about this? If you feel you are not at all racist, you give a score of 1. If you feel you are very racist, you give a score of 10. The scores between 1 and 10 allow you to say how close to either side you are."

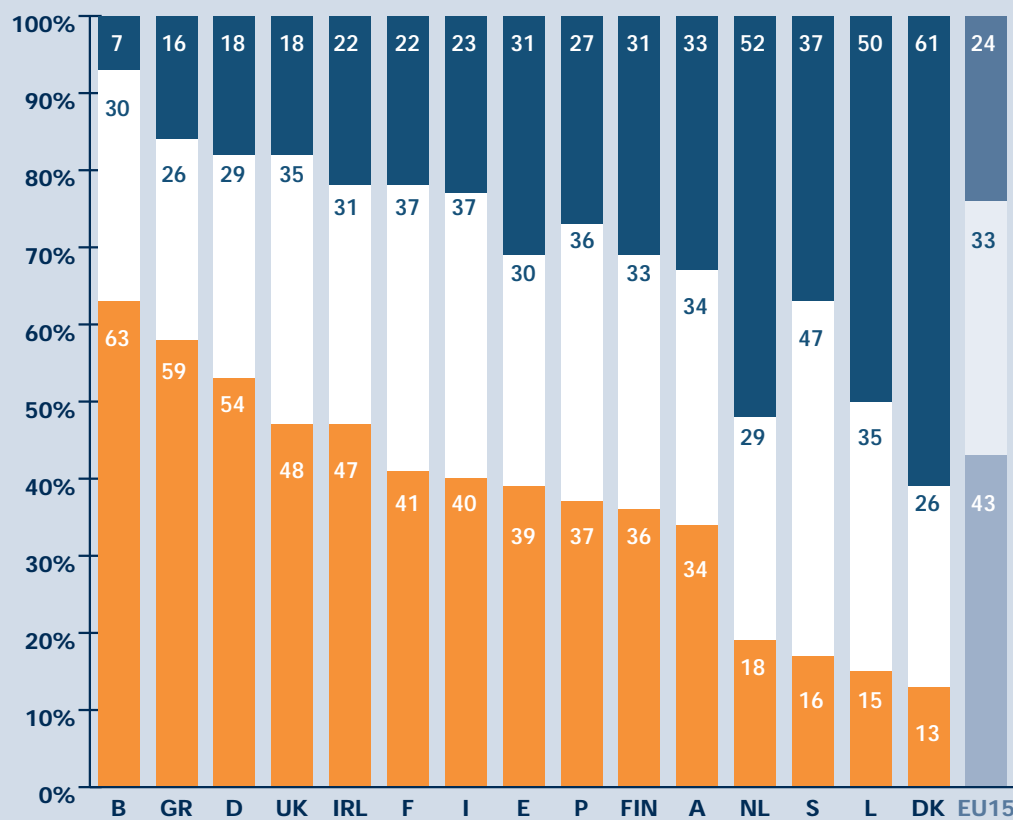
For the purposes of this graph, all those who scored 1 were classified as "not at all racist", those who scored 2 and 3 were classified as "a little racist", 4 to 6 were classified as "quite racist" and 7 to 10 as "very racist"

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- % Very racist (7-10 in scale)
- % Quite racist (4-6)
- % A little racist (2-3)
- % Not at all racist (1 in scale)



## Indicator of opinion about the institutions and political establishment (distribution by country) (in percents, non responses excluded)



### Question:

"Do you tend to agree or disagree with the following statements:  
 "The people who run the country are more concerned with themselves than the good of the country."  
 "Corruption amongst politicians is increasing."  
 "The way government and public bodies work is getting worse."  
 "I have little control over what is happening in the world around me."  
 "Public services look less and less after the interests of people like me."  
 "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer."  
 "There is nothing one can do to change things in our society."

Indicator based on a scale of seven items. "Positive": maximum 3 unfavourable scores; "critical": 4 to 5 unfavourable scores; and "negative": 6 to 7 unfavourable scores.

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■ % Opinion positive  
 ■ % Critical  
 ■ % Negative

Nearly three out of four of the interviewees (between 70% and 80%) said that "public services look less and less after the interests of people like me", "the way government and public bodies work is getting worse", "corruption amongst politicians is increasing" and that "the people who run the country are more concerned with themselves than with the good of the country".

### Racism fed by personal insecurity and fear of the future

Those who declared they had racist feelings presented common characteristics: many were dissatisfied with their life circumstances and feared losing their jobs; they felt insecure about the future ("the situation will get worse"); and/or had experienced a deterioration of their personal situation.

The survey found that there was no significant correlation between being unemployed and the degree of racist feelings expressed. The fear of losing one's job appeared to be a much more important factor. It is worth noting in this respect

that nearly half of those interviewed worked in a company that had made at least one person redundant in the past five years. Nearly one third had themselves been unemployed at one stage during the last five years. Over half had friends or family who had been affected by unemployment at one stage during this period.

Those who declared themselves to be on the Right of the political spectrum and a small percentage of those on the Left, those who were over 55 years of age, those who had left education early and those who were opposed to their country's membership of the European Union, were also more likely to express racist feelings.

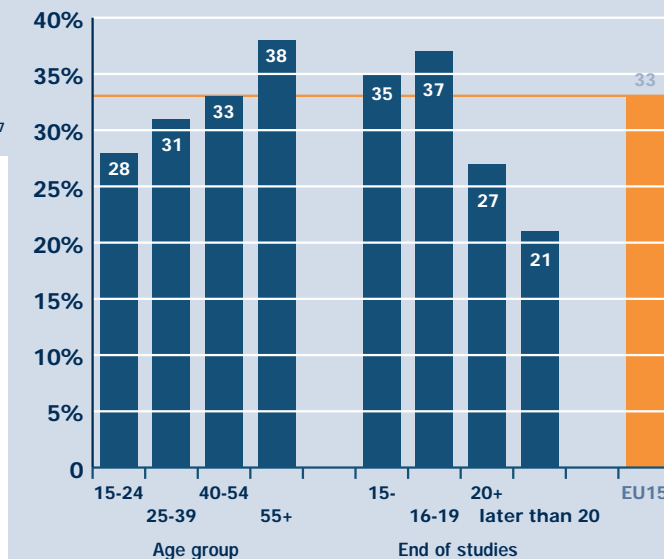
There were no significant differences between the answers of women and men respondents.

Racism was not more predominant in the cities than in rural areas, despite the lower presence of minorities there.

## Degree of declared racism according to age and level of education

■ "Quite racist"  
and "very racist"

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own language and culture", to "religious liberty and freedom of conscience" and to "freedom of speech".

Attachment to other rights was lower; some of those interviewed considered that their implementation "depends on the circumstances". Included were the right to vote, (where only 66% agreed it should be respected under all circumstances), the freedom of association (64% agreed), and the right of asylum because of political persecution and/or religious persecution (55%). Again, there were significant national variations in this respect, apparently also depending on how these rights were defined in each Member State.

### Strong belief in fundamental rights

The survey showed a large majority attach great value to fundamental rights and freedoms, with 86% opposing any discrimination based on a person's race, religion or culture.

Over 90% of the interviewees put "equality before the law" and the "right to education and training" amongst the rights to be respected under all circumstances. Over 80% added to these the right to "legal protection against discrimination", "to live with one's family", "to housing", "to one's

### Discrimination at work should be forbidden

Some 70% agreed with the statement that people from "minority groups are being discriminated against in the job market" although large differences were recorded between Member States on this point (ranging from 90% in Greece to 39% in Austria). Some 88% said that when hiring personnel, employers should only take account of candidates' qualifications.

### Diverging ways of seeing minorities

The development of a "multicultural" society was welcomed by some 75% of those interviewed, who agreed with the statement that their country had "always consisted of various cultural and religious groups". 76% said this was "a good thing".

## Degree of declared racism

according to support for membership of the European Union and political preference

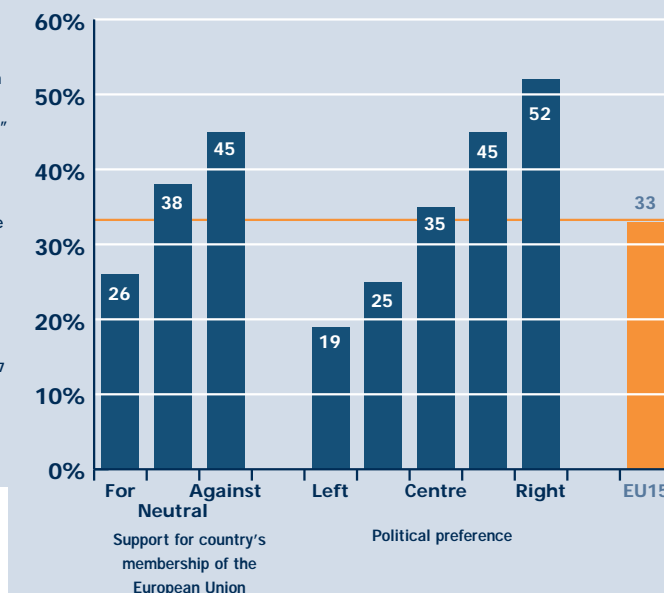
### Question:

"Generally speaking, do you think that your country's membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad?"

"In political matters people talk of 'the Left' and 'the Right'. How would you place your views on this scale?" (Scale of 1-10. A score of 1 is Left and a score of 10 is Right)

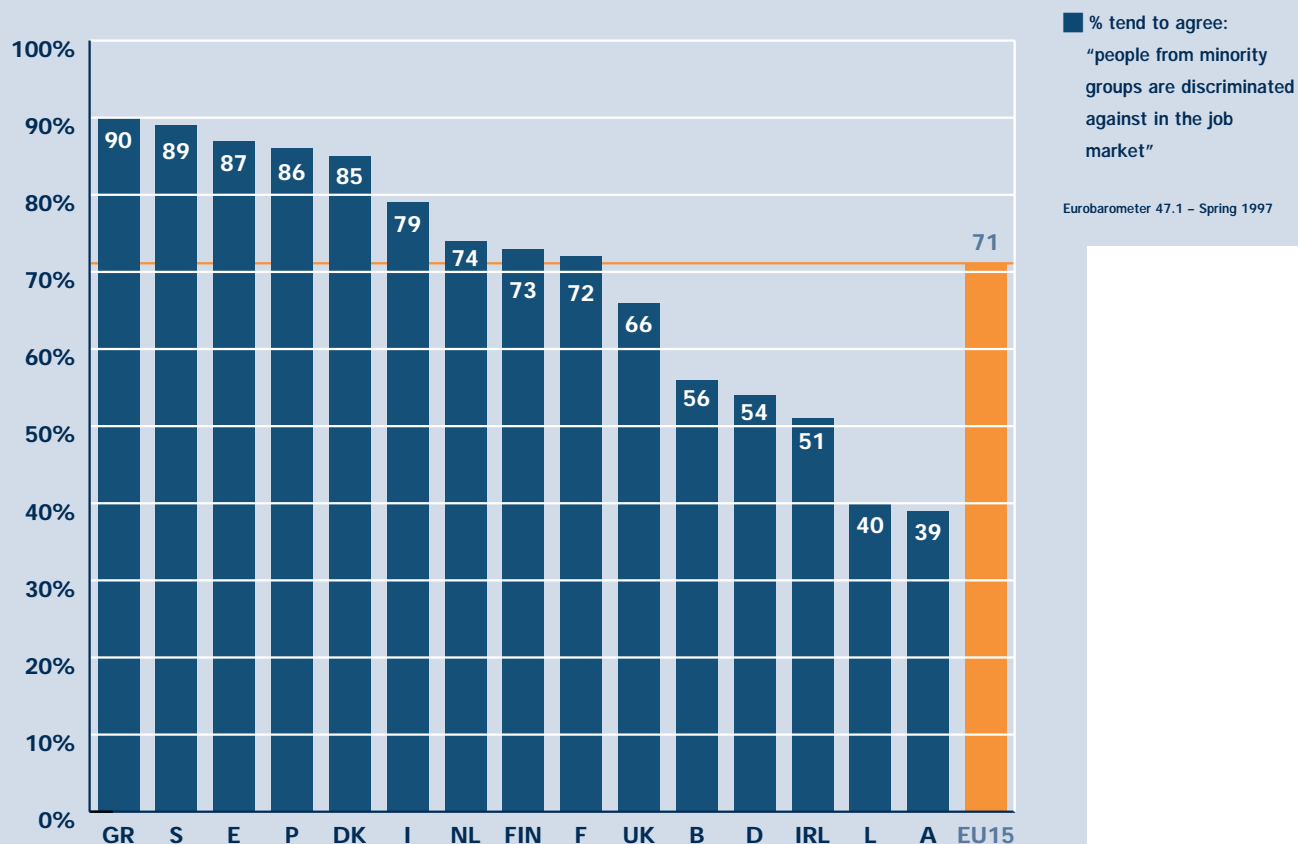
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■ "Quite racist"  
and "very racist"



Nearly 60% said minorities enrich cultural life and 73% agreed that "where schools make the necessary efforts, the education of all children can be enriched by the presence of children from minority groups". However, some 53% said that "in schools where there are too many children from these minority groups, the quality of education suffers".

**"People from minority groups are being discriminated against in the job market"**  
(distribution by country) (in percents, non responses excluded)



A majority (79%) considered that minorities pay less into the social security system than they claim. 59% said that they "abuse the system of social benefits", 44.5% that their presence "is a cause of insecurity" and 29% that their religious practices of "threaten our way of life". Views on minorities were not neatly divided and, at times, they were ambivalent. Some 63% of respondents said that "the presence of people from these minority groups increases unemployment" and 68% said minorities do jobs nobody else wants to do.

### Integration favoured, but with limits

36% said that in order to become fully accepted members of society, "people belonging to minority groups must give up such parts of their religion or culture which may be in conflict with the law". A quarter went further and said to be fully accepted, minorities must "give up their own culture". The first of these views can be described as favouring integration, whereas the second espouses a philosophy of assimilation. This distinction is more

relevant in countries with a long tradition of immigration and less so in countries which have experienced emmigration or recently facing refugee flows.

However, views are more differentiated than appears at first sight. 39% of those interviewed did not support either integration or assimilation. Over 60% disagreed that people belonging to minority groups "are so different, they can never be fully accepted members" of society. Nearly two-thirds said this depended on the minority group a person belonged to, while two out of three said they believed that "in two or three generations' time, people belonging to these minority groups will be like all other members of society".

There was a similarly mixed reaction to the question as to whether there is a limit to the number of people of other races, religions or cultures that a society can accept.

Nearly three quarters of those interviewed (71.5%) said yes, and, 65% went further. They said

## Options for Integration or Assimilation

(distribution by country) (in percents, non responses excluded)

### Question

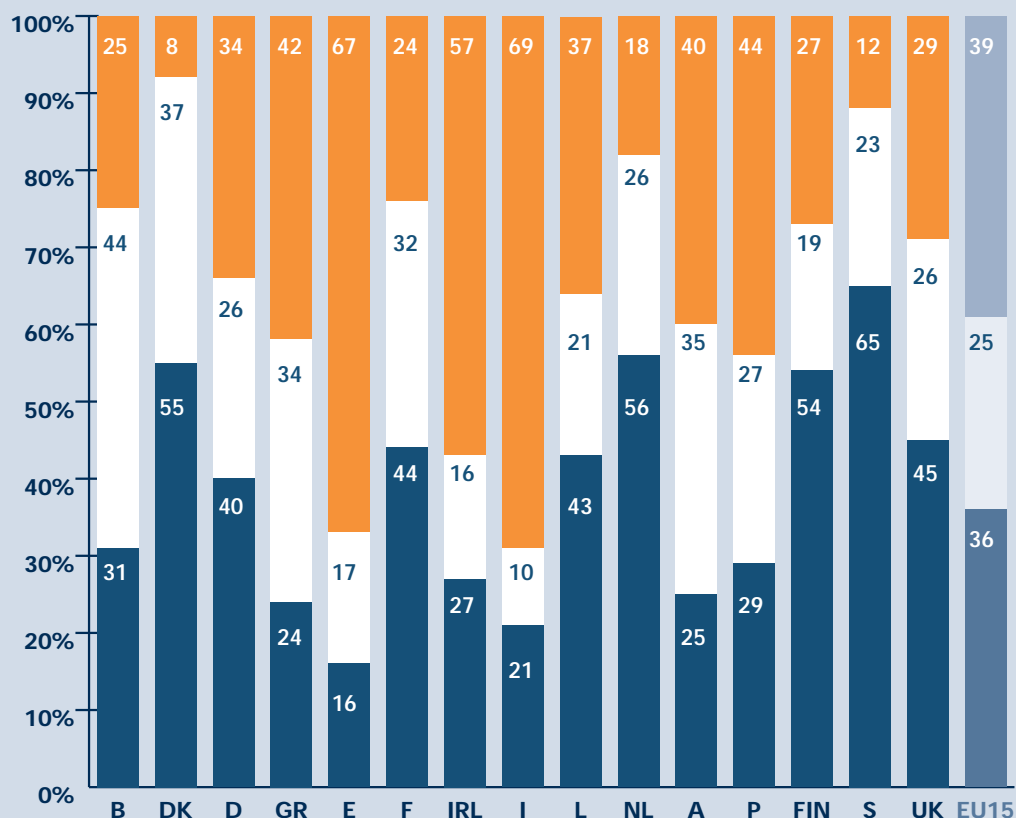
For each of the following opinions, please state whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree?"

Integration: "In order to be fully accepted members of society, people belonging to these minority groups must give up such parts of their religion or culture which may be in conflict with the law"

Assimilation: "In order to be fully accepted members of society, people belonging to these minority groups must give up their own culture"

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■ % disagrees with both  
■ % agrees with assimilation  
■ % agrees with integration



that this limit had already been reached in their country and "if there were to be more people belonging to these minority groups we would have problems".

However, only 40% of those interviewed considered that there were "too many" people from minority groups living in their country. On the contrary, 45% said there were "a lot but not too many" and 14% found there were "not many".

It is possible to conclude that the anxieties expressed by a number of respondents seemed to result not so much from the actual presence of minority groups but from the perception as to the ability of the host country to accommodate them.

### Opinion divided on immigrants' rights

Asked whether they thought their country "benefits from the presence of immigrants from non-European Union countries", 40% said yes, 48% said their country would "be better off" without their presence (compared to 40% in the 1988 sur-

vey covering 12 countries) and 12% said their presence "makes no difference".

Immigrants are most welcome so long as they have an economically useful function. 43% of the respondents said that "legally established immigrants from outside the European Union should be sent to their country of origin if they are unemployed".

These opinions coexist with the affirmation of respect for basic rights. 70% of those interviewed said that immigrants should have the same social rights as nationals. 55% agreed that they should have the right "to bring members of their immediate family" to the host country.

71% said that the authorities "should make efforts to improve the situation" of people from minority groups.

47% agreed with the statement "should legally established immigrants from outside the European Union be able to become naturalised more easily". But there were more substantial variations

between countries reflecting the political persuasion of the respondents but also the national situation regarding naturalisation which, in some countries, is easier to obtain than in others.

### Indiscriminate repatriation rejected

There was little support for the statement that "legally established immigrants from outside the European Union should all be sent back to their country of origin". Nearly 80% of those interviewed disagreed.

Moreover, 79% opposed the view that "all immigrants, whether legal or illegal, from outside the European Union and their children, even those born here, should be sent back to their country of origin".

But this still leaves some 20% who agreed with wholesale repatriation, a figure as alarming as the one for the number of respondents who openly described themselves as racist.

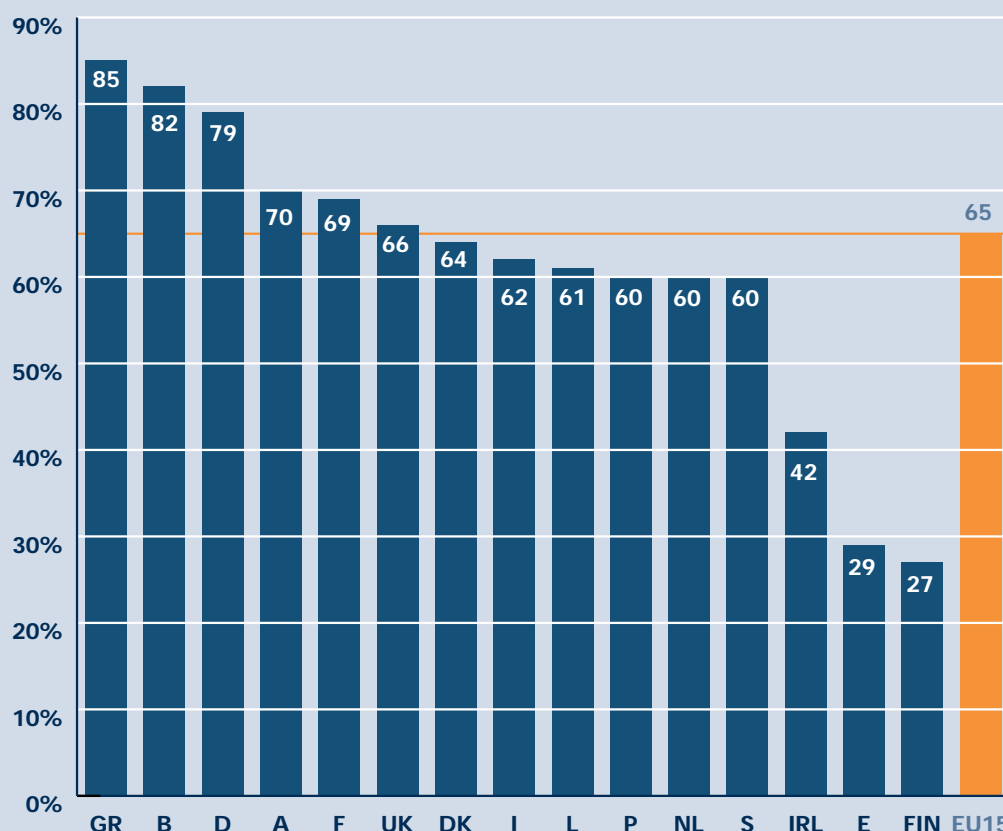
### Illegal immigrants and those involved in crime

Much of the rejection of immigrants from non-European Union countries was addressed at those considered to be "problematic". To a certain extent, it concerned unemployed immigrants (as already stated, 43% of those interviewed said that "legally established immigrants from outside the European Union should be sent to their country of origin if they are unemployed"). But its main focus was other groups, those who are in the European Union illegally, those who do not respect the law, and those involved in crime.

Nearly 66% agreed that "all illegal immigrants should be sent back to their country of origin without exception" and just over 80% favoured repatriation for illegal immigrants "convicted of serious offences".

However, some 68% thought that decisions about the repatriation of illegal immigrants "should always depend on their personal circumstances".

"Our country has reached its limits; if there were to be more people belonging to these minority groups we would have problems" (by country) (in percents, non responses excluded)



■ % tend to agree:  
"our country has reached its limits; if there were to be more people belonging to these minority groups we would have problems"

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This was one of the few areas in the survey where women and men differed in their opinions (72% of women and 65% of men wanted personal circumstances to be taken into account).

It is possible to argue that these opinions on illegal immigrants also reflect a belief in the rule of law. 88.5% of respondents held the view that "employers who hire illegal immigrants should be punished more severely".

### Expectations of schools high, in a range of actions against racism

A choice of possible actions was offered to the respondents "to improve the relationship between people of different races, religions and cultures". The one which gained most support (just under 60%), was the need to "promote the teaching of mutual acceptance and respect in schools".

This was followed by court action against people who incite racism, the promotion of fair reporting in the press, radio and television, promotion of equality of opportunity in all areas of social life, promotion of understanding of different cultures

and lifestyles and outlawing discrimination against minority groups.

Nearly 18% of all respondents said that people from minority groups should be encouraged to participate in the political life of their country.

### European Institutions have a role

Designating 1997 as the European Year Against Racism was "a good decision" according to 77% of those interviewed. But, said 82%, this effort should now be continued on a long-term basis.

A similar number of respondents (84%) called for a strengthening of actions by European Union Institutions to combat racism (adoption and implementation of legislation banning racism and provision of greater support to organisations which fight racism). ●

## The report

The report

A full report on Eurobarometer 47.1 "Racism and Xenophobia in Europe" is currently being prepared and will be available in English and French from:

**European Commission**

**Directorate General V**

(Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs)

Rue de la Loi 200

B-1049 Brussels