

# digitising europe pulse

01 / 2020



## Views on the EU digital agenda

A survey of European citizens

# Study Design

## **Quantitative research**

**Method:** Online questionnaire

**Sample:** 1,000 participants in each of the following 10 EU countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden. Divided by age, gender and region.

# Executive Summary

As the new decade begins, political institutions in Europe are facing numerous challenges regarding geopolitical, economic, environmental and social developments. However, there are also innumerable opportunities for Europe that must be seized with resolve. Digitisation plays a central role in enabling the transformation to a sustainable, socially cohesive and economically competitive Europe.

Thus, the Vodafone Institute wanted to feel the pulse of European citizens: What do they expect from EU institutions, EU governments and businesses? The present publication is the first edition of the “Digitising Europe Pulse” series, which the Vodafone Institute will conduct on a quarterly basis.

The first issue of “Pulse” focuses on the expectations people have of the new European Commission. Where do they see the most pressing issues? What do they expect? How do they view policies implemented and actions taken in years past?

## The key results:

Among all policy areas **mitigating climate change is perceived as the most pressing issue (46 %)**. Europeans are highly positive about the role of technology in building progressive societies and it is regarded as key to solving a variety of societal challenges, such as fighting diseases and improving health (87 %), improving data security (86 %), securing economic growth (84 %) and financial stability (82 %) as well as mitigating climate change (79 %).

More than two-thirds of Europeans (68 %) believe that **European policy and legislation is having a positive impact on their country’s digital development**. Citizens in Hungary and Poland (75 %) were most convinced that membership in the EU is beneficial to national digital development, while people from the Czech Republic (55 %) were more sceptical of the EU’s benefit to them as member state.

**Awareness of digital policies among Europeans is also relatively high**, including GDPR (84 %), consumer protection policies (77 %) and competition and data protection fines against global tech companies (58 %). EU citizens are less aware of other policy initiatives such as the Digital Single Market (38 %) or Digital Education Plan (28 %). Given the importance of data protection for European consumers, the majority expressed a preference for having a choice between paying for online services with money or with a collection of personal data (60 %).

Around half of Europeans believe that the **EU is positioned well globally** compared to the USA and China on **consumer protection**, but only around a third considered the EU is well positioned globally on the digital economy and Artificial Intelligence. 41 % consider **China to play a leading role in the age of digital transformation** (USA: 30 %, Europe 15 %).

**Making the internet a safer place is a major concern for EU citizens**. A majority believes that the EU’s policy priorities should focus on protecting personal data (63 %), reinforcing cyber security (56 %) and tackling hate speech and fake news (51 %).

## Climate change – the most pressing challenge

What are the most pressing questions Europe must answer in the next five years? Please select the three most pressing questions.

**46**

Mitigating climate change

**35**

Addressing challenges posed by increased migration

**34**

Fighting poverty

**30**

Fighting disease and improving health

**28**

Ensuring financial stability

**23**

Securing economic growth

**19**

Fighting youth unemployment

**13**

Fighting the rise of populism

**12** Improving data security

**12**

Strengthening social cohesion

**8** Safeguarding ethics in business and society

**8** Increasing the participation of elderly people in society

**6** Increasing quality of digital education for young people

## Europeans are positive about technology's role in building progressive societies

We often talk about technology as a challenge as much as a solution to contemporary issues. Indicate for each challenge whether technology can be part of the solution.



All respondents, who regard at least one of the challenges as pressing (n=9,904). Top Two Answers (very important / important) in %.

**The role of the European Union in driving digitisation has been discussed intensively in recent years. Technology offers new solutions to contemporary problems but it also creates challenges for citizens, politics and companies. The EU faces difficult policy choices: on one hand technology needs regulation to protect privacy rights and to ensure cybersecurity. On the one hand, the EU must keep up with the accelerating digital development in Asia and the USA to remain competitive.**

**To explore the opinions of EU citizens' on these topics, the Vodafone Institute partnered with Ipsos to conduct an online survey in 10 European Union member states. The survey results have been contextualised by three EU digitisation experts.**

For Europeans, mitigating climate change is the most pressing current challenge. Other urgent questions include migration and poverty. Europeans appear less concerned when it comes to building digital skills, with the improvement of digital education seen as least important.

Europeans are positive about technology's role in building sustainable and inclusive societies. They believe that technology can play an important role in tackling societal problems, including public health issues, economic growth, unemployment and poverty. Most importantly almost eight out of 10 believe that technology is part of the solution to climate change.

## **How can technology help us tackle climate change?**

Digitisation experts Anett Numa, Christian Matt and Krzysztof Szubert suggest that technology can help users monitor their carbon footprint and "nudge" them towards responsible behaviour. Energy meters in homes or cars are a case in point: They help people understand the environmental impact of their behaviour and prompt them to use energy more carefully. Policy makers must encourage investments in the latest smart technologies to make industrial transportation and supply-chain logistics more carbon friendly. Smart technology should also become omnipresent in private homes to manage energy use.

Christian Matt: "Technology can enable or stimulate behavioural change. For example, when IT-applications make consumers explicitly aware of their use of energy, this may change their behaviour to some extent. This is only one example of how technology can be used to solve such problems. Even though it would be naïve to say that the major problem of climate change can be tackled with a single technological solution, there are many different ways in which technologies can help, and if they all work together, then we can find sustainable solutions."

## **New Social contract for digital leadership**

Europeans do not see the EU as playing a leading role in the age of digital transformation. Only 15% consider the EU to be a driver of digital innovation. China is seen to be the front-runner, clearly ahead of the USA and the European Union. However, our survey also shows that digital innovation topics, such as artificial intelligence, IoT and the development of digital skills digital skills only play a subordinate role among the Europeans surveyed.

Experts agree with the public that European innovation, once a leader of the industrial revolution, is now trailing other markets. One crucial ingredient for making the EU a driver of technological change once again is to foster cooperation between the different industries involved in digital development. Strong public-private partnerships are also cen-

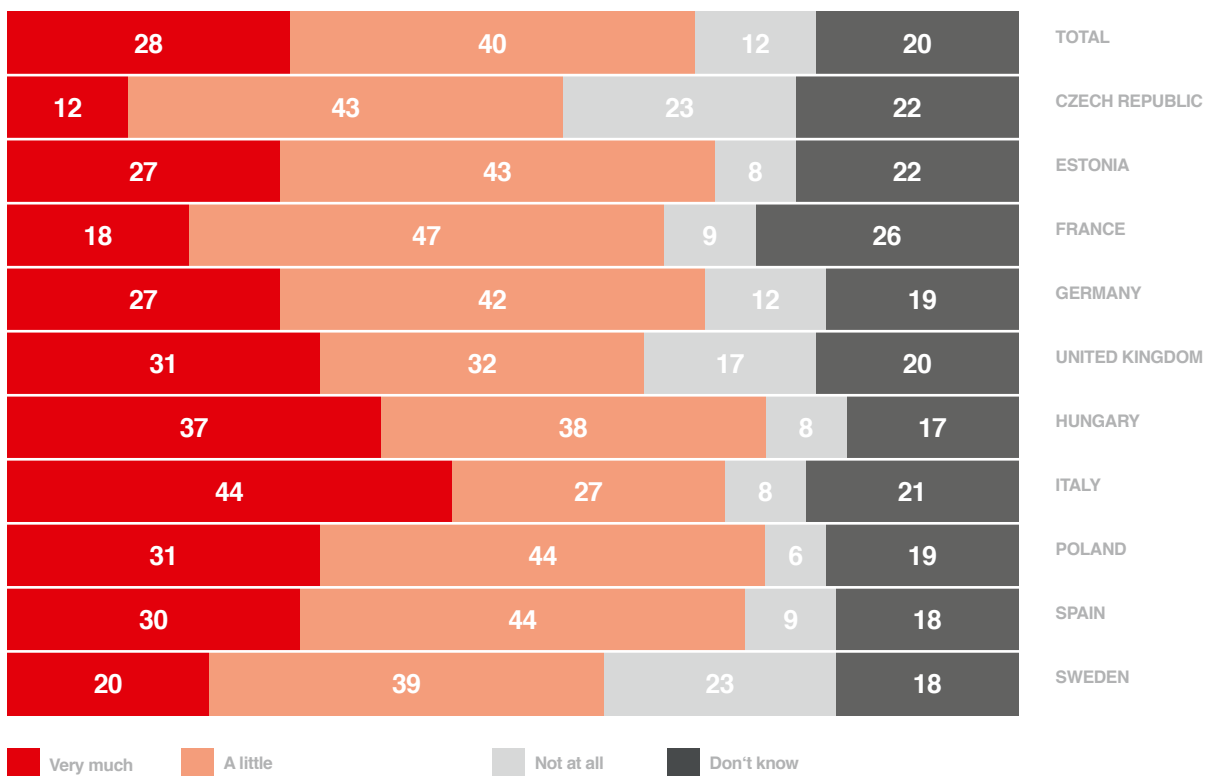
tral to success. Governments create environments in which innovation can thrive through intelligent fiscal policies and legislation – a new Social Contract based on shared values.

Experts are convinced that the European Union is in need of a common, intergovernmental digital strategy. At the moment, too much time and resources are lost to coordinating the decisions that have been taken at the national level. In order to be competitive, digital transformation in the EU must be a joint effort by all member states.

Anett Numa: “In order to progress with digital transformation, we need cooperation between different sectors. In Estonia, we have been working on building cooperation between sectors ever since the start of digitisation. All the digital solutions that the government is using were created by private companies. The government and parliament are not creating the solutions, they are buying the solutions from private companies. The EU and national governments need to start cooperating with the private and not just regulating the private sector.”

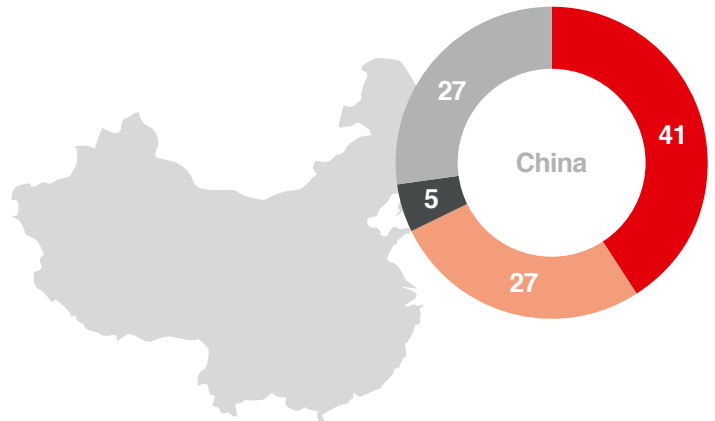
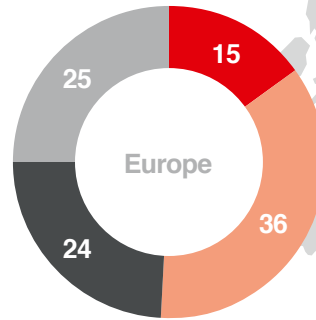
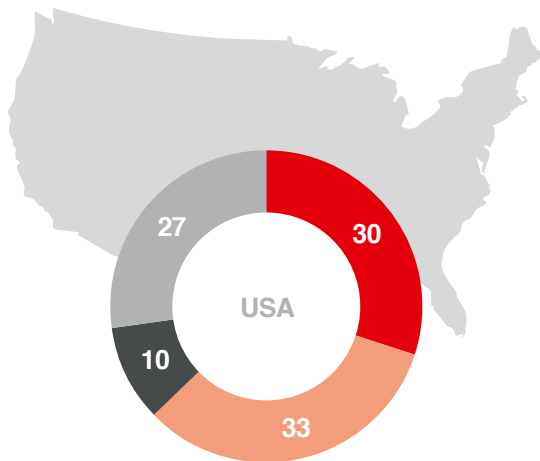
## Benefits to national digitisation strategy from European policy

Regarding digital development, do you think your country benefits from the membership in the EU?



All respondents (n=10,000). In %.

## Europe's role in the digital transformation



What role will the EU / the USA / China play in the age of digital transformation?

- It will be a driving force.
- While not the most innovative, it will remain a highly developed follower of technological change.
- If nothing is done, it will be left behind.
- Don't know

All respondents (n=10,000). In %.

Krzysztof Szubert: "What we need is a joint effort: the monitoring and implementation of one joint strategy – like the Digital Single Market Strategy – with clear coordination at the EU and state levels. The synchronisation of the EU and national funds could help a lot as well."

There are, however, areas where the EU is doing better than other markets: consumer protection and cybersecurity. Half of the Europeans surveyed believe the EU is positioned well or very well on consumer protection relative to the USA and China. Only around one in 10 Europeans thinks that the EU is doing poorly.

## Consumer protection and data protection

Consumer protection and, more specifically, personal data protection rights are major public concerns. It is here that the EU has taken a leading role since the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Christian Matt: "In several Asian countries, many people have a different attitude towards the speed at which digital technologies are integrated into society. People are a lot faster at adopting the



latest technologies there. However, this is not necessarily always a good thing. It is important to thoroughly debate certain issues, like privacy and data protection, and potentially conclude that we as a society – be it at a national or EU level – do not want to go along with certain developments that do not comply with our standards.”

Making the internet a safer place is a major concern among citizens of the European Union. Most Europeans believe that data protection should be given the highest priority, followed by cyber-security and the tackling of hate speech and fake news. There are, though, interesting differences between member states. For Estonians, reinforcing cyber-security is the most urgent issue. Estonians also see significantly more urgency when it comes to improving the population’s digital literacy.

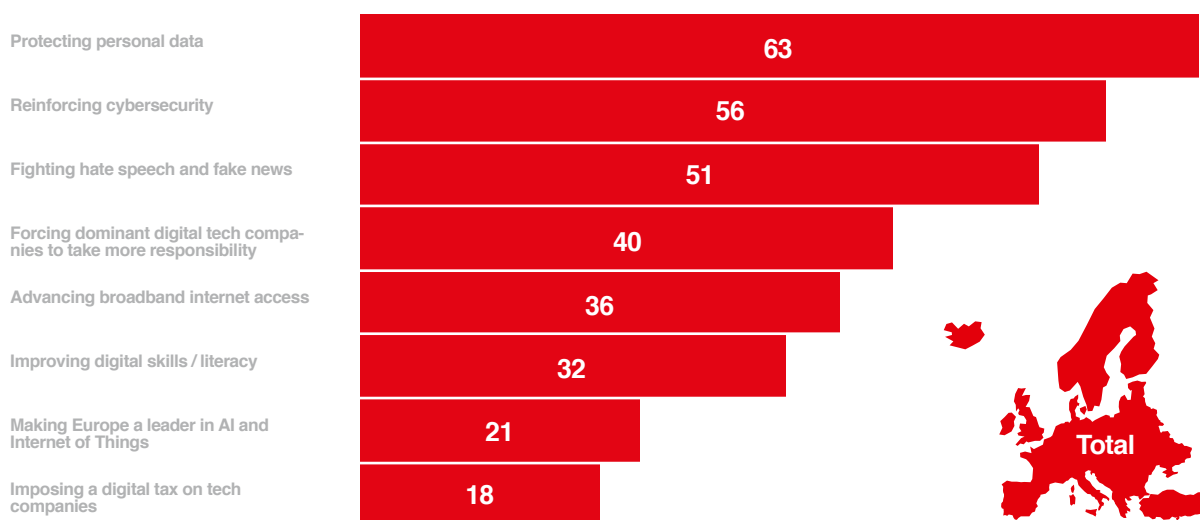
## Learning from good practice: Data protection in Estonia

Anett Numa is not surprised that Estonians are sensitive to the topic of data protection. Estonia is recognised as one of the most digitally advanced economies in Europe. The government has a strong human capital investment strategy and offers education to citizens of all ages on how to safely use technology and manage personal data.

Estonia has already digitised 99% of its public services. Guaranteeing personal data protection and preventing illegitimate access is an important prerequisite to digitise public services. That

## Data protection is a priority for Europeans

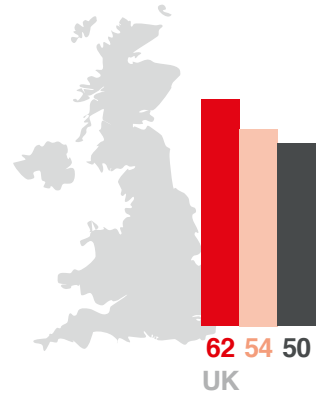
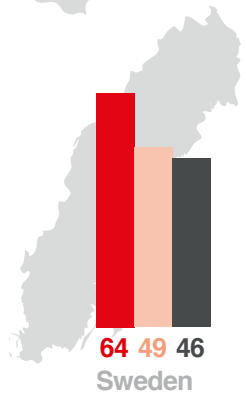
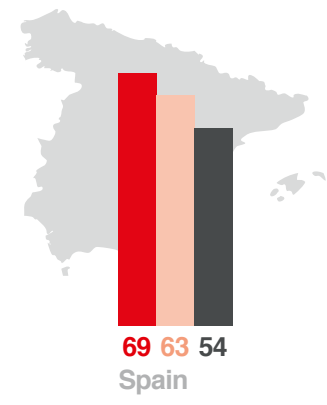
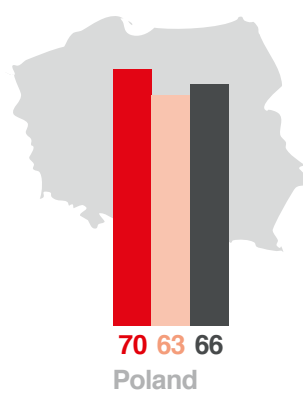
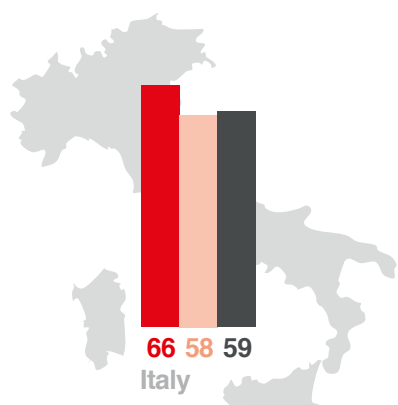
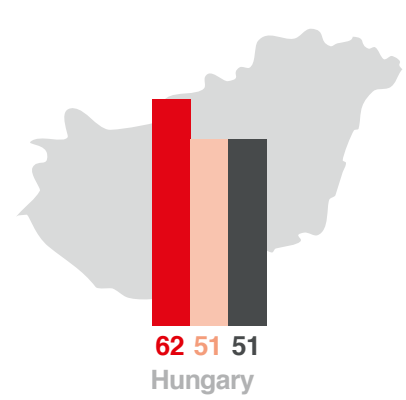
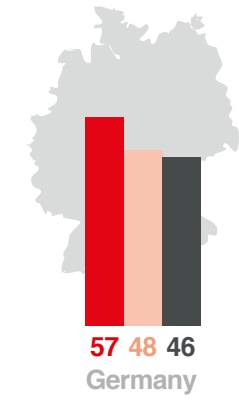
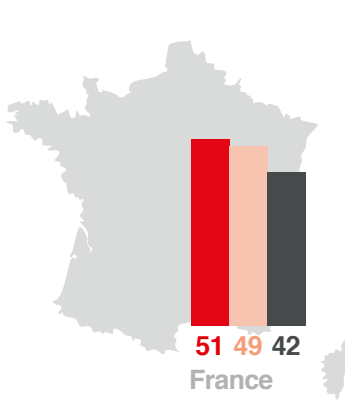
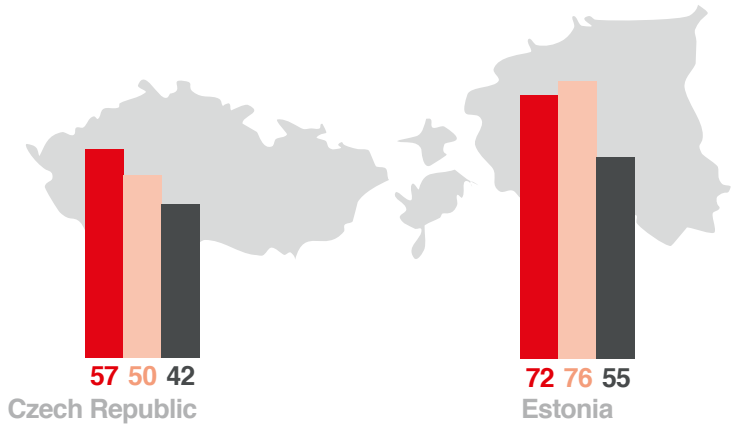
Whether it is regulation of the use of data, policing online content or investing in hard infrastructure, technological change touches on many policy areas. From your perspective, how much priority should the European Union give to the following policy areas? High priority:



All respondents (n=10,000). Top-1 Answers (high priority) in %.

Whether it is regulation of the use of data, policing online content or investing in hard infrastructure, technological change touches on many policy areas. From your perspective how much priority should the European Union give to the following policy areas?

- Protecting personal data
- Reinforcing cybersecurity
- Fighting hate speech and fake news



All respondents (n=10,000). Top one answers (high priority) in %.

is why Estonia contributed to the development of a complex data exchange interface based on a network of remote servers that every public institution must join if it collects data from citizens.

Data exchanged between government institutions must be transparent and is highly regulated by Estonian law. The Estonian system is a success story and has been exported to other countries, including Finland and Iceland.

Anett Numa: “In Estonia, power over data is in the hands of citizens. You are the owner of your own data and you are able to decide who can access what part of your data. Because the data is stored decentralized and not in the hands of one institution, we have also divided the power over that data. There should never be just one organization that stores all the information: It has to be divided.”

## Europeans want to have a choice

Europeans are using free online services such as Facebook and Google, but online service providers, and social media companies monetise personal data from users. Most European Union citizens share the belief that they should be allowed to choose whether to pay with data or with money. In France, for example, seven out of 10 online users would like to be able to decide how to pay.

Though the idea of being able to decide how to pay for online services is appealing, our digital experts do not believe that consumers would actually opt in for monetary payments. Consumers are too used to using free services and being blissfully unaware of what is done with their data for a transparent choice model to be a realistic and viable option.

Christian Matt: “Although sensitivity for privacy issues has increased in recent years, we know from research that consumers’ actual willingness to pay for

privacy-friendly services is rather low, which makes it difficult for companies to introduce paid services. Offering an additional “paying for privacy” option might also be difficult to communicate to potential customers, since they might question what kind of “evil” things the online service would do with their data should they opt to pay with their data. This transparency might put consumers off using the service altogether, making this business model unprofitable.”

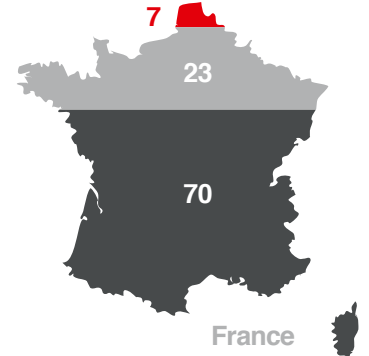
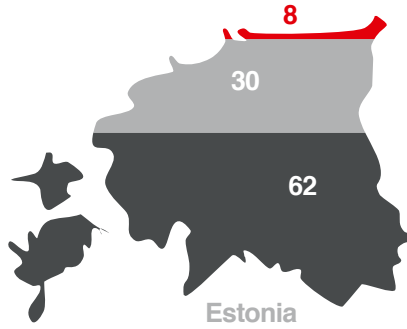
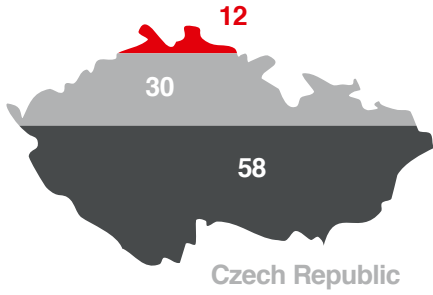
## GDPR: High awareness and support

The EU digital policies that are best known to Europeans are the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Consumer Protection Regulation. Furthermore, a majority of those EU citizens who are familiar with these policies is also supportive of them. This makes sense given that data protection and cybersecurity are seen as pressing issues anyway. In summary: People find the protection of data privacy to be necessary, they see that something is being done and they are supportive.

## Digital Education Plan under the radar

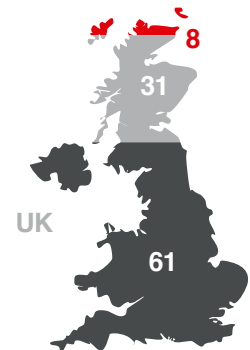
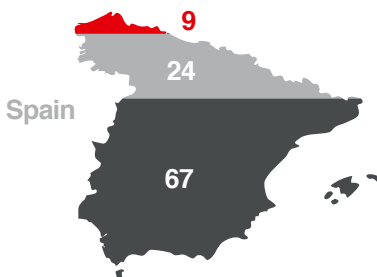
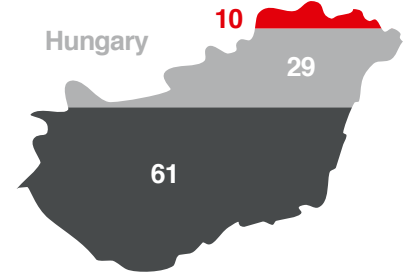
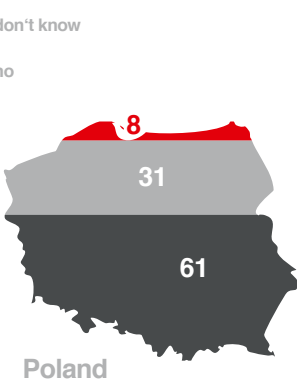
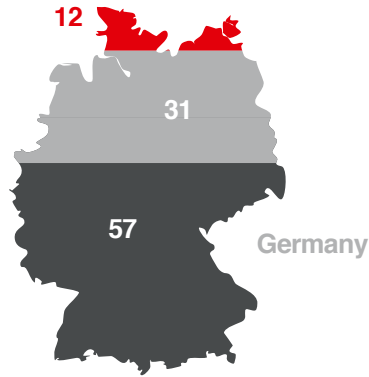
Other equally important European policy initiatives remain under the radar. Equipping citizens with digital skills is crucial, and the Digital Education Action Plan is an important step in this direction. The policy is designed to increase digital literacy from a young age, starting in schools. But it also aims to make strategic investments in researching artificial intelligence.

Krzysztof Szubert: “People are still not equipped well enough with digital skills and – even worse – they are still not sufficiently aware of the importance of digital skills for their future, including professional careers. Digital education should always be very high on the EU agenda.”



## Consumers want the choice between paying for online services with money or with data

Personal data can be used to make companies' services more efficient and customer-oriented. However, users "pay" for the usage of many online services and applications by providing their personal data. Should policymakers regulate companies offering these products by ensuring that consumers have a choice between either paying for online services with money or with their personal data?



All respondents (n=10,000). Top One Answers (high priority) in %.

Christian Matt: “Highly qualified people will continue to be the essential backbone when it comes to mastering the challenges of digital transformation in the EU. The rapid technological change implies a high necessity for lifelong learning. Taking actions to ensure that such education efforts do not stop when high school or university ends, but are rather implemented as an ongoing process, should be part of policymakers’ agendas.”

People see the positive impact of European legislation on their countries. Almost seven out of 10 Europeans think

that their country’s digital development benefits from EU membership. Experts agree that European Union-level strategies are hugely beneficial to member states’ digital development. Herein lies the real potential of the European market.

Anett Numa: “Countries that may not currently have digitisation and consumer protection regulations very high on their agenda benefit from decisions that are made at the EU level. Still, the European Commission should pay even more attention to helping its members advance digitisation.”



## Europe is seen as a leader in consumer protection and environmental technology

Compared to the US and China, how well positioned do you believe the EU is when it comes to the following areas? (Bars show: “very well“ and “well“)

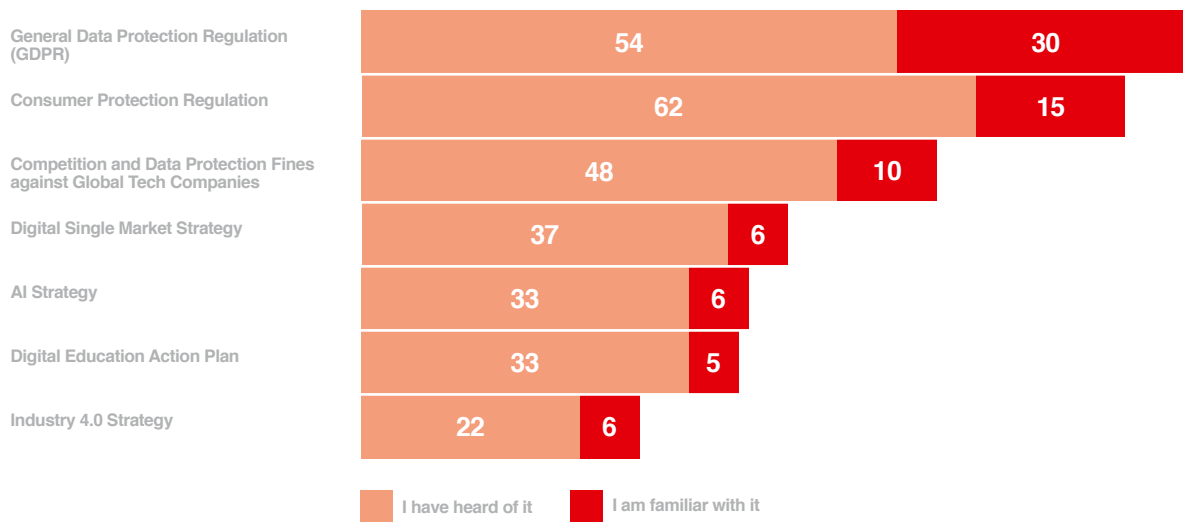


All respondents (n=10,000). Top Two Answers in %.

# Europeans support GDPR and consumer protection regulations

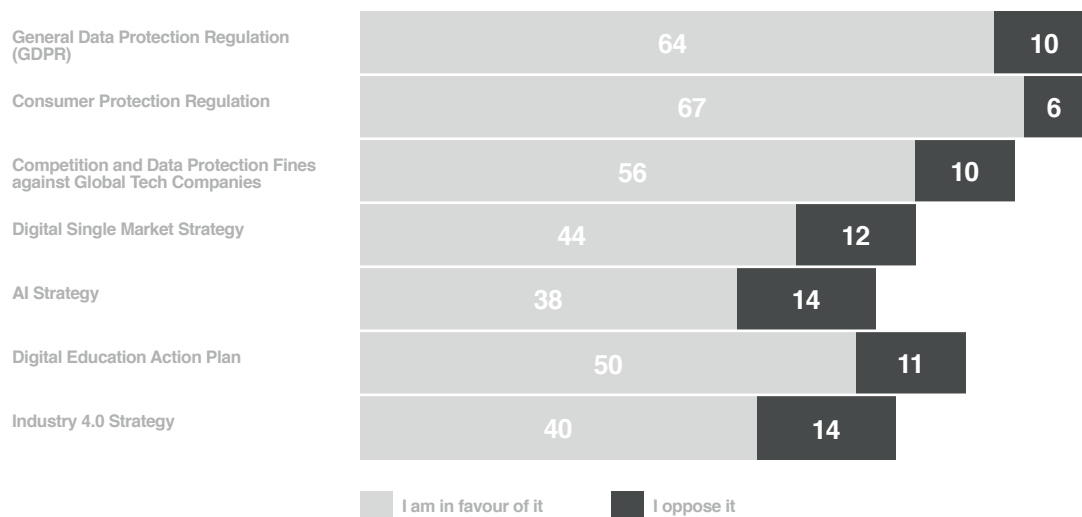
In the past five years, the European Commission has prepared a series of European digital policies. Please indicate for each of the following whether whether...

...you have **heard of it** or are **familiar with it**?



All respondents (n=10,000). In %.

If you are sufficiently familiar, would you say you are in favour of it, **oppose it**?



Respondents who have at least heard of the respective policy. In %.





# Experts

The quantitative findings were discussed by the following three digitisation experts.



## **Anett Numa**

is a Speaker at the e-Estonia Briefing Centre and consults international policy and decision makers on the Estonian digitisation experience. She also works on enhancing the cooperation between public and private sectors to support digitisation processes.



## **Christian Matt**

is Professor of Information Systems at the University of Bern, Switzerland. His research focuses on corporate digital transformation and digital value creation, as well as digital customer interfaces and experiences. In particular, he is fascinated by the socio-technical phenomena and the effects that digital technologies and increasing data have on firms and society alike.



## **Krzysztof Szubert**

holds a position as Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Technology and Global Affairs at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. He is Former Secretary of State / Deputy Minister of Digital Affairs of the Government of Poland and Government Plenipotentiary for the Digital Single Market.

# Imprint

## Authors

**Inger Paus** (Managing Director, Vodafone Institute)

**Friedrich Pohl** (Head of Communications, Vodafone Institute)

**Dr. Robert Grimm** (Director Public Affairs, Ipsos)

**Alexandra Schoen** (Senior Researcher, Ipsos)

**Lea van Nek** (Junior Researcher, Ipsos)

## Editor

**Vodafone Institute for Society and Communications**

Behrenstraße 18

10117 Berlin

Germany

## Chairman of the Advisory Board

**Joakim Reiter**

## Board of Directors

**Inger Paus, Thomas Holtmanns**

## Design Concept

**Nordpol+ Hamburg**

**Agentur für Kommunikation GmbH**

## Design

**Nick Böse**

## Photos

**Mike\_Kiev** (via iStock)

**edhar** (via iStock)

**Andrey Suslov** (via iStock)

**alvarez** (via iStock)

**edhar** (via iStock)

## Print

**LASERLINE GmbH**

**[www.vodafone-institut.de](http://www.vodafone-institut.de)**

Twitter: [@vf\\_institute](https://twitter.com/vf_institute)

LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/vodafone-institute/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/vodafone-institute/)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/VodafoneInstitute](https://www.facebook.com/VodafoneInstitute)