

FLASH EUROBAROMETER 557

# Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU and in selected enlargement countries

EUROBAROMETER **SUMMARY**  
JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2025



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

Survey coordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM “Public Opinion and Citizens Engagement” Unit)

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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## 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, 2023 and 2024, is designed to explore the level of corruption perceived and experienced by businesses 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 27 January and 28 February 2025 by Ipsos European Public Affairs. In addition to interviews across the 27 EU

Member States (12 926 interviews), interviews were also conducted in four enlargement countries: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia (1 771 interviews). Interviews took place via telephone with someone with decision-making responsibilities or leading the commercial activities in the company.

### Notes

- Survey results are subject to sampling tolerances meaning that not all apparent differences may be statistically significant. Only differences that are statistically significant (at the 5% level) are highlighted in the text.
- Survey data were weighted to marginal population distributions (in terms of number of employees and NACE sector; source: Eurostat Enterprise Statistics and Business Demography, 2023) using rim weighting. The EU27 averages are weighted according to the size of the business population of each country.
- Response percentages exceed 100% if the question allowed respondents to select multiple responses.
- In this report, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation as indicated below.

BE  Belgium

BG  Bulgaria

CZ  Czechia

DK  Denmark

DE  Germany

EE  Estonia

IE  Ireland

EL  Greece

ES  Spain

FR  France

HR  Croatia

IT  Italy

CY  Rep. of Cyprus\*

LV  Latvia

LT  Lithuania

LU  Luxembourg

HU  Hungary

MT  Malta

NL  Netherlands

AT  Austria

PL  Poland

PT  Portugal

RO  Romania

SI  Slovenia

SK  Slovakia

FI  Finland

SE  Sweden

ME  Montenegro

MK  North Macedonia

AL  Albania

RS  Serbia

\* 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 (63%) EU-based companies think the problem of corruption is widespread in their country.** Since 2019, this perception did not change much (between 63% and 65%).

Nearly all respondents in Greece (97%), Cyprus (93%) and Romania (90%) say that the problem of corruption is widespread in their country. In Denmark, on the other hand, only about one in six (18%) say the same.

Compared to 2024, a significant increase in the proportion of respondents saying that corruption is widespread is observed in Finland (+10 pp, to 28%), Hungary (+6 pp, to 83%) and Croatia (+5 pp, to 90%).

In the four enlargement countries surveyed, this share varies between 79% (Montenegro) and 91% (North Macedonia).

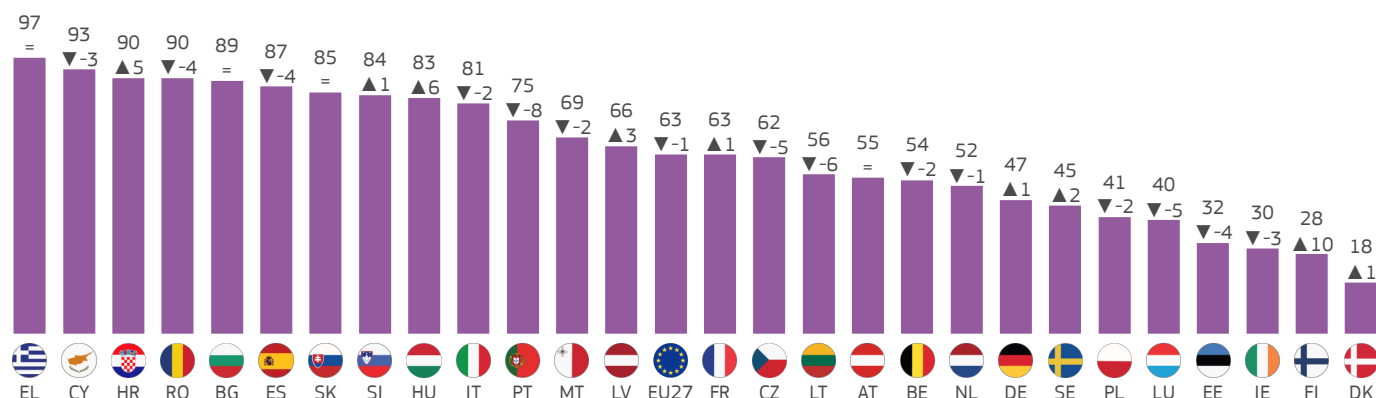
## 1.2. Corruption as a problem when doing business

**EU-based companies continue to find corruption to be a serious problem when doing business in their country.** Compared to 2024, the proportion of companies identifying corruption as a serious problem has remained broadly comparable (35% in the current survey vs 37% in 2024). However, the extent to which corruption is perceived as a serious problem varies considerably across Member States. The highest shares of companies for which corruption is a serious problem are seen in Greece (75%) and Romania (72%), while the lowest ones are observed in Ireland (8%), Estonia (9%) and Denmark (11%).

In the four enlargement countries surveyed, between 47% and 63% of respondents identify corruption as a serious problem.

**Q3** How widespread do you think the problem of corruption is in (YOUR COUNTRY)?

**Total 'Widespread'**



(%) Base: n=12 923 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2025-2024 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 543, April 2024)

### 1.3. Most common types of corruption

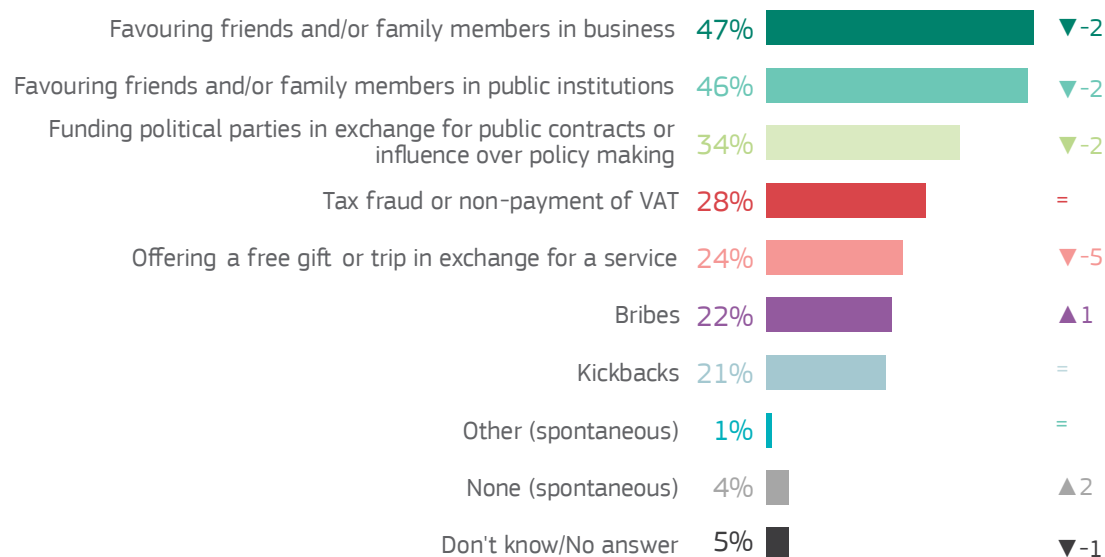
Across the EU, 47% of companies reply that **one of the most widespread corrupt practices in their country is favouring friends and/or family members in business** and 46% say the same about favouring friends and/or family members in public institutions.<sup>1</sup> Since 2017, these two practices continue to be selected by the largest shares of respondents.

As in 2024, about a third of respondents (34%) 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. Tax fraud or non-payment of VAT is mentioned by 28% of respondents. **Offering a gift or trip in exchange of a service** is mentioned by 24%, **bribes** by 22% and **kickbacks** by 21% of companies as widespread corrupt practices. The overall rank order of the practices is largely comparable to that observed in 2024.

**Favouring friends and/or family members in public institutions or 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 13 Member States. This is the case, for example, in the Netherlands (53%), Austria and Sweden (both 52%). In another ten Member States, favouring friends and/or family members in public institutions is the highest-ranking corrupt practice. This applies, for example, to Portugal (61%), Lithuania and Poland (both 59%), as well as Spain and Slovakia (both 58%).

Favouring friends and/or family members in public institutions is also considered the most widespread practice in Montenegro (61%) and North Macedonia (44%). In contrast, bribing is the highest-ranking corrupt practice in Albania (48%), while funding political parties in exchange for public contracts or influence over policy making is the highest-ranking one in Serbia (46%).

**Q5** Which of the following practices do you consider to be the most widespread in (YOUR COUNTRY)?  
(MAX. 3 ANSWERS POSSIBLE)



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 923 – All companies

▼ ▲ Evolution 2025-2024 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 543, April 2024)

<sup>1</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.

**Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU and in selected enlargement countries****1.4. Bribes and gifts**

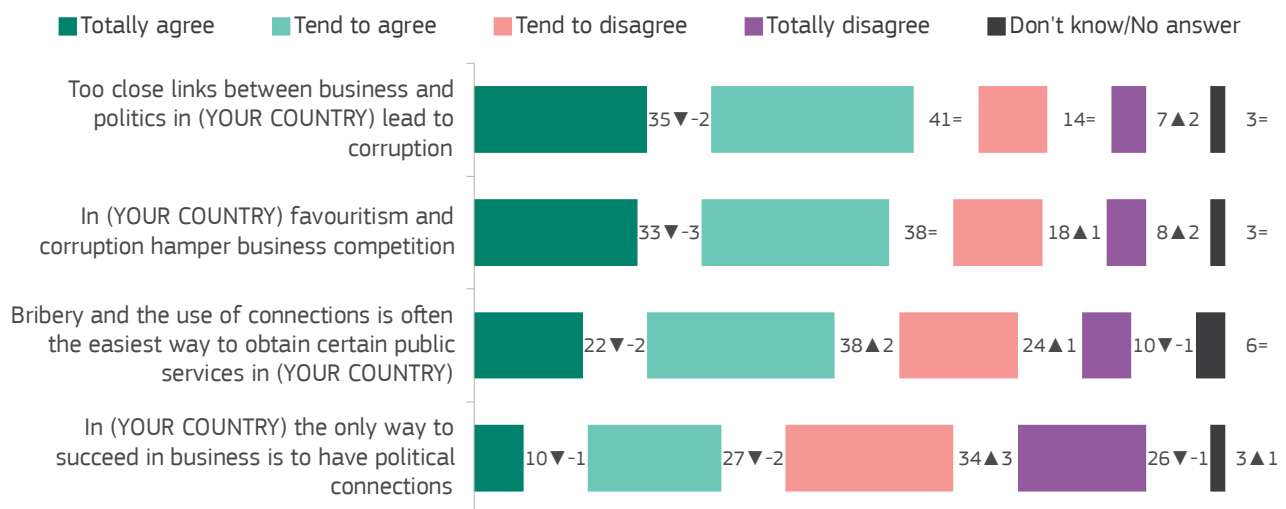
Companies in this survey were asked about the minimum value at which they would consider a gift or service received by a public official in return for a favour to be a bribe. As in 2024, a majority of respondents reply that **even a small gift, with a value of up to 50 euro, should be considered a bribe**. In more detail, 25% of respondents reply that **'any gift is a bribe'** and 33% that **a gift with a value of between 1 euro and 50 euro** should be considered a bribe.

The individual country results show that between 35% of respondents in Denmark and 76% in Poland answer that any gift, even if the value is low (up to 50 euro), should be considered a bribe. In the enlargement countries, this view is shared by between 51% of companies in Serbia and 74% in Albania.

**1.5. Practices leading to corruption**

Across the EU, about three-quarters of companies (76%) agree that **too close links between business and politics** in their country lead to corruption. Close to four in ten respondents (37%) agree that, in their country, the only way to succeed in business is to have **political connections**. About seven in ten companies (71%) 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. The EU level results for this question have remained largely the same compared to 2024.

In all but two Member States (Denmark and Luxembourg), more than half of the companies agree that too close links between business and politics in their country lead to corruption. The largest shares agreeing with this statement are found in Greece (95%), Bulgaria (91%), Cyprus (90%), Romania (90%) and Slovakia (90%). In the four enlargement countries, more than eight in ten companies agree with this statement (between 83% and 89%).

**Q6 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

(EU27, %) Base: n=12 923 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2025-2024 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 543, April 2024)



## 2. Attitudes and beliefs about measures against corruption

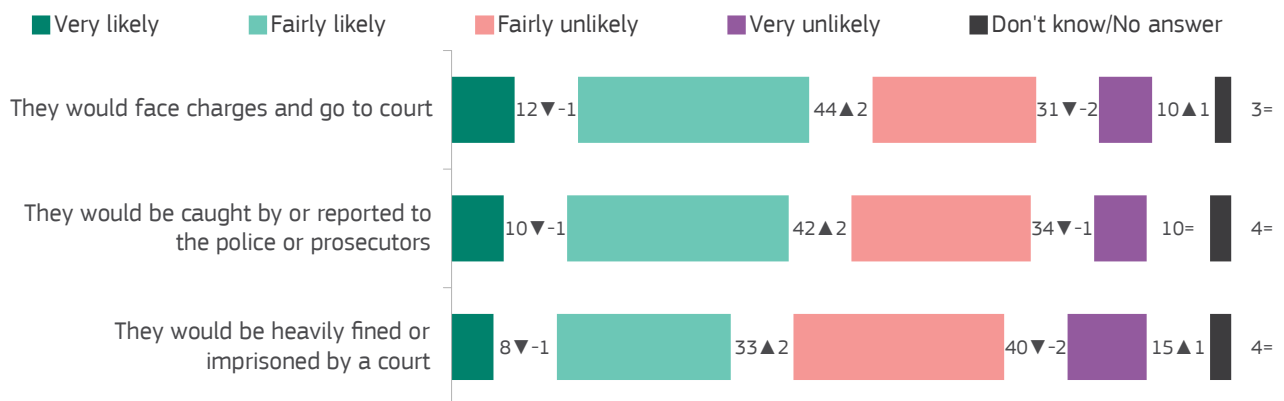
### 2.1. Opinions about law enforcement

**Only a slim majority of companies (52%) 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. Even fewer companies (41%) think it is likely that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices will be heavily fined or imprisoned by a court.**

More than half of EU-based companies (56%) believe that it is likely that **individuals and businesses engaged in corrupt practices**

**would face charges and go to court.** Just over seven in ten companies in Estonia (72%), followed by 69% of companies in Poland and 68% in Belgium, Denmark and Lithuania, consider it likely that individuals and businesses engaging in corrupt practices in their country would face charges and go to court. In Slovakia (22%) and Bulgaria (24%), in sharp contrast, less than a quarter of companies agree that such legal consequences would be likely. In North Macedonia (57%), Albania (62%) and Montenegro (63%), a majority of companies agree with this statement; in Serbia, however, just 28% agree.

**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=12 923 – All companies

▼ ▲ Evolution 2025-2024 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 543, April 2024)



## Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU and in selected enlargement countries

## 2.2. Opinions about how corruption is being tackled

A clear majority of EU-based companies (56%) disagree that **people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished** in their country. Companies in Slovakia are overall the most likely to disagree with this statement (89%), followed by companies in Bulgaria (86%), Spain (84%), Cyprus and Slovenia (both 83%). In Luxembourg, on the other hand, less than 26% of companies disagree. About half of companies in Albania (51%), North Macedonia (50%) and Serbia (47%) agree that people and businesses caught for petty corruption are appropriately punished in their country, compared to 23% of companies in Montenegro (32%).

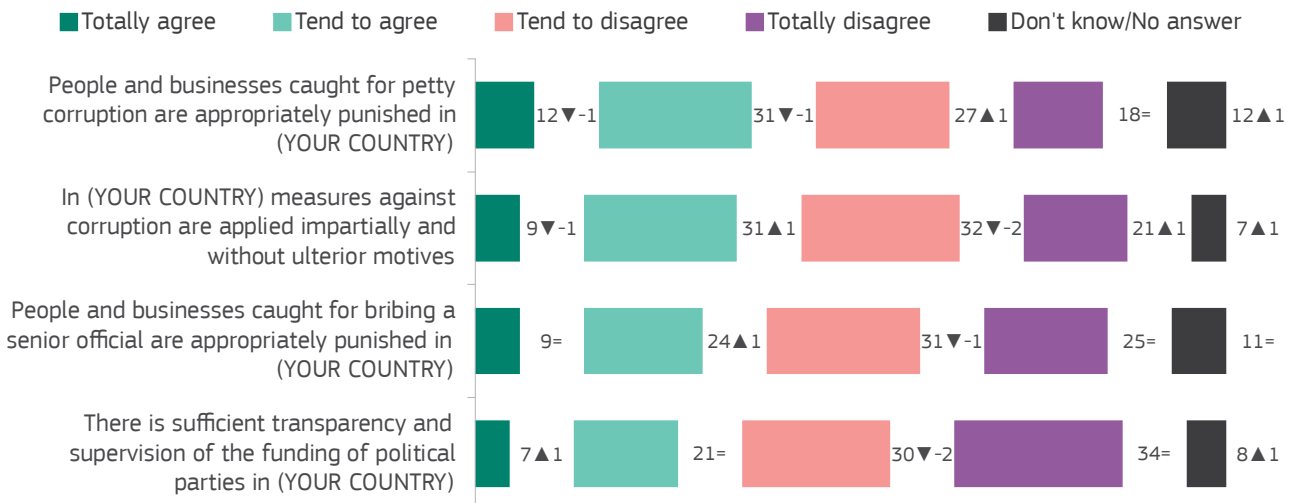
Almost equal shares agree (43%) and disagree (45%) that **people and businesses caught for petty corruption are appropriately**

**punished** in their country. Opinions about these measures have remained largely unchanged compared to 2024.

A slimmer majority of companies (53%) also disagree that **measures against corruption are applied impartially and without ulterior motives** in their country.

More than six in ten companies (64%) disagree that there is **sufficient transparency and supervision of the funding of political parties** in their country. There is considerable variation in the proportion of companies agreeing with this statement. In Luxembourg (53%) and Finland (52%), a slim majority of companies agree, compared to about one in ten companies in Spain (9%) and Greece (11%). In the enlargement countries, between 15% and 36% of companies agree that there is sufficient transparency and supervision of the funding of political parties in their country.

## Q6 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 923 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2025-2024 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 543, April 2024)

### 2.3. Opinions about whistleblowing practices

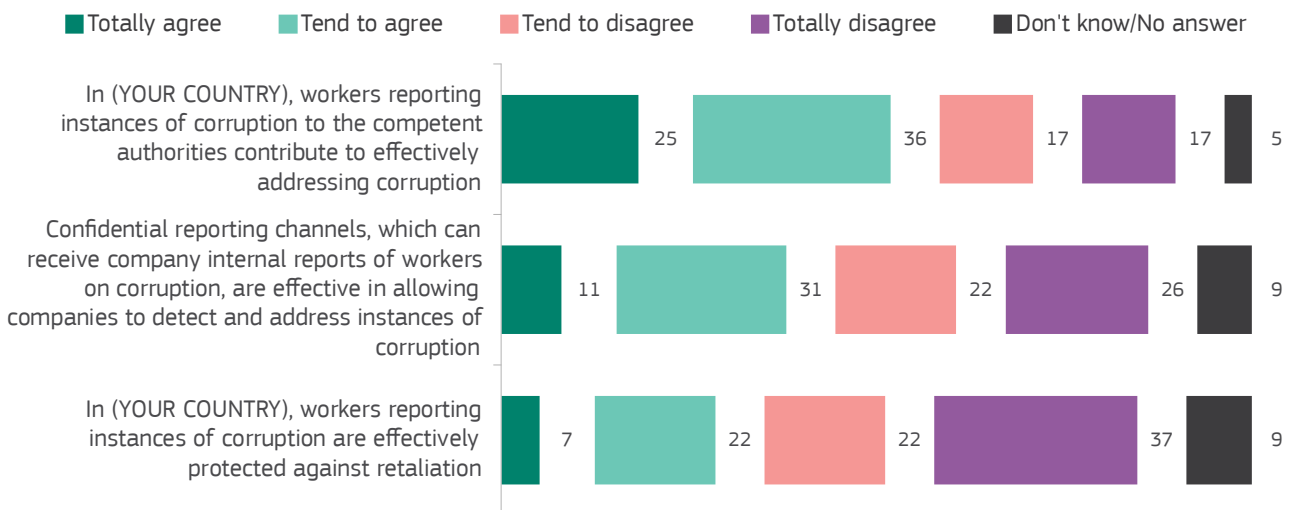
About six in ten companies (61%) agree that, in their country, **workers reporting instances of corruption to the competent authorities contribute to effectively addressing corruption**. Across all but two Member States (Bulgaria and Austria), a majority of companies agree with this statement. The highest shares of agreement are observed in Lithuania (86%) and Finland (86%), followed by Estonia (78%) and Romania (74%). In the four enlargement

countries, agreement varies between 59% in Labania and 65% in Montenegro.

Just over four in ten companies (42%) agree that confidential reporting channels, which can receive company internal reports of workers on corruption, are effective in **allowing companies to detect and address corruption**.

Fewer companies (29%) agree that, in their country, workers reporting instances of corruption are **effectively protected against retaliation**.

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



(EU27, %) Base: n=12 923 – All companies

### 3. Corruption in public procurement

Among the companies surveyed across the EU, 27% report that they have taken part in a public tender or a public procurement procedure in the past three years. At the individual country level, this proportion varies between 8% in the Netherlands and 48% in Finland. In the four enlargement countries, this share varies between 11% (Albania) and 32% (Serbia).

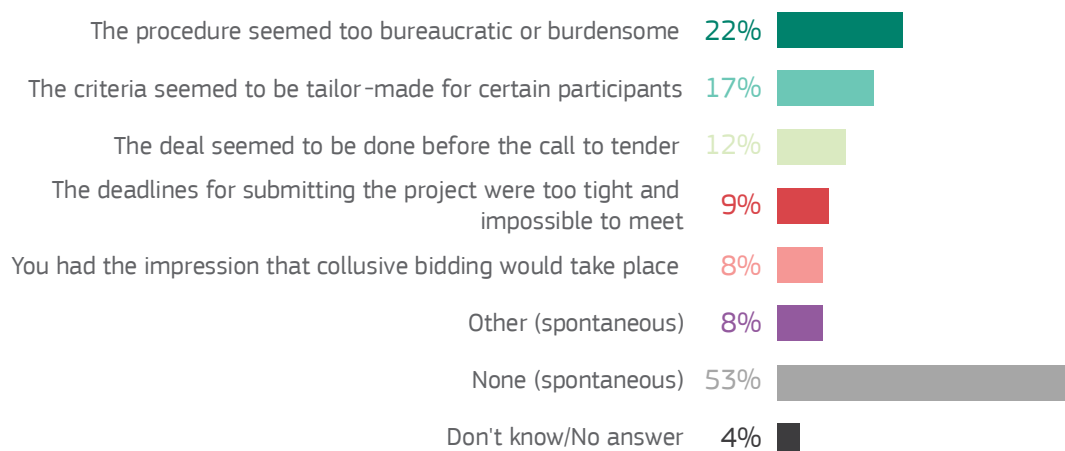
#### 3.1. Participation in public procurement procedures

Among the companies in the EU that have participated in a procurement procedure, 25% think that **corruption has prevented them from winning a public tender or a public**

**procurement contract**; this proportion has not significantly changed compared to 2024.

Among companies in the EU that have not participated in a public tender, some reply that they did not do so because the procedure seemed too bureaucratic or burdensome (mentioned by 22%), the criteria seemed to be tailor-made for certain participants (17%), the deal seemed to be done before the call for tender (12%), the deadlines for submitting the project were too tight or impossible to meet (9%) or they had the impression that **collusive bidding** would have taken place (8%).

**D9b** Was it for any of the following reasons?  
(MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)



(EU27, %) Base=8 791 – Companies that did not take part in a public tender or a public procurement procedure in the past three years

**Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU and in selected enlargement countries****3.2. Extent of illegal practices in public procurement procedures**

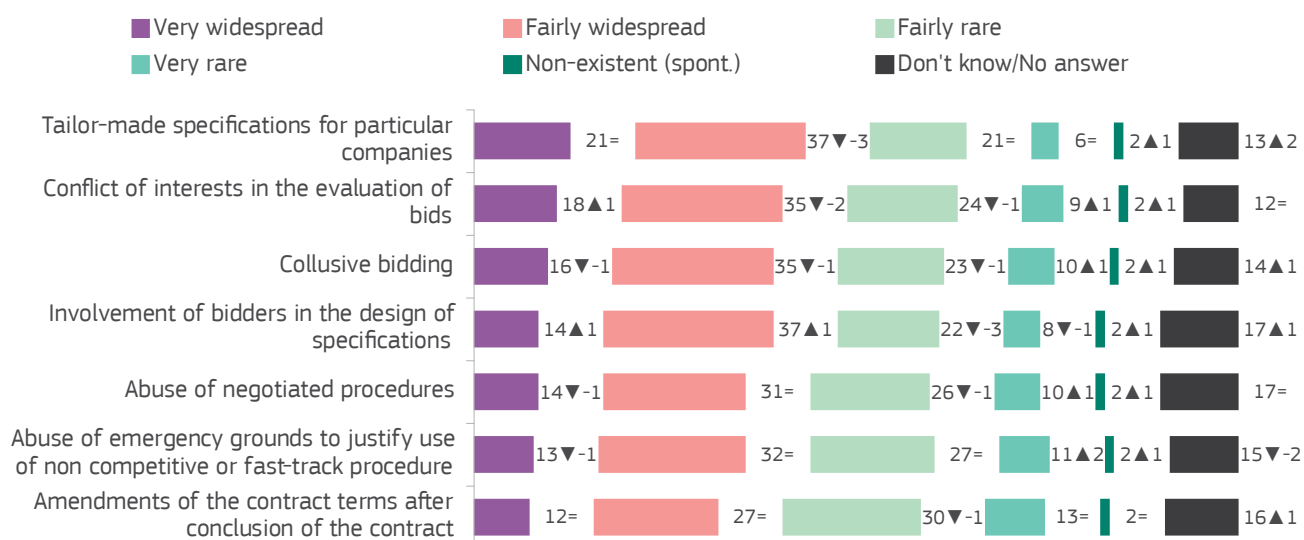
Both groups of companies, with public procurement experience and those without, were asked how widespread they think the aforementioned types of practices are in public procurement procedures in their country.

The largest share of respondents (58%) think that **specifications that are tailor-made for particular companies** are a 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 (53%) think that **conflicts of interest in the evaluation of bids** are a widespread practice in public procurement in their country; similarly, 51% of respondents answer that **collusive bidding** is a

widespread practice and another 51% say the same about the collusive bidding **involvement of bidders in the design of specifications**. Somewhat smaller shares say the same about the **abuse of negotiated procedures** (45%) and the **abuse of emergency grounds to justify use of non-competitive or fast-track procedures** (45%).

In seven Member States, at least three-quarters of companies think that **specifications that are tailor-made for particular companies** is a widespread practise; this applies to Greece (92%), Cyprus and Slovakia (both 81%), Spain and Bulgaria (both 77%), as well as Romania and Croatia (both 75%). In Serbia, 71% of companies report that it is a widespread corrupt practice in their country to make tailor-made specifications for particular companies. In the other three enlargement countries, this share varies between 61% and 65%.

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

(EU27, %) Base: n=12 923 – All companies

▼▲ Evolution 2025-2024 (comparison with Flash Eurobarometer 543, April 2024)

