

# NEWSLETTER

## LIVEWHAT—Living with Hard Times: How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences

Issue 2, January 2015

<http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/>



**LIVEWHAT** is a research project that studies policy responses and citizens' resilience in times of crisis. The project brings together universities and an international advisory board of leading scientists from nine European countries – France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

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### LIVEWHAT updates

#### **NEW FINDINGS: European citizens' responses to the economic crisis**

**H**ow do European citizens perceive the recent economic crisis? How do they react to the crisis? Who is most affected by the crisis? To what extent are social and political attitudes related to the crisis? To what extent are social and political behaviors related to the crisis? To what extent are the family and social life of people affected by the crisis? Are there important differences across social groups and countries on these and other important dimensions of subjective and

objective reactions to the crisis? To answer these questions, LIVEWHAT researchers – under the coordination of our consortium partner, University of Sheffield – developed a theoretically-minded questionnaire and conducted a survey on national representative samples of the general population in each of the countries included in the project: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. A specialized polling institute, YouGov, was subcontracted to conduct the survey in each country through the CAWI method (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) with online accessible.

Some of the survey findings are presented below.

#### **Unveiling the findings**

Beginning with examining how Europeans perceive the economic crisis, Table 1 shows that in those countries experiencing a deeper crisis the proportion of individuals saying the crisis is very serious is higher, e.g. 89% in Greece, 79% in Italy, 73% in Spain, 67% in France. On the other hand, these proportions are lower in those countries where the crisis was not so deep: from 38% in the UK to 23% in Poland, 18% in Germany, 16% in Sweden, 14% in Switzerland.

**Table 1: Crisis? What Crisis? (%)**

	<i>Fra</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Gre</i>	<i>Ita</i>	<i>Pol</i>	<i>Spa</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Swi</i>	<i>UK</i>
<b>We are suffering a very serious economic crisis</b>	66.7	17.5	88.8	79.0	23.0	72.7	16.4	14.3	38.1
<b>We are suffering a crisis but it is not very serious</b>	17.2	31.4	5.1	11.5	42.0	18.2	41.3	51.3	42.6
<b>No economic crisis</b>	3.6	34.8	2.4	3.7	22.3	2.5	24.6	21.3	10.1

Notes: % based on respondents selecting specific answer options.

Q: Some say that the UK is suffering a very serious economic crisis, others say that we are suffering a crisis but it is not very serious, while others say that there isn't any economic crisis. What do you think?

Examining social difference in perceptions of the severity of the crisis, older people in general were more likely to see the crisis as very serious, as were women and people with lower education levels. People with higher levels of political interest were more likely to see the crisis as very serious, as were leftists and people with narrower networks. Table 2 shows the proportion of individuals in various countries having to make reductions in consumption as a result of the crisis. A sign of the severity of the crisis is

that in Greece 65% of individuals had to make reductions even in the consumption of staple foods. By and large, reductions were more present in countries hardest hit by the crisis as might be expected. 90% of people cut on recreational activities in Greece, 76% reduced the use of the car, 74% delayed utility payments, 27% even had to move home as a result, 61% could not pay back loans, 17% had to sell some asset, 37% had to cut media connections, 74% did not go on holiday and 63% even reduced buying medicines or

seeing the doctor. These are stark statistics for an advanced industrialized nation and show the severity of the crisis in Greece. Reductions were quite widespread in Italy and Spain, particularly in terms of recreational holidays. Also, 43% of Italians said they had to cut back on staple foods and 40% could not buy medicines or see the doctor. On the other end of the scale, reductions were much less severe in Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and the UK.

**Table 2: Reductions in consumption (% yes)**

	<i>Fra</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Gre</i>	<i>Ita</i>	<i>Pol</i>	<i>Spa</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Swi</i>	<i>UK</i>
<b>Reduced consumption of staple foods</b>	36.2	18.8	65.0	42.0	34.7	27.1	16.8	24.4	20.2
<b>Reduced recreational activities (going out, movies, theatre, etc.)</b>	62.3	39.1	90.2	69.4	56.8	68.5	31.2	48.9	46.4
<b>Reduced use of own car</b>	47.0	22.3	75.5	56.4	40.6	45.6	19.6	26.7	27.6
<b>Delayed payments on utilities (gas, water, electric)</b>	25.4	14.0	73.9	31.5	40.0	21.9	10.1	22.4	16.0
<b>Moved home</b>	13.7	6.7	27.3	18.3	9.0	16.2	4.8	8.6	14.6
<b>Delayed or defaulted on a loan instalment</b>	17.0	13.3	61.0	22.2	31.2	20.9	9.6	21.2	13.3
<b>Sell an asset (e.g. land, apt, house)</b>	11.3	5.1	17.4	14.1	12.5	12.3	5.8	6.7	7.7
<b>Cut TV / phone / internet service</b>	17.6	6.9	36.7	24.4	17.5	24.0	17.0	12.2	21.0
<b>Did not go on holiday</b>	51.4	36.5	74.1	61.7	59.1	53.7	27.4	38.4	37.3
<b>Reduced or postponed buying medicines/ visiting the doctor</b>	31.1	16.6	62.5	40.4	40.0	21.0	15.0	25.2	10.9

Notes: % based on respondents selecting specific answer options.

Q: In the past five years, have you or anyone else in your household had to take any of the following measures for financial/ economic reasons?

In terms of citizens' reactions to the crisis, Table 3 shows that only in France, Greece, Italy, and Spain do the majority of citizens approve of marches and mass protest

demonstrations against austerity. Only in Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden do a majority approve of strikes against austerity. Across the countries in our study, less than one third of people approve of indefinite

occupations of squares against austerity – such as those of the Indignados or Occupy. Only about 15% or less approve of illegal actions.

**Table 3: Approval of protest against austerity measures (% approve)**

	<i>Fra</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Gre</i>	<i>Ita</i>	<i>Pol</i>	<i>Spa</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Swi</i>	<i>UK</i>
<b>March through town or stage mass protest demonstrations</b>	55.4	41.7	60.5	49.7	43.1	58.0	46.8	24.8	43.5
<b>Take part in strikes</b>	46.3	41.6	50.4	49.9	37.8	54.5	50.8	20.1	36.3
<b>Occupy public squares indefinitely</b>	26.8	24.1	22.0	32.8	24.8	26.0	20.5	16.5	24.3
<b>Take illegal action such as blocking roads or damaging public property</b>	11.7	6.5	6.8	11.5	14.5	10.5	9.9	6.1	7.9

Notes: % based on respondents selecting points 6 through to 10 on the 0-10 scale.

Q: When thinking about austerity policies and their consequences, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of the following actions? Please place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Strongly disapprove' and 10 means 'Strongly approve'.

When it comes to issues such as the approval of various economic measures to deal with the economic crisis, we see in Table 4 that increasing government oversight and regulation as well as reducing

the budget deficit tend to be the most popular options. The latter in particular is popular in the UK, Sweden and France and the former in Greece, Spain, France and Sweden but also the UK. Increasing

government spending is seen favorably in Greece, Poland, Spain and the UK. Giving financial support to the banks tends to be more unpopular as a measure.

**Table 4: Approval of economic measures to deal with economic crisis (% approve)**

	<i>Fra</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Gre</i>	<i>Ita</i>	<i>Pol</i>	<i>Spa</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Swi</i>	<i>UK</i>
<b>Giving financial support to banks in trouble</b>	17.5	11.4	23.3	16.5	14.0	12.7	12.1	12.2	17.4
<b>Increasing government regulation and oversight of the national economy</b>	49.2	29.7	56.9	52.7	38.6	48.9	41.3	24.8	35.3
<b>Significantly increasing government spending to stimulate the economy</b>	17.9	24.9	49.3	37.4	45.9	41.3	25.7	18.8	43.9
<b>Taking steps to reduce the government's budget deficit and debt, by cutting some spending or increasing some taxes</b>	42.9	27.6	37.0	32.8	30.3	33.0	43.0	24.3	48.1

Notes: % based on respondents selecting points 6 through to 10 on the 0-10 scale.

Q: In the UK's economic conditions, do you favor or oppose the government doing each of the following? Please place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Strongly disapprove' and 10 means 'Strongly approve'.

Crucially, Table 5 shows that across countries, national government tends to take the bulk of the blame for the rise of unemployment. However,

banks and financial actors, migrants and the European Union are also blamed. In particular, the EU is blamed in Greece; banks and

financial actors in Greece, Spain and the UK; and migrants in Greece, Switzerland and the UK.

**Table 5: Blame assignment for the rise of unemployment (% top two)**

	<i>Fra</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Gre</i>	<i>Ita</i>	<i>Pol</i>	<i>Spa</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Swi</i>	<i>UK</i>
<b>Banks and financial actors</b>	24.9	22.6	34.8	29.2	12.6	34.1	10.7	22.0	32.5
<b>National government</b>	38.8	30.4	45.2	52.9	56.2	54.1	38.4	13.6	32.6
<b>United States</b>	3.8	2.4	2.3	3.1	2.0	1.4	3.5	4.1	2.0
<b>European Union</b>	20.9	11.9	32.5	18.8	11.3	10.1	14.4	18.5	13.2
<b>Trade unions</b>	9.4	8.0	9.5	14.2	11.2	7.4	7.4	6.5	5.2
<b>Migrants</b>	17.8	8.8	21.9	18.5	17.2	11.2	19.2	25.5	26.8

Notes: % based on respondents selecting specific answer options.

Q: Which of the following do you think are most responsible for the rise of unemployment? (Please select up to two options)

Also, Table 6 shows that across countries, the national government tends to take the bulk of the blame for the country's economic difficulties. However, banks and

financial actors, and the European Union are also blamed. In particular, the EU is blamed in Greece; banks and financial actors in Greece, Spain and the UK. As such it appears that

in Greece the EU is generally held responsible for many of its economic troubles.

**Table 6: Blame assignment for the country's economic difficulties (% top two)**

	<i>Fra</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Gre</i>	<i>Ita</i>	<i>Pol</i>	<i>Spa</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Swi</i>	<i>UK</i>
<b>Banks and financial actors</b>	34.3	39.2	54.1	45.0	26.3	58.6	24.0	36.5	66.8
<b>National government</b>	44.6	34.0	54.3	60.5	61.5	60.0	51.9	20.9	38.2
<b>United States</b>	5.1	4.1	3.2	3.2	4.1	1.4	2.9	5.5	4.6
<b>European Union</b>	28.4	18.0	40.4	26.6	15.3	15.2	15.7	22.6	17.2
<b>Trade unions</b>	6.0	6.9	6.1	7.1	8.7	4.1	2.6	5.6	2.4
<b>Migrants</b>	11.9	5.1	5.2	9.2	4.8	4.1	17.5	13.1	12.6

Notes: % based on respondents selecting specific answer options.

Q: Which of the following do you think are most responsible for the UK's economic difficulties? (Please select up to two options)

As for aspects of citizens' resilience in times of crisis, Table 7 shows that when it comes to looking for creative ways to alter difficult situations that Greek, Italian and Swiss citizens see themselves as particularly resilient. This is in part good news as two of

these countries are those hardest hit by the current economic crisis. Greeks, Italian and the Swiss also stand out with respect to seeing themselves as actively looking for ways to replace the losses encountered in life. The German,

Polish, Swiss and UK respondents see themselves as ablest to deal with stressful events, whereas French, Italians, Polish and Swiss see

themselves as most active in their communities. Germans and Swiss feel most at one with the larger community in which they live. In terms of social differences in resilience as measured by the

tendency to look for creative ways to alter difficult situations, we can see that men see themselves as less resilient in this respect, individuals with lower education levels are also less likely to say they are resilient in

this way. Individuals with higher levels of political interest and more libertarian values tend to see themselves as more resilient with respect to this dimension as well.

**Table 7: Citizens’ resilience in times of crisis (% like me)**

	<i>Fra</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Gre</i>	<i>Ita</i>	<i>Pol</i>	<i>Spa</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Swi</i>	<i>UK</i>
<b>I look for creative ways to alter difficult situations</b>	50.4	62.9	72.1	67.0	59.4	60.5	54.3	65.8	55.3
<b>I actively look for ways to replace the losses I encounter in life</b>	48.6	50.4	68.1	70.1	50.3	61.0	26.3	54.8	47.9
<b>I have a hard time making it through stressful events</b>	42.7	32.6	37.0	36.7	34.6	53.4	34.8	32.2	33.4
<b>I keep myself active in the community where I live</b>	47.9	35.6	35.9	41.1	40.6	35.2	24.6	45.0	32.9
<b>I feel that I do not have much in common with the larger community in which I live</b>	32.2	25.1	37.5	35.6	34.2	37.3	32.4	23.9	38.6

Notes: % based on respondents selecting specific answer options.

Q: Please rate each of the following items on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means 'Completely unlike me' and 10 means 'Just like me'.

To sum up: countries where the crisis was lighter, as might be expected, are more positive about economic conditions and less worried about the crisis. This is not surprising since they also had to suffer fewer consequences such as having to make drastic cutbacks in consumption including staples such as food or medications and visits to

the doctor. On the other hand, the situation is more serious in those countries harder hit by the crisis. As such the survey findings has shown that understandings and experiences of the crisis vary by the national context in which one is situated—specifically whether the country experienced a deep or lighter economic crisis. There was also

evidence of some social differentiation by age, gender, education, class, employment status, political values and networks.

Check our website to read the [WP4 Integrated Report](#), presenting the full survey findings.

## Announcements and upcoming events

### LIVEWHAT final conference



**When:**

Thursday, 24 November 2016

**Where:**

Flagey (Studio 5), Rue du Belvédère 27, 1050 Ixelles, Brussels

**Registration:**

This is a public event. No registration required.



The LIVEWHAT project results will be presented at the LIVEWHAT Final Conference, which will take place in Geneva, 24 November 2016

in Brussels. The aim of the Final Conference is two-fold: 1) to present and discuss the project findings; and 2) to offer both a scholarly and policy-oriented perspective on how citizens react to economic crises, fueling public debate.

During the conference, the LIVEWHAT documentary film on *Citizens and the Crisis* will be screened, followed by a discussion with the audience. Drawing on the LIVEWHAT findings, the documentary film showcases the social and political consequences of the 2008 economic crisis and the

responses of citizens in each of the countries studied by the LIVEWHAT project: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. The final conference will be open to the public and the agenda will be made available soon on [LIVEWHAT website](#).

## LIVEWHAT events



Over the previous months, LIVEWHAT researchers have been active in seeking to present the LIVEWHAT findings in international conferences and fora. On 14-16 April 2016, our researchers, Professor Christian Lahusen and Johannes Kiess (members of the German team in LIVEWHAT), and Professor Maria Kousis and Angelos Loukakis (members of the Greek team) participated in the 23rd International Conference of Europeanists, which was organized by the Council for

European Studies in Philadelphia, USA.

During the conference proceedings, Angelos Loukakis from the University of Crete presented a collective comparative paper entitled 'Alternative Forms of Resilience in the Eurozone Crisis: Comparing the Greek and German Experience, 2007-2015' (by Angelos Loukakis, Maria Kousis, Christian Lahusen and Johannes Kiess). The paper builds on LIVEWHAT Workpackage 6 which involves an analysis of current alternative forms of resilience

(barter networks, food banks, free medical services, soup kitchens etc.) across Europe and the impact of the economic crisis.

As the paper findings show, compared to Greece, alternative forms of resilience in Germany are more formal and more institutionalized in their structure (as more than half of the organizations are NGOs, Professional Volunteer Associations and Charities or Foundations). In this respect, paper findings confirm current literature data on the German third sector.

In Greece, one third of the alternative forms of organizations are informal groups and organizations such as citizens' networks and neighborhood assemblies as well as protest and social movements groups (10%). Also, vis-à-vis Germany, in Greece alternative forms of resilience are actually one step ahead in terms of organizational development, as (former) social movement actors are basically taking over functions that were thought to be the sphere of the

state before the crisis and, consequently, they are able to



implement their principles on a much bigger scale.

Over the conference our LIVEWHAT researcher, Johannes Kiess from the University of Siegen, presented a paper entitled 'Resilience, Resistance, or Regression? How citizens cope with hard times'.



Inspired by Hirschman's thesis on 'exit voice and 'loyalty', Kiess talks about three types of reactions to the 2008 economic crisis (i.e. 'Resilience': coping and bouncing back; 'Resistance': politicizing and speaking up, and 'Regression': exiting and downgrading others; he then draws on LIVEWHAT data to show how citizens' perception of the economic crisis matters for all three reactions.

Visit our [website](#) to learn more about our researchers' publications, articles, and papers.

## Feedback from latest consortium meetings

On 17-18 May 2016, our Polish partner – the University of Warsaw – hosted the sixth LIVEWHAT Consortium meeting at the magnificent building of the New Library of the University of Warsaw. At the meeting, the teams discussed papers which are built on findings about individual responses to crises under Workpackage 4. The papers tackled challenging themes pertaining to the social aspects of individual perceptions, assessments and responses to crises by private citizens allowing us to better grasp the cross-national variations in the extent and form of resilience at the micro-level of individual citizens.



In addition, the teams discussed and planned the research steps of the sixth workpackage (WP6) on alternative forms of resilience in times of crisis. Through online surveys and interviews with national key informants, WP6 will identify a wide range of alternative forms of resilience (e.g. barter networks, food banks, free medical services, soup kitchens etc.) across Europe and try to understand what these initiatives suggest for the impact of crises on families, women, children, minorities, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups and communities.



For more information, click here: [Workpackage 6](#)

## Contact Us

LIVEWHAT Consortium includes nine European Universities across Europe. Project Coordinator is the University of Geneva (Switzerland).

The Consortium Partners are:

- European University Institute (Italy);
- Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (France);
- University of Crete (Greece);
- Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain);
- University of Sheffield (United Kingdom);
- University of Siegen (Germany);
- University of Warsaw (Poland);
- Uppsala University (Sweden).

For questions about the project, you may contact the Project Coordinator, **Professor Marco Giugni**, Director of the Institute of Citizenship Studies (InCite), University of Geneva.

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## INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES DE LA CITOYENNETÉ

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### PROJECT INFORMATION:

**Project type:** Collaborative Project  
**Call identifier:** FP7-SSH-2013-5.1-1  
Citizens Resilience in Times of Crisis  
**Start date:** December 2013  
**Duration:** 36 months  
**Grant agreement no:** 613237  
**Project budget:** 2,499,366.00 Euros

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement n° 613237.

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