

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EUROPE

**The Unconditional Basic Income
(UBI) as a model for the future ?**

A survey by Europe & Me and
FutureLab Europe, conducted for
the Europe@debate at the
European Foundation Centre
Conference in Belfast, 7 June 2012

EUROPE & ME 

FUTURELAB
EUROPE 

1. ABOUT THE SURVEY

In April and May 2012, **Europe & Me Magazine** and **FutureLab Europe** carried out a survey among 464 young Europeans regarding their views on social justice and the idea of an unconditional basic income (UBI). For this purpose, UBI was defined as a fixed amount that every person receives every month. The exact amount, and how it changes with age, location and rising income, remained up for discussion. The UBI would be sufficiently high so that other benefit schemes (unemployment benefits, pension, etc.) could be phased out. However, everybody would receive it without conditions and could spend it at his/her discretion.

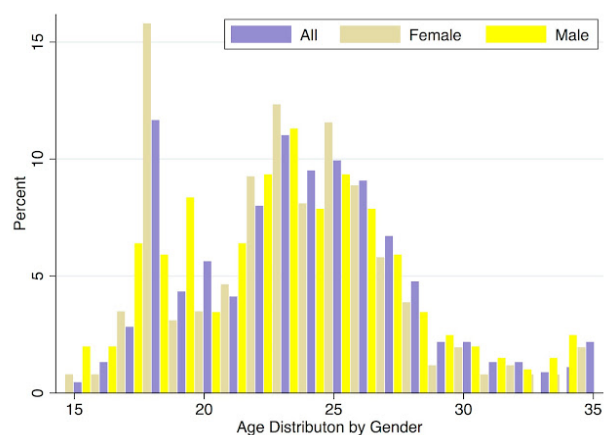
The questionnaire consisted primarily of multiple-choice questions, but also gave

the opportunity for respondents to add general comments. The data was collected through an online interface on the Europe & Me (E&M) website.

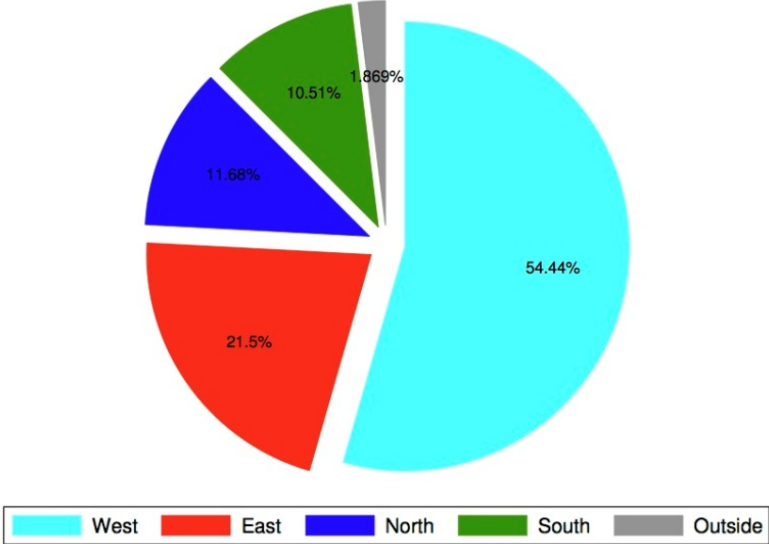
The questionnaire was promoted through the networks of the aforementioned organisations and the **Körber Stiftung**, utilising social media, newsletters, and other contacts. The results should be seen as a snapshot-view of the broader environment of the three partners. The surveyed population is not representative of any specific population and thus the results are not either. However, it provides a flavour of the views of young Europeans across the continent and beyond.

2. WHO TOOK PART IN THE SURVEY

A total of 464 young people from Europe and beyond were surveyed, of which 204 (56%) were female. The vast majority of respondents were between 19 - 28 years old.



Most respondents were Europeans from “Western” Europe, as classified by the United Nations. It is important to note that the definition of the regions in Europe does not only include EU countries. Less than 2% of respondents were non-Europeans.



Country of reference

Respondents were asked to select the country in relation to which they wished to answer the survey (this could be the country they live in or their nationality). The number of people questioned per country of reference is largely a factor of the nationalities of the networks of E&M and FLE. For instance, German respondents are numerically overrepresented in the organisations’ networks.

Occupation

occupation	% of respondents
employee	34,27
job-search	9,91
other	48,49
self-employed	7,33

The “other” category very likely includes students who are still in school or university.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of the survey show that a large majority of respondents (73%) believe that individual social welfare policy should be more harmonized in Europe. When asked whether they supported the introduction of an Unconditional Basic Income, the result was polarized: respondents were either clearly in favour or clearly against implementing a UBI. Self-employed male respondents opposed the idea of a UBI within Europe the most, while self-employed female respondents were most likely to be neutral or even in favour.

In Eastern Europe, most respondents (87%) found a UBI of 500 or less to be appropriate. In Northern and Western Europe, the majority chose an amount between € 700 - 1000 as an ideal level for a UBI, while most Europeans in the Southern region chose a slightly lower amount, between € 500 - 700.

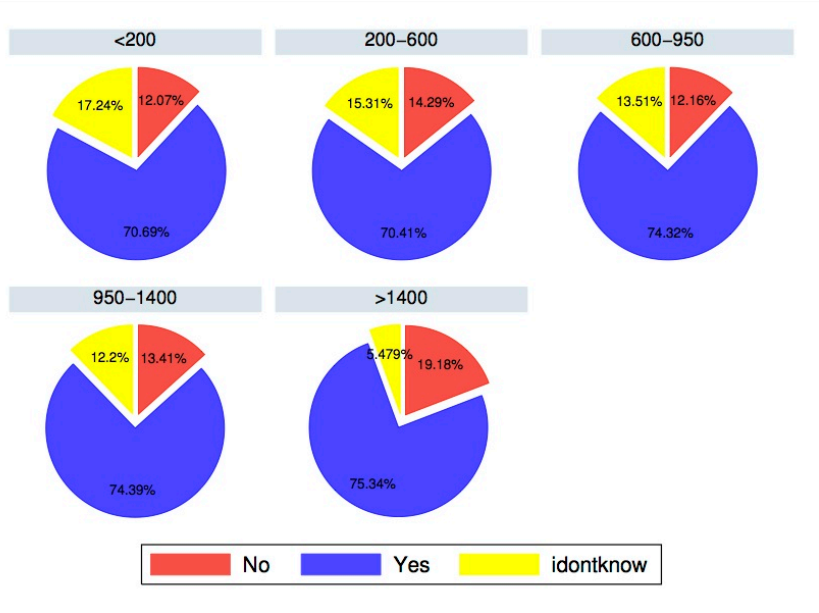
Most respondents felt that the biggest advantage of a UBI would be providing a social safety net. Hence a UBI was largely seen as a substitute for current social welfare schemes. When asked about disadvantages, most respondents were concerned that the introduction of a UBI would cause people to stop working and that it would be too expensive to finance.

When asked about their 'ideal just' distribution of wealth, most respondents opted for the 'Utopian' model which was constructed to stand in clear contrast to all other distributions, being markedly more balanced.

4. RESULTS

Question 1: Should social welfare for individuals be more harmonised within Europe?

➤ The results show that a large majority of respondents (73%) believe that individual social welfare policy should be more harmonised within Europe.



The grey bars above the pie charts relate to the monthly disposable income of respondents.

Results show clearly that the monthly disposable income of the respondents plays no apparent role in their decision-making. Over 70% of all income groups are in favour of harmonizing social welfare policy.

When given the opportunity to freely comment on the idea of harmonising social welfare policies in Europe, the spectrum of the opinions became visible:

“I think the minimum standards should be harmonised (for example, what is considered to be the minimum standard of living compared to the average standard of living in each country), but countries should still be allowed to apply higher standards.”

“The harmonisation of European social welfare policies should be done only with the accent on the poorest ones - to catch them and give them a secure option for the case of any problem which could be solved through the social welfare system. For example homeless people, orphans, handicapped people, chronically ill people, people in sudden trouble etc. It should not cover any lazy people who only speak good about

the state and society if they get some money for it. I would not like to contribute to such a system which supports people who do not contribute in any way to the wealth of the whole society, even if they could!"

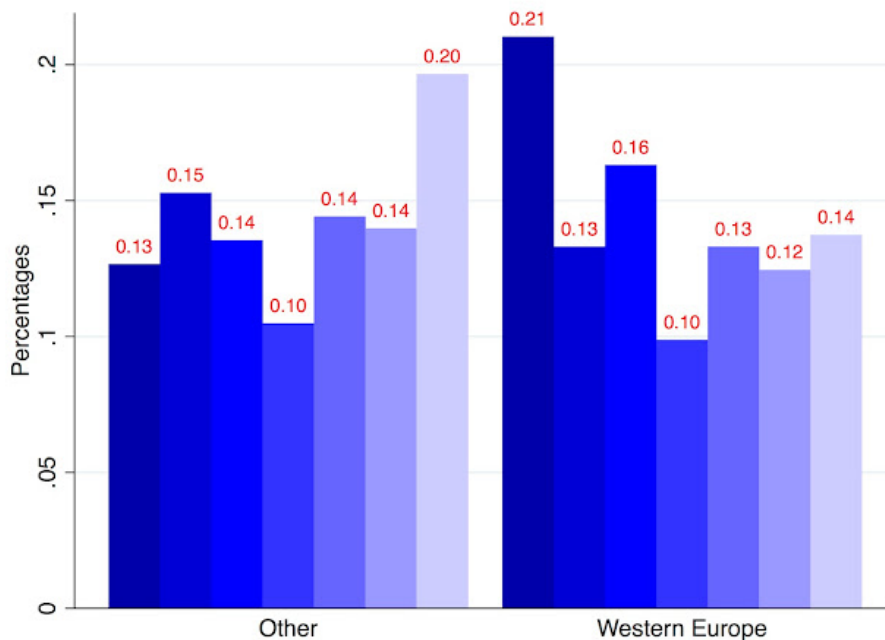
Question 2: An unconditional basic income is generally a good idea

When asked whether the introduction of a UBI is generally a good idea within Europe, results show that female respondents are more likely to be in favour of an introduction than male respondents. Regarding different regions, respondents in Western Europe were most likely to be

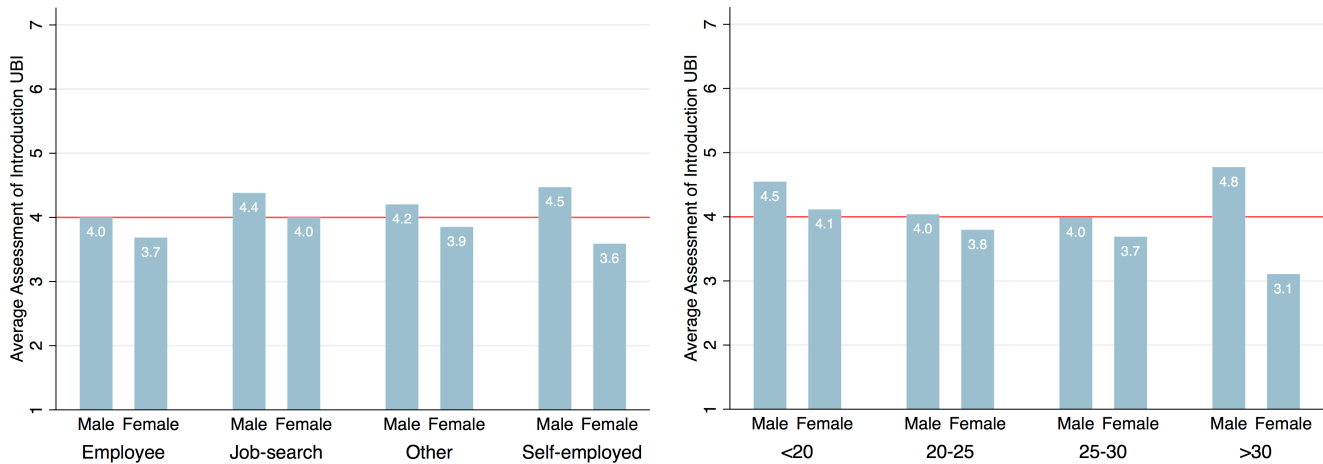
in favour of a UBI, showing a clear tendency to fully support this statement.

➤ **Overall, the answers are fairly polarised and in general respondents are either clearly in favour or clearly against implementing a UBI.**

Legend: darker colour indicates stronger support. Dark blue = "Fully support this statement", light blue = "Strongly against this statement". The figures above the bars indicate the percentages within each subgroup, expressed as a fraction.



Legend: 1= I fully support this statement, 7= I am strongly against this statement



➤ Interestingly, the results show that self-employed male respondents opposed the idea of a UBI within Europe the most, while self-employed female respondents are the most likely to be neutral or even in favour.

The results show a large divide between female and male respondents over 30, male respondents being rather opposed to the idea of a UBI and female respondents being rather in favour.

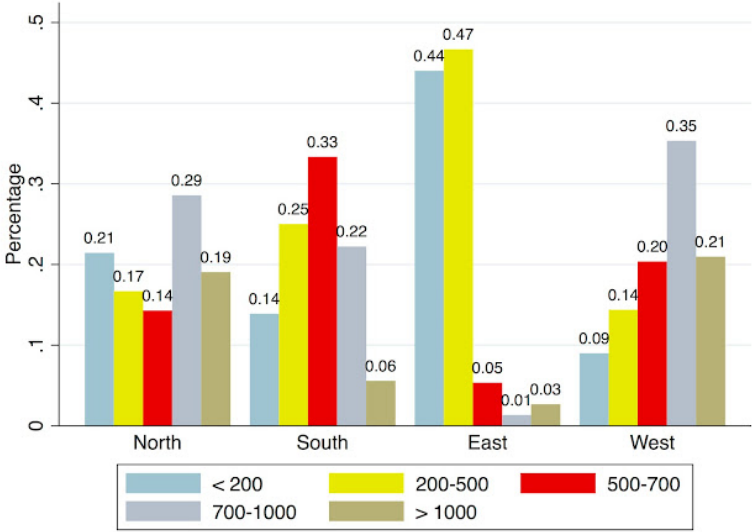
Moreover, there seems to be a clear link between one's age and one's assessment of a UBI. The older the respondent, the more in favour of a UBI he/she is. In other words, young Europeans oppose the idea of introducing a UBI more than their older counterparts. The only exceptions to this trend are males over 30, who have the most negative assessment of introducing a UBI.

“I think it is a very good idea to talk about a UBI. I believe that a UBI would help every country a lot and that is how a society should be treated: fairly. Everybody has the same conditions and nobody is superior or inferior.”

“In general, I believe that the idea of a UBI is a good opportunity for a society to become more social. But in my opinion, it is very hard to establish a fair and well-structured UBI system. Moreover, it is too expensive and could bring about different problems for the future. So, it is very important to discuss the topic very seriously.

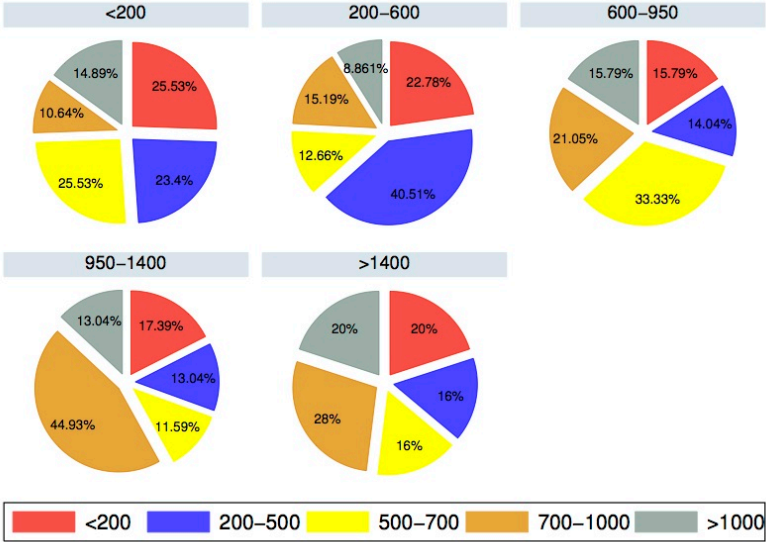
“I think it is a very bad idea - social welfare such as this proposed UBI is unsustainable by the state and by any system, you name it! Who would pay for this? The same people of course, through more and more crippling taxes, which appear to be so dear to those of a socialist mind-set.”

Question 3: If introduced, what would be an appropriate level for a UBI in your country of reference?



➤ **In Eastern Europe, most respondents (87%) found a UBI of 500 or less to be appropriate. In Northern and Western Europe, the majority chose an amount between € 700 - 1000 as an ideal level for a UBI, while most Europeans in the Southern region chose a slightly lower amount, between € 500 - 700.**

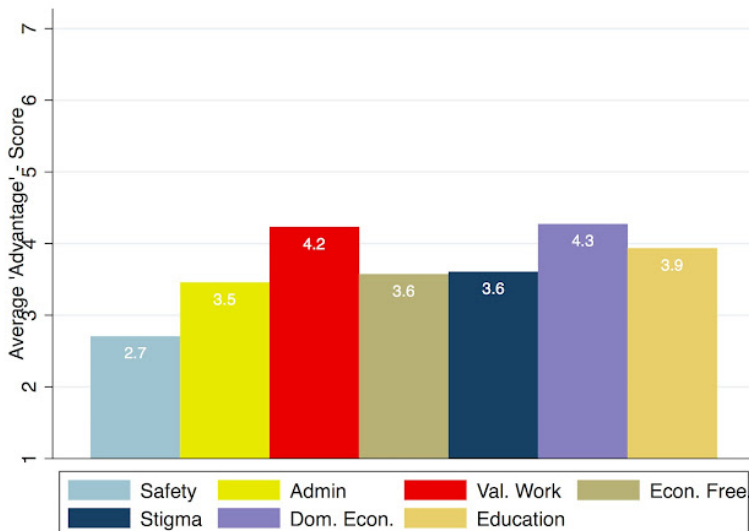
The following figure breaks down the level deemed appropriate for a UBI (in the pie charts) by classes of disposable income of the respondents (grey bars above).



Results clearly show that respondents relate their estimation for an appropriate level of a UBI to their own disposable income.

Question 4: What do you think are the biggest advantages of an unconditional basic income? Please rank.

Respondents ranked a number of possible advantages regarding an introduction of a UBI. They could choose from the following answers and write comments.



1. **Safety:** It provides a basic social safety net.
2. **Admin:** It would make the administration of the welfare system more efficient, less bureaucracy.
3. **Val. work:** With the UBI many people would do valuable work voluntarily, i.e. without receiving extra payment.
4. **Econ. Free.:** It would increase economic freedom / security and economic independence
5. **Stigma:** It would abolish the stigmatisation induced by the current welfare systems.
6. **Dom. Econ.:** It would have a positive effect on the development of the domestic economy.
7. **Education:** The general level of education would rise since children would stay longer in school.

Legend: 1= I am sure this will be the case, 7= I am sure this will not be the case

- **Most respondents felt that the biggest advantage of a UBI would be providing a social safety net. Hence a UBI is largely seen as a substitute for current social welfare schemes.**

Some of the comments made by respondents follow below:

"Unconditional income is easier to implement the more countries participate. That also reduces the immigration problem."

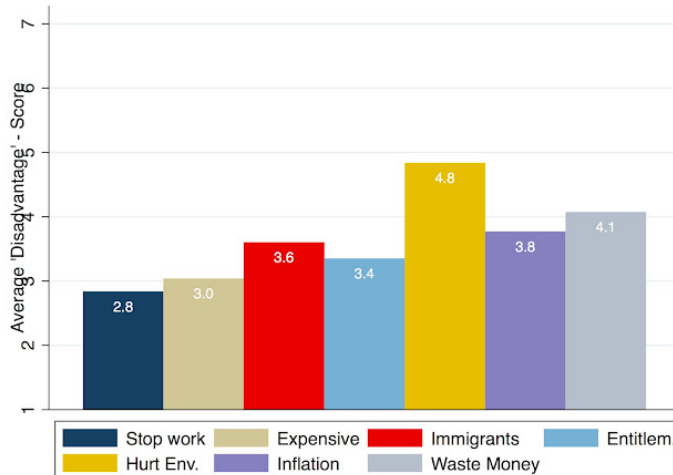
"One additional advantage is higher transparency of the benefits received by the state due to the unified money flow (in contrast to the current system that scatters benefits in different complicated ways)."

"There are some good arguments why to not pay out an unconditional income 100% in terms of money. To reduce the risk of people wasting their money (buying alcohol, drugs, instead of useful things) part of this income could be given out in terms of vouchers (for food, living). On the downside, this will of course increase transaction costs."

"It would free people from the pressure arising due to the need to choose an education or job they don't want in order to ensure a certain standard of living for their family."

Question 4: What do you think are the biggest disadvantages of an unconditional basic income?

Respondents ranked a number of possible advantages regarding an introduction of a UBI. They could choose from the following answers and write comments.



1. **Stop work:** People would work less or stop working, especially in unpleasant jobs.
2. **Expensive:** It would be too expensive to finance.
3. **Immigrants:** It would attract immigrants.
4. **Entitlement.:** It would encourage the sense of entitlement to large free benefits.
5. **Waste Money:** Money would not be spent wisely.
6. **Hurt Env.:** It could stimulate economic growth which could be harmful to the environment.
7. **Inflation:** It would cause inflation.

Legend: 1= I am sure this will be the case, 7= I am sure this will not be the case.

➤ Most respondents were concerned that the introduction of a UBI would cause people to stop working and that it would be too expensive to finance.

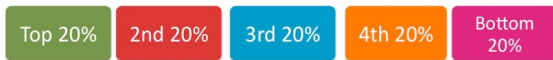
"Too expensive in this time and age. Not a good substitute for an unemployment wage as it has no conditions or requirements. Not really sure either if this entire thing would work or whether it'd be a drag on the economy."

"My main criticism is that - yes, I know times are tough and the financial crisis got to us all - giving everyone a reasonable amount of money on a monthly basis would ruin the job market, it would damage businesses, it would lead to losses for everyone in the end. If everyone would have a constant income without lifting a finger, extremely few people would work - it's communism gone lazy. The fact that they might volunteer - that really doesn't seem credible, especially for young people. Basically, I have serious doubts this kind of thing would work, although I do agree national governments are ineffective when it comes to welfare. However, it would be unfair for taxpayers to end up supporting people who don't work because they know they'll have a basic income at the end of the month."

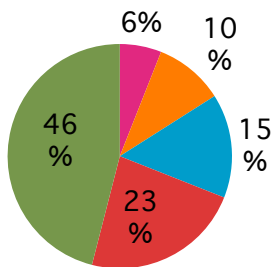
"I am against an unconditional basic income because it could not be fair in any case (especially if introduced on a European Level), I do not see a reason in paying money to people who work (not useful spending) and it is impossible to finance."

Question 6: What do you think would be a just distribution of wealth?

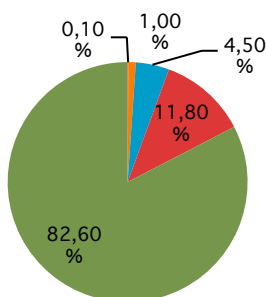
In the survey, the respondents were shown a number of pie charts that represent different distributions of wealth in different countries worldwide. The participants did *not* have any indication of the countries the charts were referring to. The only thing they were told is that each slice of the pie charts represents the proportion of wealth held by one fifth of the population in the country: the green slice, by the wealthiest fifth, the red slice by the next wealthiest etc. From altogether seven pie charts, the respondents were asked to choose what they consider to be the most just distribution of wealth as well as a distribution that they consider unjust, but still acceptable.



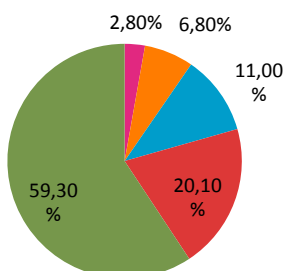
1. "Utopia" (UTO)



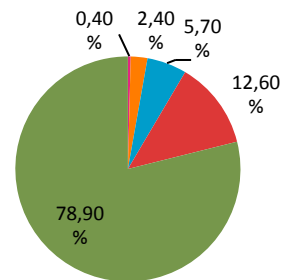
2. USA (USA)



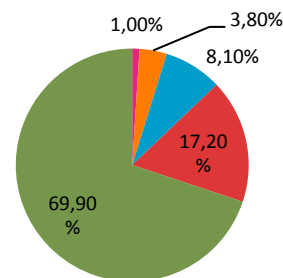
3. China (PRC)



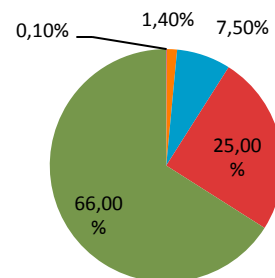
4. Indonesia (INA)



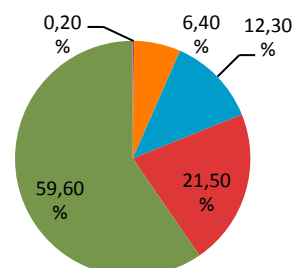
5. India (IND)



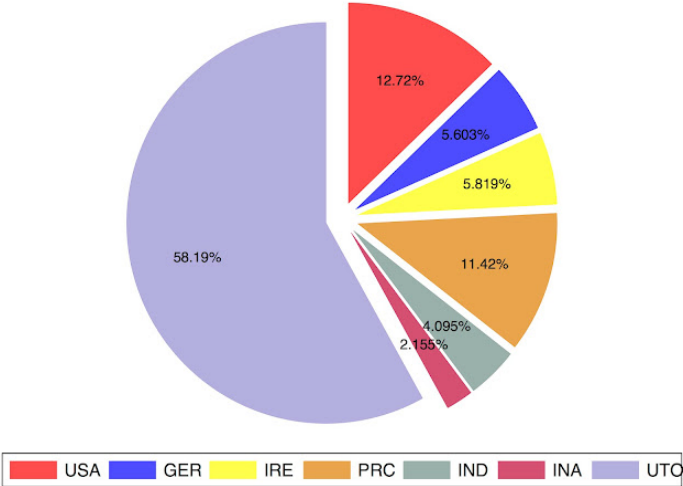
6. Germany (GER)



7. Ireland (IRE)

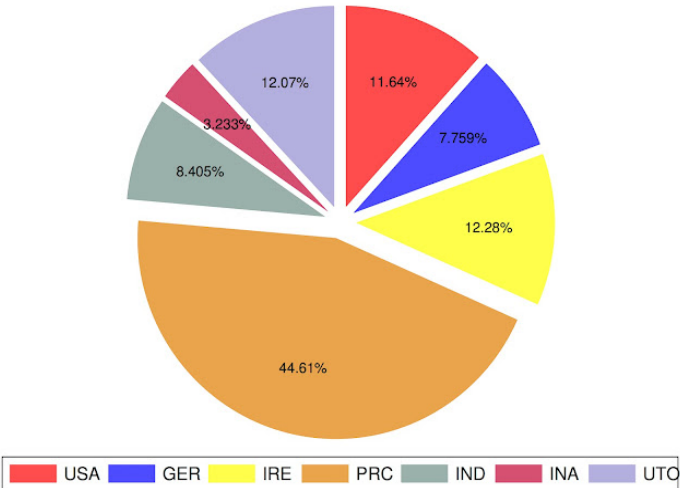


The wealth distribution of “Utopia” was constructed to stand in clear contrast to all other distributions, being markedly more balanced. All other distributions relate to Davies et. al. (2009), *The Level And Distribution Of Global Household Wealth* (<http://www.nber.org/papers/w15508>).



A: All choices overview (ideal just distribution)

➤ The Utopian wealth distribution is clearly perceived as the most just (Figure A).



B: All choices overview (marginal just distribution)

➤ In contrast, when asked which distribution would be the least acceptable while still being just, China’s distribution was chosen by the majority (Figure B).

5. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The following participants of FutureLab Europe and Europe & Me carried out the survey analysed in this report.

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About E&M

E&M is an online lifestyle magazine created by young Europeans for young Europeans. Its motto is to "make Europe personal", because Europe is often only identified with politics and bureaucracy. The magazine was founded in September 2007 and first published in July 2008, and since then the team has been writing about every possible "Europe" - the Europe of young master's students, the Europe of Chernobyl survivors, the Europe of the European Commission, the Europe of immigrants and the Europe of ex-pats.

During the last three years, the magazine has published a new issue every three months and built up an online community of more than 1500 participants. More than one hundred authors have written for the magazine. The founding team comprises eight people with six different nationalities, and the writers and readers come from twenty different countries. Editors, authors and community work together voluntarily for a common goal: to capture the feeling of a new, transnational lifestyle.

For more information read the magazine at www.europeandme.eu, or follow us on twitter [@europeandme](https://twitter.com/europeandme), or Facebook: www.facebook.com/europeandme.

About FutureLab Europe

FutureLab Europe is a programme for bright, ambitious young European professionals aged 20 to 30 who want to play an active part in shaping the future direction of Europe. With FutureLab Europe they achieve insights into European decision-making, discuss topical issues with European and national policy-makers and other stakeholders, and develop their own distinctive vision for the development of the European project. Through debates, research and interactive events they gain an understanding of, and contribute to the discussions on the future of Europe.

FutureLab Europe is a project of the European Alliance for Democratic Citizenship, affiliated to the Network of European Foundations and initiated by the Körber Foundation. It is operated by the European Policy Centre. For more information visit FutureLab Europe online at the website: www.futurelabeurope.eu, or follow us on twitter: [@FutureLabEurope](https://twitter.com/FutureLabEurope), or Facebook: www.facebook.com/FutureLabEurope.