



FLASH EUROBAROMETER 543

# Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU

EUROBAROMETER SUMMARY  
APRIL 2024



Survey conducted by Ipsos European Public Affairs at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs

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This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

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Flash Eurobarometer 543 – Businesses’ attitudes towards corruption in the EU

Summary

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## Introduction

Corruption is a multi-sector phenomenon, present both in the public and private sector, and in the political arena. While corruption can take the form of petty crime or complex high-level corruption, it can also hide behind favouritism and nepotism, conflicts of interest and revolving doors – where business meets politics. The European Commission (EC) has been given a political mandate to measure efforts in the fight against corruption and to develop a comprehensive EU anti-corruption policy.

This Eurobarometer survey, first conducted in 2013, and repeated in 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2023, is designed to explore the level of corruption perceived and experienced by companies employing one or more persons in the following six key sectors: energy, mining, oil and gas, chemicals; healthcare and pharmaceutical; engineering and electronics, motor vehicles; construction and building; telecommunications and information technologies; and financial services, banking and investment.

For this Flash Eurobarometer, a representative sample of companies (see above) was interviewed between 3 and 23 April 2024 by Ipsos European Public Affairs. Interviews took place via telephone with someone with decision-making responsibilities or leading the commercial activities in the company. In total, 12 856 interviews were conducted.

### Notes

- Survey results are subject to sampling tolerances meaning that not all apparent differences between countries and socio-demographic groups may be statistically significant. Thus, only differences that are statistically significant (at the 5% level) – i.e. where it can be reasonably certain that they are unlikely to have occurred by chance – are highlighted in the text.
- Survey data are weighted to marginal age by gender population distributions using post-stratification weighting. The EU27 are weighted according to the size of the 15+ population of each region/ country.
- Percentages may not add up to 100%, as they are rounded to the nearest percent. Due to rounding, it may also happen that the percentages for separate response options do not exactly add up to the totals mentioned in the text. Response percentages exceed 100% if the question allowed respondents to select multiple responses.
- In this report, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations used in this report are indicated below.

BE  Belgium	FR  France	NL  Netherlands
BG  Bulgaria	HR  Croatia	AT  Austria
CZ  Czechia	IT  Italy	PL  Poland
DK  Denmark	CY  Rep. of Cyprus*	PT  Portugal
DE  Germany	LV  Latvia	RO  Romania
EE  Estonia	LT  Lithuania	SI  Slovenia
IE  Ireland	LU  Luxembourg	SK  Slovakia
EL  Greece	HU  Hungary	FI  Finland
ES  Spain	MT  Malta	SE  Sweden

\* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 27 EU Member States. For practical reasons, interviews are only carried out in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

# 1. Perceptions about corruption and practices leading to corruption

## 1.1. How widespread is the problem of corruption?

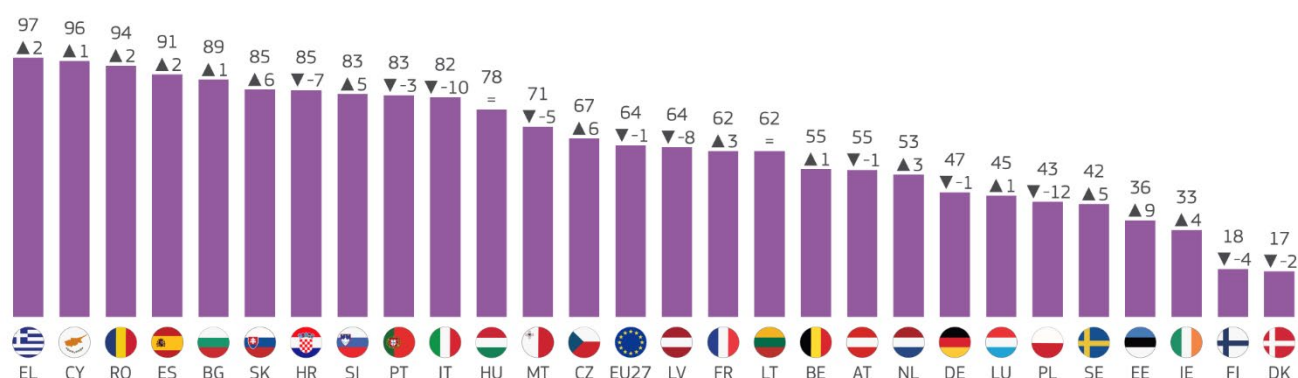
**More than six in ten (64%) EU-based companies think the problem of corruption is 'very' or 'fairly widespread' in their country.** About three in ten companies think that corruption is 'fairly rare' (24%), 'very rare' (7%) or non-existent (1%). These figures have remained stable compared to 2023.

Nearly all respondents in Greece (97%), Cyprus (96%) and Romania (94%) say that the **problem of corruption is 'very' or 'fairly widespread'** in their country. In Denmark and Finland, on the

other hand, only about one in six (17%-18%) respondents reply that corruption is widespread in their country.

Compared to 2023, a significant **increase** in the proportion saying that **corruption is widespread** is observed in Estonia (+9, to 36%) and Slovakia (+6 pp, to 85%).<sup>1</sup> In contrast, in four Member States, there is a **significant decrease** in the proportion of respondents saying that **corruption is widespread** in their country. This is the case in Poland (-12 pp compared to 2023, to 43%), Italy (-10 pp, to 82%), Latvia (-8 pp, to 64%) and Croatia (-7 pp, to 85%).

### Q3 How widespread do you think the problem of corruption is in (YOUR COUNTRY)? Total 'Widespread'



(%) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼ ▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)

<sup>1</sup> Survey results are subject to sampling tolerances meaning that not all apparent differences between years may be statistically significant. Thus, only statistically significant differences (at the 5% level) –

i.e. where it can be reasonably certain that they are unlikely to have occurred by chance – are highlighted in the text.

## 1.2. Most common types of corruption

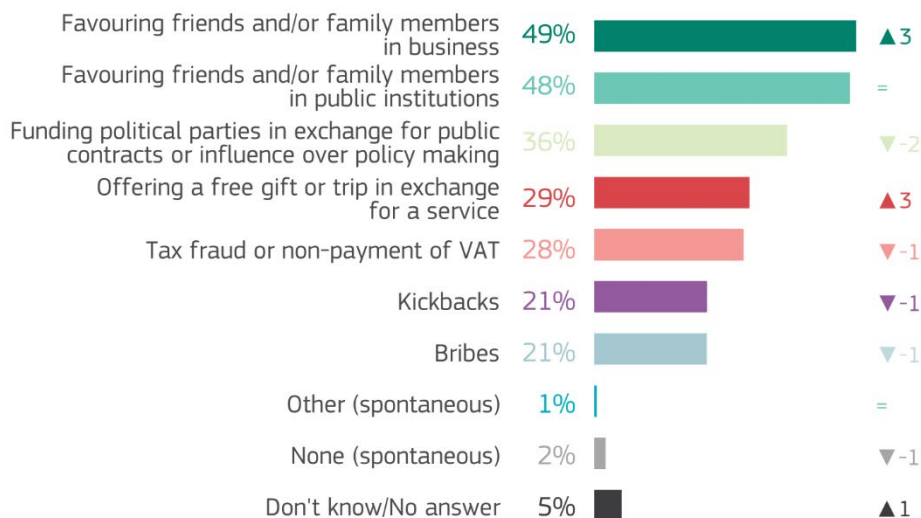
**Across the EU, 49% of companies reply that one of the most widespread corrupt practices in their country is favouring friends and/or family members in business and 48% say the same about favouring friends and/or family members in public institutions.<sup>2</sup>** These two practices were also selected by the largest shares of respondents in 2023.

More than a third of respondents (36%) identify funding political parties in exchange for public contracts or influence over policy making as one of the most widespread corrupt practices in their country. Offering a gift or trip in exchange of a service (29%) and tax fraud or non-payment of VAT (28%) are both mentioned by nearly three in

ten respondents. Kickbacks and bribes (each selected by 21%) are considered the least widespread corrupt practices. The overall rank order of these practices is comparable to that observed in 2023.

**Favouring friends and/or family members in public institutions and in business** are considered among the most widespread corrupt practices by companies across all Member States. Favouring friends and/or family members in business is the highest-ranking corrupt practice in 11 Member States. This is the case, for example, in Sweden (65%) and France (57%). In another 11 Member States, favouring friends and/or family members in public institutions features as the highest-ranking corrupt practice. This is the case, for example, in Spain (66%), Belgium (61%), as well as in Portugal and Romania (both 59%).

**Q6** Which of the following practices do you consider to be the most widespread in (YOUR COUNTRY)?  
 (MAX. 3 ANSWERS POSSIBLE)



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼ ▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)

<sup>2</sup> Respondents were asked which corrupt practices they consider the most widespread in their country.

They were presented with a list of seven practices and up to three practices could be selected.



### 1.3. Bribes and gifts

Companies in this survey were asked about the minimum value at which they would consider a gift or service received by a public official in return for a favour to be a bribe. **As in 2023, a majority of respondents reply that even a small gift, with a value of up to 50 euro, should be considered a bribe.** In more detail, 24% of respondents reply that **'any gift is a bribe'** and 34% that **a gift with a value of between 1 euro and 50 euro** would be considered a bribe. At the other end of the spectrum, 16% of respondents answer that only if a public official has received a **gift of more than 200 euro** they would consider this a bribe.

The analysis of the **country results** shows that between 35% of respondents in Denmark and 70% in Czechia answer that any gift, even if the value is low (**between 0 and 50 euro**), should be considered a bribe.

### 1.4. Opinions about practices leading to corruption

**About eight in ten companies (79%) 'totally agree' or 'tend to agree' that too close links between business and politics in their country lead to corruption.** Four in ten respondents (40%) agree that, in their country, the only way to succeed in business is to have **political connections**.<sup>3</sup>

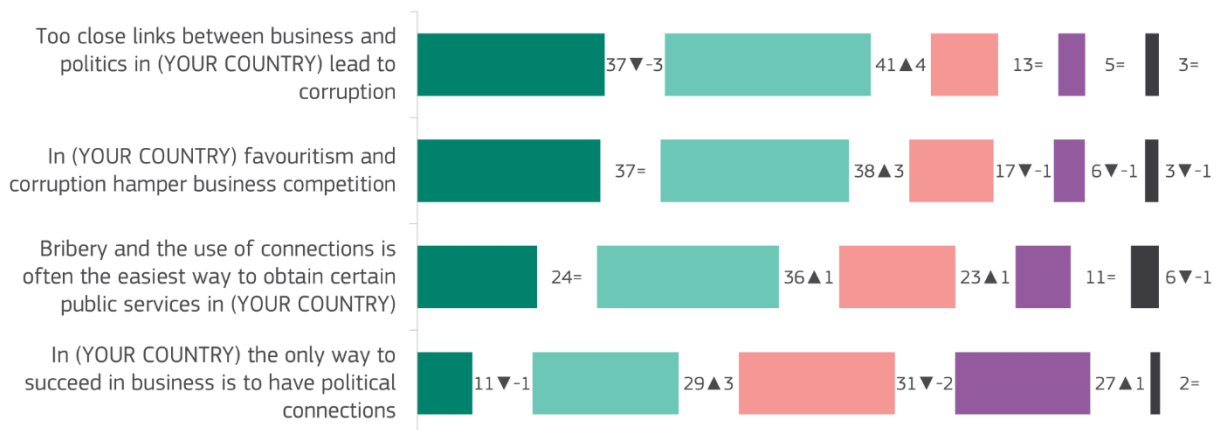
**Across the EU, about three-quarters of companies (74%) agree that, in their country, favouritism and corruption hamper business competition.** Six in ten companies (60%) agree that **bribery and the use of connections** is often the easiest way to obtain certain public services in their country.

In all but two Member States, more than half of the companies interviewed agree that **too close links between business and politics in their country lead to corruption**. The smallest shares agreeing with this statement are seen in Denmark (40%) and Luxembourg (43%), while the largest shares are found in Greece (93%), Bulgaria (92%), Cyprus (91%) and Spain (90%). In line with the EU average results, across most countries, this is the statement that companies are the most likely to agree with.

Across most countries, a smaller share of companies agree that, in their country, **the only way to succeed in business is to have political connections**. Nonetheless, in five countries, a majority of respondents agree with this statement: Portugal (65%), Cyprus (57%), Italy (53%), Greece (52%) and Hungary (50%).

#### Q7 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Totally agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree Totally disagree Don't know/No answer



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)  
responses shown in charts may not exactly add up to the totals mentioned in the text.

## 2. Attitudes and beliefs about measures against corruption

### 2.1. Opinions about law enforcement

Overall, across the EU, just a **slim majority of companies believe that it is 'very' (14%) or 'fairly likely' (42%) that individuals and businesses engaged in corrupt practices would face charges and go to court**, with 43% thinking, however, that this is unlikely to be the case. **Only one in two companies** think it is likely that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices in their country will be **caught by or reported to the police or prosecutors** (11% 'very likely' and 40% 'fairly likely'). **About four in ten respondents** think it is likely (9% 'very likely' and 31% 'fairly likely') that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices will be **heavily fined or imprisoned by a court**, with 56% thinking that this is unlikely to be the case..

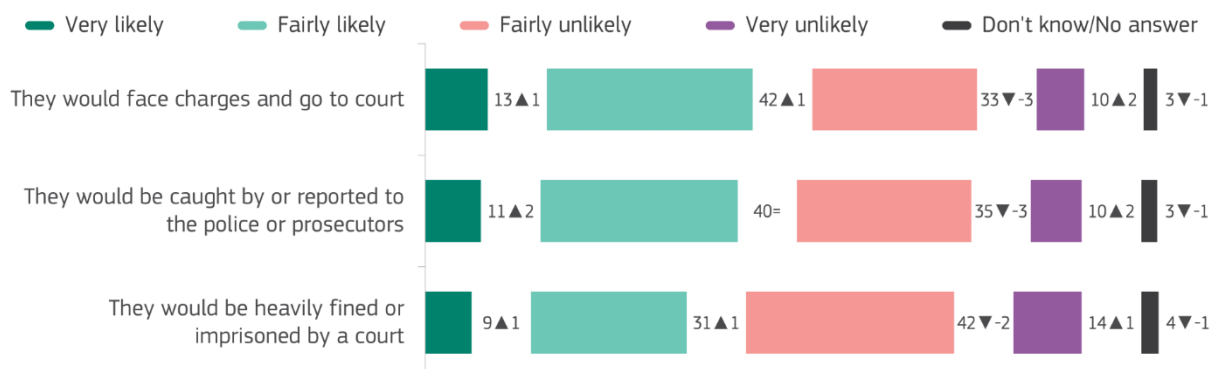
About three-quarters (74%) of companies in Estonia, followed by 70% of companies in Denmark and Poland, and 69% in Lithuania, consider it 'very' or 'fairly likely' that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices in their country would **face charges and go to**

**court**. In Bulgaria (23%) and Slovakia (26%), in sharp contrast, less than three in ten companies agree that this is likely.

Respondents in Denmark (72%) and Lithuania (70%) are among the most inclined to think it is likely that people or businesses engaging in corrupt practices in their country **would be caught by or reported to the police or prosecutors**. In turn, respondents in Slovakia (25%), Bulgaria (30%) and Cyprus (32%) are the least likely to consider it likely that people or businesses engaging in corrupt practices in their country would be caught or reported to the authorities.

More than six in ten companies in Austria (62%), Denmark (62%) and Luxembourg (61%) think it is likely that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices will be **heavily fined or imprisoned by a court**. In Bulgaria, the view that corruption practices are followed up by fines or imprisonment by a court is shared by just 11% of companies. This proportion is also lower than a quarter in Slovakia (19%) and Slovenia (22%).

**Q8** How likely do you think it is that the following would happen to people or businesses engaging in corrupt practices in (YOUR COUNTRY)?



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)



## 2.2. Opinions about how corruption is tackled

When asked **if people and businesses caught for petty corruption are appropriately punished in their country, equal shares agree (44%) and disagree (45%)**. However, a **clear majority (58%) disagree** that people and businesses caught for **bribing a senior official are appropriately punished** in their country.

There is also **a majority of companies (54%) disagreeing that measures against corruption are applied impartially and without ulterior motives** in their country. About **two-thirds of companies (66%) disagree** that there is **sufficient transparency and supervision of the funding of political parties** in their country.

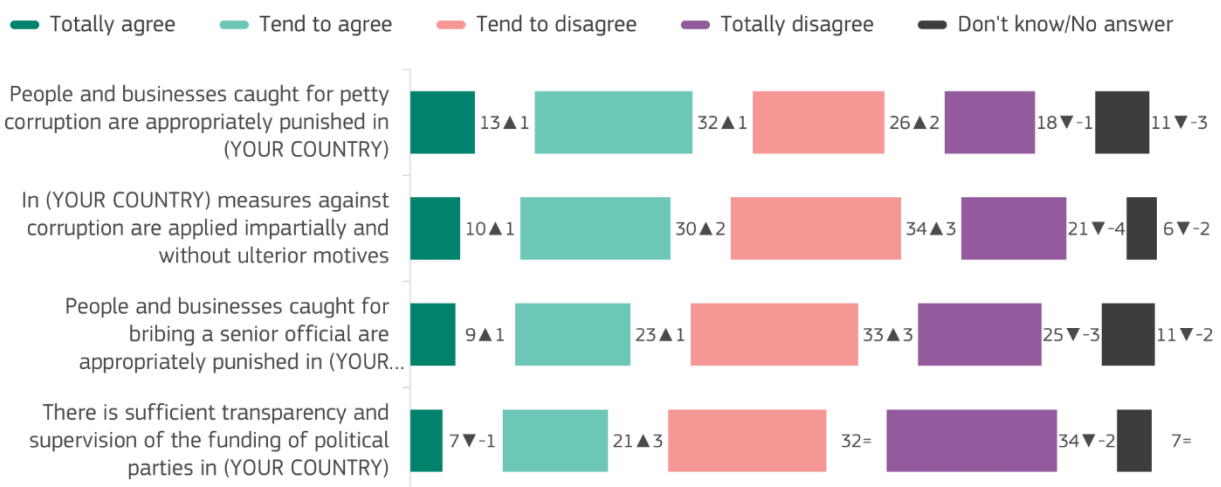
In 12 Member States, more than half of companies agree that **people and businesses caught for petty corruption are appropriately punished** in their country. Companies in Finland are overall the most likely to agree with this statement (66%). In Spain, on the other hand, 21% of respondents agree that people and businesses caught for petty corruption are appropriately punished.

Companies in Finland (63%) are also the most likely to agree that **people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official** are appropriately punished in their country. At the other end of the spectrum, in Slovakia (9%) and Cyprus (10%), about one in ten respondents agree with this statement.

In Luxembourg, 71% of companies agree that, in their country, **measures against corruption are applied impartially and without ulterior motives**. In another six Member States, at least half of respondents agree with this statement on impartiality (from 50% in the Netherlands to 63% in Finland). In Bulgaria, on the other hand, only 9% of respondents agree that anti-corruption measures are applied impartially in their country.

There is also considerable variation in the proportion of companies agreeing that there is **sufficient transparency and supervision of the funding of political parties** in their country. In Finland, 51% of companies agree that there is sufficient transparency and supervision. On the other hand, this view is shared by about one in ten companies in Cyprus (9%), Spain (10%) and Greece (12%).

### Q7 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)

### 3. Problems encountered when doing business

**Corruption** is considered a 'very serious' or 'quite serious' problem by more than a third of EU-based companies (37%) when doing business in their country. A similar number (also 37%) consider **patronage and nepotism** a serious problem when doing business in their country. These proportions are about the same as in 2023.

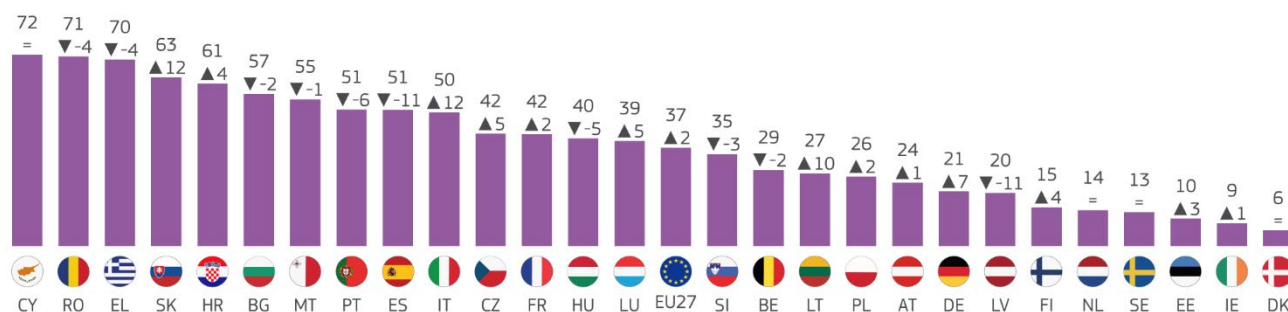
The **complexity of administrative procedures, tax rates** and **fast-changing legislation and policies**, however, are the **main problems companies face when doing business in their country**. About two-thirds of companies (66%) report that the complexity of administrative procedures is serious problems for them when doing business in their country; the proportion saying that tax rates are a serious problem is also 66%. These are followed by fast-changing legislation and policies (identified by 64% of companies as a problem).

#### Corruption as a problem when doing business

There is a large variation across the Member States in the **extent to which corruption is considered a serious problem** when doing business. The highest proportions of companies for which corruption is a 'very serious' or 'quite serious' problem are seen in Cyprus (72%), Romania (71%) and Greece (70%), while the lowest proportions are observed in Denmark (6%), Ireland (9%) and Estonia (10%). In Denmark, 80% of companies reply that corruption is 'not at all a problem' for their company; a similarly high proportion is observed in the Netherlands (77%).

Compared to 2023, a significant change in the proportion of companies **identifying corruption as a problem** is seen in four countries. In Latvia, less companies than in 2023 consider corruption a problem for their company (-11 pp, to 20%), while a significant increase in the proportion of companies thinking so is seen in Lithuania (+10 pp, to 27%), Italy (+12 pp, to 50%) and Slovakia (+12 pp, to 63%).

**Q1\_1** Do you consider the following to be a problem or not for your company when doing business in (YOUR COUNTRY)?  
*Corruption*  
**Total 'A problem'**



(%) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼ ▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)

## 4. Corruption in public procurement

### 4.1. Perceived level of corruption in public procurement

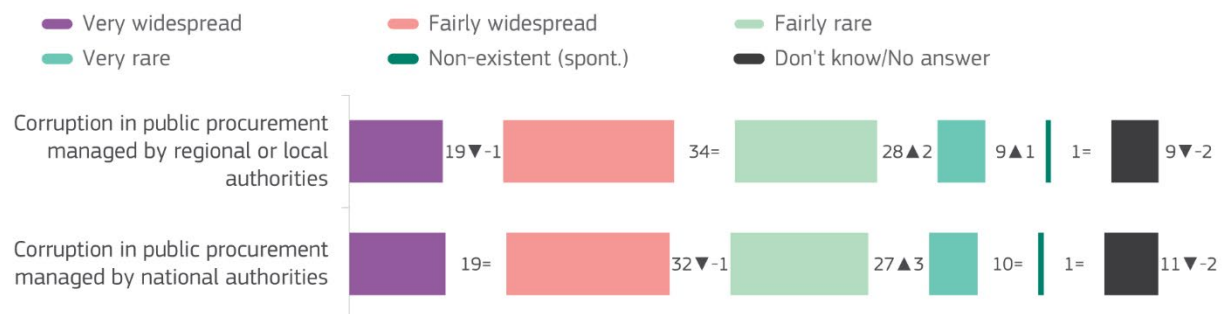
Overall, across the EU, **slightly more than half of companies surveyed report that corruption in public procurement managed by national authorities is widespread in their country** (19% 'very widespread' and 32% 'fairly widespread') and **a similar proportion say the same about corruption in public procurement managed by regional or local authorities** (19% 'very widespread' and 34% 'fairly widespread').

More than eight in ten respondents in Cyprus (85%) reply that **corruption in public procurement managed by national authorities** in their country is 'very' or 'fairly widespread'. In another 15 Member States, this view is shared by at least half of respondents

(from 50% in Hungary to 79% in Greece). In seven Member States, less than four in ten companies reply that corruption in public procurement managed by national authorities in their country is widespread (from 18% in Finland to 36% in Poland).

Companies in Cyprus (86%) – joined by those in Greece (85%) – are also the most likely to say that corruption public procurement managed by **regional or local authorities** is 'very' or 'fairly widespread' in their country. There are also similarities among the countries where companies are the least likely to think that corruption in public procurement is widespread. Less than a quarter of respondents in Finland (24%), Ireland (both 24%) and Denmark (23%) answer that corruption in public procurement managed by regional or local authorities is widespread in their country.

**Q5** And how widespread do you think the following practices are in (YOUR COUNTRY)?



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)

## 4.2. Extent of illegal practices in public procurement procedures

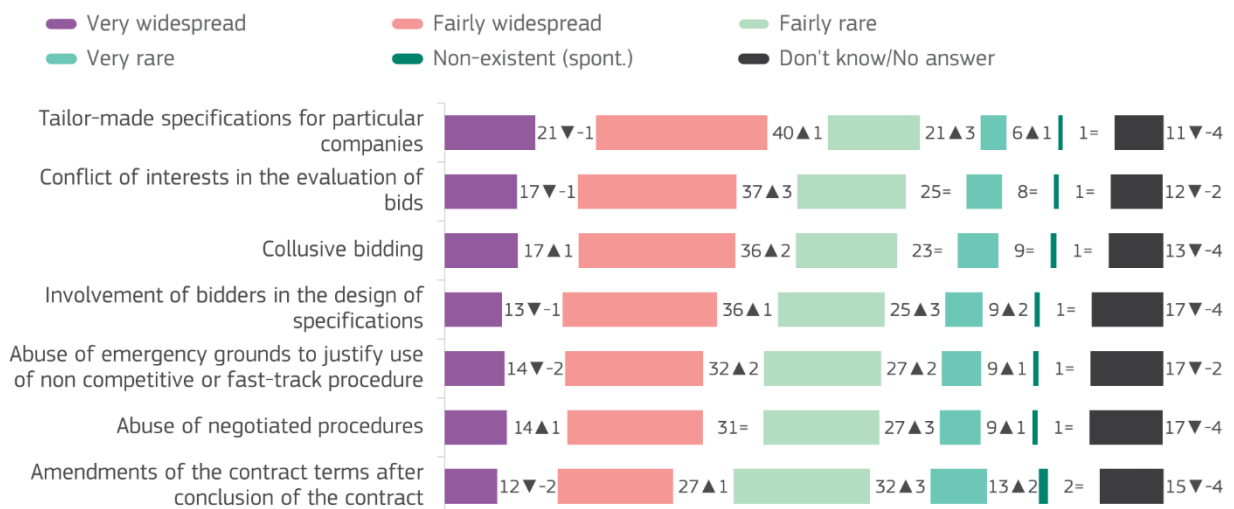
Respondents were asked how widespread they believe certain practices are in public procurement in their country. **The largest share of respondents (61%) think that specifications that are tailor-made for particular companies are a 'very' or 'fairly widespread' practice in their country.** In turn, the smallest share of respondents (39%) say that it is a widespread practice in their country to make **amendments of contract terms after conclusion of the contract.**

A majority of respondents (54%) think that **conflicts of interest in the evaluation of**

**bids** is a widespread practice in public procurement in their country; similarly, 53% of respondents answer that **collusive bidding** is widespread. Somewhat smaller shares say the same about proportions think that **involvement of bidders in the design of specifications** (49%), **abuse of negotiated procedures** (46%) and **abuse of emergency grounds to justify use of non-competitive or fast-track procedures** (46%) are widespread practices in their country.

Given that a considerable share of companies do not have recent experience with public procurement, the number of 'don't know' responses is somewhat higher for this question (between 12% and 17%).

### Q4 And how widespread do you think the following practices are in public procurement procedures in (YOUR COUNTRY)?



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 856 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2024-2023 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 524, March-April 2023)

