

Around the world in 80 ways – Who's afraid of globalisation?



What workers say

Eurofound research shows that the majority of trade unions across the EU do not appear to be against globalisation as such. For the most part, they seem to accept it as an inevitable fact of economic life, implying the relocation of activities to other countries. However, some unions suggest that employers tend to exaggerate the possibility of relocating production abroad, using it as a threat to obtain concessions. Trade unions tend to emphasise the need to ensure that responses to globalisation do not lead to deteriorating social standards and working conditions. At the same time, trade unions largely appear to recognise the necessity to anticipate change and invest in high-skilled jobs in response to globalisation.

In many cases, trade unions tend to look to the EU to guarantee effective social policies as well as the efficient use of European Works Councils, in order to protect against negative effects of globalisation.

What employers say

Though often not formally published, most employer organisations across the EU have, in practice, a position on globalisation. It is only in some of the new Member States, such as Bulgaria, Latvia, Poland and Romania that globalisation does not seem to be a major issue for employer organisations at present.

The majority of employer organisations consider globalisation to have a generally positive effect, even if they do not always make a clear distinction between the impact of foreign inward investment, foreign ownership of companies and the relocation of activities to other countries.

Some employer organisations offer support and advice to members considering offshoring but also warn that it may not be the best solution in all cases.

Globalisation is often linked to the issue of competitiveness and used as an argument to underline the need for more business-friendly policies, such as reducing taxes on labour and wage costs, labour market reform, adopting a more positive attitude to immigration, streamlining bureaucratic procedures and improving infrastructure.



What citizens think

Given the broadly positive attitudes of the social partners, it is somewhat surprising that support for globalisation among European citizens is actually falling. Defined as 'the general opening-up of all economies, which leads to the creation of a truly worldwide market', 63% of citizens surveyed across the EU15 in 2003 responded that they were in favour of this development; 29% were opposed. Some three years later, when asked whether the term 'globalisation' brought positive or negative connotations to mind, only 42% of European citizens considered it positive; 44% focused on the negative aspects.

When citizens were asked about the threats and opportunities of globalisation in a Eurobarometer survey in 2003, more than half of respondents (56%) in the EU15 saw globalisation as an opportunity for companies. When the same question was asked again three years later – this time in 25 Member States – only 37% of respondents held the same view.

The proportion of European citizens seeing globalisation as a threat to employment went up from 39% in 2003 (EU15) to 47% in 2006 (EU25).

Further information

This fact sheet forms part of the Eurofound resource pack on *Around the world in 80 ways – today's global market place*. The pack explores the impact of globalisation, providing insights into developments, perceptions and measures dealing with its consequences.

For a copy of the pack or for further information on this area of activity, please email: globalisation@eurofound.europa.eu

To view the resource pack online and all other Foundation materials on this topic, please visit: www.eurofound.europa.eu/resourcepacks/globalisation.htm

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