

EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION PERCEPTION ABOUT COVID-19

BY BRYAN PRAVISAN MANOO AND ZUZANA PALUŠÁKOVÁ



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International Republican Institute

@IRIglobal
IRI.org

E: info@iri.org
P: (202) 408-9450

Between August 24 and September 12, 2020 IPSOS France - a social science research firm known for high quality opinion research fielded an online survey in 19 countries, commissioned by the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) and the European Liberal Forum (ELF). The survey featured a specific questionnaire focusing on European public perception of COVID-19.

Here are five lessons from this data:

Lesson #1:

The level of concern about coronavirus corresponds to the intensity of the crisis/risk in each country/category of the population.

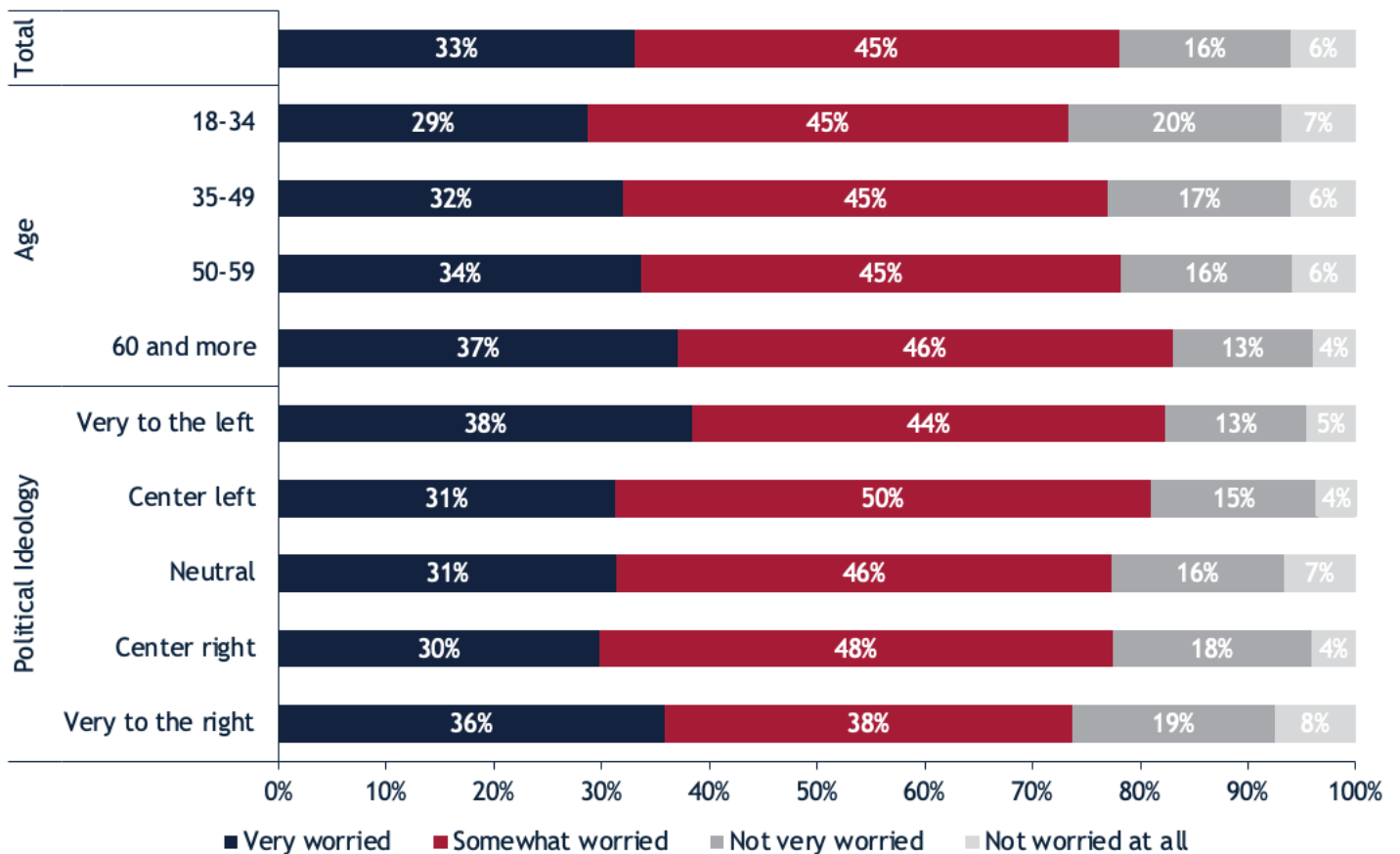


78%

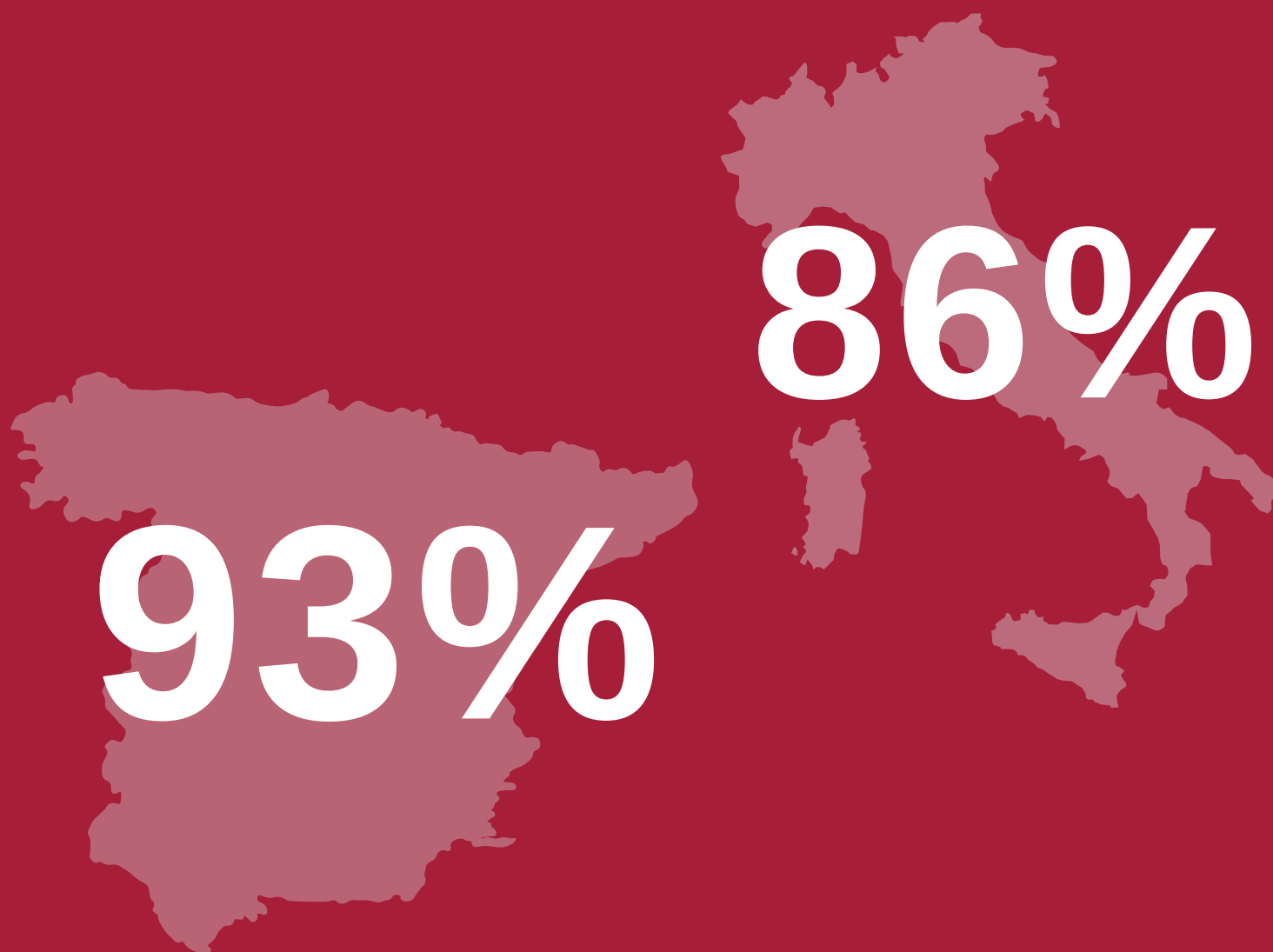
OF RESPONDENTS
ACROSS EUROPE
CLAIMED TO BE SOMEWHAT
OR VERY **WORRIED** ABOUT THE
SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS IN
THEIR COUNTRIES.

A larger share (83 percent) of people aged 60 and older is worried than in other age groups. In terms of political preference, both people who identify as left (82 percent) and right (76 percent) share similar levels of concern.

How worried are you about the spread of coronavirus in your country?

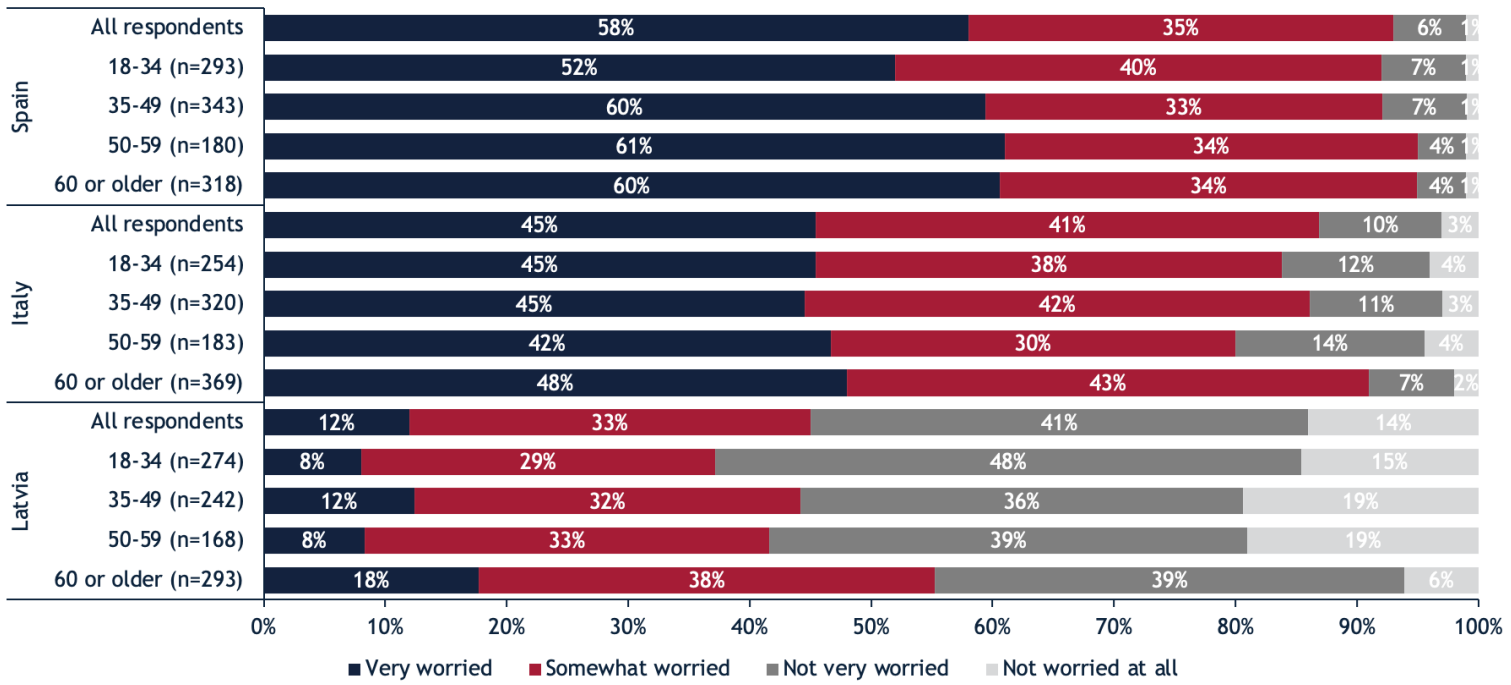


SPAIN AND ITALY REPORT THE HIGHEST SHARES OF WORRIED PEOPLE.



Spain and **Italy** were also the countries most affected during the first wave in spring of 2020. These are also the only countries where high levels of concern are shared across all demographic groups, with 92 percent of young people (those aged 18 to 34) being "somewhat" or "very" worried in Spain and 83 percent in Italy. They are **followed by Denmark, the United Kingdom and Romania.**

How worried are you about the spread of coronavirus in your country?





63%

**OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN
LATVIA ARE NOT WORRIED
ABOUT COVID-19**

On the other side of the spectrum, only 45 percent of respondents **in Latvia** expressed worry about the spread of coronavirus, with 63 percent of young people stating that they are not worried – the highest in Europe. Latvia was one of the countries registering the fewest COVID-19 cases during the spring and summer.

The main conclusion is that the **data very much mirrors the situation during the first wave of coronavirus in Europe**, with Italy and Spain being particularly affected, while some other countries managed to minimize the health and economic impacts of the virus. Further, the data indicates that the more vulnerable (particularly the 60-year olds and above) and married people registered higher levels of concern than the rest of the population.

Lesson #2:

Countries in the EU's periphery often have favorable views of China or Russia's role in fighting the pandemic.

Youth are particularly open to this narrative.

Looking at the efficiency of national governments responding to COVID-19, **only a slight majority (52 percent) of all respondents indicated that their country's government has had an effective role¹ in fighting the coronavirus, with the highest scores registered in Denmark (78 percent), the Netherlands (70 percent) and Germany (68 percent).** Those with higher income² (57 percent) and high education levels³ (54 percent) were more likely to state that their government played an important role. Countries in the European periphery usually registered less confidence in their government's performance. For example, **47 percent of respondents in both Poland and Spain agreed that their own government was not efficient⁴** in battling the crisis. Bulgarians (45 percent), Romanians (44 percent), Slovenes (42 percent) and Hungarians (41 percent) were also more critical of their government's performance.



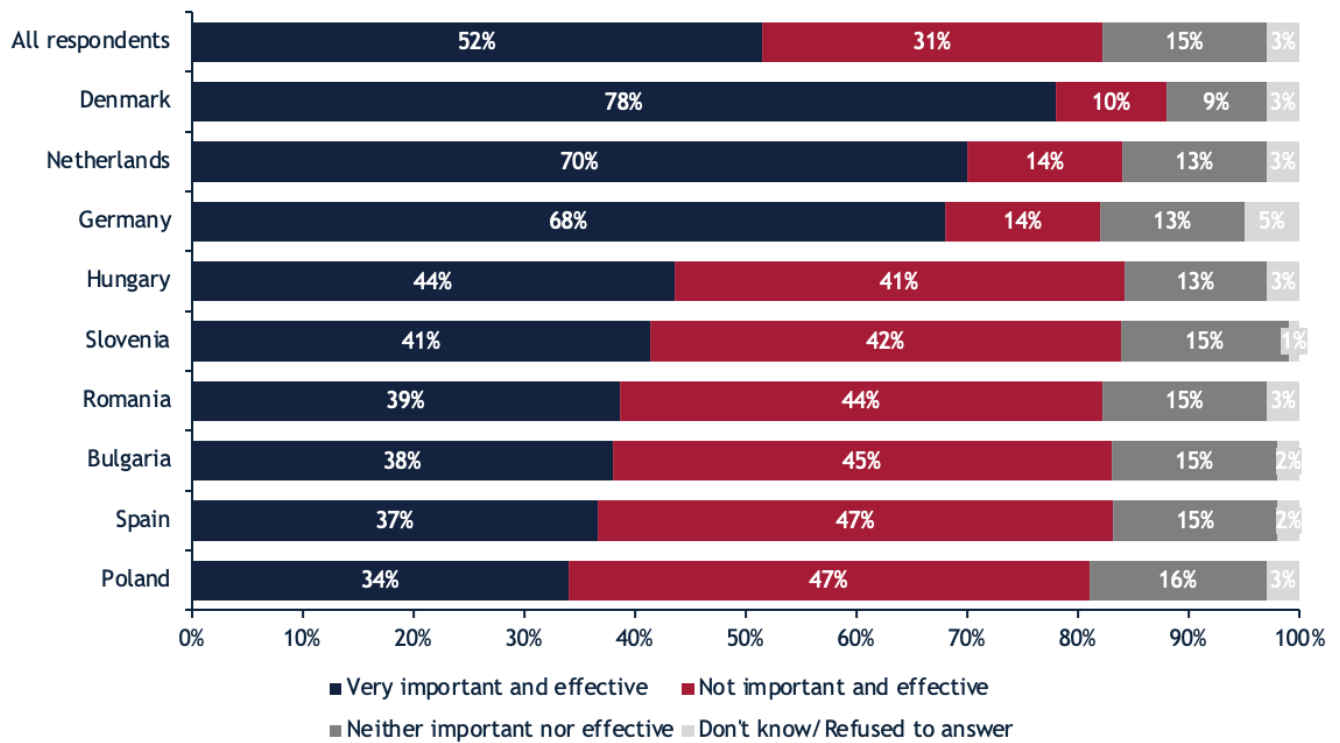
¹"Effective role" is defined as a score of at least 6 on a scale from 0-10, with 0 meaning not important and effective and 10 meaning very important and effective.

²"Higher" is defined as a revenue self-categorized as the highest categories of total household income declared by respondents during the poll (as defined by IPSOS in each country) – more specifically, for Germany € 3,001 and above net monthly income; for France € 3,601 and above net monthly income; for Italy € 36,001 and above pre-tax annual income; for the United Kingdom £ 45,000 and above pre-tax annual income; for Spain €36,000 and above pre-tax annual income; for Poland Zł 5,001 and above after-tax monthly income; for Romania RON 5,500 and above after-tax monthly income; for the Netherlands € 48,001 and above pre-tax annual income; for the Czech Republic Kč 42,001 and above after-tax monthly income; for Sweden Kr 700,000 and above pre-tax annual income; for Hungary Ft 400,001 and above after-tax monthly income; for Austria €3,001 and above after-tax monthly income; for Bulgaria Lv. 1,651 and above after-tax monthly income; for Denmark DKK 700,000 and above pre-tax annual income; for Slovakia € 1,294 and above after-tax monthly income; for Lithuania € 2,201 and above after-tax monthly income; for Slovenia € 2,201 and above net monthly income ; for Latvia € 1,361 and above net monthly income; for Estonia € 1,801 and above net monthly income.

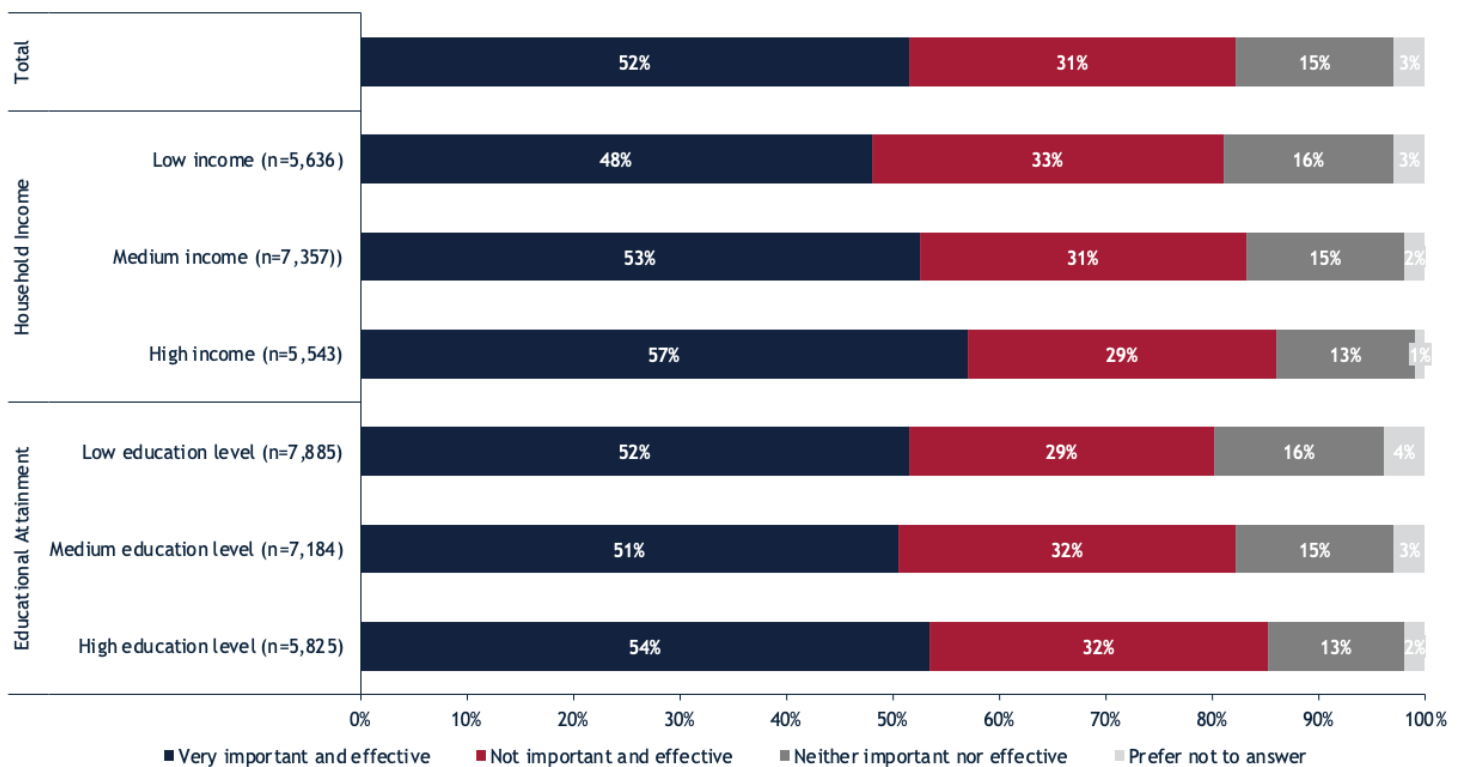
³High education is defined as post-secondary education in all countries studied.

⁴Not efficient is defined as a score of 4 or less on a scale from 0-10 with 0 meaning not important and effective and 10 meaning very important and effective.

The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country? The country's government

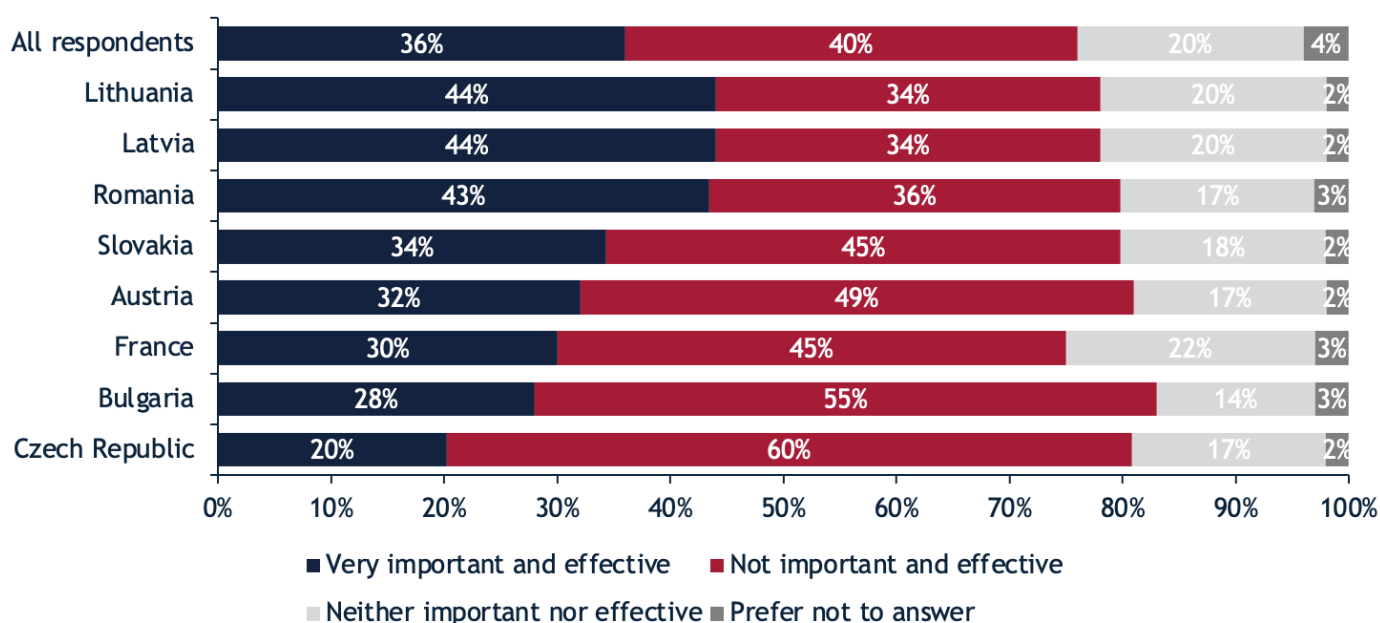


The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: The country's government



Only 36 percent of people surveyed felt that the European Union (EU) has an important role in fighting coronavirus in their country. The highest scores were recorded in Lithuania (44 percent), Latvia (44 percent) and Romania (43 percent). The EU is viewed as not efficient by 60 percent of all Czech respondents, with 74 percent of people older than 60 sharing negative views about the role of the EU, a Euro-skepticism shared by a large majority (76 percent) of respondents who self-identify as "very to the left".⁵ Similar views on the inefficient role of the EU are found in Bulgaria (55 percent), Austria (49 percent), Slovakia (45 percent) and France (45 percent). These views hold consistently across political preferences, with 47 percent of respondents across Europe, who identify as "very much to the right",⁶ stating that the EU has not played an important role in combatting the coronavirus in their countries.

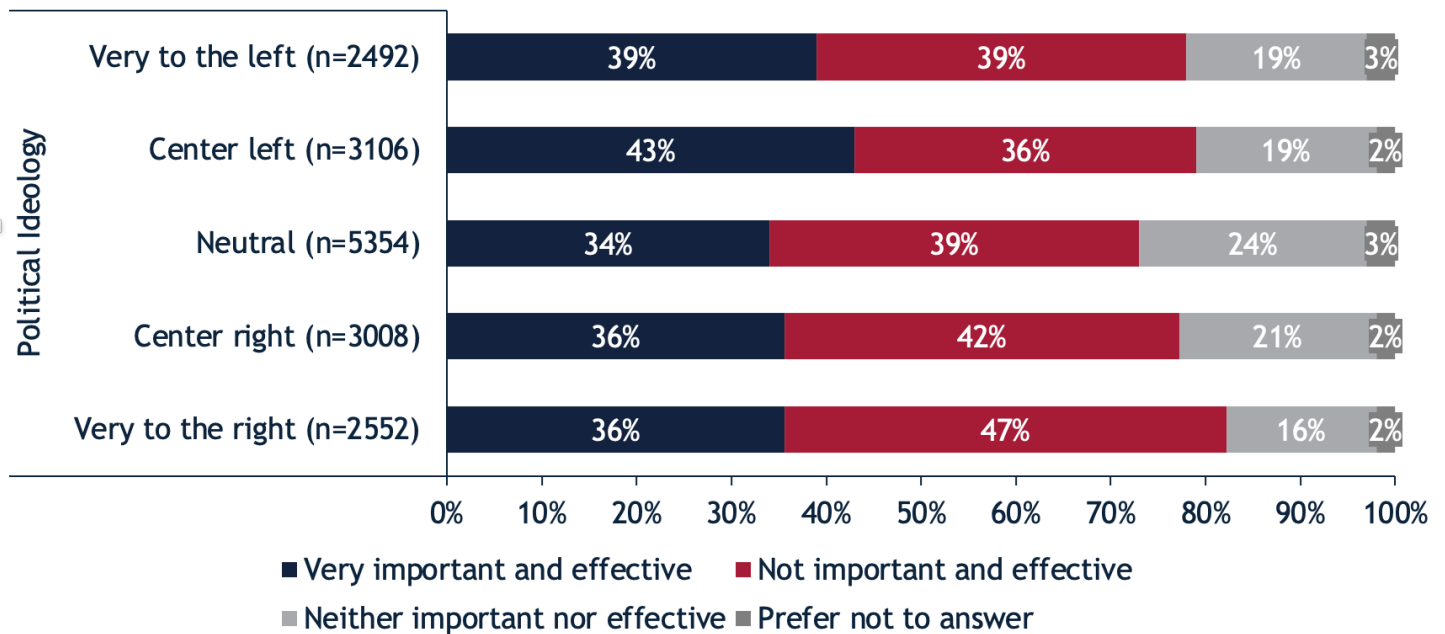
The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: The European Union



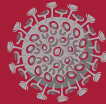
⁵"Very to the left" is defined as a score between 0 and 2 on a scale of 10, where 0 indicates very to the left and 10 indicates very to the right.

⁶"Very to the right" is defined as a score between 8 and 10 on a scale of 10, where 0 indicates very to the left and 10 indicates very to the right.

The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: The European Union

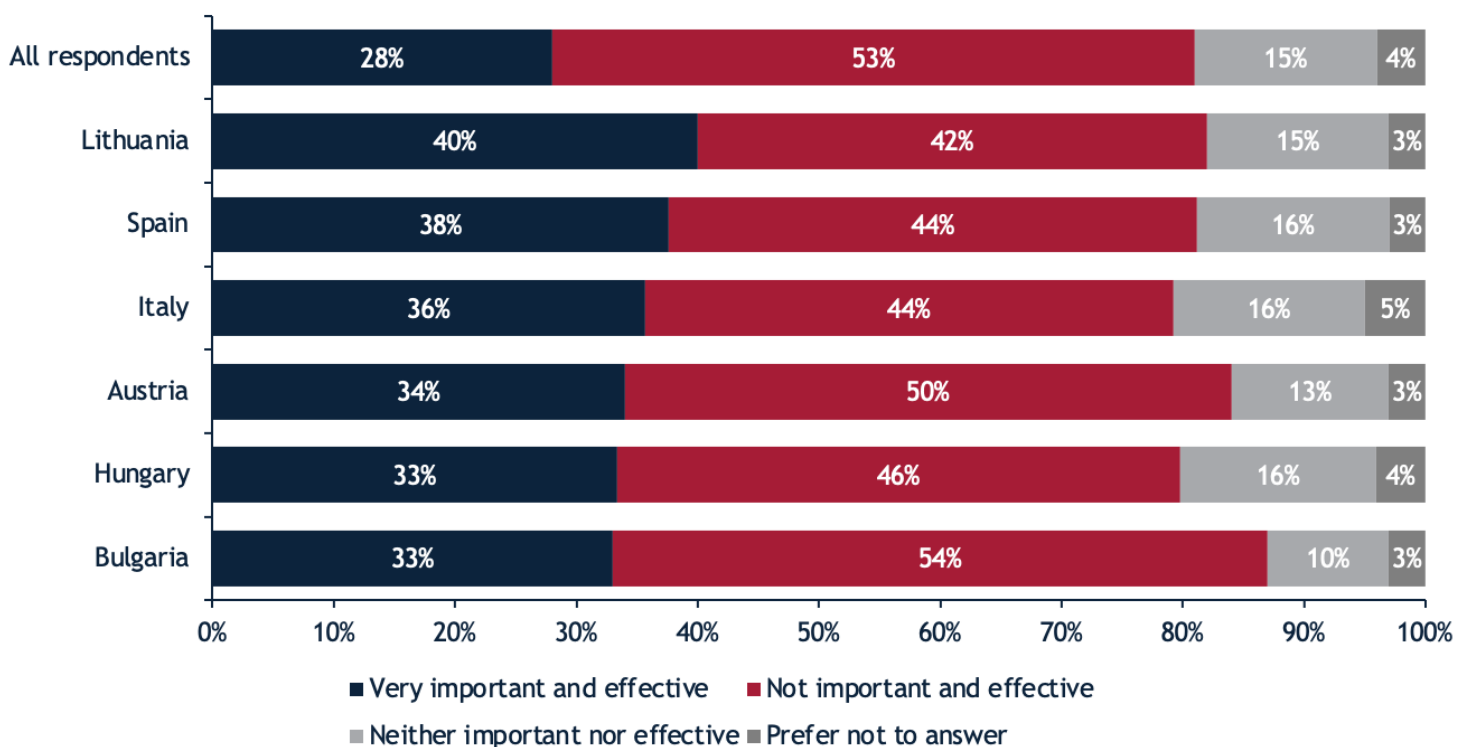


In Italy, **43%** of 18-34 years olds stated that **China** has played an **important and effective role** in fighting the coronavirus in their country.



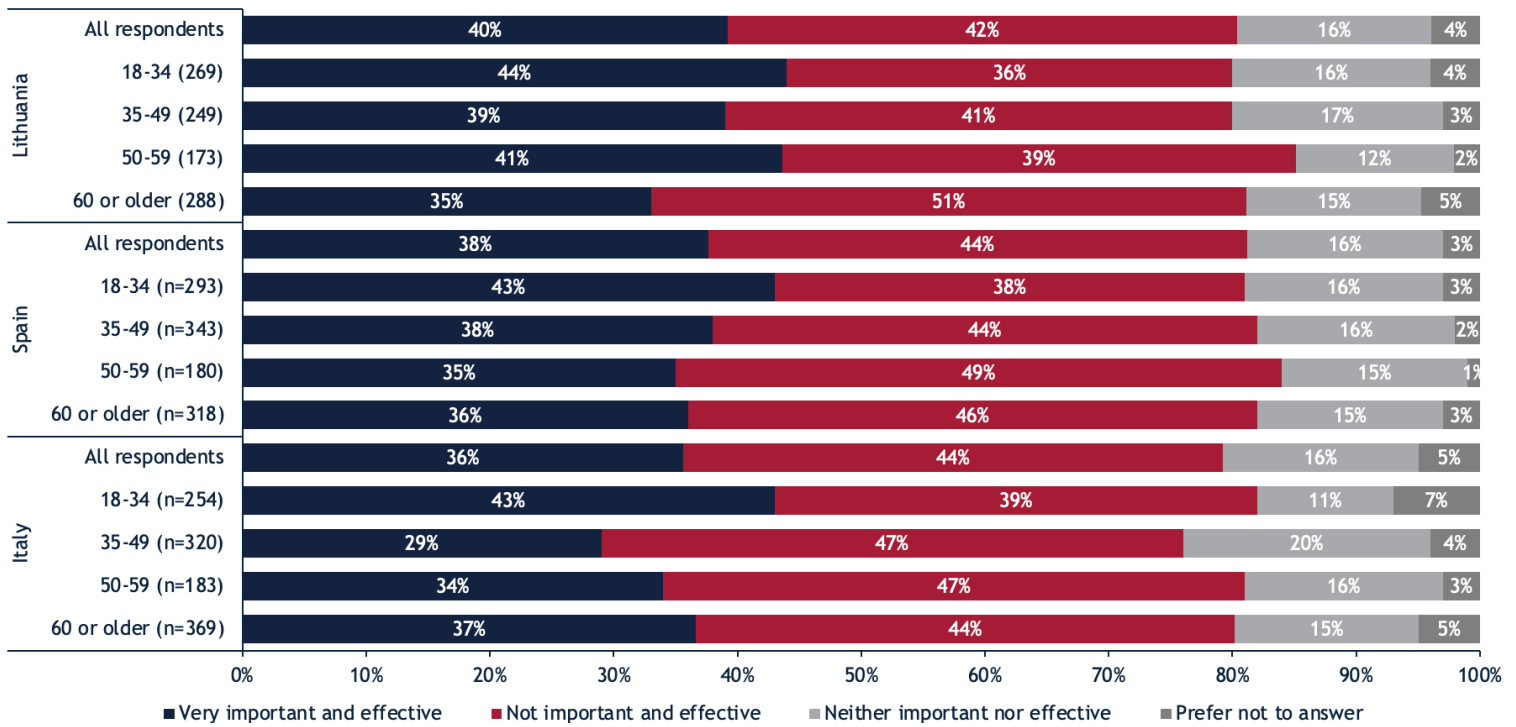
Regarding respondents' views on **China's role in fighting the pandemic in their own countries**, **China's highest efficiency scores were recorded in Lithuania (40 percent), Spain (38 percent) Italy (36 percent), Austria (34 percent), Hungary (33 percent), and Bulgaria (33 percent).**

The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: China

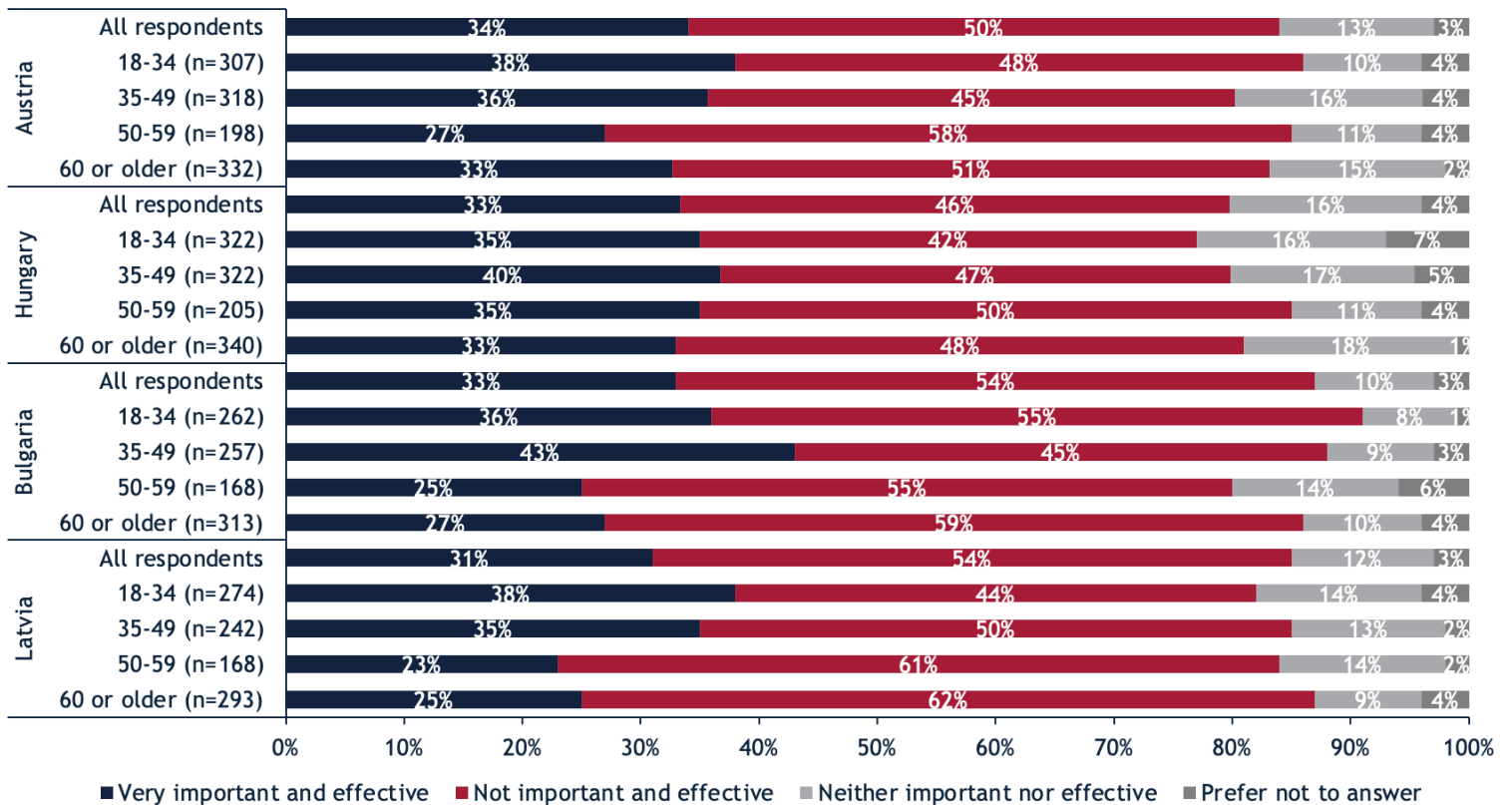


What is striking about these numbers is the difference between younger and older generations. **In Italy, 43 percent of those aged 18-34 year olds said that China has an important and effective role in fighting the coronavirus in their country.** We can find comparable shares of young people in Spain (43 percent) and in Latvia (38 percent). We also observe a slightly lower but still significant share in Romania (36 percent), the UK (35 percent), Poland (31 percent), and Denmark (30 percent). In Bulgaria, 43 percent of those aged between 35-49 stated the same as well.

The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: China



The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: China

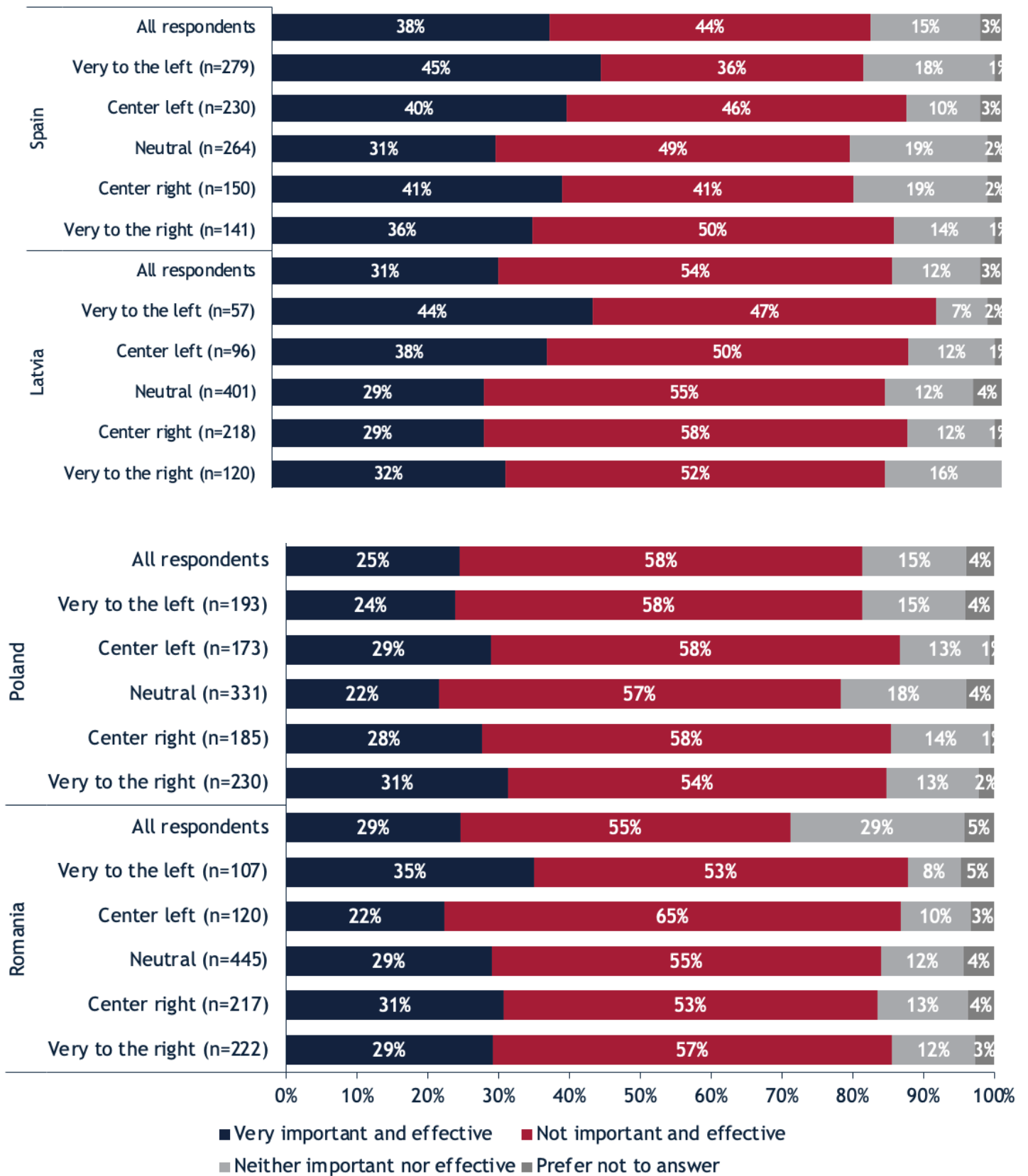


Across Europe, 32 percent of those who identified as "very left"⁷ said that China was effective in fighting the coronavirus in their country, seemingly implying that, while "Putinophilia" was associated with the right in many European countries, admiration for the Chinese Communist Party seems to be coming from the left of the European political spectrum.

However, this general trend does not reflect the unique circumstances of several countries. For example while 45 percent of those who identify as very to the left in Spain and 44 percent in Latvia felt China was effective, 31 percent of those who identify as "very right" in Poland indicated the same. Additionally, in Romania, 65 percent of those who identify as center-left⁸ do not find China's help effective at all.

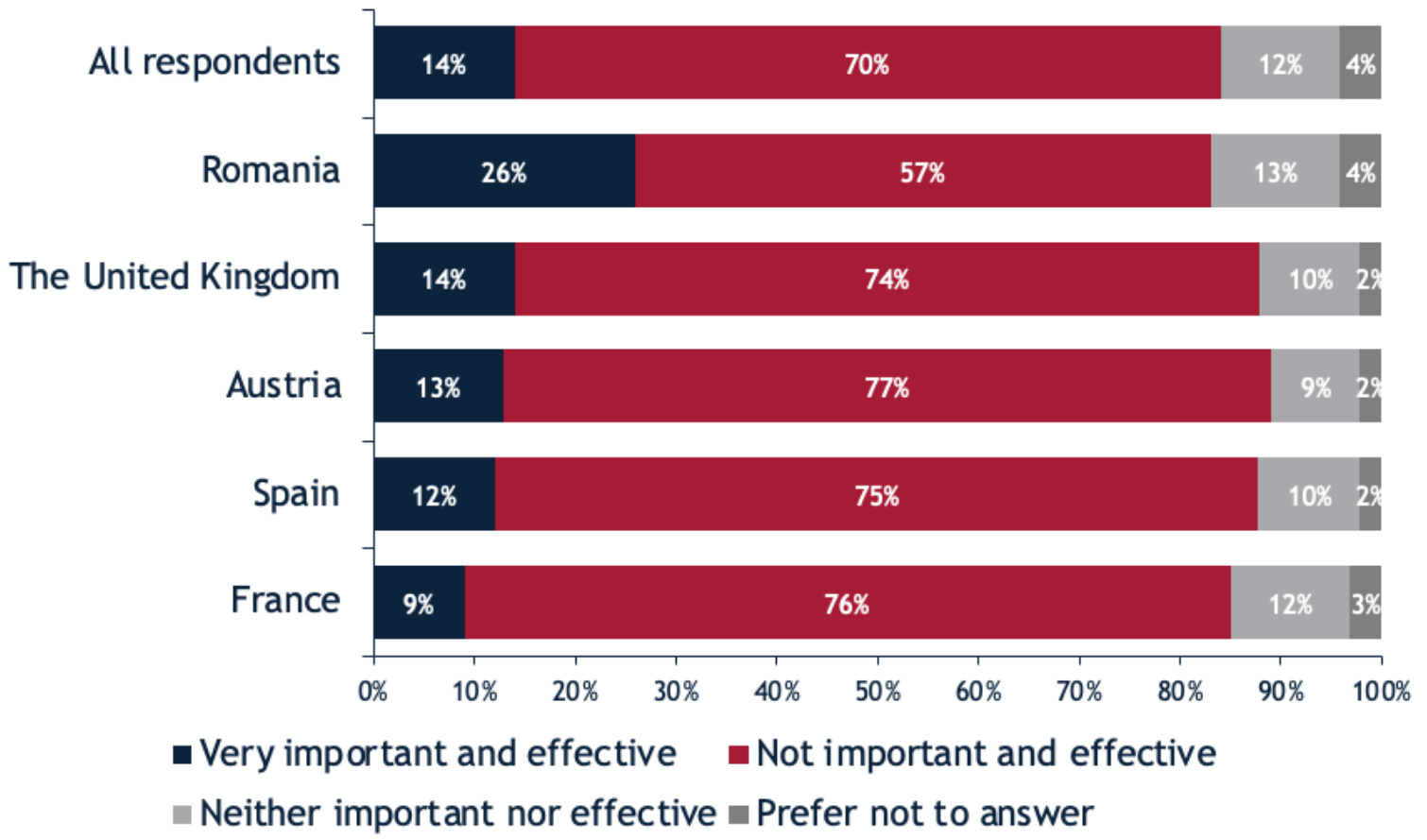
⁷Very left" is defined as a score between 0 and 2 on a scale of 10, where 0 indicates very to the left and 10 indicates very to the right.
⁸"Center left" is defined as a score between 3 and 4 on a scale of 10, where 0 indicates very to the left and 10 indicates very to the right.

The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: China



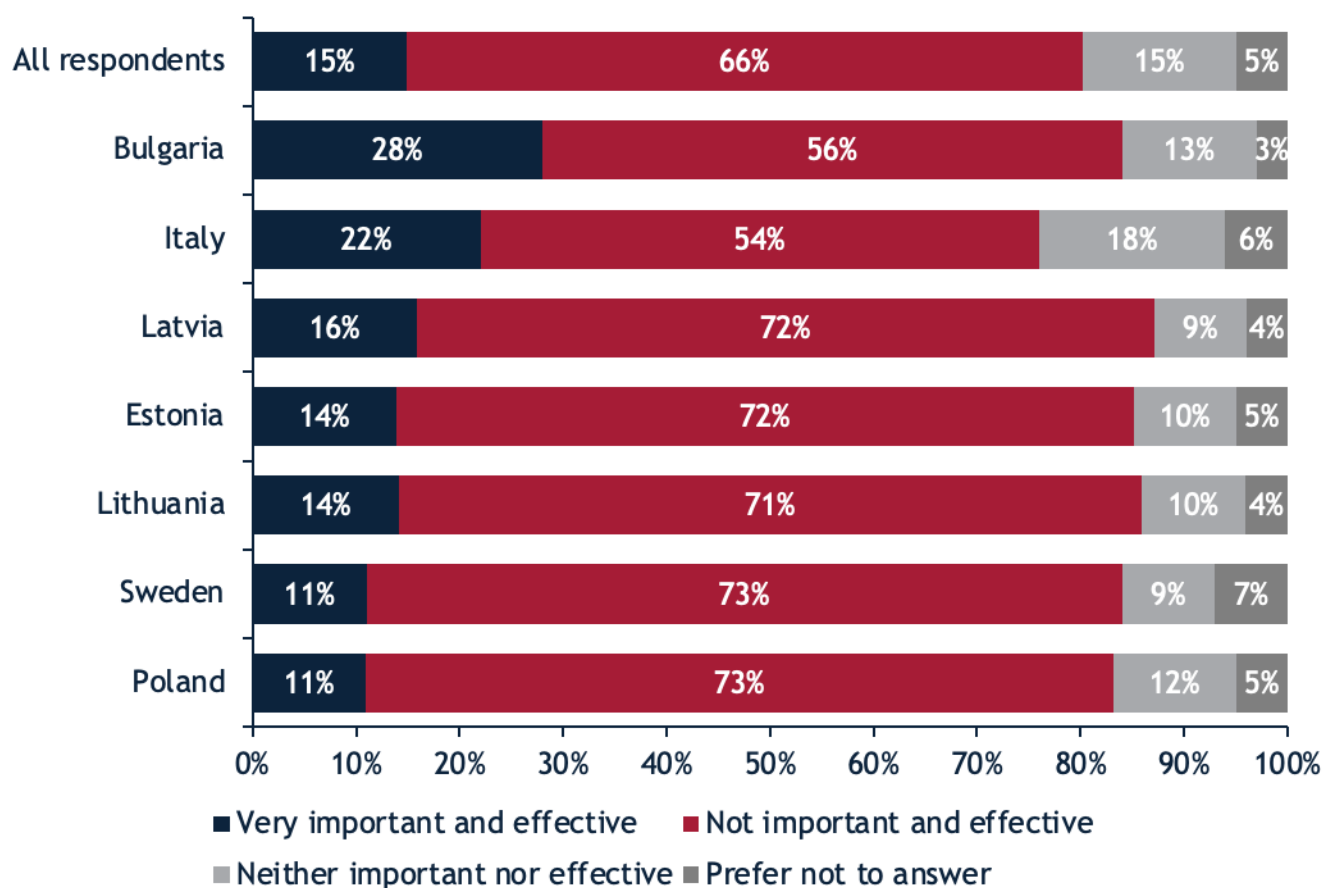
Only 14 percent of Europeans surveyed found the United States efficient in dealing with the virus. The highest score was observed in Romania (26 percent). A very dominant majority of the respondents in Austria (77 percent), France (76 percent), Spain (75 percent) and the UK (74 percent) consider the United States to have been neither important nor effective.

The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: The United States



Despite an effort to charm European audiences, **Russia also scored very poorly. Only 15 percent of all respondents found Russia to be helpful in fighting the coronavirus in their country.** Unsurprisingly, the highest levels of skepticism come from Russia's Baltic neighbors - a majority of respondents in Sweden (73 percent), Poland (73 percent) and in the Baltic States (71 percent) rated Russia as not helpful. The highest score was recorded in Bulgaria (28 percent) and Italy (22 percent). In Bulgaria, the younger demographics recorded the highest pro-Russia scores, with 41 percent of those aged 18-34 claiming Russia was helpful in fighting the coronavirus in their country. The survey shows that **Chinese and Russian propaganda seem to be having an impact on young people's perceptions. This is one, and most worrying, takeaways of this survey.**

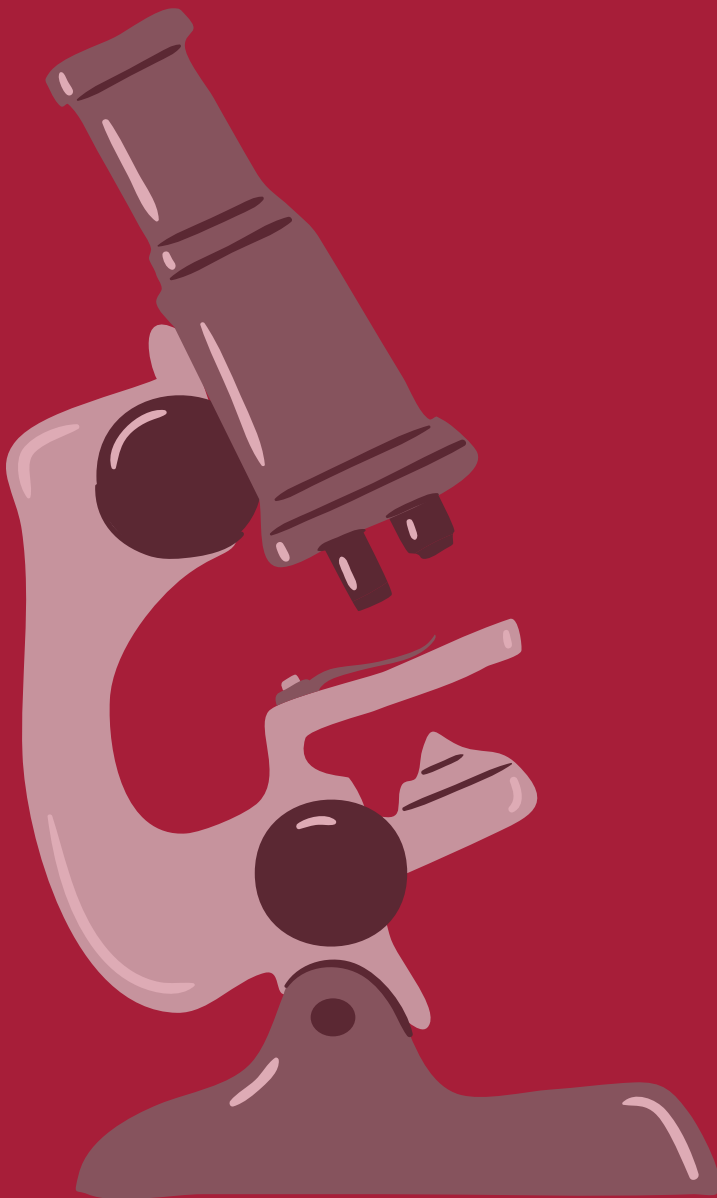
The following countries or institutions have had an important and effective role in fighting coronavirus in your country: Russia



Lesson #3:

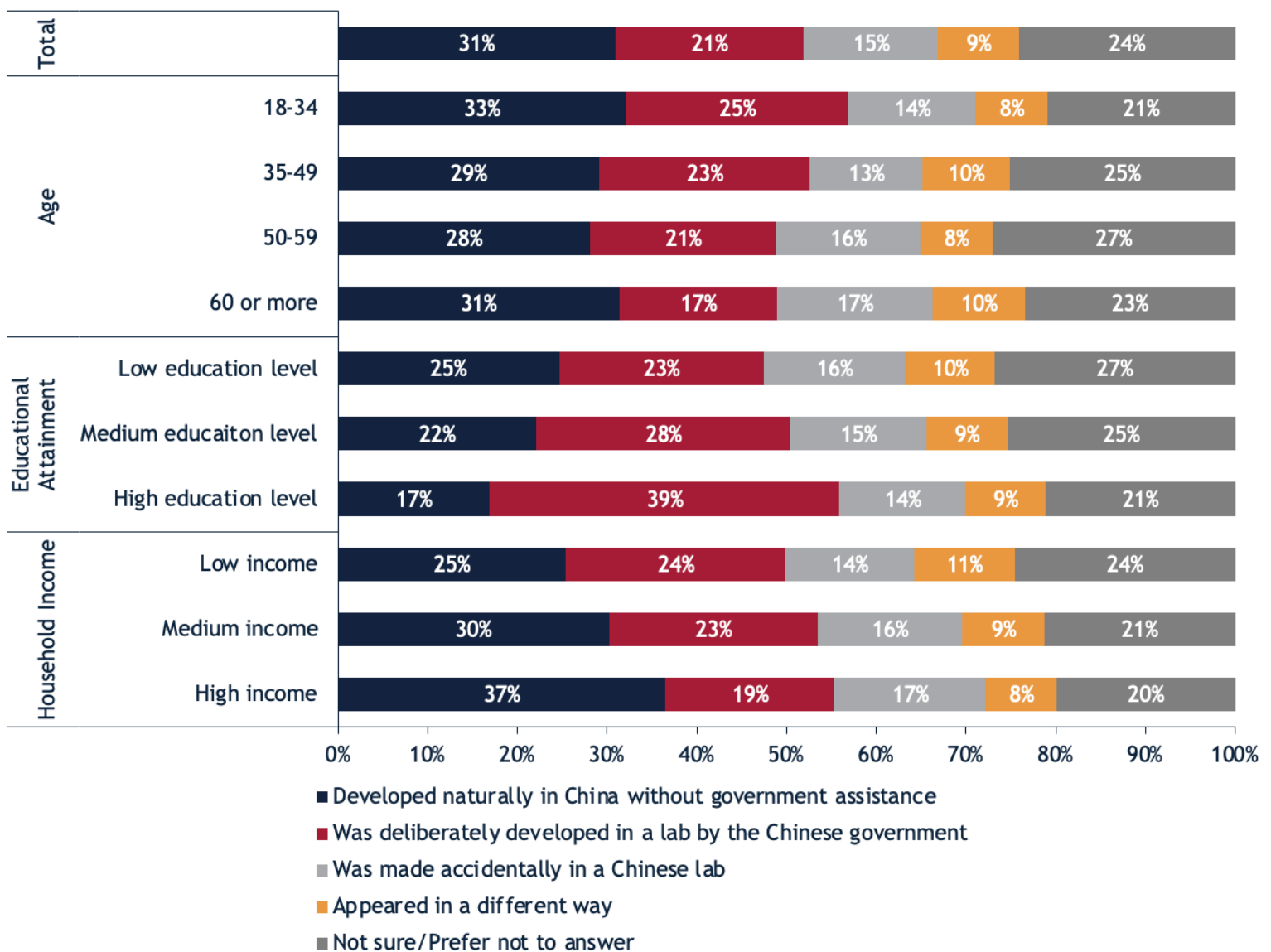
**Apart from geography,
there is little
consensus on the
origins of the virus.**

**21% OF RESPONDENTS
ANSWERED THAT THE CORONAVIRUS
WAS DELIBERATELY
DEVELOPED IN A LAB
BY THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT.**



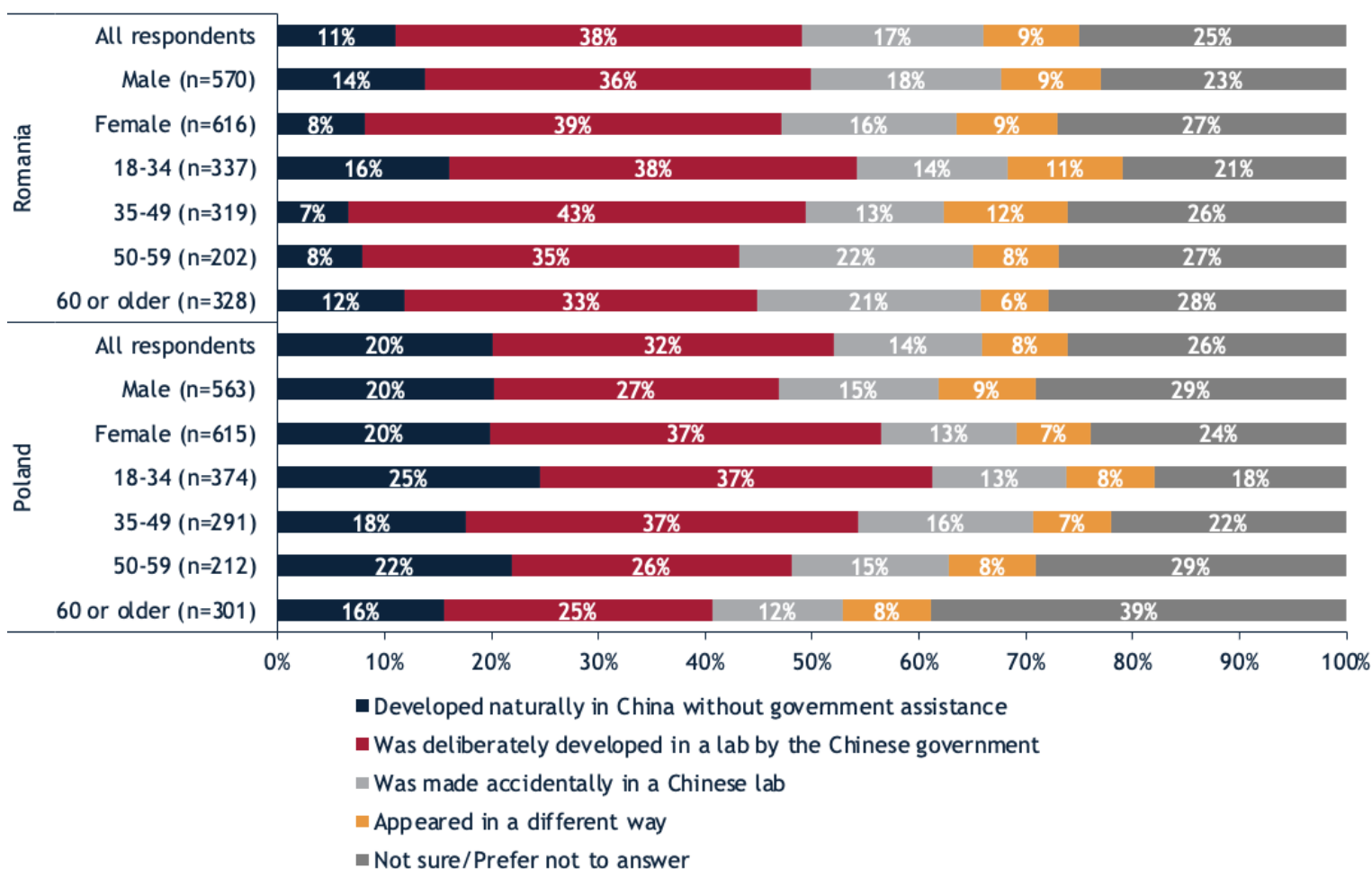
When asked to identify the most likely origin of the current coronavirus strain, **a narrow majority of respondents (52 percent) agreed the virus originated in China**, although their responses varied as to how it initially developed. Young people (18-34 years old) were most likely to believe the virus originated in China (58 percent), followed closely by people with higher education levels (56 percent), and people from high income households (56 percent). **Only 31 percent of the respondents stated the virus developed naturally in China without government assistance**, while 21 percent stated it was deliberately developed in a lab by the Chinese government.

From what you have seen or heard, do you think it is most likely the current strain of the coronavirus...?

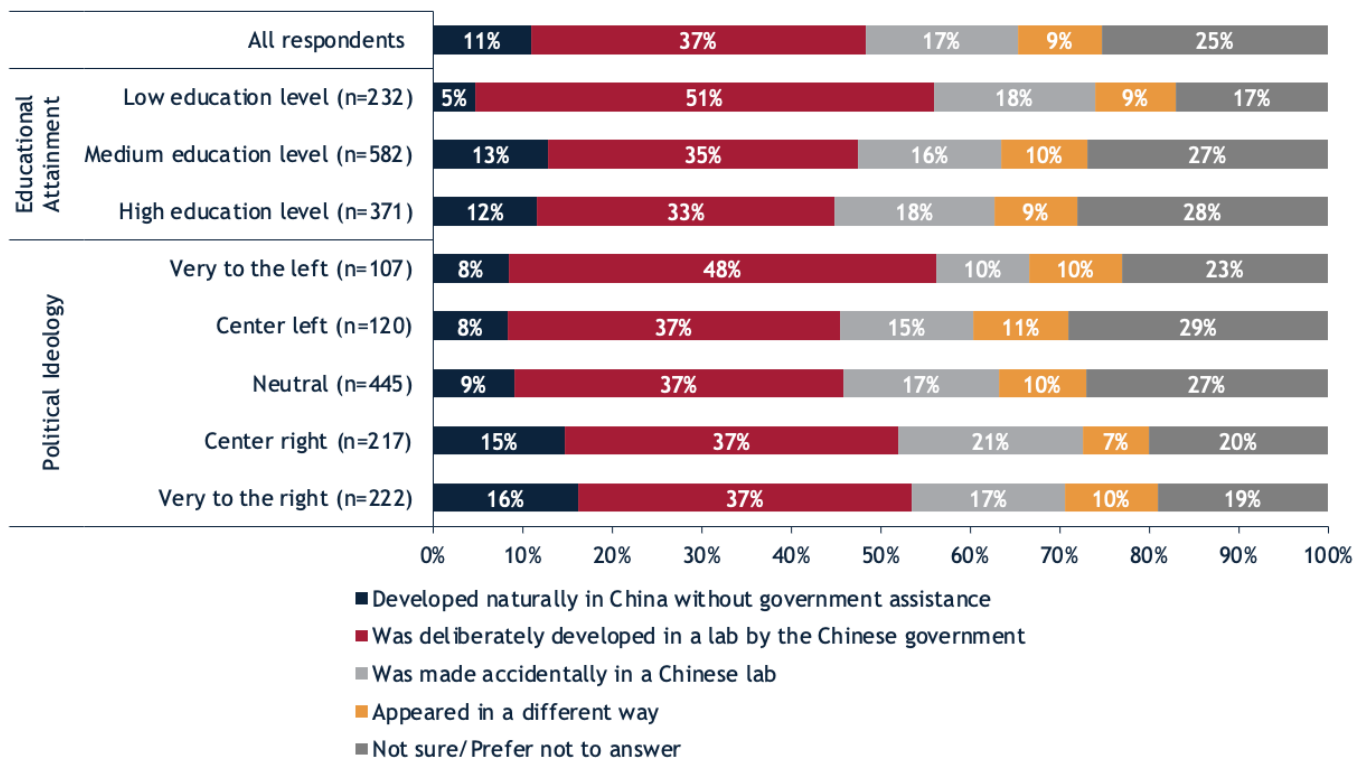


In considering responses from specific countries, 38 percent of Romanian respondents and 32 percent of Polish respondents respectively, believe the latter theory. In Poland, women and respondents between 18-49 years old are more likely to believe COVID-19 is man-made than other groups. In Romania, younger people with a low education level (51 percent), people from rural areas, and those who identify as very to the left (48 percent) believe COVID-19 is man-made.

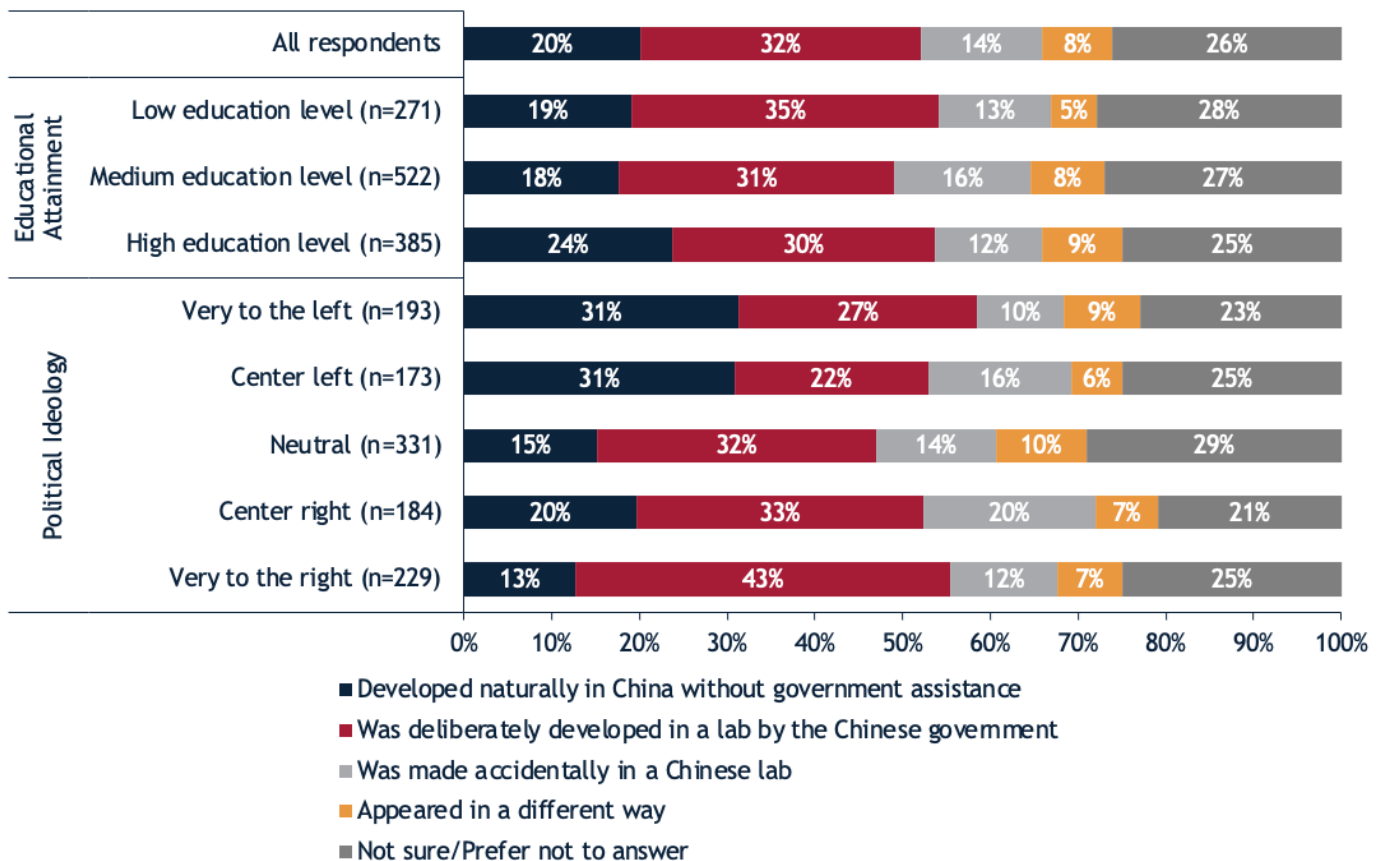
From what you have seen or heard, do you think it is most likely the current strain of the coronavirus...?



From what you have seen or heard, do you think it is most likely the current strain of the coronavirus...?
(Among those who live in Romania, n=1,186)



From what you have seen or heard, do you think it is most likely the current strain of the coronavirus...?
(Among those who live in Poland, n=1,178)



ONLY 31%
OF RESPONDENTS
STATED THAT THE VIRUS
DEVELOPED NATURALLY
IN CHINA WITHOUT
GOVERNMENT
ASSISTANCE.



Notably, the responses to this question underscore a lack of consensus on the perceived origin of the coronavirus. When asked this question, **24 percent of those interviewed answered “not sure/prefer not to answer,” possibly indicating a lack of credible information sources and/or high levels of misinformation.** In both Slovakia and the Netherlands, 25 percent of respondents said that they were not sure where the coronavirus originated. In Poland and the Czech Republic, 36 percent and 33 percent respectively, of respondents older than 60 indicated, that they were not sure where the coronavirus originated. As respondents were not asked to share their sources of news and information, drawing clear conclusions on this question proves difficult. Given these findings, however, this data may be valuable as a foundation for future research. Despite lacking a clear consensus, the question reveals that older people (50 or older), unemployed people and people with lower education levels are the least sure about the origin of the virus.

Lesson #4:

**In this crisis,
restricting freedom of
movement seems less
problematic than using
citizens' mobile phone
data.**

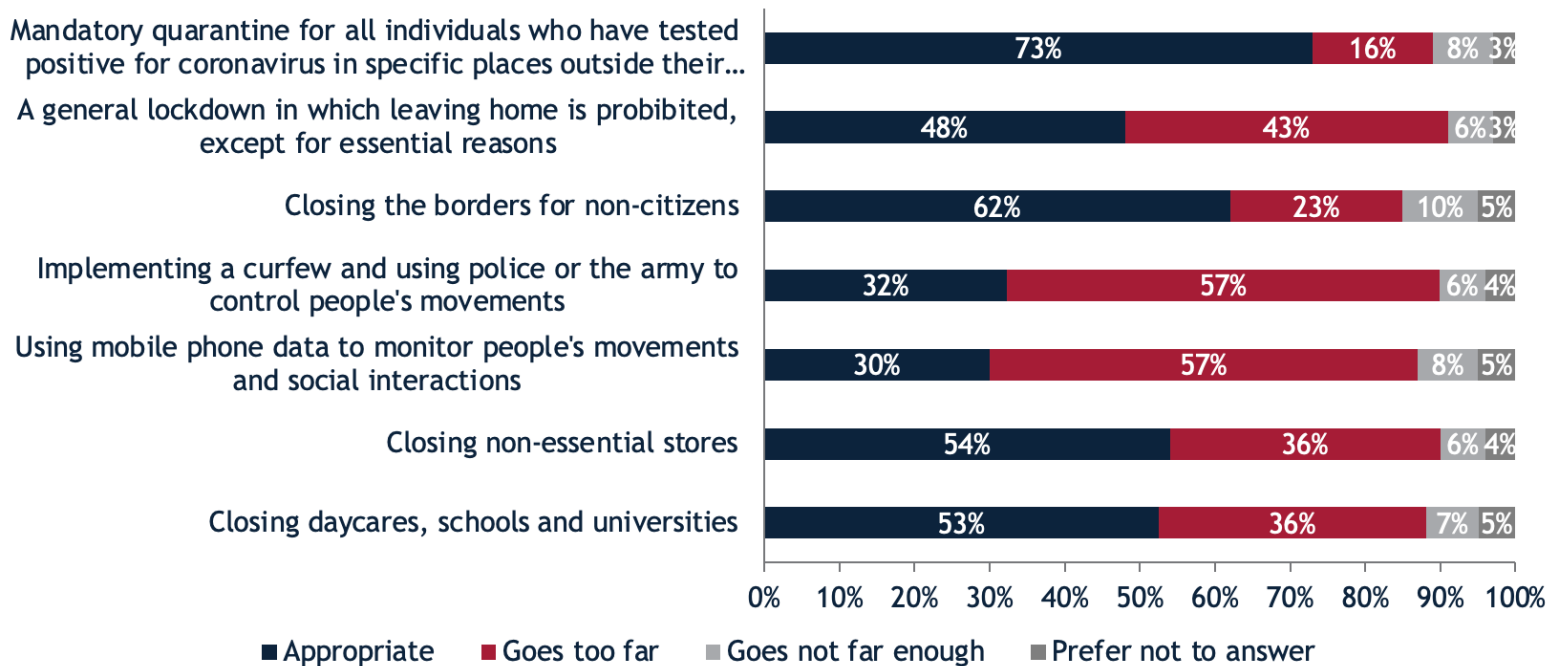


73%

**OF RESPONDENTS
ACROSS EUROPE
STATED THAT MANDATORY
QUARANTINE FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS
WHO HAVE TESTED POSITIVE IS
APPROPRIATE.**

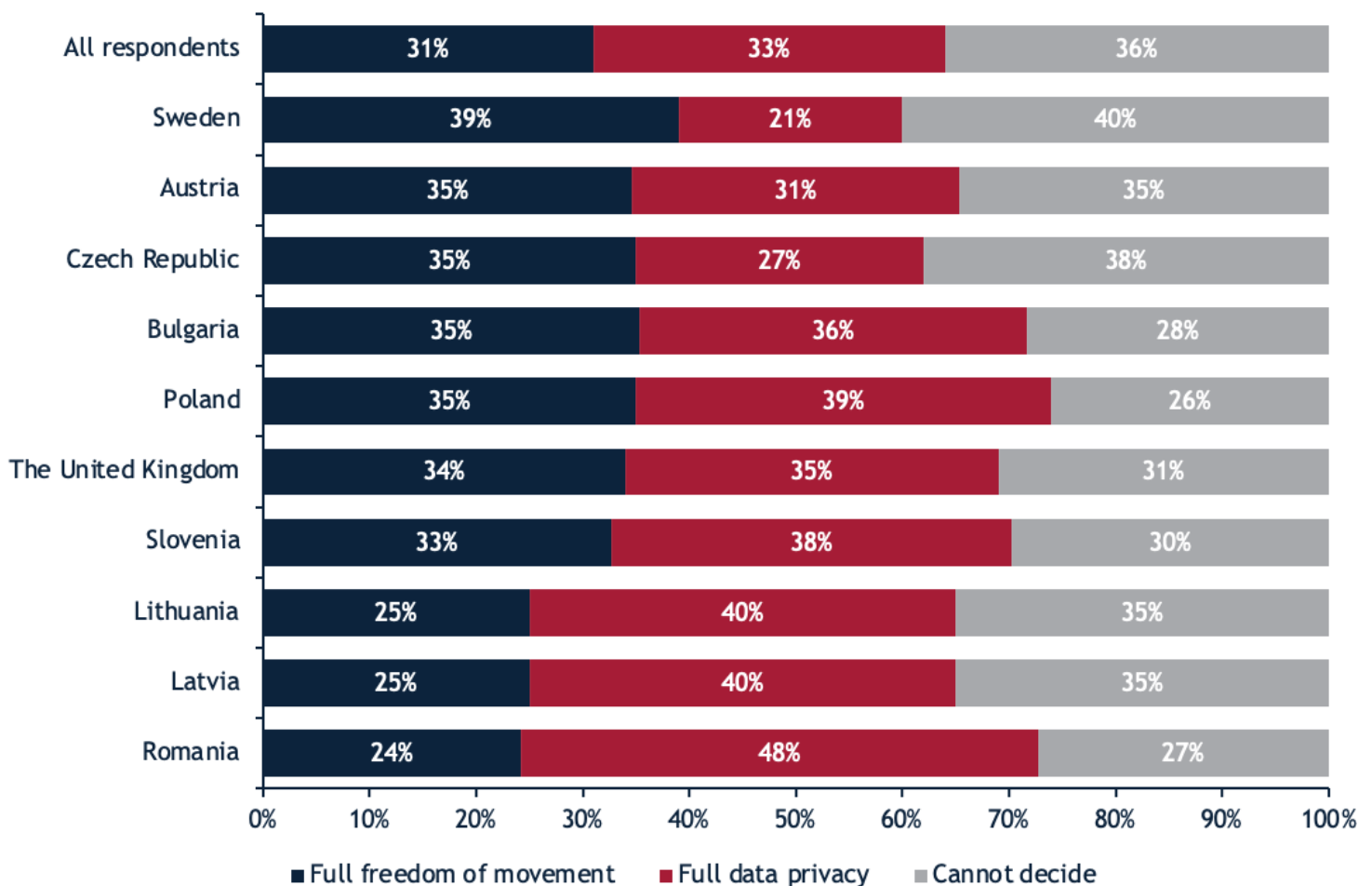
Responses indicate **general approval of citizens in most European countries of the measures adopted** to slow the spread of the coronavirus. 62 percent of respondents stated it is appropriate to close the borders of their countries to non-citizens. 73 percent believe mandatory quarantine for all individuals who have tested positive is appropriate. However, 57 percent of respondents believe curfews and the use of police or the army to control the movement of people is unacceptable. The same number of respondents also believe the **use of mobile phone data to monitor people's movements is unacceptable**. When deciding between full freedom of movement or full data privacy, 36 percent of respondents across Europe could not decide.

Here is a list of measures that have been taken in some countries against the spread of coronavirus. Would you say that each of these measures is appropriate, goes too far, or goes not far enough?



Comparing countries, respondents from Romania (48 percent), Lithuania (40 percent), Latvia (40 percent), and Slovenia (38 percent) favor full data privacy over full freedom of movement. Conversely, respondents from Sweden (39 percent), Austria (35 percent) Czech Republic (35 percent), and Poland (35 percent) favor full freedom of movement. In Bulgaria, fairly equal shares of respondents would choose full data privacy and full freedom of movement.

I would rather have full freedom of movement/I would rather have full data privacy



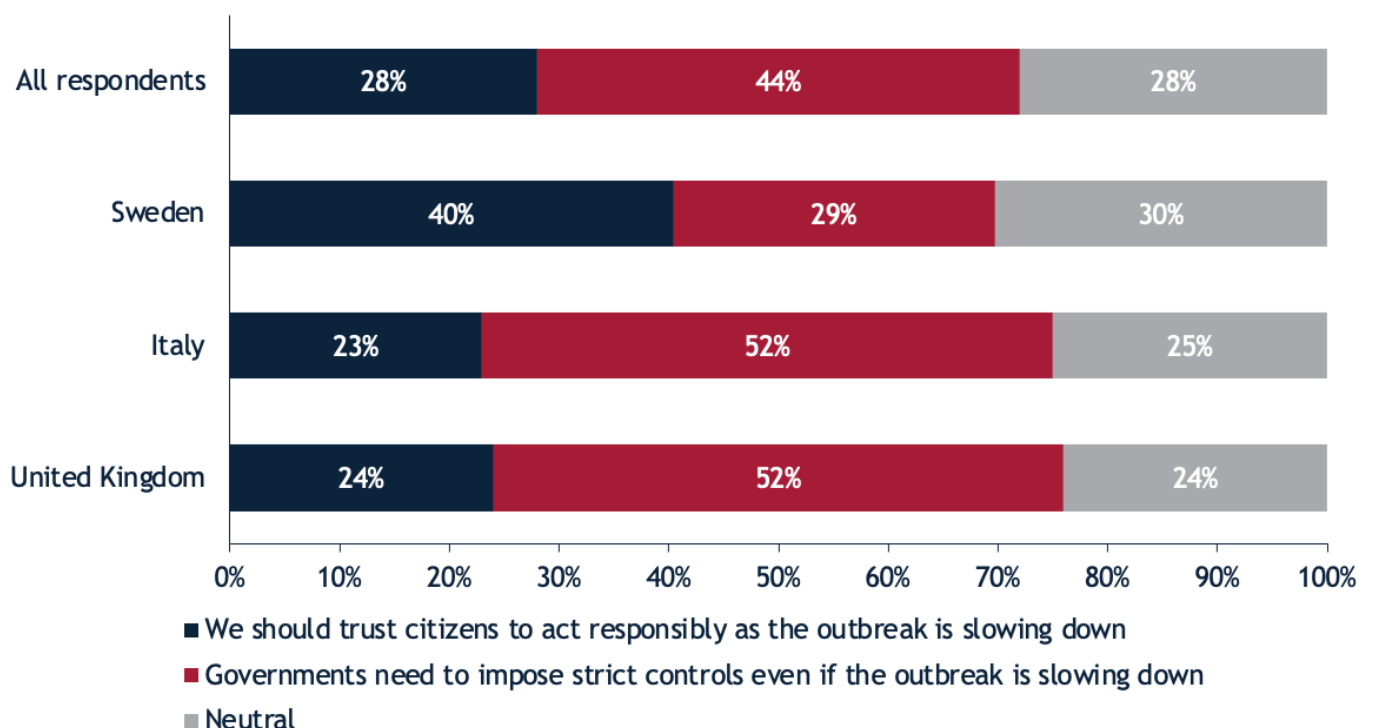
Responses from Swedish citizens unsurprisingly stand out, given the country's looser approach to pandemic management. **According to Swedish respondents, the majority of adopted measures elsewhere in Europe goes too far:** closing daycares, schools and universities (53 percent), closing non-essential stores (49 percent) were seen as unacceptable. However, 64 percent of respondents approved closing the borders to non-citizens.

Here is a list of measures that have been taken in some countries against the spread of coronavirus. Would you say that each of these measures is appropriate, goes too far, or goes not far enough?
 (Among those who live in Sweden, n= 1,174)



Regarding the role of the state, pan-European numbers show that a plurality of respondents expect governments to intervene in dealing with the crisis. 44 percent of those surveyed prefer strict government controls⁹, even if the outbreak were to slow down, as opposed to 28 percent who agree that citizens should be trusted to act responsibly.¹⁰ In the same situation 28 percent adopted a neutral position. Swedish respondents (40 percent) led the pack in terms of trust towards citizens, while Italians (52 percent) and Britons (52 percent) were more favorable to strict controls. **While Europeans favor more state intervention to deal with the pandemic, the same sentiment does not extend to the economy.** Although 25 percent of total respondents believe governments must play a leading role in the economy, 48 percent believe governments should provide funds while allowing businesses and people to lead in rebuilding the economy after the pandemic. 27 percent of respondents took a neutral position.

We should trust citizens to act responsibly as the outbreak is slowing down/Governments need to impose strict controls even if the outbreak is slowing down



⁹"Strict government control" is defined as values of 4 and 5 on a five-point scale where 1 stands for "We should trust citizens to act responsibly as the outbreak is slowing down" and 5 stands for "Governments need to impose strict controls even if the outbreak is slowing down."

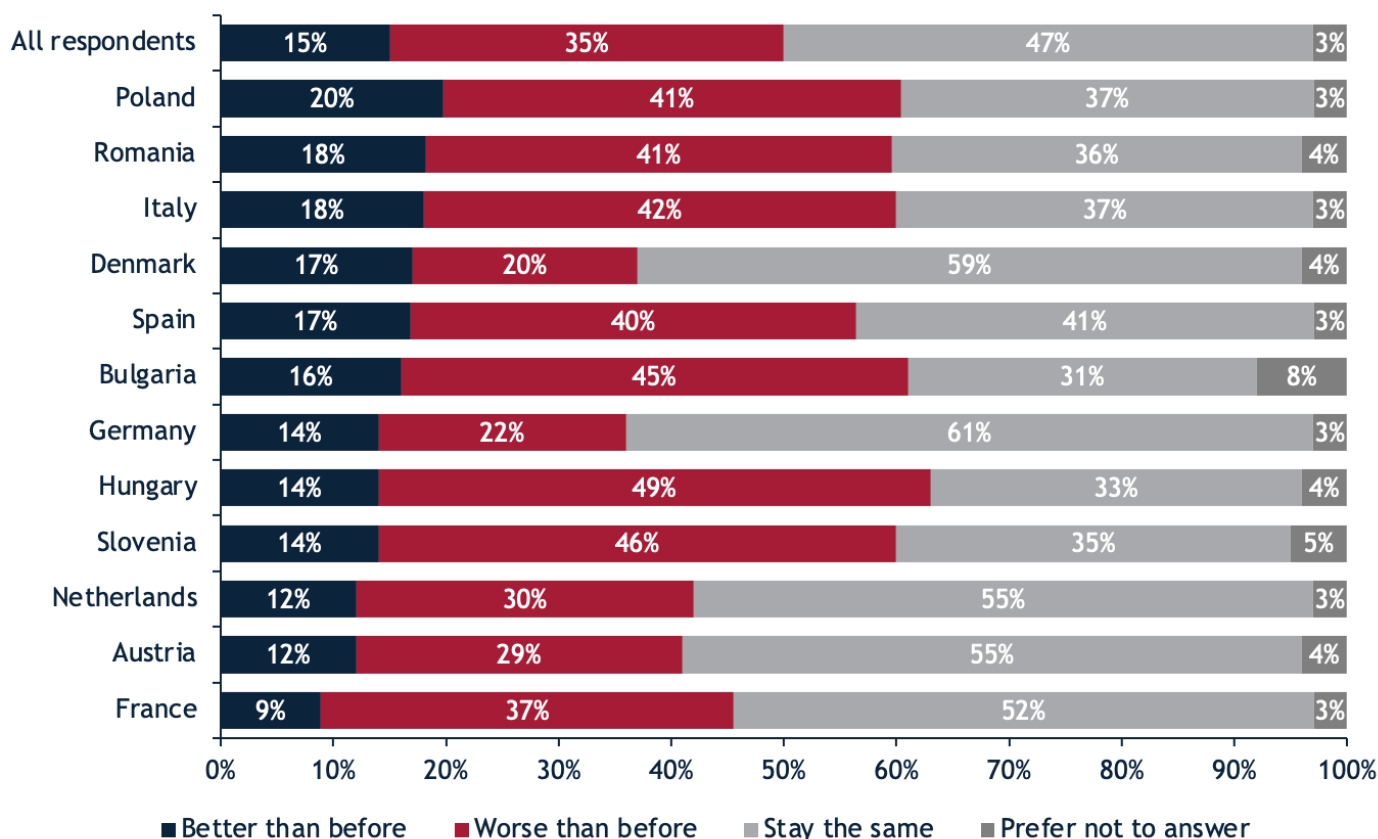
¹⁰"Trust citizens to act responsibly" is defined as values of 1 and 2 on a five-point scale where 1 stands for "We should trust citizens to act responsibly as the outbreak is slowing down" and 5 stands for "Governments need to impose strict controls even if the outbreak is slowing down."

Lesson #5:

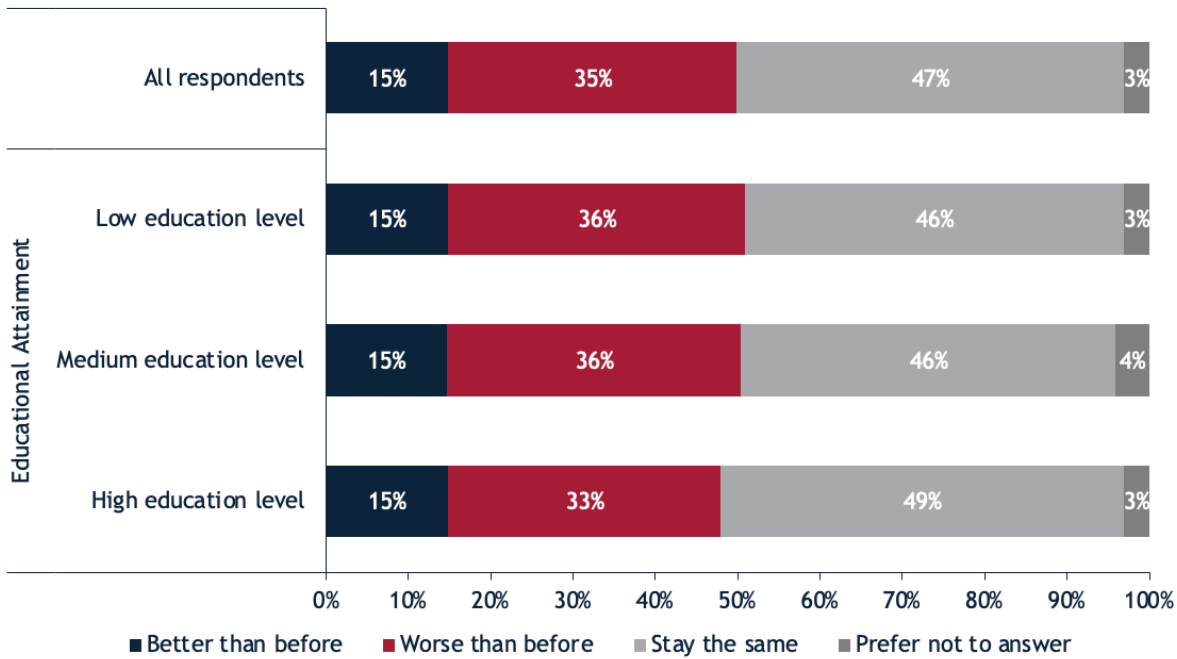
Europeans are pessimistic about the economic future of their countries, and divided on their personal prospects.

Respondents across Europe were also asked **if their own financial situations would get worse, better, or stay the same** as before the coronavirus outbreak. The responses show **a clear regional divide**, as respondents from western and northern Europe seem more confident about their own financial situation than their counterparts in southern, central and eastern Europe. In Germany (61 percent), Denmark (59 percent), the Netherlands (55 percent), Austria (55 percent) and France (52 percent), the majority of respondents do not expect their own financial situation to change in any way. But even in western European countries, a high proportion of respondents from low income households (46 percent) and people living in rental housing (44 percent) expect their financial situation to get worse. Respondents with higher education levels (49 percent) and those from high income households (53 percent) expect their situation to stay the same.

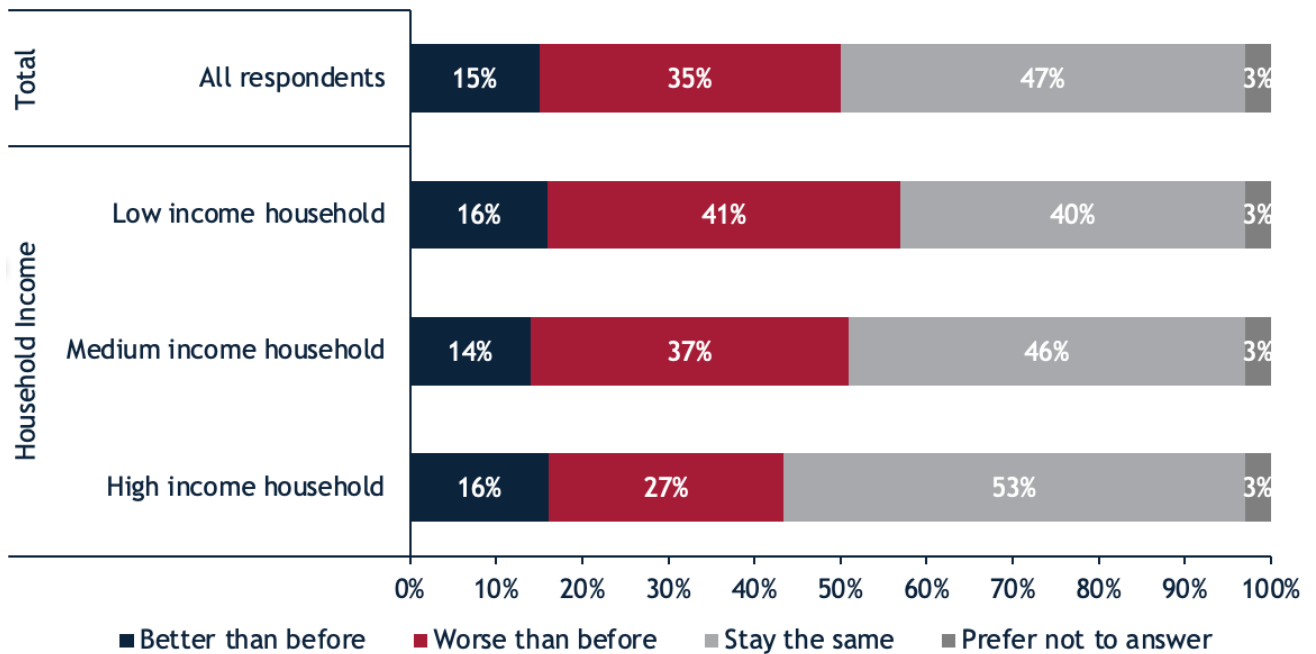
Do you expect the situation next year to get worse, better or stay the same as before the coronavirus outbreak?: Your own economic and financial situation



Do you expect the situation next year to get worse, better or stay the same as before the coronavirus outbreak?: Your own economic and financial situation

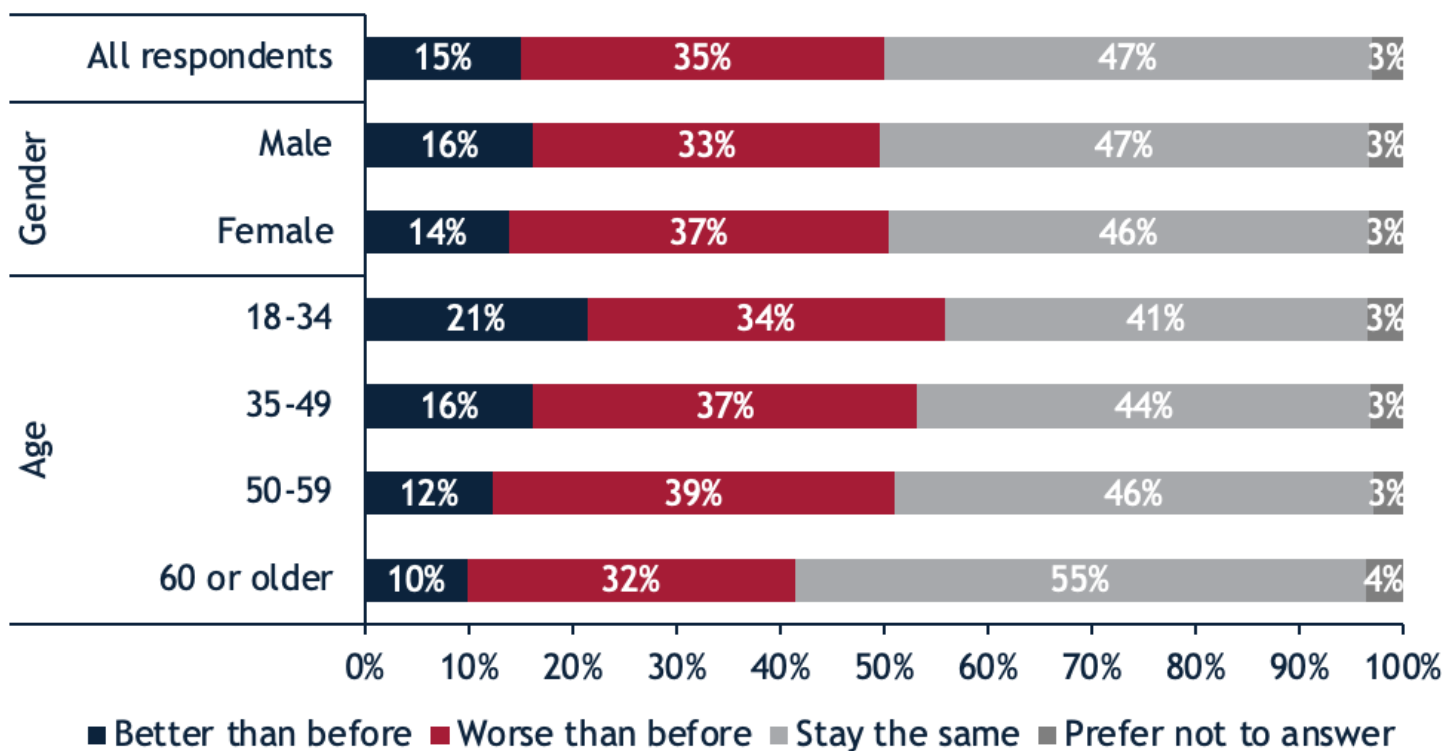


Do you expect the situation next year to get worse, better or stay the same as before the coronavirus outbreak?: Your own economic and financial situation



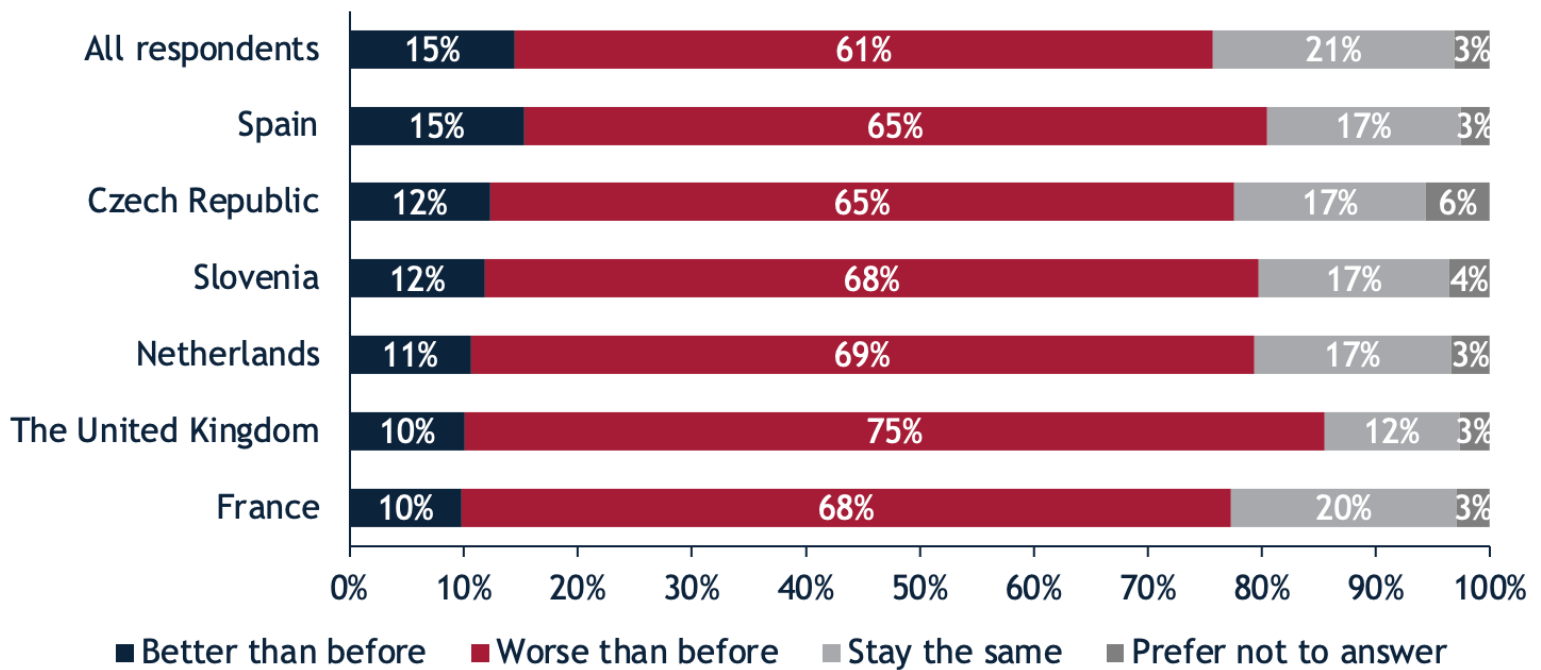
On the contrary, respondents from Hungary (49 percent), Slovenia (46 percent), Bulgaria (45 percent), Italy (42 percent), Romania (41 percent), Poland (41 percent), and also Spain (40 percent) feel that their financial situation will get worse after the coronavirus crisis. Women (37 percent), people of working age (35-59 years old), as well as the more sociologically vulnerable segments of society (skilled or unskilled workers and unemployed, respectively 35 percent and 43 percent and generally people in the lower incomes brackets) believe their own financial situation will get worse.

Do you expect the situation next year to get worse, better or stay the same as before the coronavirus outbreak?: Your own economic and financial situation



The general expectation is that one's country will be worse off economically after the COVID-19 crisis, and **geographical divisions seem to be much less significant**: the most pessimistic prognoses were recorded in the UK (75 percent), Netherlands (69 percent), Slovenia (68 percent), France (68 percent), Czech Republic and Spain (65 percent).

Do you expect the situation next year to get worse, better or stay the same as before the coronavirus outbreak?: The economic situation in your country



Methodology:

The survey was coordinated and carried out by IPSOS on behalf of the International Republican Institute's Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR), the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and the European Liberal Forum.

Fieldwork dates: August 24th to September 12th, 2020.

Sample representation: a total of 20,896 citizens aged 18+ were interviewed in 19 European countries Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

The margin of error for each country ranges from 2.8 to 3.1 points, depending on the country's sample size. The margin of error for sub-group analysis within a country (e.g. political orientation, age etc.) will be higher.

The survey was conducted through Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). Sample was drawn from IPSOS's Access Panel (IIS). Quotas were applied on gender, age, occupation, region and market size while drawing the sample.

Respondents who participated in other IPSOS CAWI polls were excluded.

For country-specific analysis, the sample was weighted using a country specific weight that adjusts for gender, age groups (18-34,35-49, 50-59,60+), region and population density. For an analysis of all countries in the sample, a global weight was used. The global weight appends a country-population adjustment on to the regular country-specific weight to allow for the full-sample presentation of the data.

Country	Sample
Austria (AUT)	n=1,155
Czech Republic (CZE)	n=1,197
Denmark (DNK)	n=969
France (FRA)	n=1,177
Germany (DEU)	n=1,150
Hungary (HUN)	n=1,189
Italy (ITA)	n=1,126
Netherlands (NLD)	n=1,183
Poland (POL)	n=1,178
Romania (ROU)	n=1,186
Slovakia (SVK)	n=1,000
Slovenia (SVN)	n=984
Spain (ESP)	n=1,135
Sweden (SWE)	n=1,174
United Kingdom (GBR)	n=1,158
Bulgaria (BGR)	n=1,000
Estonia (EST)	n=978
Lithuania (LTU)	n=979
Latvia (LVA)	n=978

International Republican Institute

@IRIglobal
IRI.org

E: info@iri.org
P: (202) 408-9450