

# EU solidarity in times of Covid-19<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** European solidarity is in high demand as the Covid-19 pandemic delivers a deep and asymmetric shock to EU economies and societies. Will there be sufficient supply? The European Council meeting of 17-21 July has agreed on a historic €750bn EU recovery fund. Yet, it has also exposed deep rifts among governments about the appropriate level and scope of European solidarity. The success of the agreement ultimately depends on voter attitudes. Will they support – and pay for – European solidarity or will they oppose it? We use new survey evidence (April 2020) to assess public support for European solidarity in 13 EU member states and the UK. Our analysis yields a number of important findings: support for solidarity varies by geographical distance, by issue, and by the perceived net-benefit to the own country; support is motivated by expectations of reciprocal benefit rather than feelings of moral obligation or common identity; in terms of instrumentation, most respondents prefer permanent EU arrangements of risk and burden sharing to ad hoc mutual assistance; a relative majority of respondents prefers a Europe that protects to a market Europe or a global Europe aspiring to international leadership.

## 1. Solidarity: high demand but short supply

What's new? In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, European solidarity is in high demand, bringing back haunting memories – a *déjà vu* if there ever was one – from the 2010-2015 eurozone sovereign debt crisis and the 2015-2016 migration crisis, when the supply of solidarity remained meagre at best. Practically overnight, European institutions, from the Schengen open border agreement to the single market have come under siege. The freedom of movement was suspended, first by Austria and then by 21 more EU member states. The spread of the pandemic brought havoc first to Italy and Spain and then to Germany, the Netherlands and other member states. It exposed economic divergences that had been hidden behind the veil of a timid recovery in recent years. Some member states were much better placed to fight the downturn with discretionary fiscal measures than others, thus reinforcing the contentious quest for European solidarity.

Trying times for EU solidarity, but there are silver linings too. Compared to the eurozone crisis, when EU leaders wavered to do the bare minimum to keep the EU together and to save the euro, the coronavirus crisis response proved more expedite and better coordinated. The ECB moved fast to contain interest rate spreads in the Eurozone in March. The member states agreed on a loan-based first aid package of

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<sup>1</sup> An [earlier version of this article](#) was published in mid-July as a Policy Brief, before the EU leaders reached a deal on July 21<sup>st</sup> on the bloc's long-term budget and economic recovery fund after four days of intense negotiations.

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540 billion Euros in April. In July, they passed an EU recovery package of 750 billion Euros, a large part of which is grants-based. While some have hailed this as a breakthrough towards more European solidarity, the fraught negotiations also revealed the divisiveness of the issue among government leaders anxious to keep their voters happy. But how critical are voters really? When do they support and when do they oppose solidarity with other member states and why?

Our analysis is based on the third iteration of the EUI-YouGov survey on Solidarity in Europe. The survey covers 13 EU member states and the UK<sup>4</sup>. It was conducted in April 2020 at the height of the Corona pandemic in Europe. As in earlier (2018, 2019) renditions of the survey, it explores how support for European solidarity varies by issue (solidarity for what?), instrument (solidarity how?) and by member state (solidarity by whom for whom?). In addition, the 2020 survey contains questions on the ‘kind of society’ and the ‘kind of Europe’ citizens wish to live in. The dataset is available for download in Open Access from the EUI research repository [through this link](#).

## 2. The multi-dimensional political space of (European) solidarity

*Solidarity as insurance.* Organized solidarity provides the members of a community with an insurance mechanism against ‘bad luck’. This allows individual members to accept more risk, thereby enabling the group as a whole to pursue more ambitious goals and to more effectively defend its community cohesion under conditions of adversity. That is the overriding advantage of solidarity. Yet, this advantage only materializes in the long run and before the victims of bad luck are known. Once the veil of ignorance is lifted, and the identity of the victims is revealed, there are also short-run problems (as highlighted in the [2018 report](#)):

- i. Solidarity is costly. It requires that group members pass some of their own physical, financial, human or organizational resources to other members of the community in order to improve the well-being, or reduce the suffering of these other members. Solidarity involves sharing in a real, that is material sense. In the short-run this may be perceived as a net-loss rather than a beneficial insurance premium for the long-run.
- ii. Solidarity is uneven. Solidarity involves transfers from better-off to less well-off members of the community. The transfers are zero-sum, at least in the short term. They flow from good risks to bad risks, from givers to takers, from net-contributors to net-beneficiaries with no immediate compensation. This may give rise to perceptions of inequity and unfairness.
- iii. Solidarity breeds the suspicion of *moral hazard*. Solidarity unburdens actors from the need to self-protect against bad risks. This may induce careless or even openly exploitative and fraudulent behaviour that elicits unnecessary bad risks, i.e. risks that could have been avoided through appropriate self-protection, and this further increases the costs of solidarity. Even when victims act with all appropriate care, the sheer suspicion of carelessness can lead to distrust and denial of solidarity.

There are solutions to each of these problems but they are ambiguous. To reduce the costs of solidarity, risk should be put on many shoulders. Hence, the risk pool should be relatively large. To avoid the same actors always ending up at the paying-end of the solidarity relation, the risk pool should be

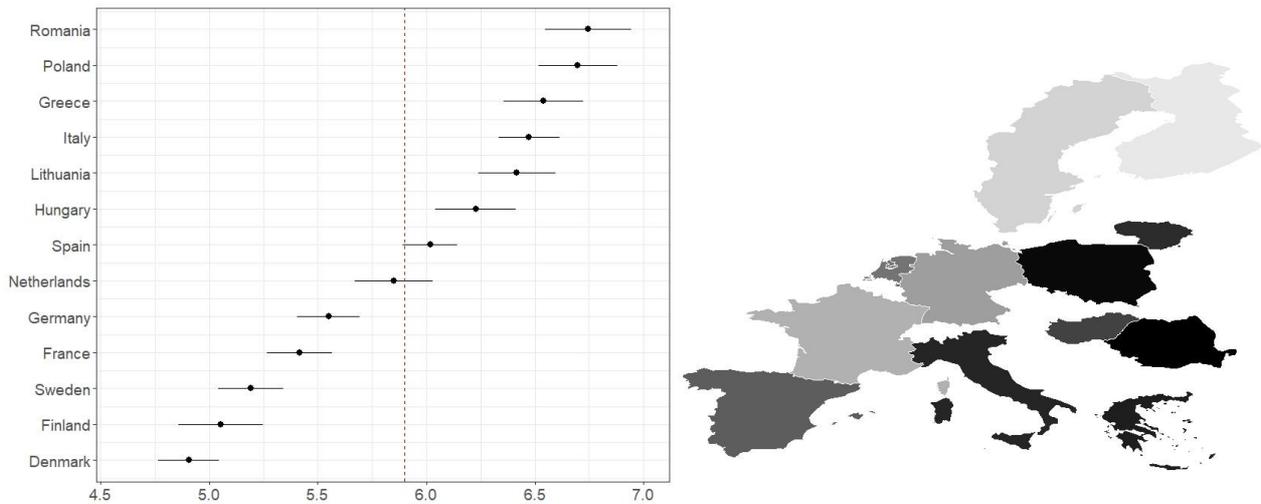
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<sup>4</sup> Total sample size was 21779 adult respondents (2151 from the UK, 2014 from Denmark, 1005 from Finland, 2033 from France, 2004 from Sweden, 1007 from Greece, 1032 from Hungary, 2021 from Italy, 1013 from Lithuania, 1136 from the Netherlands, 1012 from Poland, 1017 from Romania, 2281 from Spain). Fieldwork was undertaken between 17<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The survey was carried out online. All figures are based on data taken from the YouGov survey.

heterogeneous so as to increase the chances of turn-taking in solidary giving and taking. Yet, to reduce (the suspicion of) moral hazard, the risk pool should be small and homogeneous. People tend to trust people who are like them because they have more scruples before betraying their own kind. The EU is large and its societies are diverse. This makes European solidarity potentially very rewarding for all, but also very fragile. Does European solidarity exist?

*European solidarity is real.* In the EUI-YouGov survey, we ask respondents on a 0-10 scale whether they think national governments should spend national resources only on their own country and the welfare of their own people or also on other EU countries and other people. We summarize the answers in Figure 1. The figure shows the country averages (left-panel) and maps these averages geographically (right-panel). It shows two fairly coherent regional clusters: the least resourceful South-Eastern bloc of countries shows more willingness to pay for others, whereas the more resourceful North-Western bloc shows less willingness to pay. Support levels in the North-Western group fall below the European average (represented by the vertical dashed line) whereas the seven South-Eastern countries in our sample are above average. This chimes with the entrenched divisions in the European Council between Northern creditors and Southern debtors, the ‘Frugal Four’ and the ‘Friends of Cohesion’. Note, however, that the European average is fairly high and the spread around the average is fairly compressed. General support for solidarity varies from moderate (an average of 5 for Denmark) to moderately-high (average 7 for Romania). Hence, the overall picture is quite positive.

**Figure 1 – Support for spending national resources on other EU countries.**

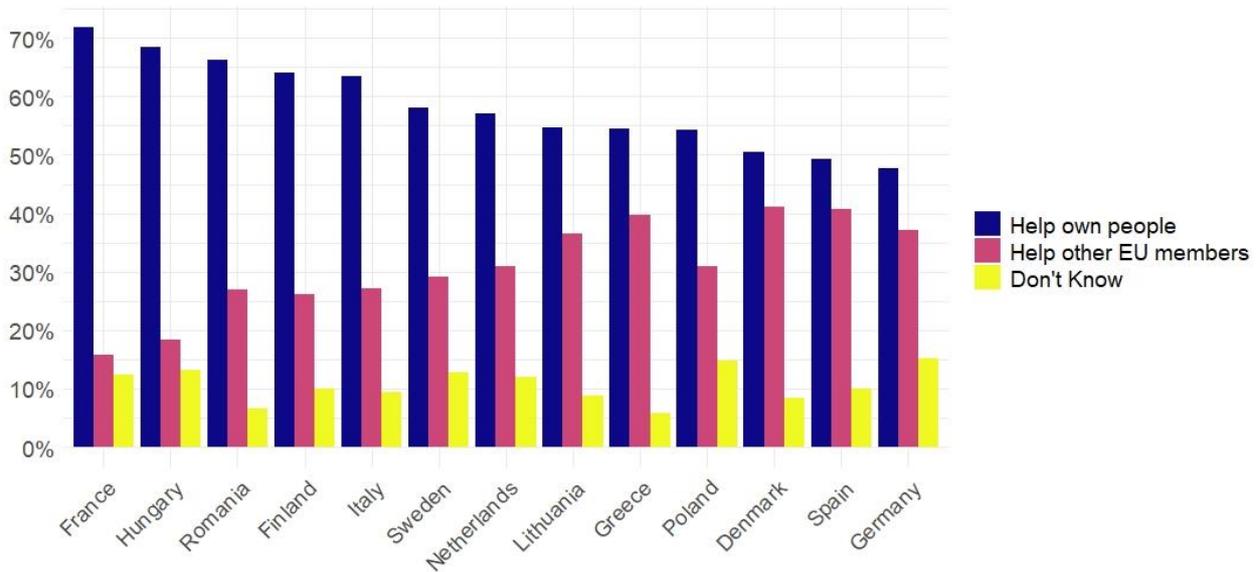


The **left-panel** represents country averages with 95% confidence intervals. The **right-panel** represents the European map, where darker colours express more support for solidarity. The **survey question** is: “Some people think that the member states of the European Union should mostly spend their resources on their own countries and the welfare of their own people. Other people think that the member states of the European Union should pool their resources and spend them on all countries and all people across the whole of the European Union. What about you – on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘Spending resources only on your own country and your own people’, and 10 means ‘Spending resources equally on all countries and all people in the European Union’, where would you put your opinion?”

*Solidarity is national first.* Next, we ask respondents whether they prefer their taxes to be spent on helping country nationals or also on helping other European citizens. Here, a different picture emerges (figure 2): There is not a single member state, in which a majority of respondents supports spending national tax revenue also on the citizens of other EU member states. Apparently, respondents are more willing to share with other European countries if asked about government resources in general (as in the

previous question) than if asked about their own taxes in specific (as in the present question). In the tax frame, respondents clearly favour solidarity with country nationals first. Other Europeans come second.

Figure 2 – Using taxes to help other countries.

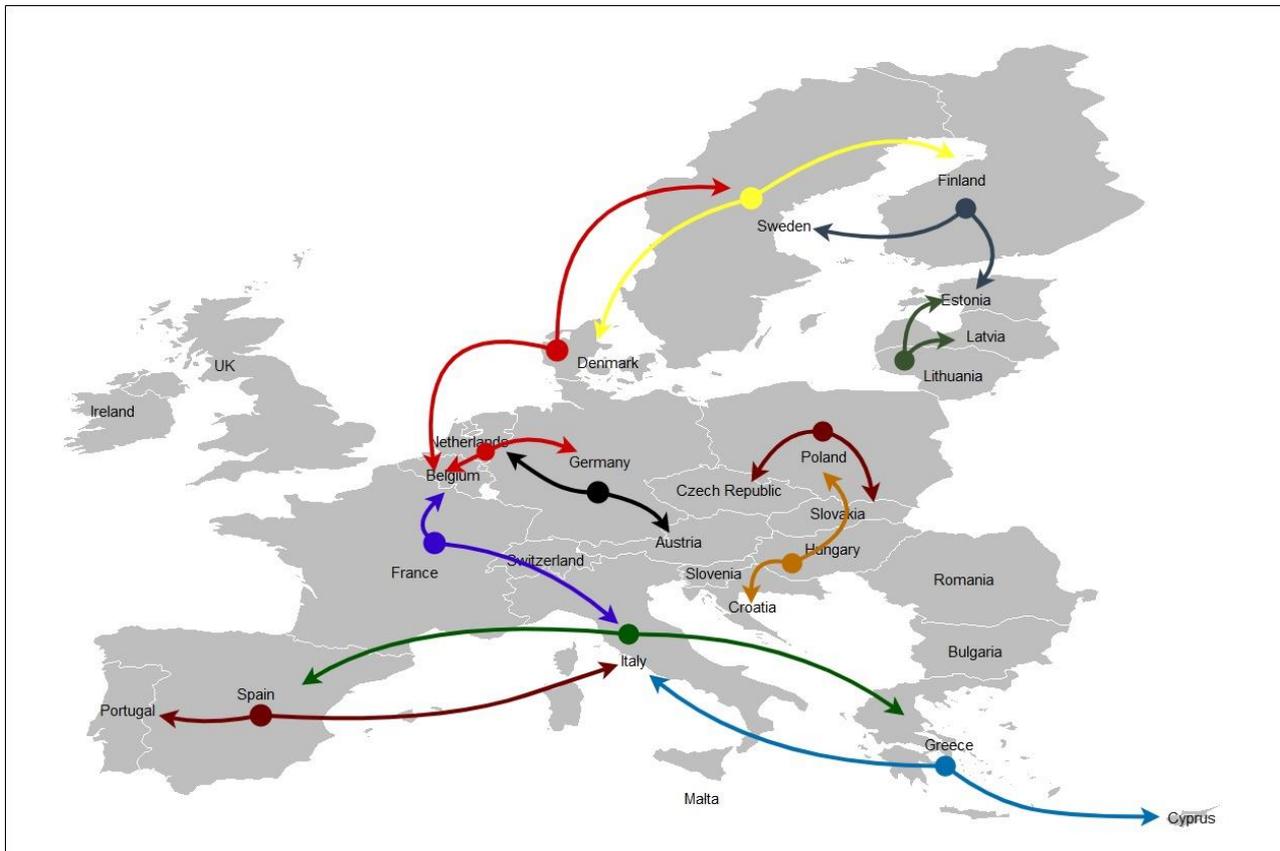


The Y-axis represents the % of respondents who answered 'help own people' and 'help other EU members', including 'don't know'. The X-axis represents survey countries. The survey question is: "Which statement comes closer to your view...?" The possible answers are: "I would prefer all of my taxes to be spent on helping the people of [country]", 'I would prefer some of my taxes to be spent on helping people in other countries in the European Union', or 'Don't know'

Interestingly, the top five countries in terms of support for spending tax revenue outside national borders are Denmark, Spain, Greece, Germany and Lithuania, i.e. countries from both the EU's South-East and North-West. On the 'selfish' extreme, we find France, Hungary, Romania, Finland and Italy. Again, this is a mixed group. This finding is at odds with the Northern frugality v. Southern lavishness narrative. Apparently, the North-West and South-East are less cohesive groups than often assumed. We come back to this below.

Solidarity decreases with geographical distance. In the survey, we also investigate which countries respondents are most willing to help: do Europeans feel more solidaristic with those who are most in need of assistance or with those closer to their own national borders? To find out, we listed 33 countries – from Europe and beyond – and asked respondents about their willingness to offer financial assistance to them in case of a major crisis. Figure 3 below shows a distinct proximity bias: Europeans are most willing to help adjacent rather than distant EU member states. Take for example the three Scandinavian countries. Swedish respondents are more willingness to help Finland (first) and Denmark (second) than any other country on the list. In return, Danes support Swedes (second) and Fins (third). By the same token, Finnish respondents are willing to help Sweden (second) and Denmark (third) after neighbouring Estonia. In Southern Europe, we observe a similar proximity bias: Italian, Spanish, and Greek respondents prefer helping each other to supporting more distant member states such as Sweden or Denmark.

Figure 3 – Solidarity with whom?



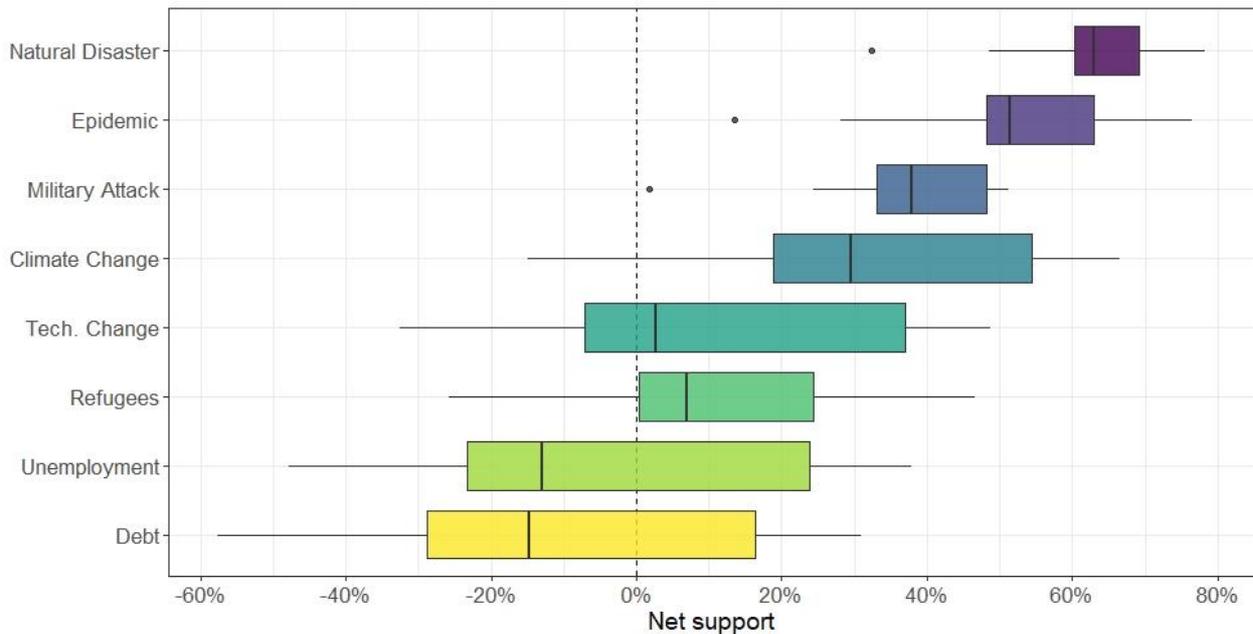
The figure represents the top 2 choices of respondents from 12 EU countries. The arrows start in the survey country; they point to the top two countries chosen by the respondents. The **survey question** is: “Imagine a country suffered some kind of major crisis, and was looking for help from others. Do you think [country] should or should not be willing to offer financial help to each of the following countries?” Possible answers are ‘Should be willing to help’, ‘Should not be willing to help’, or ‘Don’t know’.

We also find a negative Brexit-effect: The willingness to render financial assistance to the UK is very low across the EU member states in our sample. For example, the UK comes last for Spanish and Greek respondents, even after non-European countries like Tunisia, Columbia, and Vietnam. Likewise, the UK comes as the second-to-last option for Italian and German respondents, third-to-last for France, fourth-to-last for Finland, and fifth-to-last for Romania. Interestingly, Britons are more willing to help non-European Canada and distant Malta and Cyprus than neighbouring France or Ireland.

*European solidarity is strongest for exogenous shocks.* Which issues elicit the strongest feeling of European solidarity? We ask respondents whether or not their own home state should help other EU member states suffering from eight different types of crises: natural disaster, pandemic, military attack, climate change, technological backwardness, refugee inflows, high unemployment, and high debt? Figure 4 below summarizes the results. As it shows, Europeans are more prepared to help others deal with ‘exogenous’ shocks (i.e. shocks that are commonly perceived as being caused by factors beyond government control) than with ‘endogenous’ problems of the national economy (i.e. shocks that are commonly associated with wrong policy choices and government mistakes). Natural disasters and pandemics elicit the strongest support while national debt crises and high unemployment receive the least support (see also the [2018 report](#)). Also, there is much less cross-national variance in support for the former two types of crisis (indicated by small boxes and short whiskers) than for the latter two (Large boxes and long whiskers). In other words, there is more cross-national agreement that disasters and pandemics deserve

solidarity than debt crises. These findings indicate considerable support for European solidarity on a range of salient issues, including the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and (to a lesser extent) technological change. That is the good news. The bad news is the low level and wide dispersion of support for debt relief and unemployment solidarity – both issues that are central to post-Covid-19 recovery.

Figure 4 – Net-support for solidarity by issue.



The **X-axis** represents the difference between the % of respondents willing and not willing to help with each of eight different crises. The **Y-axis** represents the eight crises, from the most to the least supported. The **vertical zero-line** (dashed) represents equal share of respondents willing and not willing to help. The **survey question** is: “Imagine another country in [Europe/ the European Union] is suffering a [crisis]. Do you think [country] should or should not provide any major help?” Possible answers are ‘Yes, [country] should provide major help’, ‘No, [country] should NOT provide any major help’, or ‘Don’t know’.

In sum, the evidence shown so far demonstrates that European solidarity exists, yet only as a ‘second order’ solidarity after national solidarity is secured for. The solidarity among member state populations decreases with geographical proximity and varies substantially across issues.

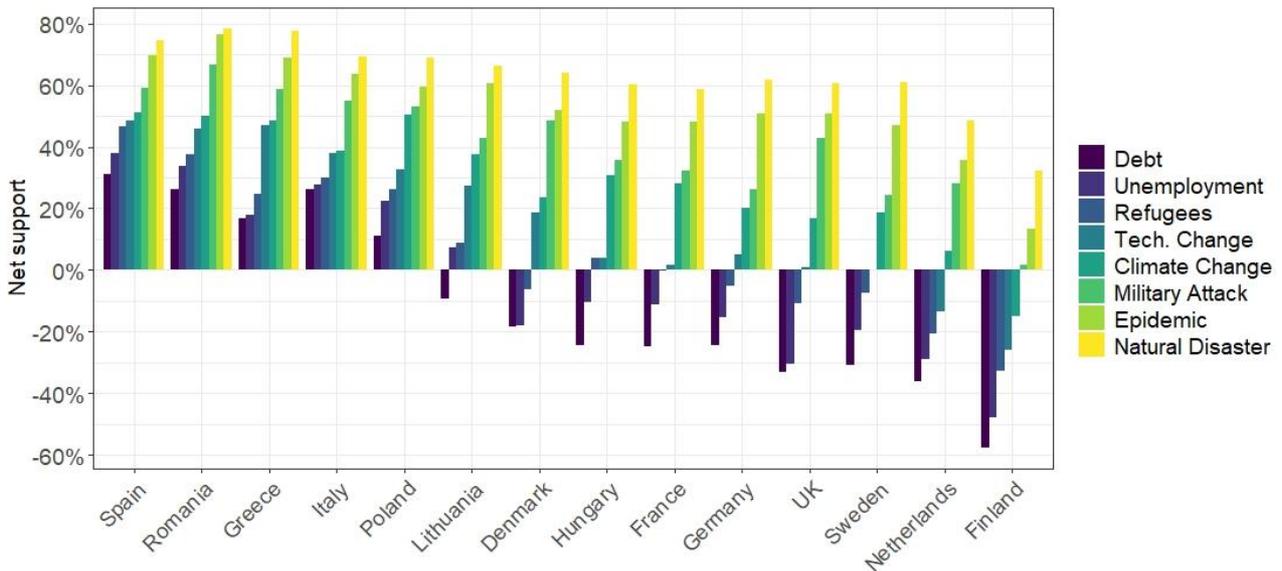
### 3. The ‘moral hazard’ conundrum in perspective

*Solidarity and moral hazard.* It is often taken for granted that the main obstacle to effective EU solidarity is the deep divide between a rich bloc of North-Western member states, including Scandinavian Denmark, Sweden, Finland, alongside Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, and a group of relatively poor South-Eastern member states, including Italy, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. The confrontation between the Northern ‘frugal four’ country alliance and Southern and Eastern member states during the special European Council on the EU recovery package in July 2020 is in line with this view: The frugal governments were prepared to risk the failure of the meeting to whittle down the grant-based part of the recovery fund, impose policy conditionality on recipients, and defend their own budget rebates, in short, to reduce the level and scope of European solidarity. One main justification for their

reticence was the well-rehearsed risk of moral hazard: financial solidarity with EU-countries in fiscal trouble discourages self-help and reform and encourages dependency and free-riding. The social democratic former Dutch finance minister and president of the Eurogroup Jeroen Dijsselbloem epitomized this moral hazard angst by his infamous warning that “you cannot spend all the money on drinks and women and then ask help” (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 20 March 2017). Solidarity, in this perspective, is cheap moral talk to justify the exploitation of the able by the unable, of the industrious by the lazy, and of the deserving by the undeserving. The expectation is that those who expect to profit will support common sharing among EU member states while those who expect to lose will instinctively oppose it.

Our survey shows evidence broadly in line with this view, but with important nuances and variation. In figure 5 we plot positive and negative net-support for the eight crisis scenarios (see figure 4 above) by country. The figure confirms that the EU’s North-West is indeed less solidaristic (in terms of the number crisis for which they offer positive net support) than the South-East. Yet, on closer inspection, three rather than two groups shine through. First, an all-out solidarity group consisting of Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain. Second, a group of staunch opponents: Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. Finally, an intermediate group, including Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary and Lithuania. The intermediate group is more diverse in geographic composition than the other two groups and also contains the largest member states (Germany and France).

Figure 5 – Net support for solidarity by country & crisis.

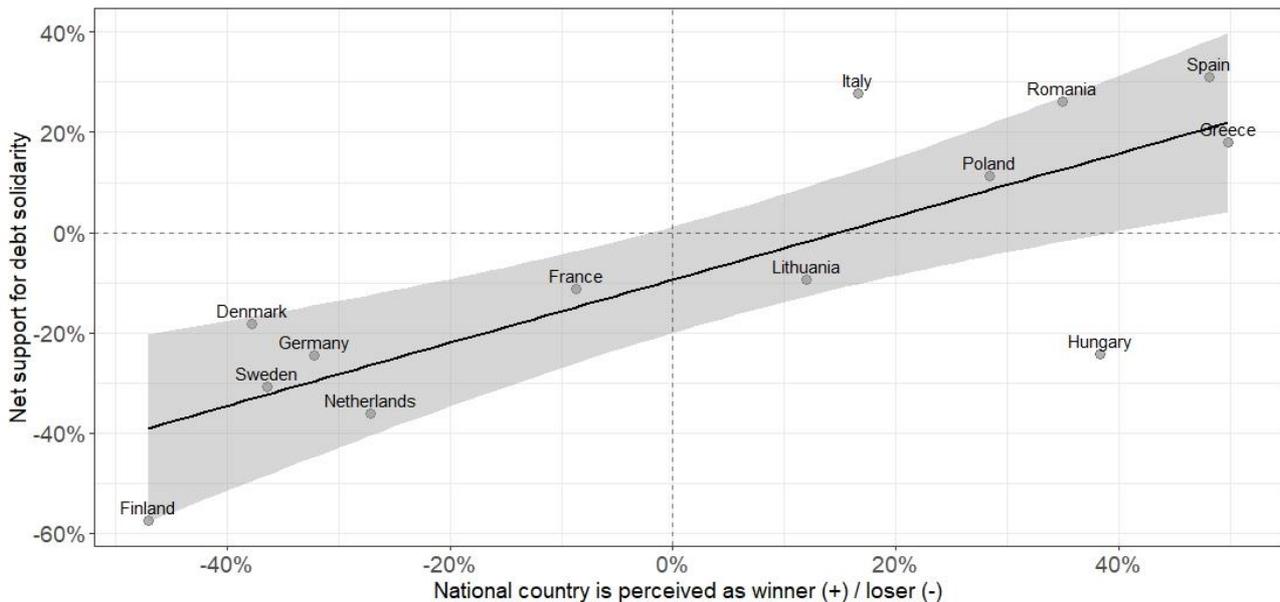


The Y-axis represents the difference between the % of respondents willing and not willing to help with each of the eight crises. The X-axis represents survey countries. The horizontal zero-line represents equal share of respondents willing and not willing to help. For the survey question see figure 4.

*Solidarity and perceived gain or loss.* The moral hazard narrative suggests that citizens are more supportive of European solidarity, if they expect their own country to be a net-winner. In figures 6 and 7, we compare respondents’ perceptions of the net-position of their own country (winner or loser of a hypothetical EU emergency fund) to their net-support for European solidarity in two different crisis scenarios: debt and pandemic. Figure 7 is fully consistent with the moral hazard account: Respondents support cross-border debt-relief if they believe their own home country do be a potential winner of EU solidarity (upper-right quadrant), and they oppose debt-solidarity if they believe their own country to be a net-loser of solidarity

(lower-left quadrant). Only two countries don't fit the pattern: Lithuania and Hungary. Here respondents oppose assistance to indebted member states even though they perceive their own countries as net-winners of solidarity.

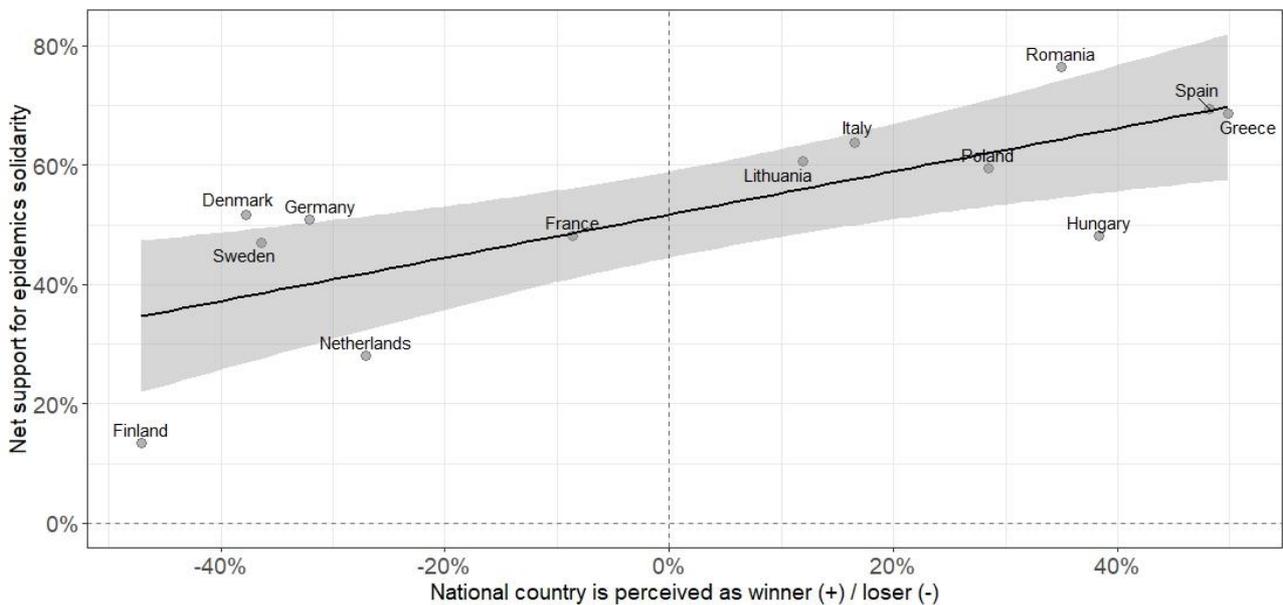
Figure 6 – Net support for debt solidarity by perceived net-gain/loss of the own country.



The **X-axis** represents the difference between the % of respondents believing their country would be a winner or loser of a potential EU emergency fund. The **Y-axis** represents the difference between the % of respondents willing and not willing to help with debt crises. The shades represent 95% confidence intervals. The **survey question** on perceived country position is: “If there was a large EU-wide emergency fund for EU countries to draw on when they faced a variety of different types of crisis. Do you think that, over a long period of time, [country] would ultimately be an overall...” Possible answers are ‘Winner: the help received from this fund by [country] would be higher than the resources put in by it (the national net-balance is positive)’, ‘Loser: the resources put into this fund by [country] would be higher than the help received by it (the national net-balance is negative)’, or ‘Don't know’. For the survey question on debt solidarity see figure 4.

Figure 7 presents a more benign picture. To be sure, solidarity with pandemic-stricken member states also increases with perceived net-gain of the own country. Yet the slope of the curve is less pronounced and the general level of support is much higher. All member states are located in the two upper quadrants indicating positive net-support regardless of whether the country is perceived as winner or loser.

Figure 7 – Net support for pandemic solidarity by perceived net-gain/loss of the own country.

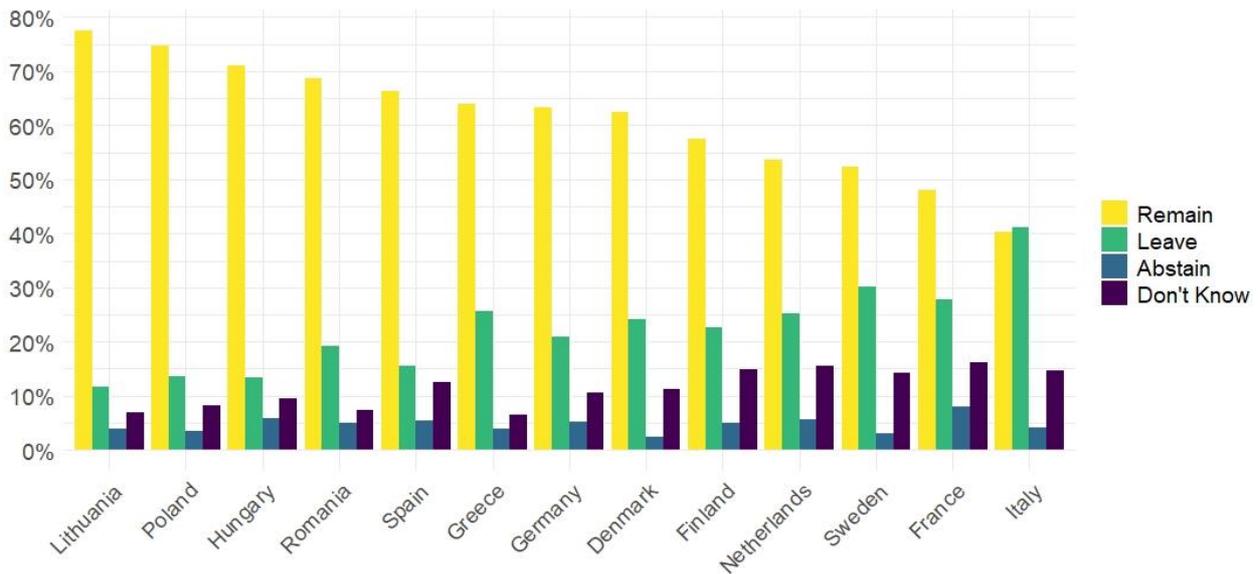


The **X-axis** represents the difference between the % of respondents believing their country would be a winner or loser of a potential EU emergency fund. The **Y-axis** represents the difference between the % of respondents willing and not willing to help with natural disasters. The shades represent 95% confidence intervals. For the **survey questions** see figure 6.

The contrast between figures 6 and 7 reinforces the argument that support for solidarity varies with the type of crisis: if the, real or presumed, causes of a crisis are endogenous, as often in debt crises, the self-perceived winners of solidarity will support it and the losers will oppose it. If, however, the purported causes of the crisis are exogenous, as usually in the case of pandemics, near everyone supports solidarity, regardless of net-gains or losses. EU solidarity is issue specific. The fact that support for solidarity and perceived net-gain are positively correlated in both figures, is consistent with the moral hazard view: those who gain more from solidarity offer more support to it. Note, however, that it also fits a more benign reading of solidarity as reciprocal: those who expect to gain more from solidarity are prepared to give back more. We come back to this issue below.

*Willingness to leave the EU.* The political consequences of the moral hazard conundrum depend to a large extent on whether the self-perceived losers will follow the UK example and leave the EU rather than contribute more to EU solidarity. According to our data, this is not the case. The respondents from ‘frugal’ countries show considerable attachment to the EU. In the survey, we asked respondents how they would vote in a hypothetical in-out referendum on EU membership. As figure 8 shows ‘remain’ trumps leave in all 13 EU countries in our survey including frugal countries. The one notable exception is Italy where ‘leave’ beats ‘remain’ by a small margin. The support for EU membership in frugal countries may reflect the “wisdom of the crowds”, as these small open economies obviously profit most from market integration. The Italian picture reflects true desperation. It looks even more bleak, when we look at voting intentions by party affiliation: the centre-left PD is the only large Italian party with consistent support for EU membership. All other Italian parties favour leaving the EU by large margins (as discussed in [another study](#) based on the EU-YouGov 2020 data). More solidarity may be required to keep this crucial member state in the EU to the economic benefit, not only but also, of frugal exporters.

Figure 8 - Remain or leave?



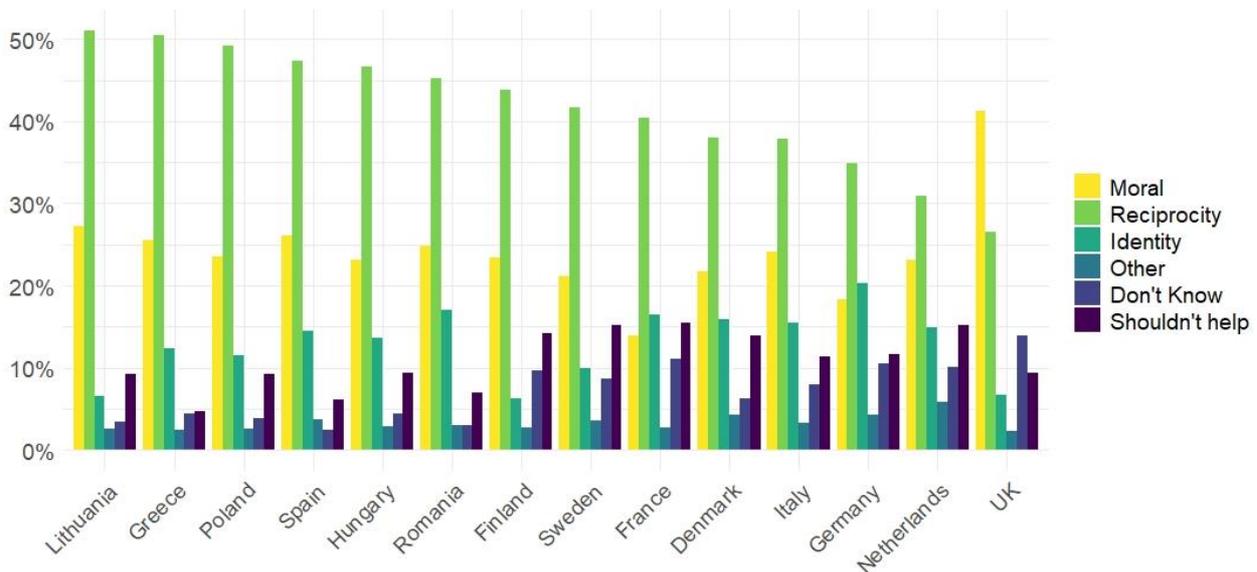
The Y-axis represent the % of respondents by country who answer 'remain' and 'leave' in a hypothetical referendum on EU membership, including 'abstain' and 'don't know'. The X-axis represents survey countries. The survey question is: "If there was a referendum on membership of the European Union, how would you vote?" Possible answers are: 'I would vote to remain a member of the European Union', 'I would vote to leave the European Union', 'I would not vote', or 'Don't know'.

In sum, we find that EU solidarity is constrained by distributive concerns. The stringency of these concerns varies by crisis type and is moderated by a low general willingness to leave the EU.

#### 4. Silver linings for EU solidarity

The drivers of solidarity. What motivates citizens to share resources with fellow citizens from other member states? The survey offered respondents three possible answers: we help other Europeans because it is the right thing to do (i.e., morality), or because we might ourselves need help in the future (i.e., reciprocity), or because we share a common identity with them (i.e., identity). Figure 9 presents the answers. It shows a general preference among Europeans for reciprocal solidarity: 40% of respondents are motivated by reciprocity, on European average, whereas 24% think it is morally the right thing to do. Only 13% believe European solidarity is a matter of shared identity. This is good news in so far as reciprocity provides a more solid basis for solidarity in a large heterogeneous union than moral obligation or identity.

Figure 9 – Best reason for helping other Europeans.

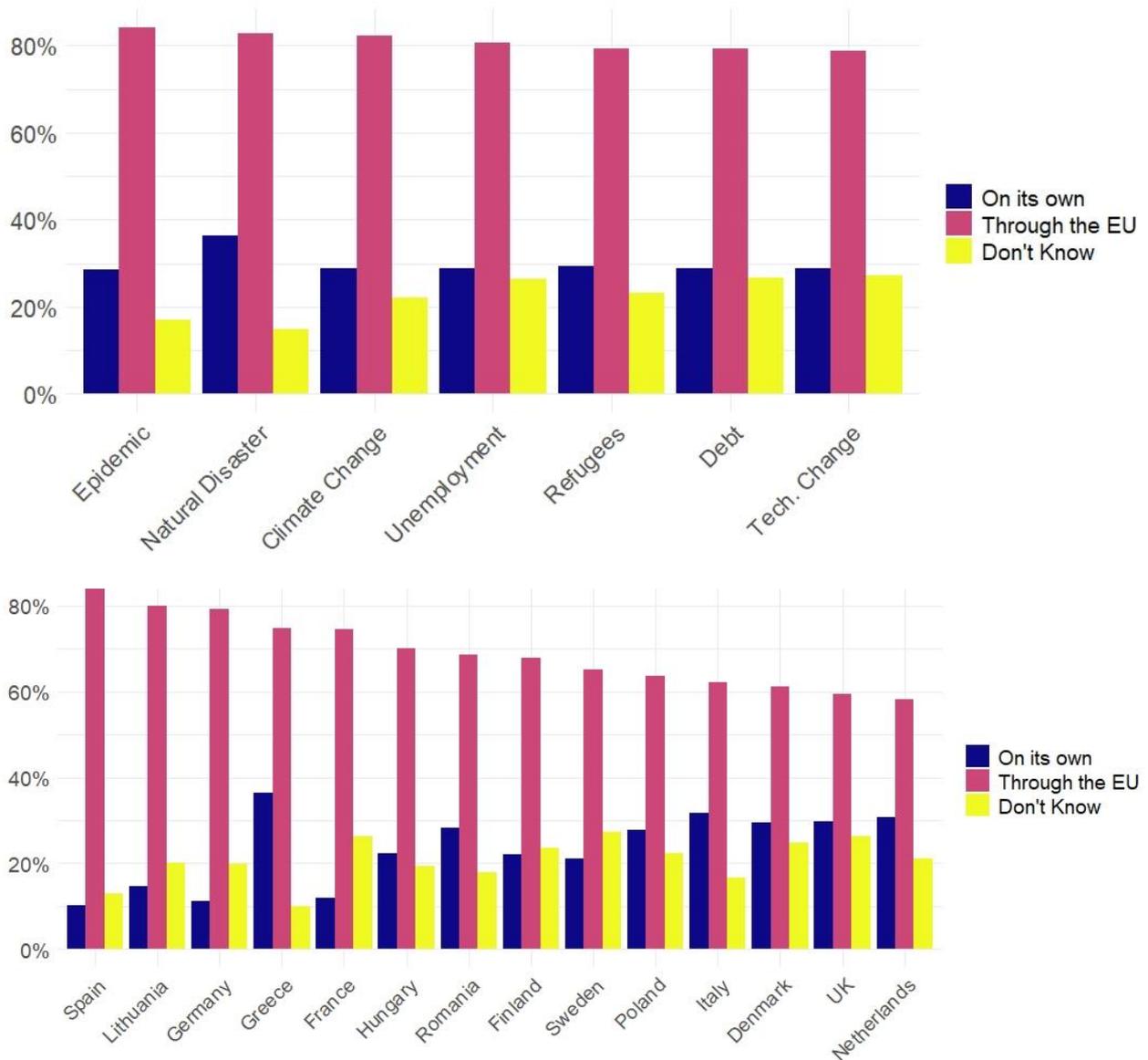


The **Y-axis** represent the % of respondents' top choice of reason why Europeans should help each other, including 'don't know' and those who believe European shouldn't help any other country. The **X-axis** represents the survey countries. The **survey question** is: "What is the best reason for helping other Europeans?" Possible answers are 'Because it's the right thing to do', 'Because we may need help ourselves someday', 'Because we have a shared identity with them', 'Other', 'Don't know', or 'we shouldn't try to help other Europeans'.

Interestingly, the two countries where the identity-option ranks among the top two are France and Germany. Opposition to solidarity ('we shouldn't help other Europeans') is low. It ranges from 5% in Greece to 15% in France, Sweden, and the Netherlands with the other countries falling in between. The UK deviates dramatically from the general pattern: Britons believe more in morality than in reciprocity as a driver of European solidarity. Their sense of shared identity is at a European low.

A preference for permanent European solutions. In the survey, we also asked respondents how governments should channel support to other member states, bilaterally from one national government to another, or centrally through joint EU institutions. Figure 10 maps the answers across crises and across countries. It shows that Europeans have a general preference for EU solutions. There is hardly any variance across different types of crisis. There is more variance across countries. However, it escapes a simple North-West v. South-East interpretation: support for EU coordination is low in frugal Denmark, as one would perhaps expect, but also in catholic Italy. Likewise, support for EU solutions is very high in both Germany and Spain.

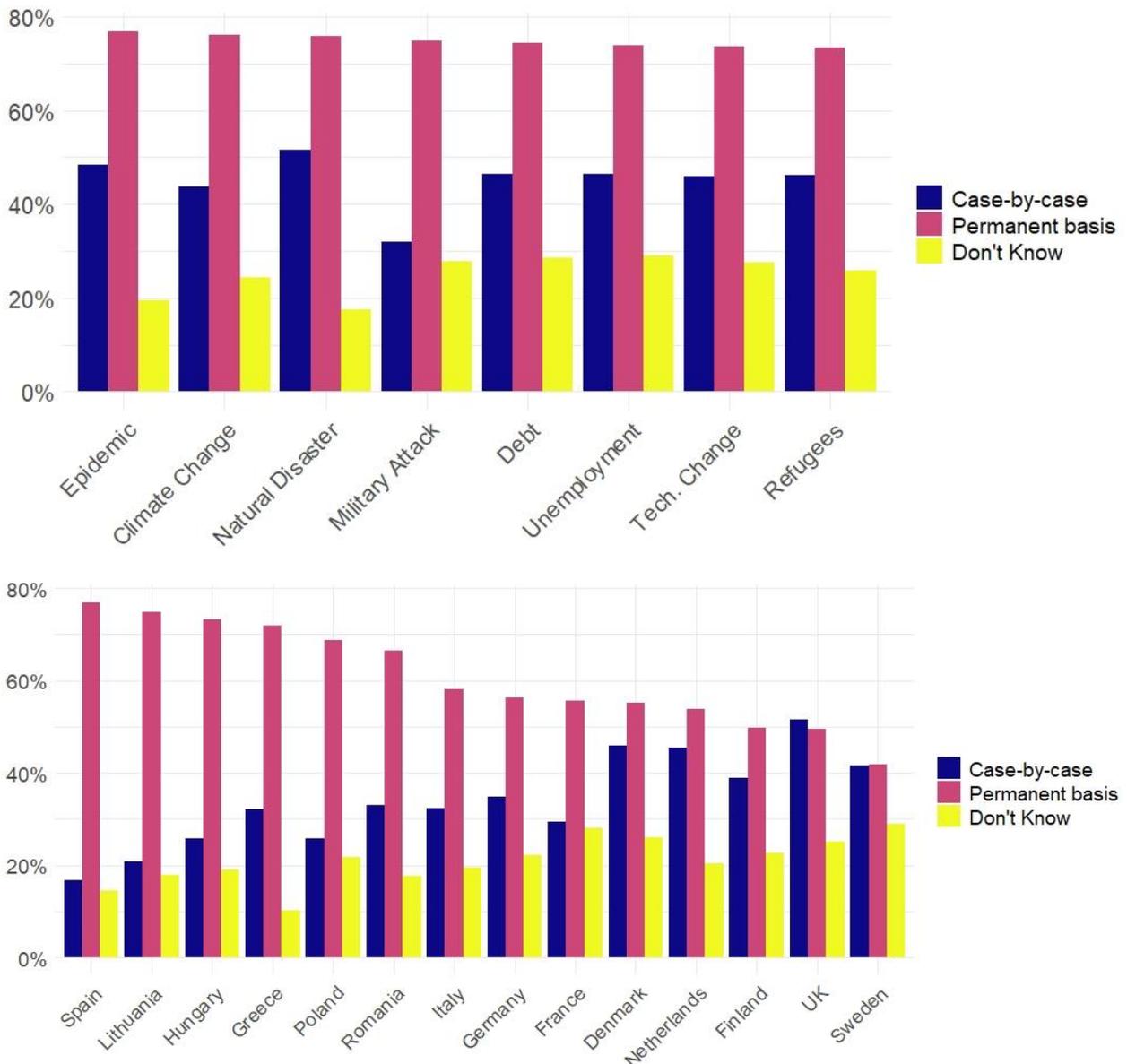
Figure 10 – Mode of solidarity provision: unilateral or joint?



The Y-axis represents the % of net supporters for helping other European countries unilaterally or jointly, including ‘don’t know’, by crisis (above) and by country (below). The X-axis represents the eight crises (above) and survey countries (below). The **survey question** is: “Please imagine that [country] has decided to provide major to another country in [Europe/ the European Union] suffering a natural disaster. How should it provide the help? Should it act on its own, or as part of a joint effort managed by the European Union?” Possible answers are ‘[country] should provide help on its own’, ‘[country] should provide help by contributing to a joint EU-led initiative’, or ‘Don’t know’.

As the survey also reveals European publics prefer a permanent system of mutual assistance to ad-hoc, case-by-case, solutions (figure 11). Again, there is less variation across crisis types than across countries. While it is true that in South-Eastern countries, support for permanent support systems is generally higher than in North-Western countries, it surpasses support for case-by-case assistance in all countries but the UK and Sweden. Note, however, that support for case-by-case solutions is considerably higher in small frugal countries including Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden than in other EU member states.

Figure 11 – Mode of solidarity provision: permanent or case-by case.



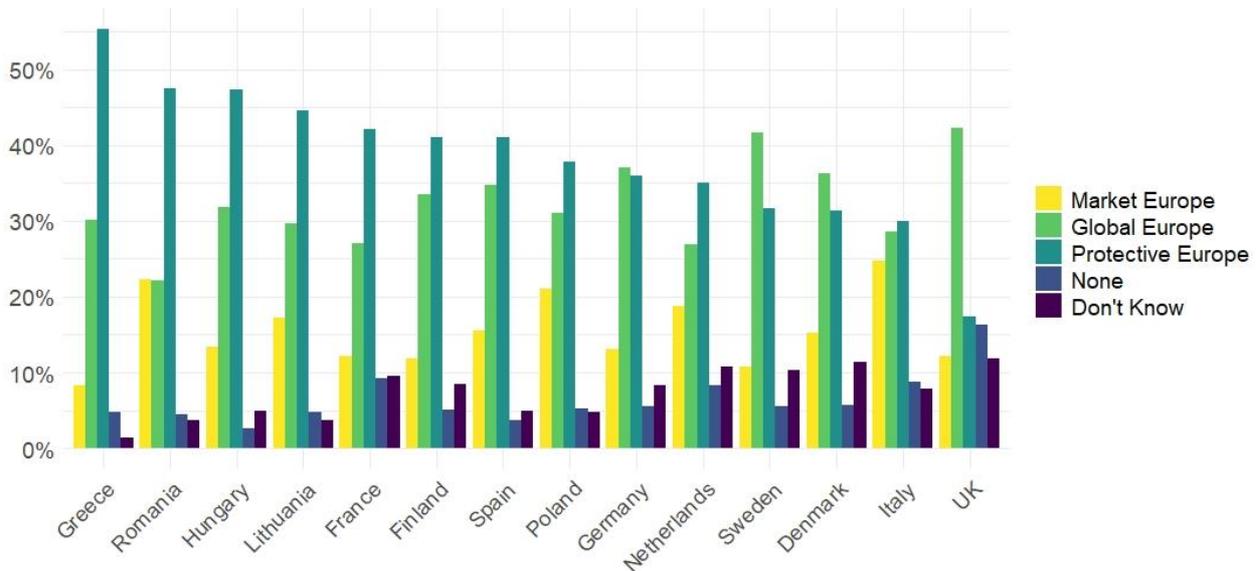
The Y-axis represents % of supporters for helping other European countries on a case-by-case or on a permanent basis, including 'don't know', by crisis (above) and by country (below). The X-axis represents the eight crises (above) and survey countries (below). The survey question is: "And in that situation, which of these kinds of help do you think would be best?" Possible answers are 'Other countries including [country] should provide help on a case-by-case basis as natural disasters arise', 'Other countries including [country] should provide help through a permanent system which has been set up to help any [European/ EU] country in need (e.g. a permanent disaster relief fund', or 'Don't know'.

In short, once the Rubicon of (conditional) EU solidarity is crossed, European publics trust joint EU organization, instrumentation and coordination of solidarity more than ad-hoc, case-by-case, uni- and bilateral country-level support.

A preference for a more protective and global Europe. For the 2020 rendition of the survey, we asked in which Europe respondents would like to live: a market Europe that stresses economic integration, market competition and fiscal discipline; a global Europe that acts as a leader on climate, human rights and global

peace; or a protective Europe that defends the European way of life and welfare against internal and external threats (figure 12). All in all, a protective Europe came out first (37%) with Global Europe as a close second (33%), and a market Europe trailing far behind (15%).

Figure 12 – What Europe would you prefer to live in?



The Y-axis represents % of respondents preferring to live in a market, global, or protective Europe by country, including ‘none’ and ‘don’t know’. The X-axis represents survey countries. The **survey question** reads as follows: “Please tell us in which Europe you would prefer to live”. Possible answers are: ‘A market Europe that stresses economic integration, market competition and fiscal discipline’, ‘A global Europe that acts as a leader on climate, human rights and global peace’, ‘A protective Europe that defends the European way of life and welfare against internal and external threats’, ‘None of the above’, or ‘Don’t know’.

While evidently not a direct question on solidarity, the issues of protection and global responsibility are closely related to solidarity. The demand for a protective Europe is particularly high among respondents from South-Eastern member states (but not Italy). North-Western countries, by contrast, are torn between a protective and a global Europe (with the exception of Finland and the Netherlands). The UK is the only country where support for Global Europe leads support for a Protective Europe by a large margin. A Market Europe is not what European *demos* generally aspire to. Interestingly, support for this vision is strongest in South-Eastern countries, including Italy, Poland and Romania.

## 5. Political lessons

Governments and EU institutions decide on the future of Europe, not voters. Yet governments and, to a lesser extent, EU institutions ‘must look over their shoulders’ (Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks) to ensure sufficient voter support for their European dealings. Leaders feel the popular pressure and this influences European decision making, as at the marathon meeting of the European Council in July 2020. This is why the EUI and YouGov surveyed public attitudes towards European solidarity. Our findings yield five important lessons for policy makers.

1. *European solidarity exists but is hard to come by:* Overall support for European solidarity is positive, ranging from moderate to moderately-high. However, the scope for European solidarity is

constrained by the distributive conflict between self-perceived net-contributors and net-recipients. Yet, there is no evidence of a clear-cut cleavage between rich nay-sayers in the North and poor Samaritans in the South-East. While it is generally true that respondents in North-Western countries are more sceptical about European solidarity than respondents in the South-East, there is a lot of variance within these groups. The largest countries of the EU, Germany and France, tend to take middling positions between the blocks.

2. *European solidarity is second best, issue-specific and reciprocal:* Unsurprisingly, solidarity is national first and European only second. It decreases with geographical distance as familiarity shrinks and stereotypes gain in salience. By and large, European citizens' view solidarity as an issue-specific and reciprocal benefit rather than a general moral or identity-based obligation. Our findings indicate considerable support for European solidarity on salient issues of a presumptively exogenous nature, including the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and technological change. Support for solidarity is lower and more dispersed on issues usually considered as endogenously caused such as, most prominently, sovereign debt. Consistent with their emphasis on reciprocal assistance for dealing with exogenous shocks, Europeans fancy a more protective and global Europe
3. *European solidarity is best managed by EU institutions on a permanent basis:* Quite surprisingly, when national governments do engage in European solidarity, their electorates have a strong preference for permanent EU-instrumentation, above and beyond unilateral case-by-case support between member states. This may imply that a comprehensive European-Commission-led Covid-19 recovery strategy will attract considerable public support across Europe.
4. *Opposition to European solidarity is strongest in small member states unlikely to leave the EU.* Electorates in Sweden and the Netherland, but also Denmark and Finland, are apprehensive about European solidarity. Yet, at the same time, they show a very low willingness to leave the EU in a hypothetical referendum. The attachment to the EU makes sense for small open economies striving on trade and finance. This sets a limit to how far they can push their opposition to solidarity. The success of frugal governments in scaling back the original Franco-German proposal for a grants-based EU recovery fund by € 110 bn has attracted a lot of media attention. Still these governments agreed to € 390 bn more in grants in the end than they had initially announced. There simply isn't much future for small, trade-dependent economies on a continent that pushes large countries like Italy and Spain towards default and populism in government. A forceful recovery of the EU's South is also in the best interest of the frugal North. Given their dependence on the EU, it may pay to talk tough to them also on other solidarity issues, such as corporate tax avoidance in the Single Market.
5. *European solidarity needs explanation:* The solidarity package coming out of the European Council negotiations of 17-21 July 2020 combines different instruments (grants and loans), different issues (economics and health), and varying timelines (loans, grants, reforms, rebates fading in and out), to satisfy different national needs and demands. The overall logic of the deal will not always be equally self-evident to all national electorates. There will be ample room for citizens in the North to feel exploited and for citizens in the South to feel short-changed. In order to maintain and potentially even broaden public support, it is important to highlight the insurance character and reciprocal nature of solidarity in the North, and to explain why solidarity may be in the best national interest even of countries which bear the short-run costs. Likewise, it is important to explain to Southern constituencies that reform conditionality and external discipline may be justifiable in exchange for robust financial support. Fears of moral hazard are real even if not always well founded. For instance, few people in Northern Europe know that Italy has been running primary surpluses for more than a decade. As the EUI-YouGov survey shows, distrust increases with geographical distance (drinks and women). Not nice, but a fact of political life.