



Inequality and fairness perceptions: recent developments in the EU

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Outline

1. Eurobarometer surveys and policy briefs on Fairness
2. Main findings: Change in perceptions in the EU
3. What could drive the changes in inequality concerns?
4. What could drive the changes in fairness perceptions?

Motivation

- The European Pillar of Social Rights aims at ensuring social fairness
- Importance of monitoring fairness and inequality perceptions
 - People's perceptions mostly, but not always reflect actual outcomes
 - Preferences for redistributive policies depend more on inequality perceptions and concerns than on actual inequality (Hauser and Norton, 2017)
- The Covid-19 outbreak and the Russian invasion of Ukraine may have substantially affected people's perceptions in the EU, possibly even more than objective measures of fairness and inequality

Eurobarometer surveys and policy briefs on Fairness

Eurobarometer surveys on Fairness

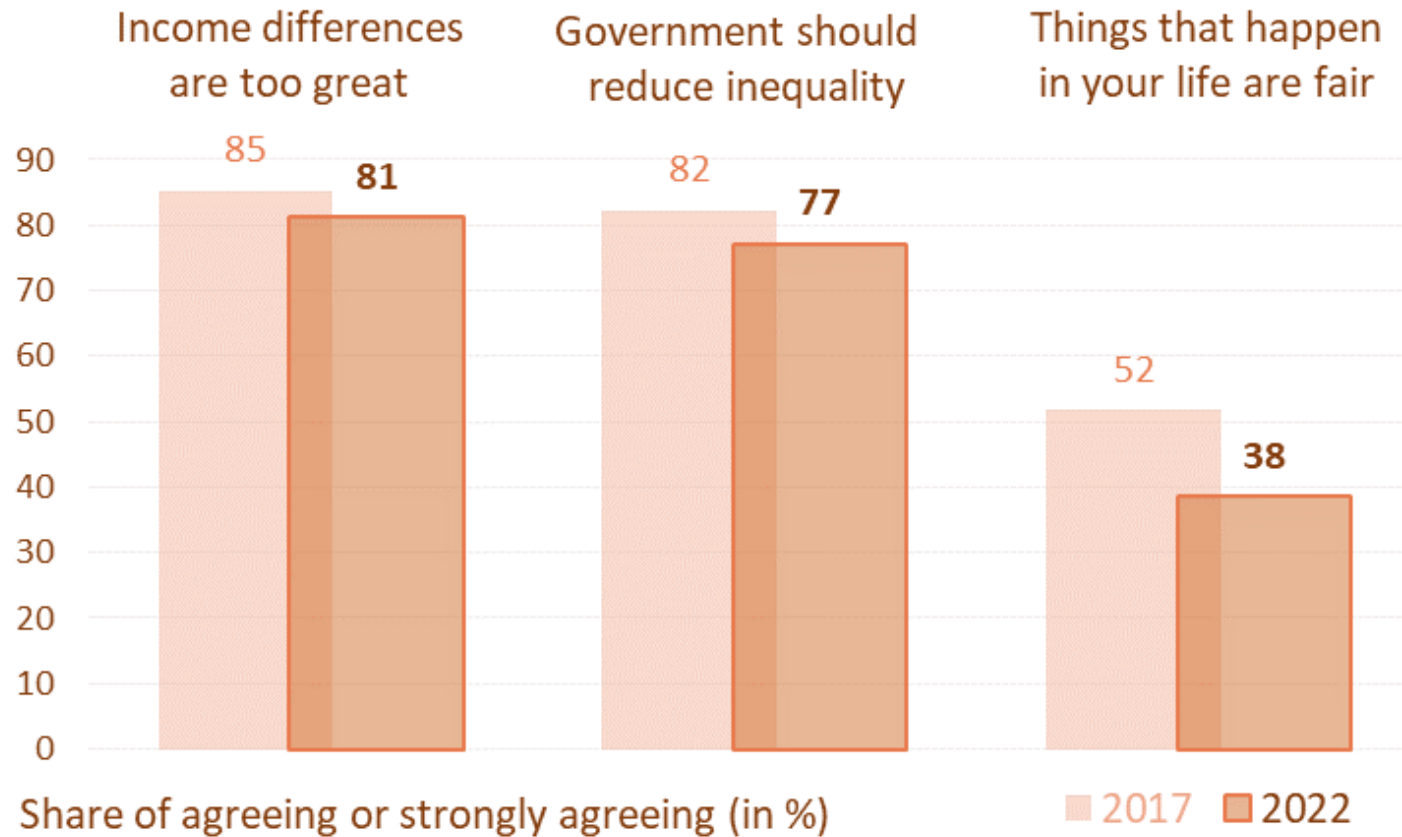
- 2 Special Eurobarometer surveys in 2017 and 2022
- More than 26,000 EU citizens interviewed in each survey
- Focus on Fairness, Inequality and Inter-Generational Mobility
 1. **Fairness perceptions:** fairness of life, equality of opportunity
 2. **Inequality concerns:** differences in incomes are too great
 3. **Preferences for redistribution:** government should reduce income inequality
- 2022 survey released in Feb 2023 (joint DG EMPL & JRC)

JRC fairness policy briefs

1. Perceptions of inequality and fairness: what has changed over the past 5 years? [\[download\]](#)
 2. Preferences for redistribution and social policies in the EU [\[download\]](#)
- 2 upcoming policy briefs on:
- Equality of opportunity: the role of early childhood education and conditions
 - Drivers of relative income (mis)perceptions

Main findings: Change in perceptions in the EU

Change in perceptions in the EU

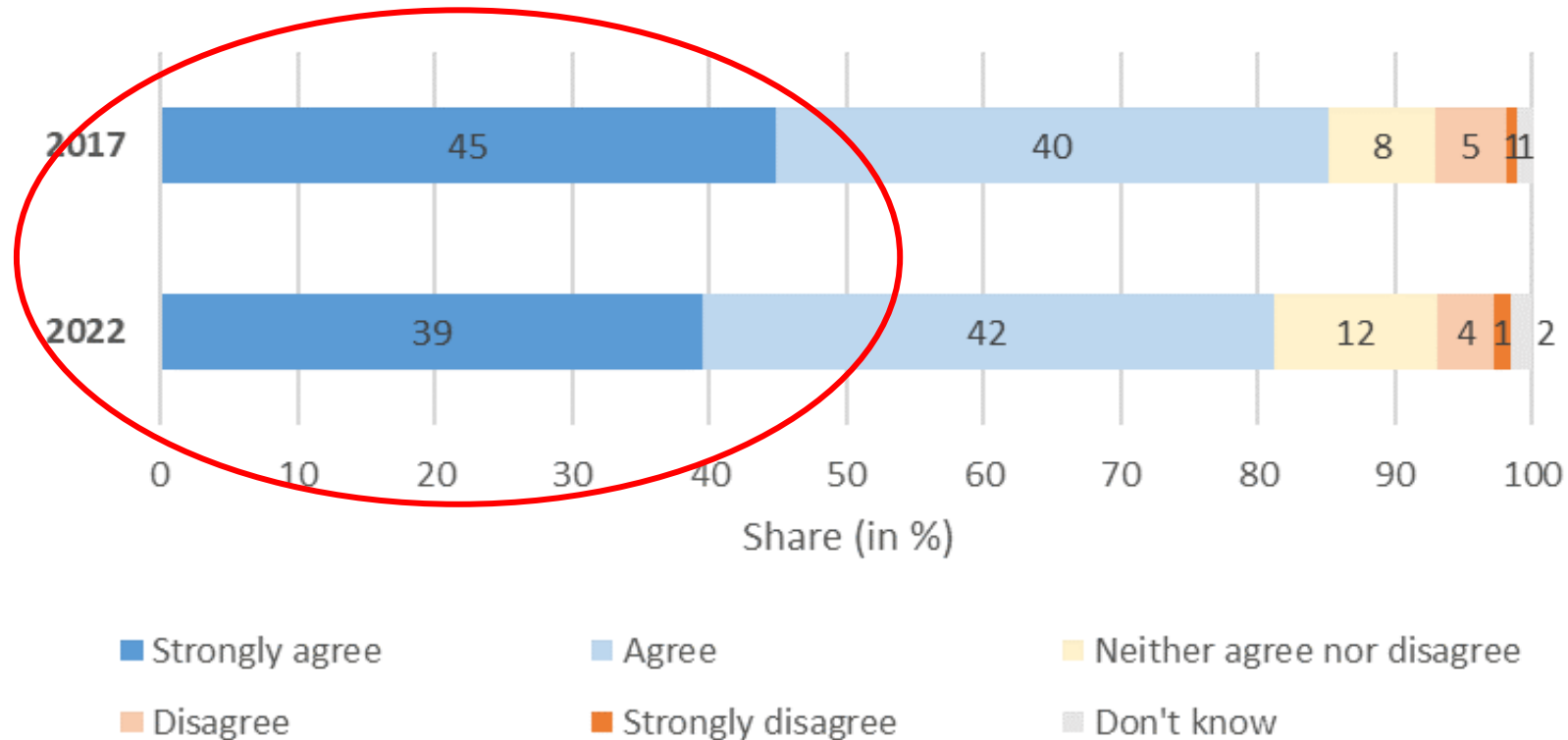


Source: Special Eurobarometers 471 and 529, EU-27 averages (population weighted).

What could drive the changes in inequality concerns?

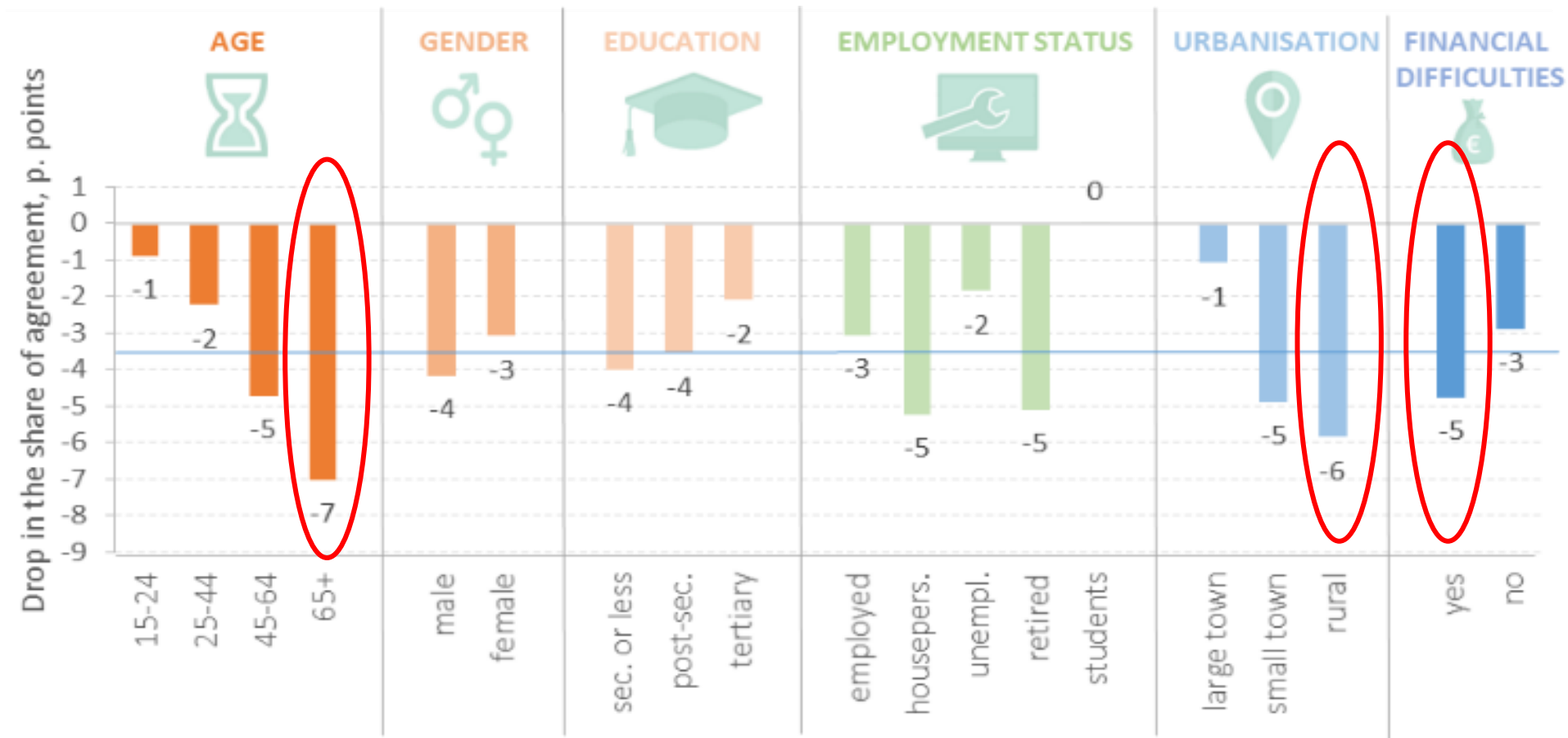
Change in inequality concerns

Nowadays differences in people's incomes are too great



Source: Special Eurobarometers 471 and 529, EU-27 averages (population weighted).

Change in inequality concerns by groups

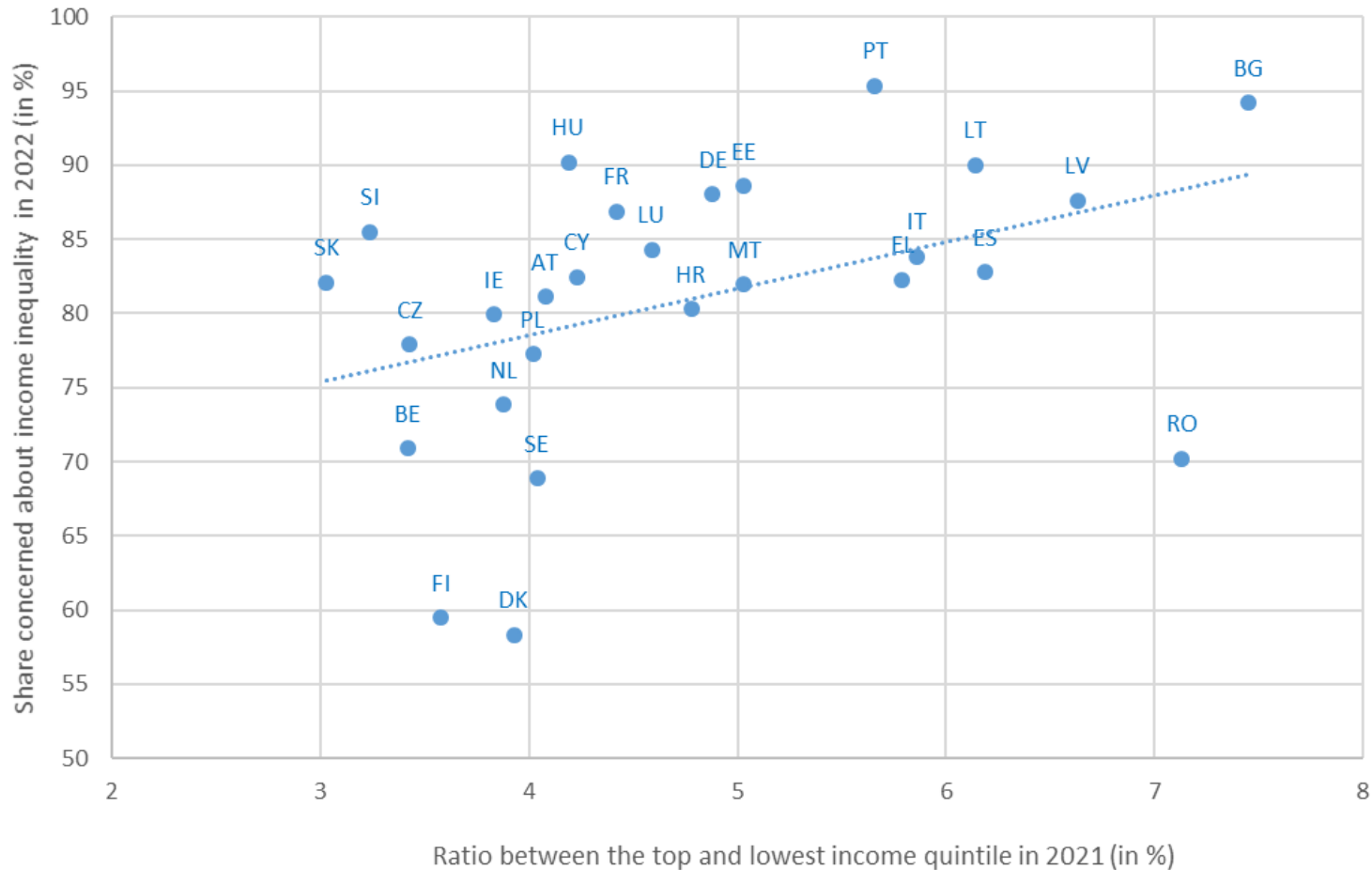


Note: the figure shows the difference between 2017 and 2022 in the share of agreement with the statement (answer categories 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree') for each socio-demographic group. Source: Special Eurobarometers 471 and 529, EU-27 averages (population weighted).

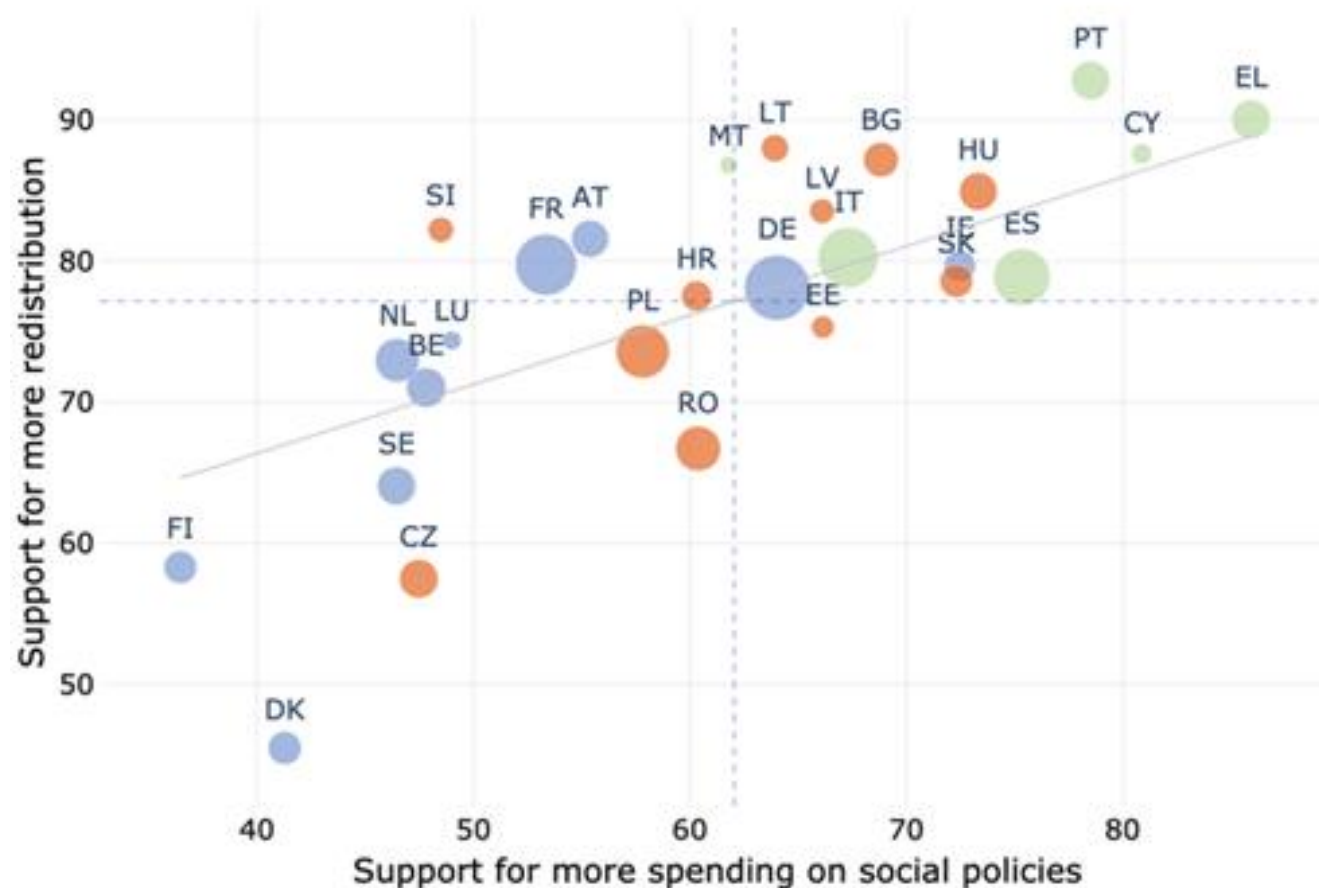
Change in inequality concerns by groups

- Despite the COVID-19 crisis, income inequality concerns decreased for most socio-economic groups.
- This drop was largest for older individuals, those living in rural areas and those with financial difficulties.
- Differences in concerns between socio-demographic groups have become smaller.
- Similar results are found for the share of people agreeing that the government should reduce inequalities.

Actual income inequality & inequality concerns



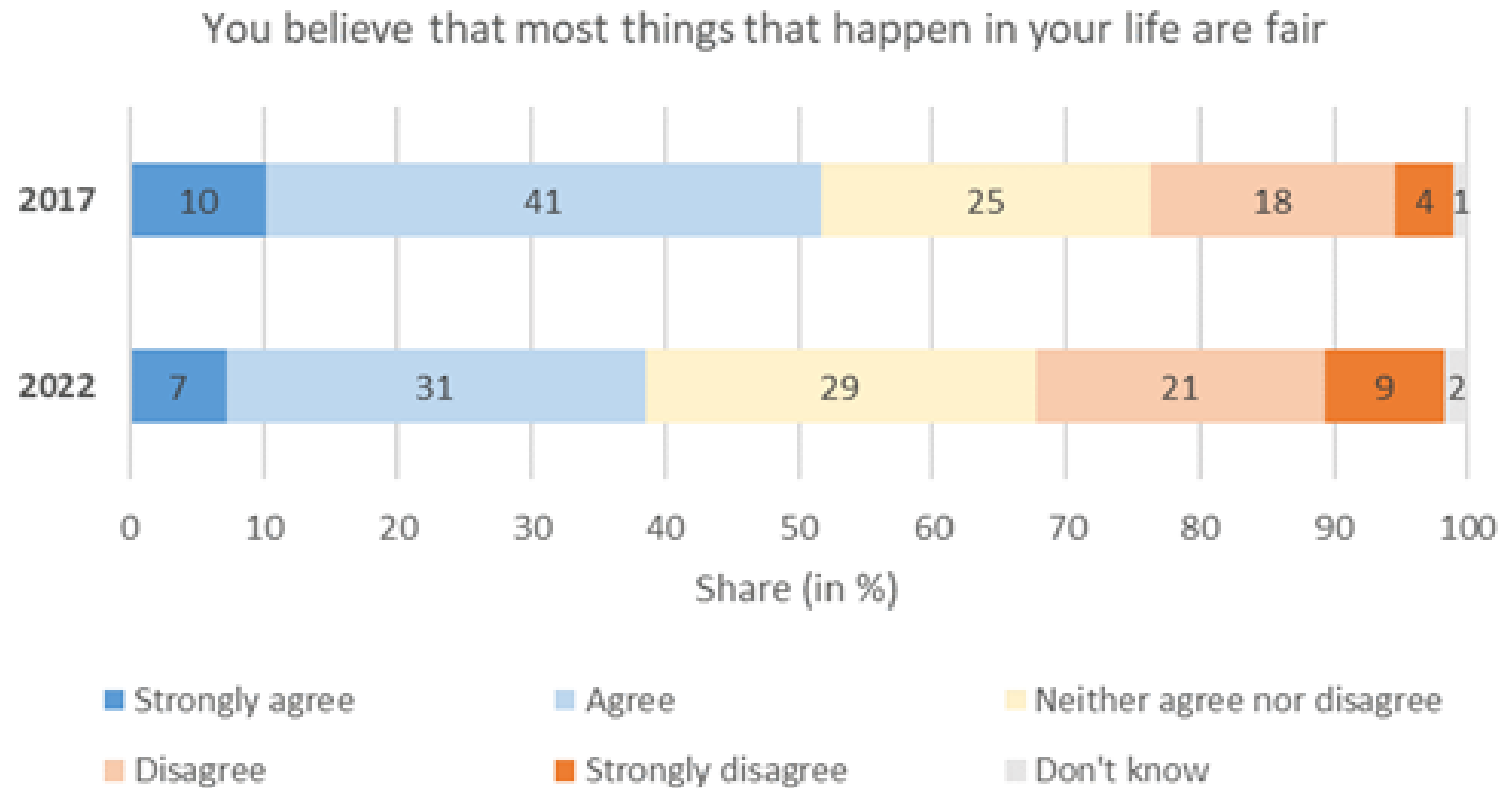
Support for social policies & redistribution views



Note: the y-axis refers to the share of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statement 'national government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels'. The x-axis refers to the share of respondents who want to spend 'more' or 'much more' on social policies (i.e. the average of eight different social policies). Source: Special Eurobarometer 529, EU-27 averages (population weighted).

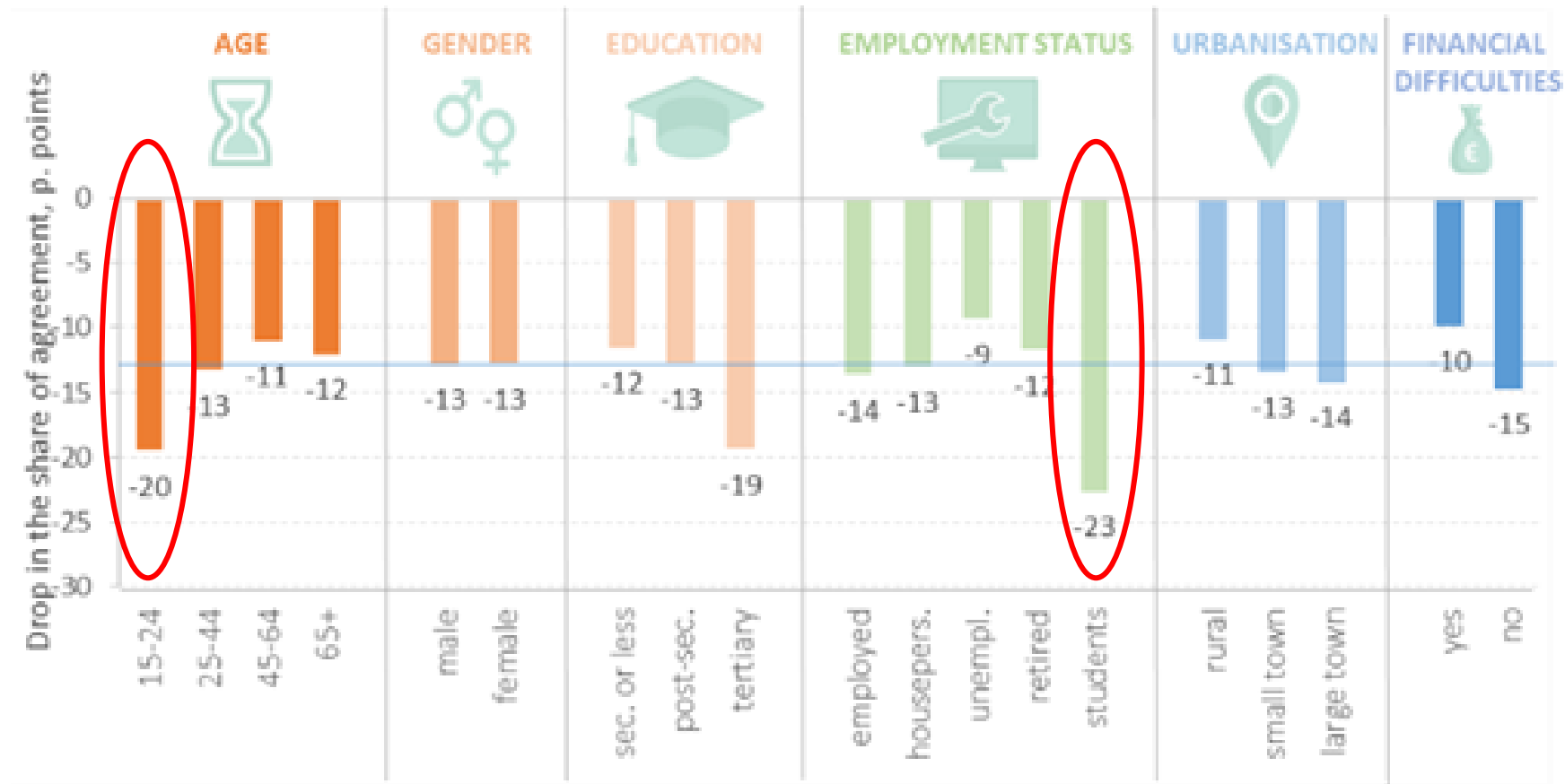
What could drive the changes in fairness perceptions?

Change in perceptions about fairness of life



Source: Special Eurobarometers 471 and 529, EU-27 averages (population weighted).

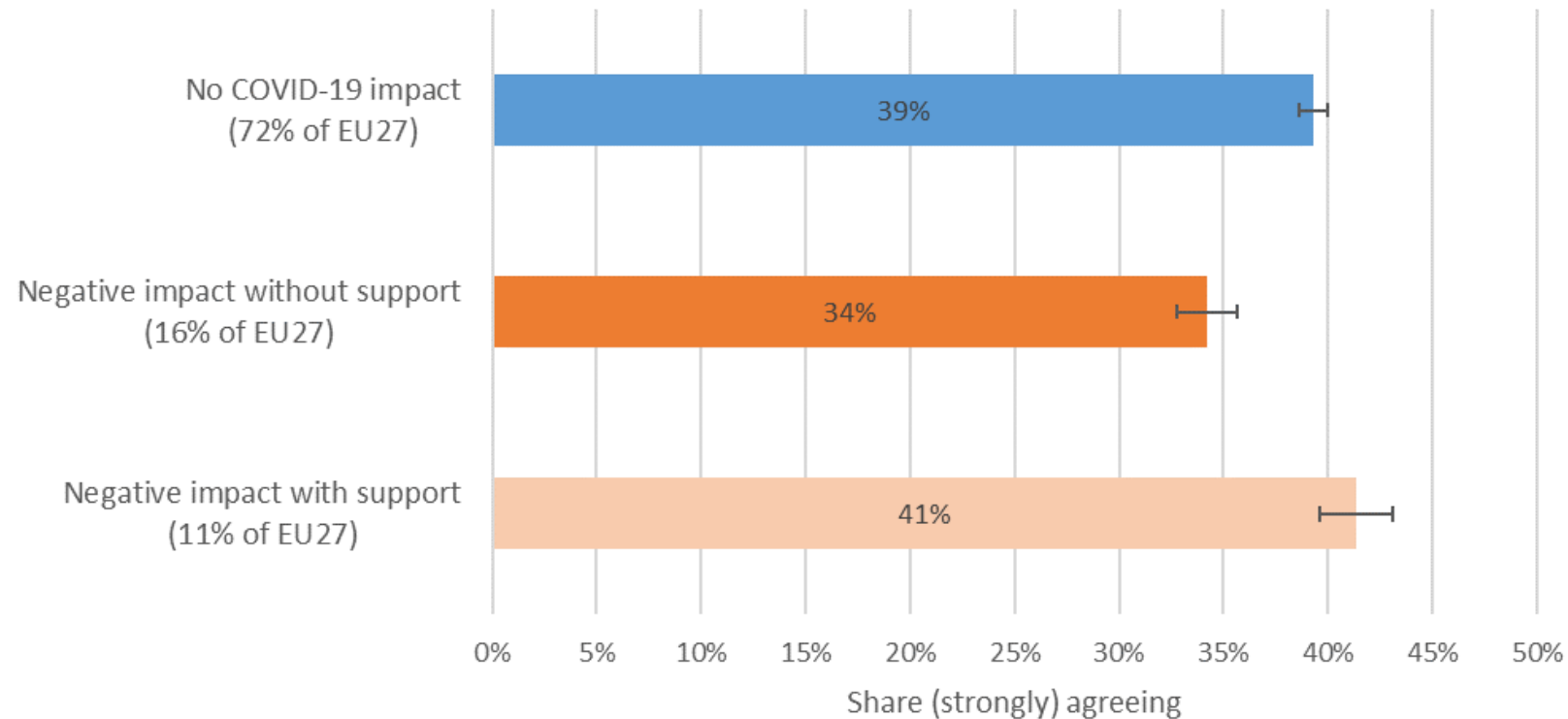
Change in fairness views by groups



Note: the figure shows the difference between 2017 and 2022 in the share of agreement with the statement (answer categories 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree') for each socio-demographic group. Source: Special Eurobarometers 471 and 529, EU-27 averages (population weighted).

COVID-19 impact and fairness perceptions

You believe that most of the things that happen in your life are fair

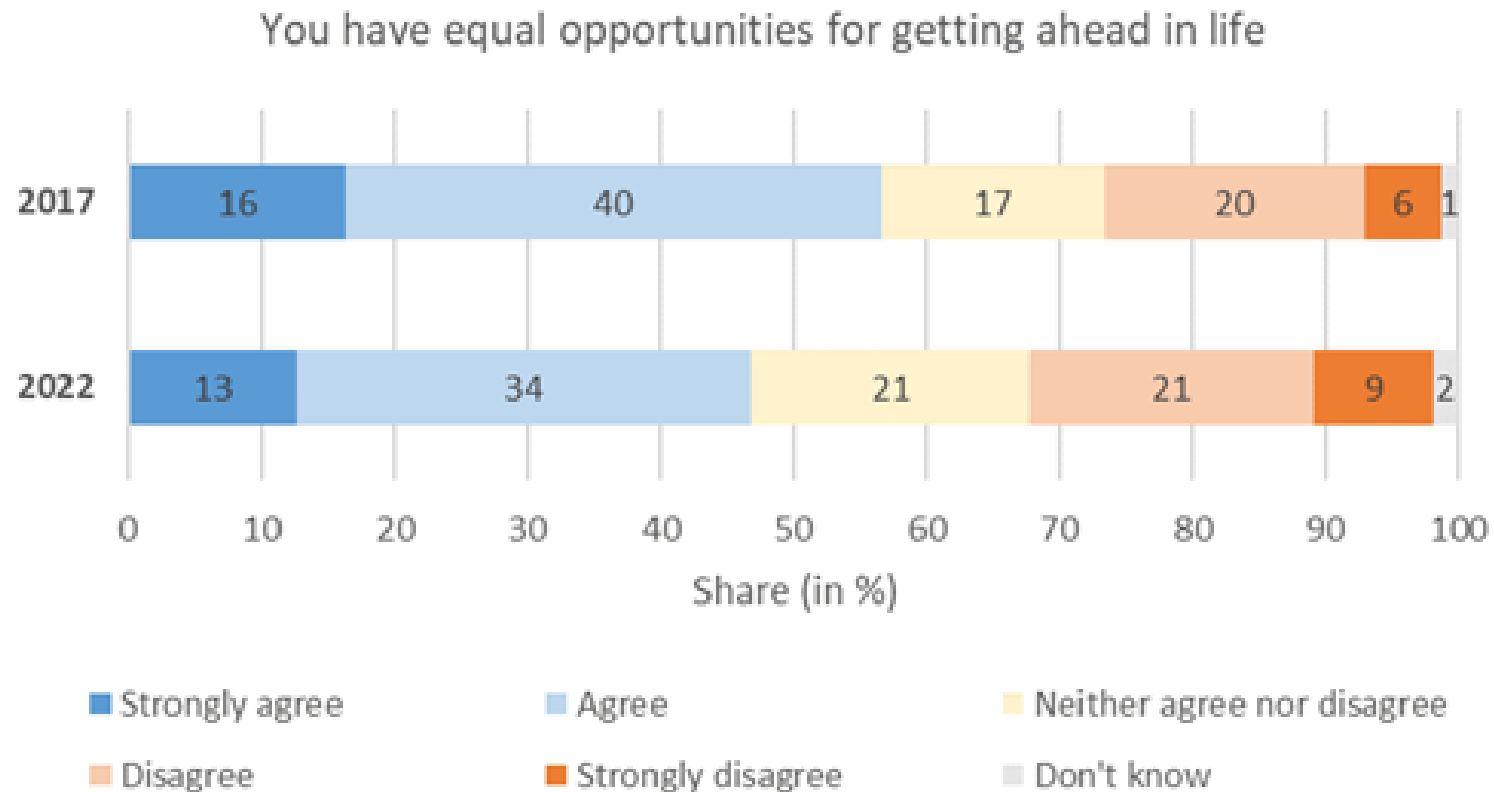


Note: the figure shows predictive probabilities from an OLS regression including socio-economic characteristics and country FE. Respondents in the 'negative impact' categories include those reporting a job-related impact (job loss, reduction in income / working hours, furlough scheme) or negative impact on their physical or mental health. Public support includes unemployment benefits, wage support, paid sick leave and State aid.

Change in fairness views by groups

- Fairness perceptions and inequality concerns are generally related, but the drop fairness views cannot be explained by inequality concerns
- Fairness perceptions diminished especially among young people and students
- But they diminished less among lower-educated individuals and those with financial difficulties.
- The drop does not seem to be due to the direct health or job-related impact of the pandemic

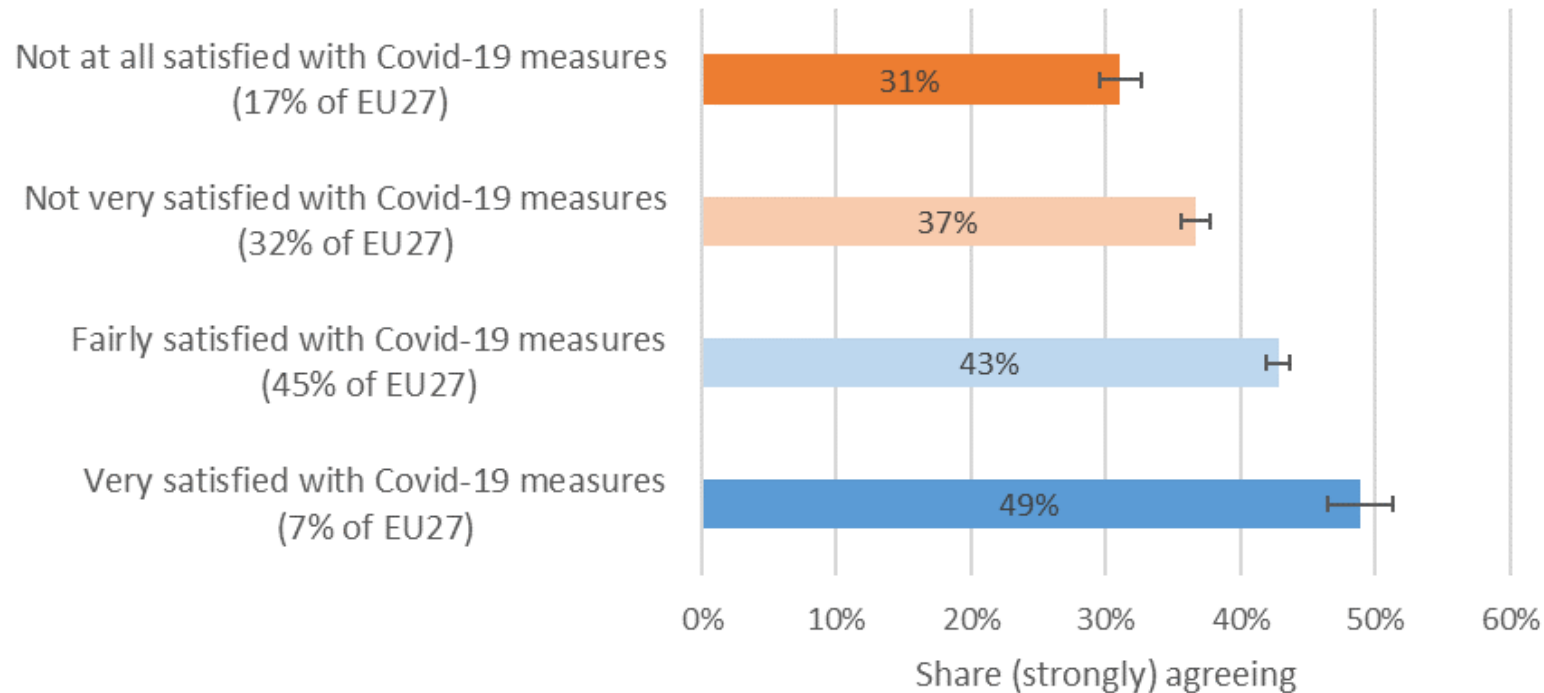
Change in perceptions of equality of opportunity



Source: Special Eurobarometers 471 and 529, EU-27 averages (population weighted).

Satisfaction with COVID-19 measures and perceived fairness of life

You believe that most of the things that happen in your life are fair



Note: the figure shows predictive probabilities from an OLS regression including socio-economic characteristics, political preferences, trust in the government, interpersonal trust and country FE. Individuals were asked about the degree of satisfaction with the measures to address the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic taken by the national government.

Main findings

1. While remaining high, inequality concerns have decreased in the EU over the past 5 years
2. Similarly, there was a small decrease in the preference for governmental intervention to reduce income inequality
3. Perceptions about fairness of life have also decreased, especially among the young
 - The direct health or job-related consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic do not seem to be a major cause
 - Potential drivers include perceived inequality of opportunity and discontent with measures taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic

Thank you



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Interested to know more?

- [Fairness page](#) on EU Science HUB
- Eurobarometer surveys on Fairness:
 - Main results of the 2022 survey: [Special Eurobarometer survey 529](#)
 - Main results of the 2017 survey: [Special Eurobarometer survey 471](#)
- [Webinars](#) of the Community of Practice on Fairness
- Contact us: ec.fairness.cop@ec.europa.eu