

## Health Care Is a Major Issue in Many Countries But There Are Big Differences Across 28 European Countries

*Highest levels of importance in Sweden, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands*

*Lowest levels in Spain, Belgium, France, Malta, Slovenia, Luxembourg and Lithuania*

The latest Eurobarometer survey published by the European Union finds huge differences in the proportions of citizens in 28 countries who believe their health care systems are important as issues to be addressed. When asked to pick “the two most important issues facing” their countries “at the moment,” those who give “the health care system” as one of their top two issues vary from a high of 52% in Sweden to a low of only 3% in Spain.

### The “Europe-as-a-Whole” Picture

As a whole, health care is the fifth most important issue in Europe. The weighted average data for all 28 countries show that the top seven issues are:

Base: Citizens in 28 Countries

Unemployment	47%
Economic situation	29%
Crime	27%
Rising prices/Inflation	16%
<b>Health care system</b>	<b>15%</b>
Terrorism	15%
Immigration	10%

Other issues mentioned are pensions – what Americans would call Social Security – (9%), taxes (7%), education (7%), defense or foreign affairs (5%), the environment (4%), housing (3%) and public transportation (2%).

These are the results of the Eurobarometer 2003 Spring Survey based on 28,405 face-to-face interviews conducted between March and May 2003 (and released in July). The data collection was managed by the Gallup Organization, based in Hungary.

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## How does this compare with the United States?

In the most recent Harris Interactive survey asking a similar, but not identical, question, health care was mentioned by 10% of all adults as “one of the two most important issues for government to address.” It was placed equal third, far behind the economy (32%) and below “the war” (15%).

### Countries where health care is much more important as an issue

More than 25% of all citizens see the health care system as one of the two most important issues in these six countries:

Base: Citizens in 28 Countries

Sweden	52%
Finland	42%
Ireland	35%
Netherlands	35%
Hungary	29%
Slovakia	26%

In Sweden and Finland, health care is the issue mentioned most often. In the Netherlands, it trails crime and the economy. In Ireland, it is second to crime. In Hungary, it rates below crime and unemployment.

### Countries where health care is a relatively unimportant issue

The countries where the fewest people mentioned health care as one of their two top issues are:

Base: Citizens in 28 Countries

Spain	3%
Belgium	6%
France	8%
Malta	10%
Slovenia	10%
Luxembourg	10%
Lithuania	10%
Turkey	12%

## How the Big Countries Compare

In the five biggest economies, health care is more important in the United Kingdom, somewhat less important in France, and much less important in Spain. Those mentioning it as one of the two top issues are:

Base: Citizens in 28 Countries

United Kingdom	20%
Germany	13%
Italy	13%
France	8%
Spain	3%

## What do these data mean?

In general, people mention issues as “important” if they are dissatisfied with them; they tend not to mention issues which they feel are being handled well by their governments. So it is a reasonably safe assumption that **there is a strong correlation between high numbers in this survey and dissatisfaction with how the health care system is performing**, even if this correlation is not perfect.

But what does being an important issue (or dissatisfied) mean? In our experience, it can mean (at least) two different things. In many developed countries (probably most), dissatisfaction is usually with **scarce health care resources, overcrowding and waiting lists** which need to be addressed, by **increased funding**.

In the **U.S.A.** (which was not included in this survey), dissatisfaction with the system usually focuses on other issues – **access, costs and insurance coverage**.

This is an important difference. In the **U.S.A.**, many people really want to change the way health care is financed. In most other countries, they often want to improve (and give more resources to) the system without fundamentally changing the way in which it is financed and delivered.

## Most Important Issues (Country) Facing – By Country

“What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?”

	28-Country Average	Belgium	Denmark	Germany	Greece	Italy	Spain	France	Ireland	Luxembourg
Crime	27	34	26	16	24	39	10	39	47	41
Economic situation	29	21	16	37	34	21	13	21	13	14
Rising prices/inflation	16	13	2	15	18	22	14	14	28	10
Unemployment	47	41	29	66	62	34	35	48	18	40
Terrorism	15	9	16	7	6	23	54	13	5	7
Immigration	10	16	25	5	6	13	17	11	10	10
Health care system	15	6	21	13	18	13	3	8	35	10

	Netherlands	Portugal	U.K.	Finland	Sweden	Austria	Bulgaria	Cyprus	Czech Rep.	Estonia
Crime	49	24	39	24	22	20	48	46	34	47
Economic situation	40	28	11	14	28	21	38	24	38	23
Rising prices/inflation	3	30	4	6	2	13	10	26	8	16
Unemployment	19	54	8	57	25	42	60	17	39	46
Terrorism	7	4	28	3	3	8	3	4	4	1
Immigration	8	2	32	5	10	10	5	3	3	1
Health care system	35	22	20	42	52	17	13	16	13	22

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	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Malta	Poland	Romania	Slovakia	Slovenia	Turkey
Crime	31	26	41	15	35	26	22	34	6
Economic situation	25	33	27	32	32	32	43	32	55
Rising prices/inflation	19	14	14	22	5	40	20	24	26
Unemployment	44	46	59	26	79	34	58	51	66
Terrorism	3	1	2	2	3	3	2	1	8
Immigration	3	1	1	4	0	3	1	2	2
Health care system	29	21	10	10	18	22	26	10	12

**NOTE:**

1. These include all current EU members and all candidate countries.
2. All other issues (mentioned less often) excluded.

## Methodology for Eurobarometer (2003 Spring)

The Standard Eurobarometer and the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer interviewed 28,405 citizens in the 28 European countries that are either the members of or candidates to the European Union (wave CCEB 2003.2 and EB 59 represent face-to-face interviews conducted between March and May, 2003). The fieldwork for both surveys was done concurrently using identical questions.

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