

# Promoting social cohesion and convergence in the EU



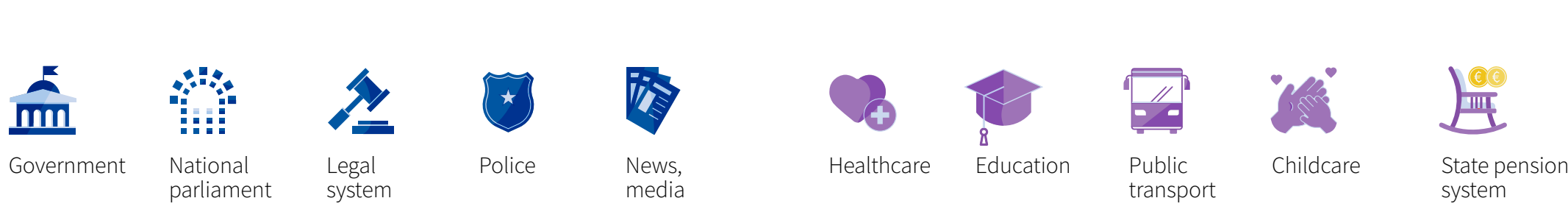
Achieving upward convergence in living and working conditions is a key determinant in strengthening economic and social cohesion in the EU.

## Social cohesion and trust

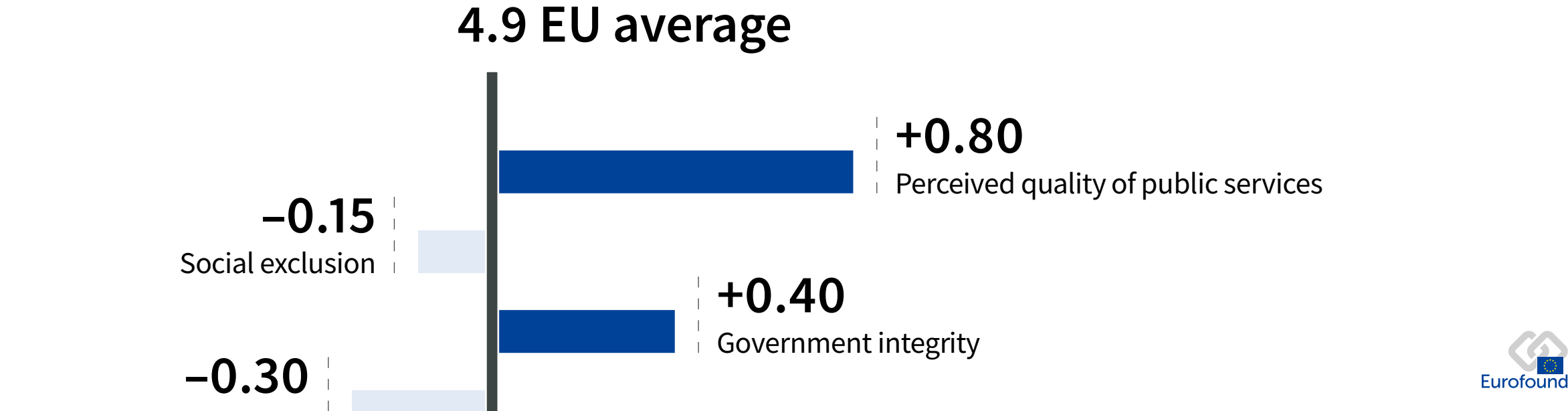
Improving social cohesion, reducing income inequalities and moderating social tensions help to build trust. The perception of tension in society and the feeling of social exclusion is associated with low trust in institutions. To boost trust in institutions, addressing the quality of public services, such as health and care services, is the most powerful driver.

Public services across the EU play a major role in addressing the COVID-19 crisis. Trust is critical for these services to be delivered effectively when facing significant challenges. Maintaining citizens' trust in national and European institutions also facilitates compliance with public health measures.

### Factors affecting trust in national institutions

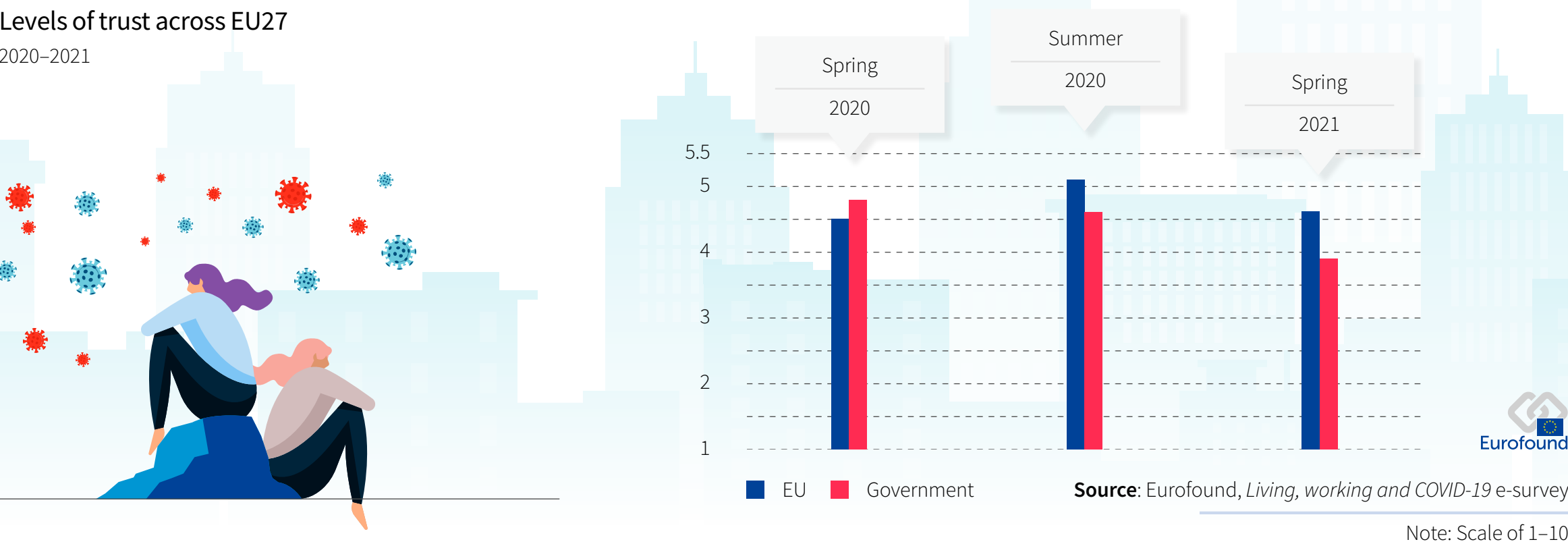


The average level of trust in national institutions over the years stood at **4.9 for the EU**, on a scale of 1–10. A range of factors affect levels of trust but the perceived quality of public services is an essential component of improving trust in national institutions.



## Change of citizens’ trust in the EU during the pandemic

- Trust in national governments across all Member States has dropped below levels recorded at the start of the pandemic.
- Trust in the EU also fell but is still higher than trust in national governments.
- The ‘future of Europe’ debate has an important role to play in reaching out and listening to citizens’ concerns as the EU recovers from the impact of COVID-19 and moves to a greener, more digital EU economy.



Inequalities across the EU have risen with implications for social cohesion and trust in institutions. Monitoring inequalities in and between Member States and citizens is essential to building a more cohesive and social Europe.

### Increasing gap in financial difficulties between employed and unemployed EU citizens as the pandemic progressed



## Achieving upward convergence

When Member States improve **economic and social performances and inequalities decrease**, upward convergence takes place.

The 2008 crisis showed how economic and social dimensions of the EU are interconnected.

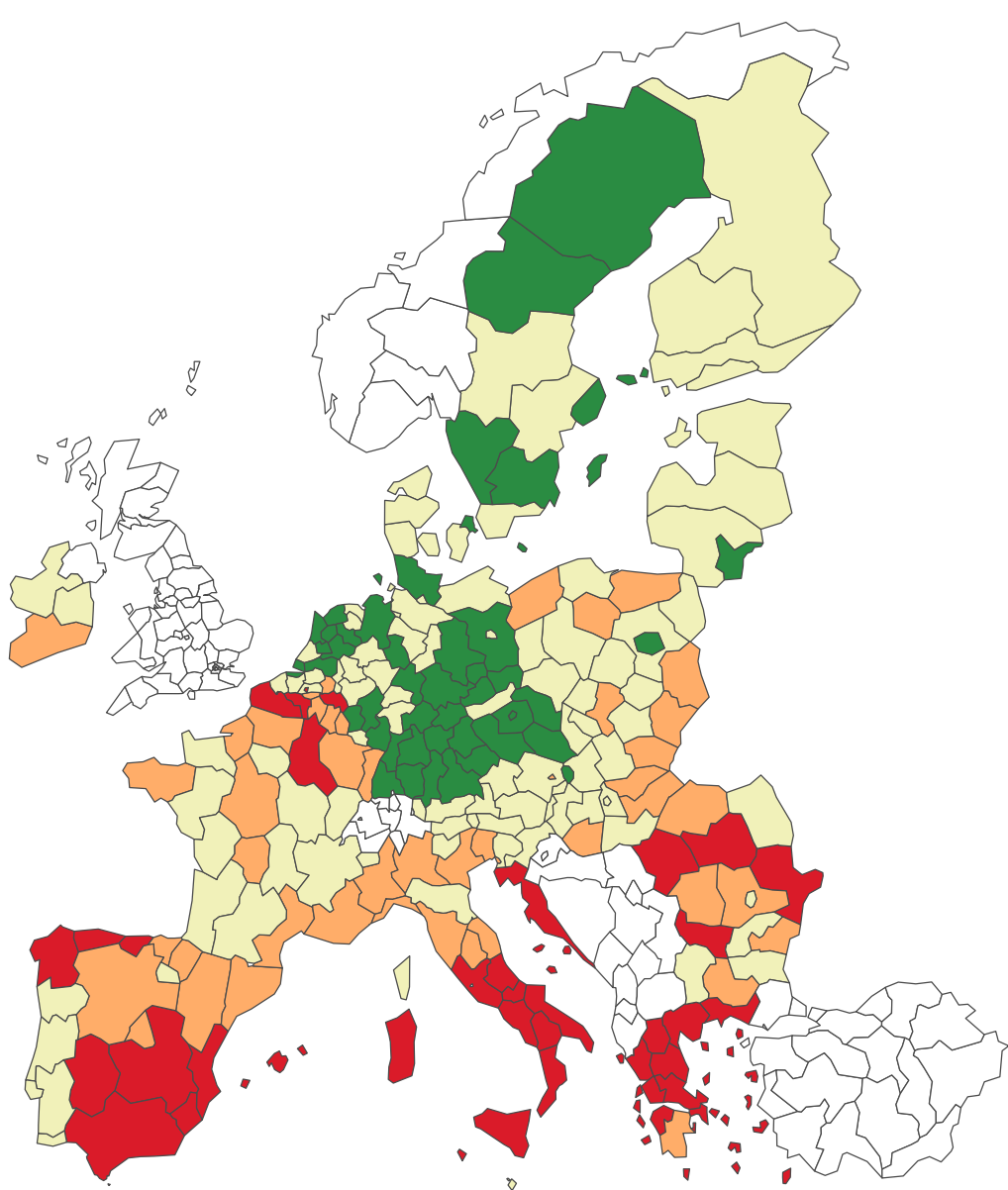
Eurofound findings show a **record increase in upward convergence in Member States during positive economic periods**.

However, when disparities increase in an economic downturn, downward divergence takes hold.

## Regional convergence

Significant disparities are evident within and between countries in terms of upward convergence.

The true picture of economic development in some countries is diluted by the strong performance of one or two regions that overshadow weaker performance in other regions.



Upward convergence is pivotal to stability. If not achieved, there is a risk of undermining the functioning of the EU, as well as the fostering of political discontent about the European project.

Source: Eurostat 2021 (lfst\_r\_lfe2emprt)

## Convergence and gender equality

Between 2010 and 2018, there was **upward convergence in gender equality in the EU as a whole**.

Despite this, several Member States, mainly from central and eastern Europe, continue to trail behind.

Developments stemming from the COVID-19 crisis threaten to roll back recent achievements in gender equality, especially in the domains of work and free time.



Measures to contain the pandemic have taken a heavier and disproportionate toll on women's employment and increased the level of care responsibilities.

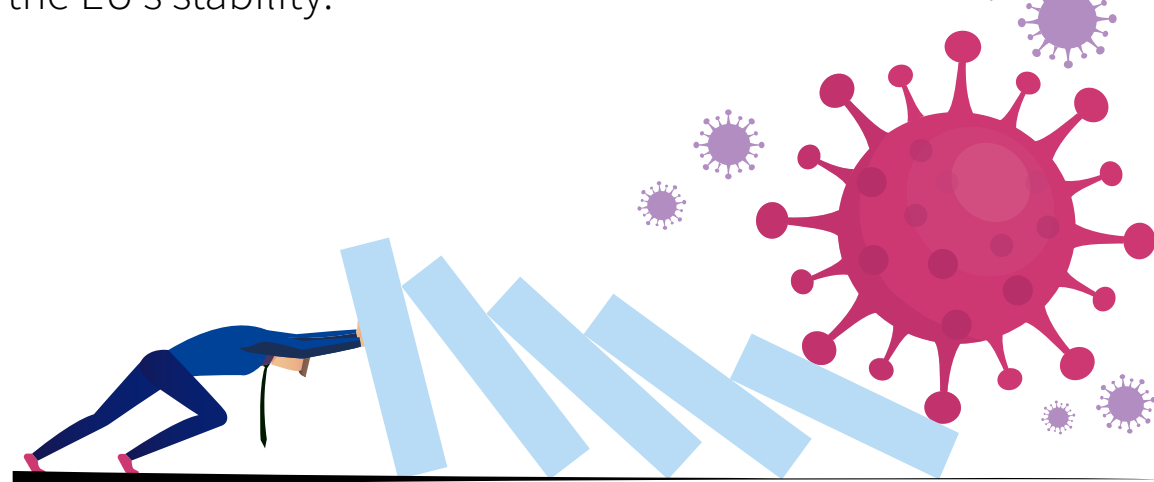
As Member States translate their recovery plans into action, new measures will need to be gender-sensitive and greater equality achieved in both paid and unpaid work.

## Putting the spotlight back on cohesion and convergence

Following a period of uninterrupted growth, COVID-19 has put social cohesion and upward convergence high on the EU political agenda.



The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities which can threaten the EU's stability.



Higher trust levels reported by those who received support during COVID-19 sends a clear message of the importance of social protection to national governments and the EU.



Tackling growing inequalities will test the EU's economic and social resilience. Translating the **European Pillar of Social Rights** into actions on the ground will be critical.

