

Attitudes of Europeans towards resource efficiency

Summary

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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.

Flash EB Series #316

Attitudes of Europeans towards resource efficiency

Survey conducted by The Gallup Organization,
Hungary upon the request of
Directorate-General Environment



Coordinated by Directorate-General
Communication

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THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION

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Introduction

The primary objective of the Flash Eurobarometer survey “*Attitudes of Europeans towards resource efficiency*” (Flash N° 316) was to gauge EU citizens’ perceptions, attitudes and practices concerning resource efficiency, waste management and recycling. In detail, the survey examined:

- citizens’ perceptions of Europe’s efficiency in its use of natural resources
- the amount of waste EU households produce and whether they separate that waste for recycling or composting
- preferred actions to improve EU households’ and communities’ waste management
- citizens’ views on how to pay for waste management
- EU households’ food waste production and preferred ways of decreasing that waste
- citizens’ perceptions of the importance of a product’s environmental impact when making purchasing decisions
- citizens’ willingness to buy second-hand products and products that made of recycled materials.

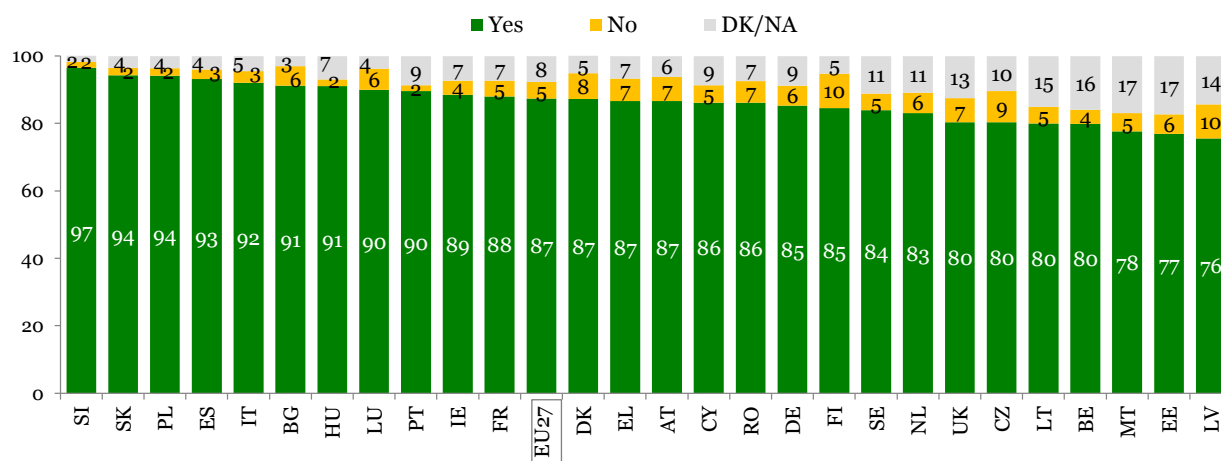
The survey obtained interviews – fixed-line, mobile phone and face-to-face – with nationally representative samples of EU citizens (aged 15 and older) living in the 27 Member States. The target sample size in all countries was 1,000 interviews; in total, 27,164 interviews were conducted by Gallup’s network of fieldwork organisations between 4 January and 8 January 2011. Statistical results were weighted to correct for known demographic discrepancies.

1. Europe's use of natural resources

Almost 9 in 10 (87%) EU citizens stated that **Europe could be more efficient in its use of natural resources**; the proportion of respondents who thought in this way was high in all individual countries surveyed and ranged from 76% in Latvia to 97% in Slovenia.

The variation across socio-demographic groups was highest when looking at respondents' level of education: 91% of respondents with the highest level of education agreed with this statement compared to 81% of those with the lowest level of education.

Could Europe be more efficient in its use of natural resources?



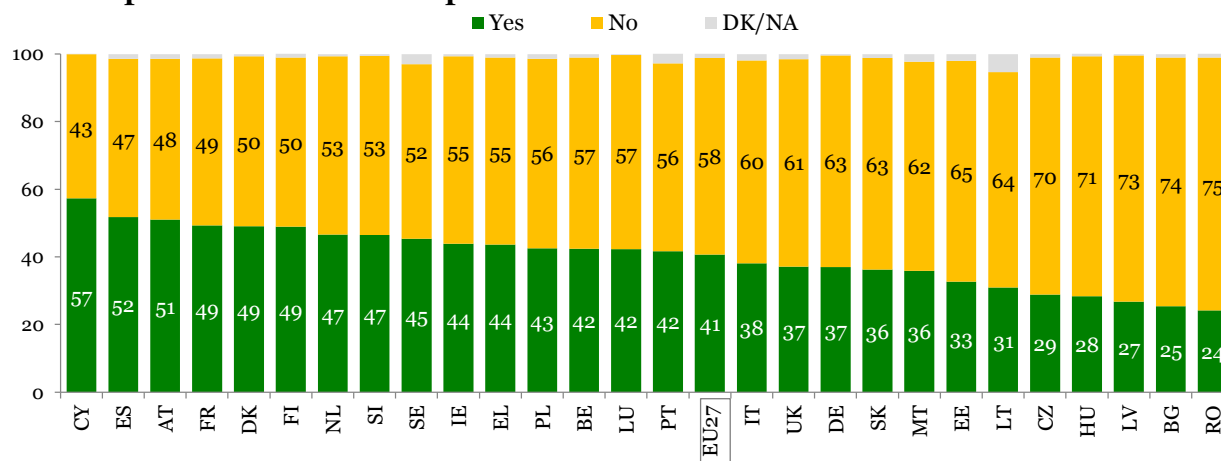
Q0. Do you think Europe could be more efficient in its use of natural resources?
Base: all respondents, % by country

2. Households' waste management

Although a majority of respondents in most EU Member States thought that **their household was not producing too much waste**, 4 in 10 (41%) EU citizens thought the opposite. In particular, more than half of respondents in Cyprus (57%), Spain (52%) and Austria (51%) thought that they were producing too much household waste.

Respondents with the highest level of education, 25-54 year-olds, the self-employed, employees and metropolitan residents were the most likely to say that they were producing too much household waste; for example, 47% of the most educated shared this view compared to 34% of the least educated.

Do respondents' households produce too much waste

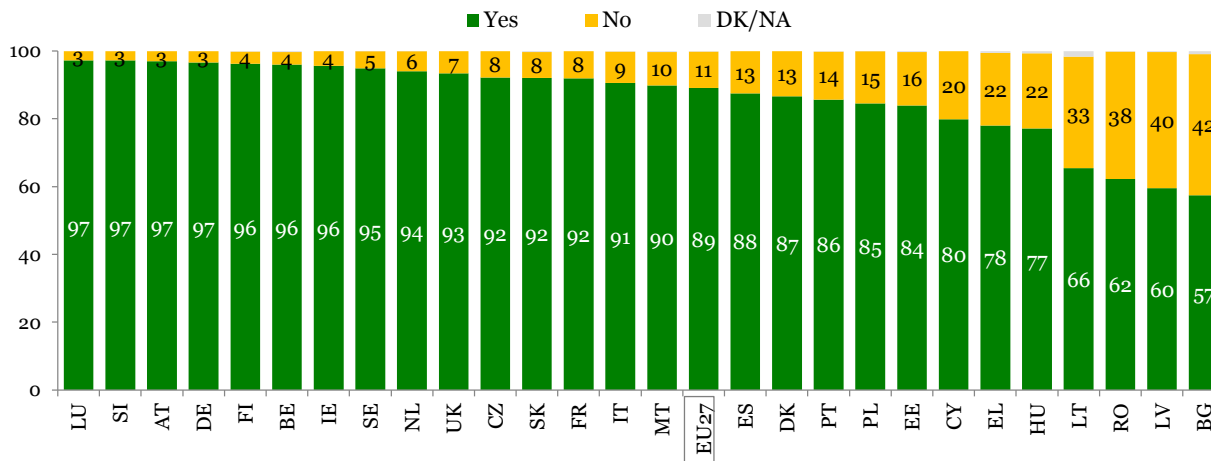


Q1. Do you think that your household is producing too much waste or not?
Base: all respondents, % by country

Roughly 9 in 10 (89%) EU citizens said that they **separated at least some of their waste** for recycling or composting or composting. In four countries, at least a third of respondents said they did not recycle or compost any of their household waste: Lithuania (33%), Romania (38%), Latvia (40%) and Bulgaria (42%).

Younger respondents and those still in education were more likely to say that they did not separate any of their household waste for recycling or composting. For example, 15% of 15-24 year-olds said that they did not separate their waste compared to 9% of over 40 year-olds.

Are households separating waste for recycling or composting?



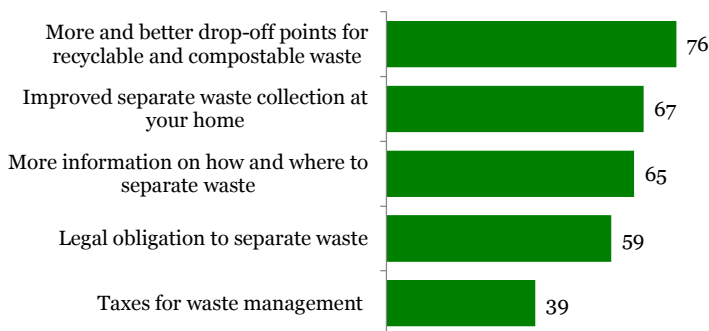
Q2. Do you separate at least some of your waste for recycling or composting?
Base: all respondents, % by country

3. Improving waste management

3.1 Initiatives that would convince respondents to separate waste

When asked which initiatives would convince them to separate (more) waste for recycling or composting, the largest proportion (76%) of EU citizens selected *more and better drop-off points for recyclable and compostable waste*. *Improved separate waste collection at home* was mentioned by two-thirds (67%) of respondents and a similar proportion (65%) selected *more information on how and where to separate waste*.

Initiatives that would convince respondents to separate (more) waste



Q3a. What would convince you to separate more of your waste?
Q3b. What would convince you to separate at least some of your waste?
Base: all respondents, % of "Would convince", EU27

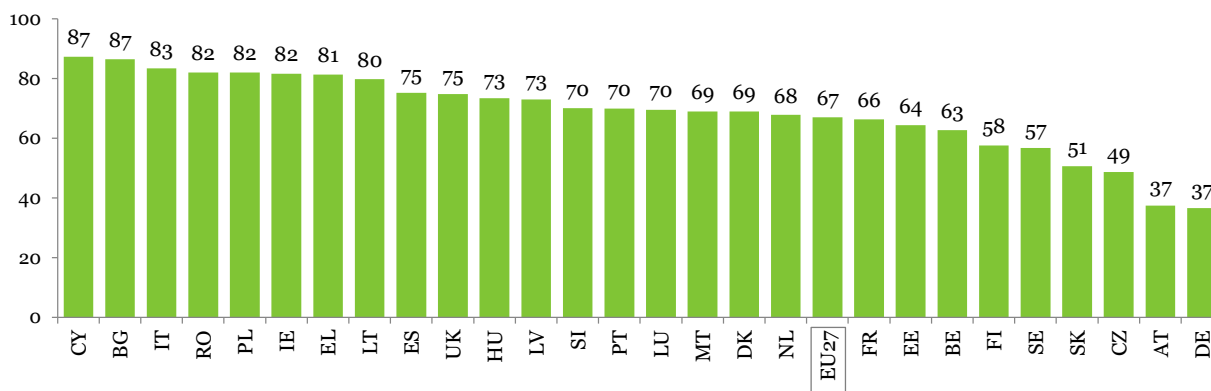
Roughly 6 in 10 interviewees (59%) thought that *legal obligations to separate waste* would convince them to separate (more) waste, compared to 4 in 10 (39%) interviewees who answered that adopting *taxes for waste management* would have the same effect.

Not surprisingly, in countries with relatively more advanced waste management systems and with higher proportions of respondents who already separated their waste (such as Germany, Austria and Sweden), respondents were less likely to think that the suggested proposals would convince them to separate even more waste.

Respondents in Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus and Italy were more prone than respondents in other countries to say that a specific proposal would convince them to separate (more) waste. For example, in Italy and Cyprus, *more and better drop-off points for recyclable and compostable waste, improved separate waste collection at home and more information on how and where to separate waste* were all selected by at least 80% of respondents.

Initiatives that would convince respondents to separate (more) waste

Improved separate waste collection at your home



Q3a. What would convince you to separate more of your waste?
Q3b. What would convince you to separate at least some of your waste?
Base: all respondents, % of "Would convince" by country

With the exception of the over 54 year-olds, over 70% of respondents across all socio-demographic groups said that *better drop-off points for recyclable and compostable waste* would convince them to separate (more) waste. Younger respondents and full-time students were the most likely to find this suggestion to be convincing. Similarly, a higher proportion of younger respondents and full-time students thought that *improvements in separate waste collection at home* would convince them to separate (more) waste for recycling and composting.

3.2 Initiatives that would improve waste management in respondents' communities

In line with the results concerning the question about possible proposals that would convince respondents to separate (more) waste, the largest proportion (70%) of EU citizens mentioned *better waste collection services* as an initiative that would improve waste management in their community.

More than 6 in 10 (65%) respondents said that *stronger law enforcement* on waste management would have the same effect and a similar proportion (63%) saw benefits from *making producers pay for the collection and recycling of waste*. Finally, roughly 4 in 10 interviewees (38%) mentioned *making households pay for the waste that they produced* as a viable strategy.

Initiatives to improve waste management in respondents' communities

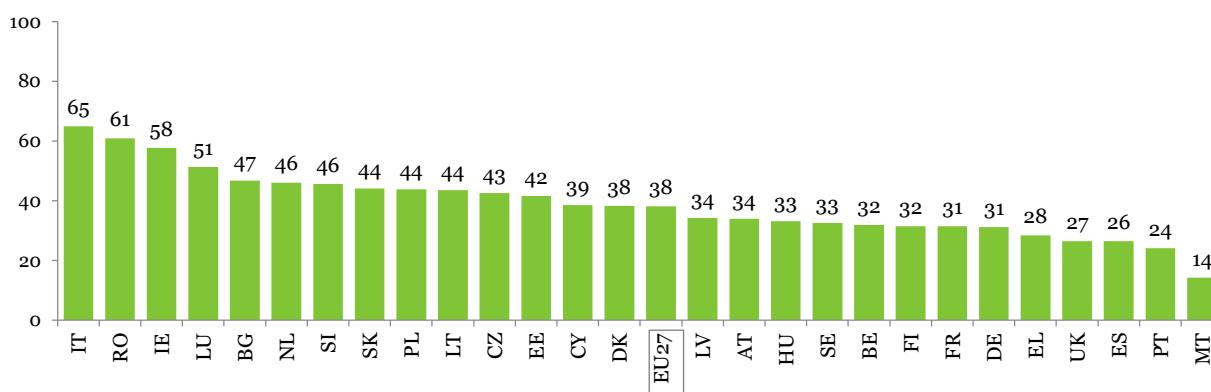


Q4. What do you think needs to be done to improve waste management in your community?
Base: all respondents, % of "Selected", EU27

When compared to other proposals suggested in the survey, respondents in almost all other countries were less likely to think that *making households pay for the waste that they produced* would improve waste management in their communities. The proportions selecting this approach were the highest in Italy (65%), Romania (61%) and Ireland (58%).

Initiatives to improve waste management in respondents' communities

Make households pay for the waste they produce



Q4. What do you think needs to be done to improve waste management in your community?

Base: all respondents, % of "Selected" by country

Across all socio-demographic groups, respondents were the least likely to mention *making households pay for the waste that they produced* as a viable strategy to improve waste management in their community; the proportion selecting this response ranged from 34% for 15-24 year-olds to 40% for 40-54 year-olds, manual workers and the self-employed. *Better waste collection services*, on the other hand, was selected by the highest proportion of respondents across all socio-demographic groups.

4. Preferred methods of paying for waste management

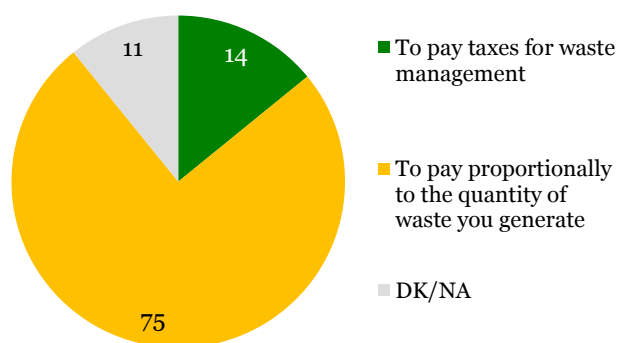
When asked whether they would prefer to pay for waste management through their taxes or via **an amount related to the quantity of waste** that their household generated, three-quarters of EU citizens selected the latter option; a minority (14%) selected the former. Roughly a tenth (11%) of respondents did not express an opinion on this topic.

Roughly 6 in 10 (59%) EU citizens would prefer to **include the cost of waste management in the price of the products that they bought**; a quarter said they would prefer to pay through their taxes. Finally, 16% of respondents gave a "don't know" response.

In summary, the options of *paying an amount proportional to the quantity of waste produced in a household* and *including the cost of waste management in product prices* were both preferred over the option of *paying for waste management through taxes*. Furthermore, the former (of the two preferred initiatives) received the highest level of support (75% vs. 59% who wanted to include the cost in the product price).

In all countries, *paying an amount proportional to the quantity of waste that a household generated* received more support than a system based on paying taxes for waste management: support for the former ranged from 47% in Portugal to 88%

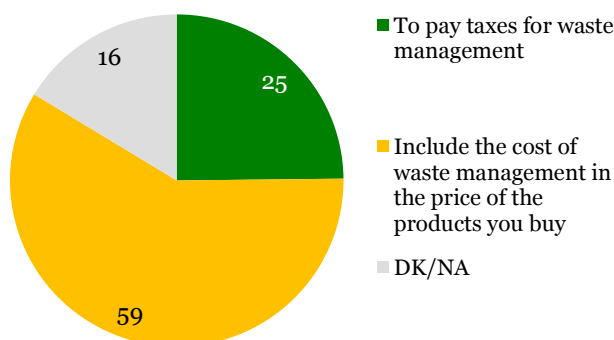
Paying for waste management: taxes vs. an amount related to quantity of waste



Q12. Which one would you prefer: to pay taxes for waste management or to pay an amount related to the quantity of waste your household generates?

Base: all respondents, % EU27

Paying for waste management: taxes vs. cost included in the product's price



Q13. Which one would you prefer: to pay taxes for waste management or to include the cost of waste management in the price of the products you buy?

in Luxembourg, while support for the latter ranged from 6% in Hungary to 30%-31% in Bulgaria and Lithuania. Similarly, across almost all countries, a relative or absolute majority of respondents said that they would prefer to *include waste management costs in the product price* rather than pay for waste management through their taxes.

As for the EU-wide results, across all Member States, respondents appeared to be more likely to support the initiative of *paying an amount proportional to the quantity of waste produced* than to support the idea of *including the cost of waste management in product prices*.

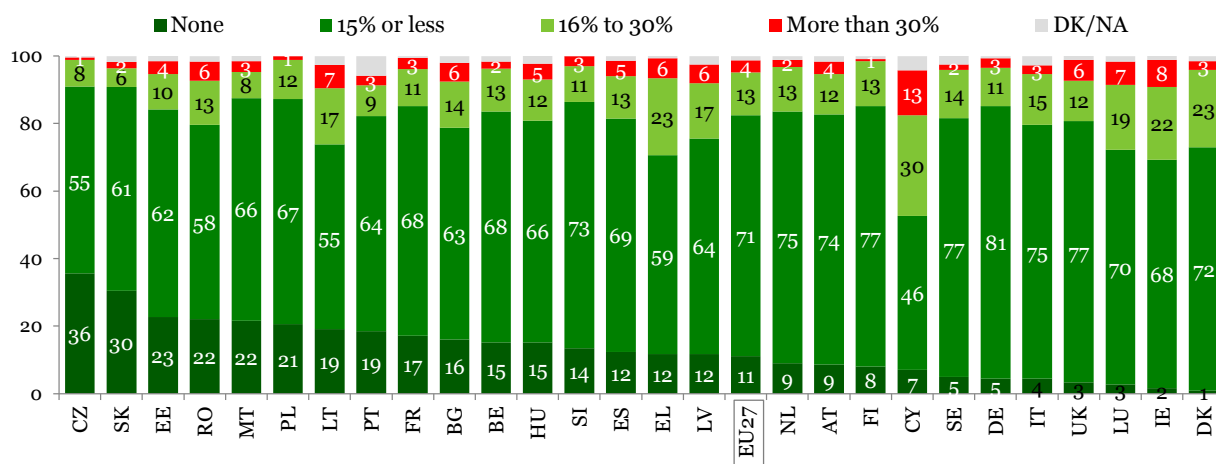
Across all socio-demographic segments, at least 7 in 10 respondents preferred to *pay an amount proportional to the quantity of waste* that they generated instead of *paying for waste management through their taxes*; the proportion of respondents that supported this approach ranged from 72% among 15-24 year-olds to 79% of 40-54 year-olds and employees. The proportion of respondents who would support *including the cost of waste management in product prices*, on the other hand, ranged from 53% among respondents with the lowest level of education to 64% for 40-54 year-olds.

5. Food waste production – perceptions and solutions

About a tenth (11%) of EU citizens said they did not waste any of the food they purchased. About 7 in 10 (71%) interviewees estimated that 15% or less of the **food that they bought went to waste**. A further 13% estimated that between 16% and 30% of the food that they purchased ended up in the waste bin and 4% said that it was more than 30% of the food that they bought.

Across all countries, a majority of respondents said that, of the food that they purchased, not more than 15% – or even no food at all – was wasted. Cypriots were the most likely to answer that 16% or more of the food that they purchased went to waste (43% gave this answer), followed by respondents in Ireland (30%), Greece (29%), and Denmark and Luxembourg (both 26%).

Estimated percentage of food that goes to waste



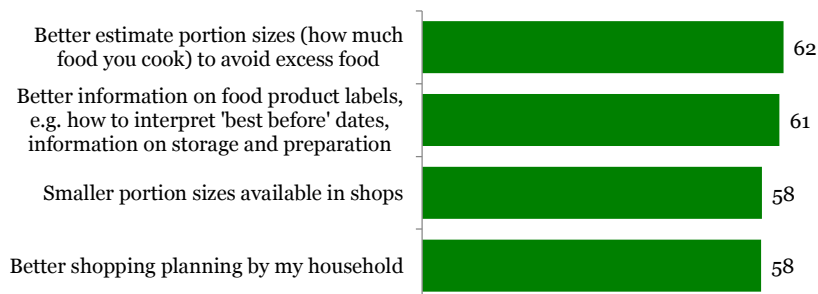
Q5. Can you estimate what percentage of the food you buy goes to waste?

Base: all respondents, % by country

Certain socio-demographic groups were more likely to say that they did not waste any of the food they purchased: women (13% vs. 9% of men), over 54 year-olds (20% vs. 3%-8% across all other age categories), those with the lowest level of education (17% vs. 3%-12% across all other educational groups) and non-working respondents (16% vs. 6%-10% across all other occupational categories).

When asked **what would help them to waste less food**, each of the solutions listed in the survey were selected by roughly 60% of EU citizens: 62% selected *better estimates of portion sizes*, 61% mentioned *better information on food product labels*, 58% would like *smaller portion sizes to be available in shops* and the same proportion listed *better shopping planning* by their household.

What would help people to waste less food?



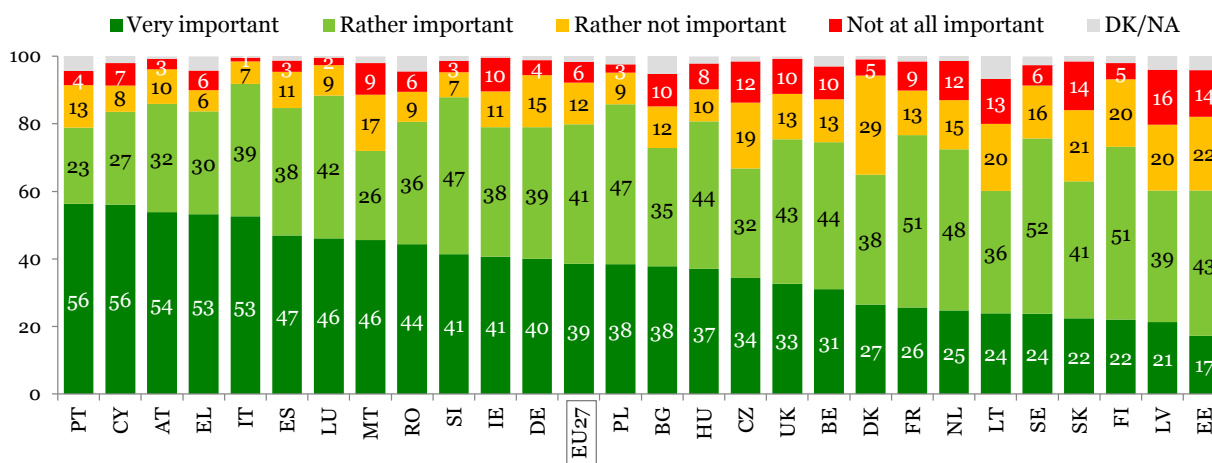
Q6. What would help you to waste less food?
Base: those who buy food that goes to waste, % of "Selected", EU27

Younger respondents – and full-time students – more frequently than their older counterparts said that a good approach to help them waste less food would be *better shopping planning* by their household (67% of 15-24 year-olds and 65% of full-time students compared to 49% of the over 54 year-olds) and *better estimates of portion sizes* to avoid excess food (77% of 15-24 year-olds and 74% of full-time students compared to 55% of the over 54 year-olds).

6. Importance of a product’s environmental impact

Eight in 10 EU citizens felt that a **product’s environmental impact** – such as whether it was **reusable or recyclable** – was an important element when deciding which products to buy (39% “very important” and 41% “rather important”). More than half of interviewees in Italy, Greece, Austria, Cyprus and Portugal (53%-56%) said that this aspect was a *very important* factor in purchasing decisions.

Importance of a product’s environmental impact



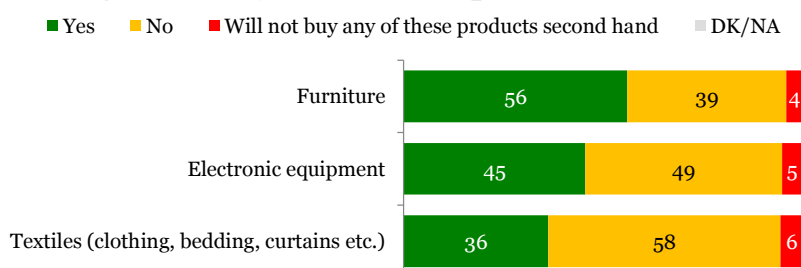
Q7. How important for you is a product’s environmental impact – e.g. whether the product is reusable or recyclable – when making a decision on what products to buy?
Base: all respondents, % by country

Women, the over 39 year-olds, those with the lowest level of education and non-working respondents were somewhat more likely to say that a products’ environmental impact was *very important* (41%-45%), while men, the 15-39 year-olds, full-time students were slightly more likely to say that it was either *rather not* or *not at all important* (21%-23% combined total).

7. Perceptions about second-hand products

A majority (56%) of EU citizens said they would buy second-hand *furniture* and less than half (45%) said they would buy *electronic equipment* on a second-hand basis. In addition, a comparatively smaller proportion (36%) of EU citizens said they were willing to buy second-hand *textiles* (e.g. clothing, bedding or curtains).

Willingness to buy second-hand products

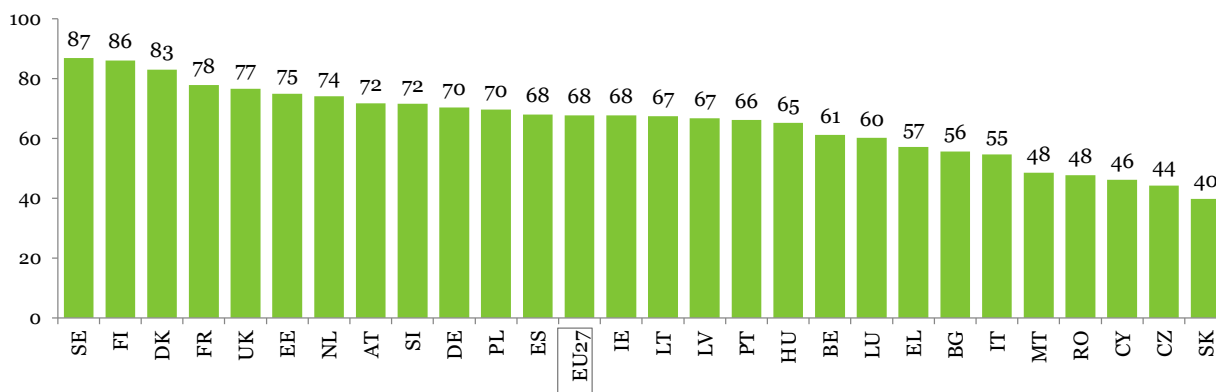


Q8. Would you buy the following products second-hand?
Base: all respondents, % of "Yes", EU27

Overall, almost 7 in 10 (68%) EU citizens said that they were **willing to buy certain products second-hand**, such as furniture, electronic equipment or textiles; Swedes (82%), Finns (78%) and Danes (72%) were the most likely to give this answer. In almost all EU Member States, respondents were more likely to say that they would buy second-hand furniture than they were to say that they would buy second-hand electronic equipment or textiles.

Willingness to buy second-hand products

(% of those who mentioned at least one of the listed products)



Q8. Would you buy the following products second hand?
Base: all respondents, % of "Yes" by country

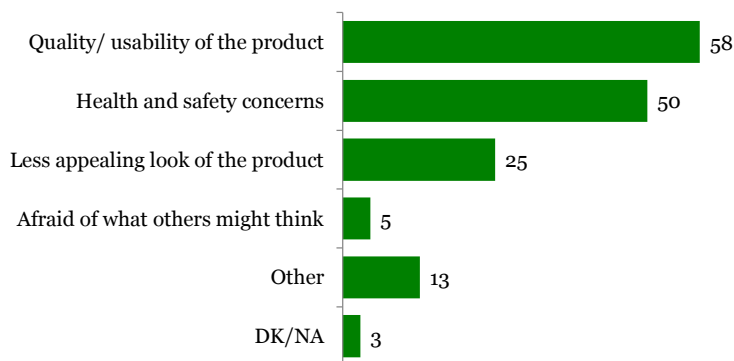
The over-54 year-olds, respondents with the lowest level of education and non-working interviewees were each time the least likely to say that they would buy second-hand products, be it furniture, electronic equipment or textiles. Younger respondents and full-time students, on the other hand, were consistently among the most likely to say they would buy second-hand products.

While the proportion willing to buy second-hand textiles was higher among women (39% vs. 33% of men), men were more likely to consider buying second-hand electronic equipment (49% vs. 41% of women).

Almost 6 in 10 (57%) EU citizens – who would not buy certain items second-hand – said that concerns about *quality and usability* prevented them from doing this; one in two interviewees mentioned *health and safety concerns*.

A quarter of respondents said that a *less appealing look of the product* discouraged them from buying second-hand products, while *being afraid of what others might think* was selected by 5%.

Reasons for not buying second-hand products



Q9. What prevents you from buying these products second-hand?

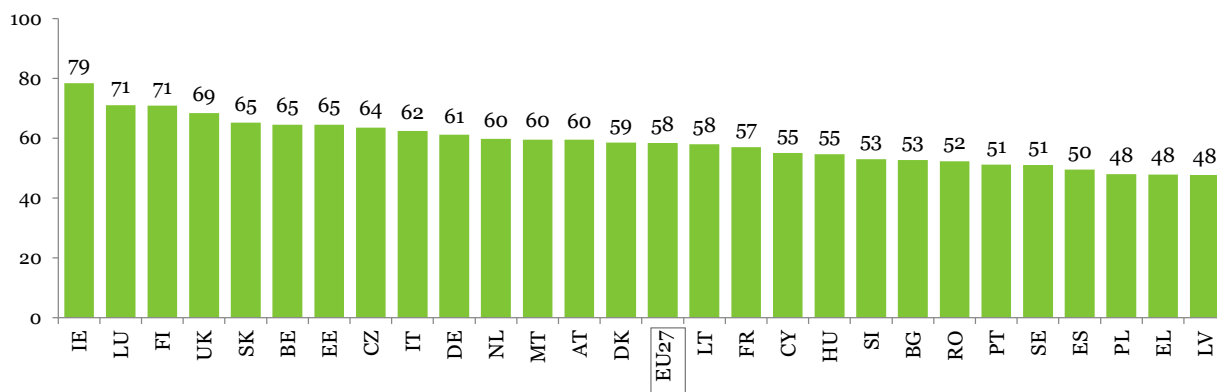
Base: those who would not buy at least one of the second-hand products, % of mentions, EU27

Three-quarters of respondents in Ireland said that **health and safety concerns** prevented them from buying second-hand products. Cyprus, the UK, Hungary and Greece were close to Ireland with between 66% and 70% of respondents mentioning this reason.

In all countries, roughly one in two – or more – interviewees mentioned **quality and usability** as a reason for not buying second-hand products. Respondents in Ireland (79%), followed by those in Luxembourg and Finland (both 71%), were the most likely to select this answer.

Reasons for not buying second-hand products

Quality/usability of the product



Q9. What prevents you from buying these products second-hand?

Base: those who would not buy at least one of the second-hand products, % of mentions by country

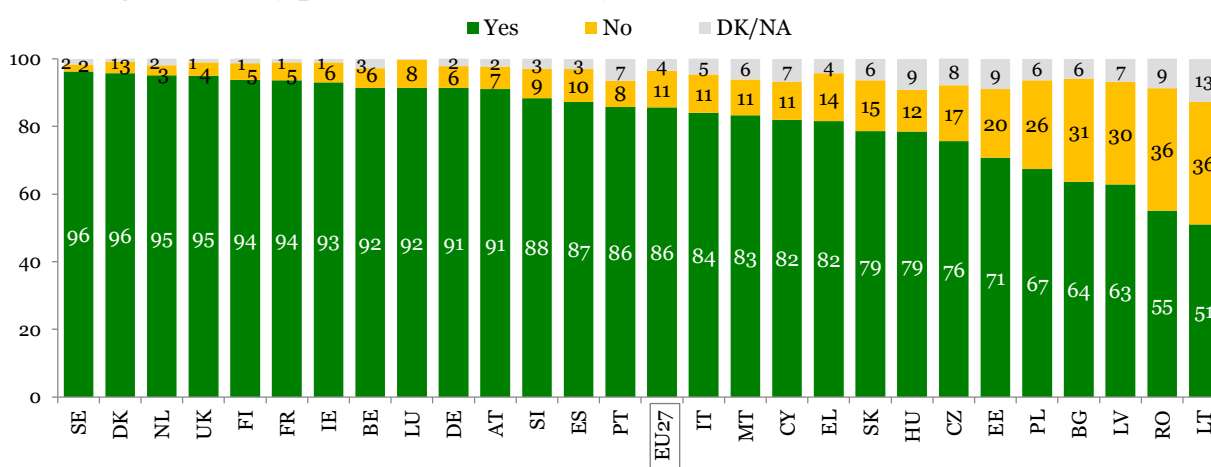
Across all socio-demographic groups, the highest proportion of respondents referred to *quality or usability* when asked what prevented them from buying second-hand products. Furthermore, this reason was most frequently cited by 15-24 year-olds and full-time students. Full-time students and 15-24 year-olds, however, were also more likely than their counterparts to say that *a less appealing look* prevented them from buying second-hand products. For example, 32% of 15-24 year-olds compared to 22% of the over 54 year-olds selected this reason.

8. Perceptions about products made of recycled materials

More than 8 in 10 (86%) EU citizens said they would **buy products made of recycled materials**. A willingness to buy such products ranged from 51% in Lithuania to 96% in Sweden and Denmark. More than a quarter of respondents in Poland (26%), Latvia (30%), Bulgaria (31%), Romania and Lithuania (both 36%) were not willing to purchase products made of recycled materials.

The over 54 year-olds, respondents with the lowest level of education, manual workers and non-working respondents were the least likely to say that they would buy products made of recycled materials. For example, 77% of respondents with the lowest level of education said they were willing to buy such products, compared to 91%-92% of those with the highest level of education and full-time students.

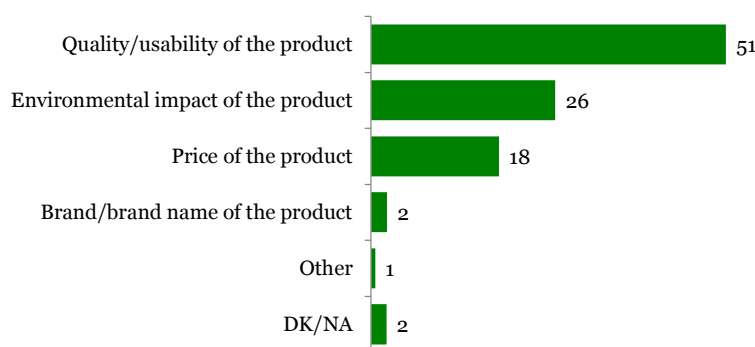
Willingness to buy products made of recycled materials



Q10. Would you buy products made of recycled materials?
Base: all respondents, % by country

A slim majority (51%) of EU citizens – who were willing to buy products made of recycled materials – selected *quality or usability* as the most **important factor in their decision to buy such products**. Roughly a quarter (26%) mentioned a product's *environmental impact* and a lower proportion (18%) referred to a *product's price*. A *product's brand* was the least frequently mentioned factor (2%).

Most important factor in respondents' decision to buy products made of recycled materials

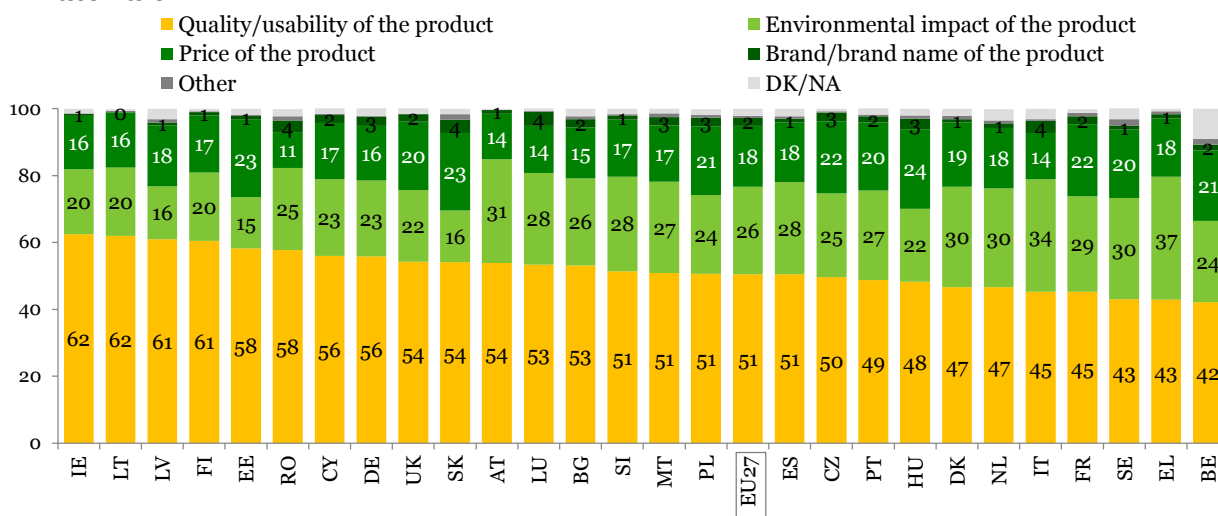


Q11a. What would be the most important factor in your decision to buy products made of recycled materials?
Base: those who would buy products made of recycled materials, % EU27

Across almost all socio-demographic groups, a majority of respondents selected *quality or usability* as the most important factor in their decision to buy products made of recycled materials. Nonetheless, this factor was somewhat more frequently mentioned by 25-39 year-olds (54% vs. 47%-52% across all other age groups) and respondents with the highest level of education (53% vs. 44%-51% across all other educational groups).

The proportion of interviewees who said that *quality or usability* was the most important factor in their decision to buy products made of recycled materials ranged from 42% in Belgium to 62% in Ireland and Lithuania; this response was selected by a relative majority in all EU Member States.

Most important factor in respondents' decision to buy products made of recycled materials



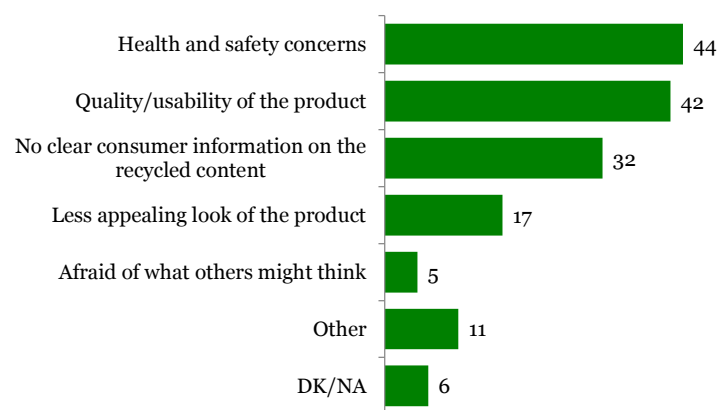
Q11a. What would be the most important factor in your decision to buy products made of recycled materials? Base: those who would buy products made of recycled materials, % by country

Quality and usability also featured as a **reason why respondents would not buy products made of recycled materials** (selected by 42% of respondents who were not willing to buy such products). A similar proportion (44%) of these respondents had *health and safety concerns*.

Roughly a third (32%) of interviewees said that *a lack of clear consumer information on the recycled content* stopped them from buying products made of recycled materials. One in six (17%) respondents mentioned *a less appealing look of the product* and a minority (5%) said they were *afraid of what others might think*.

Respondents in Luxembourg (66%) and Ireland (65%) were the most prone to say that **quality and usability** prevented them from purchasing products made of recycled materials. About 7 in 10 interviewees in Cyprus (72%) and Greece (69%) answered that **health and safety concerns** stopped them from buying products made of recycled materials. Finally, a majority of respondents in Ireland and Austria (64% and 61%, respectively) viewed a **lack of clear consumer information on the recycled content** as a reason for not buying products made of recycled materials.

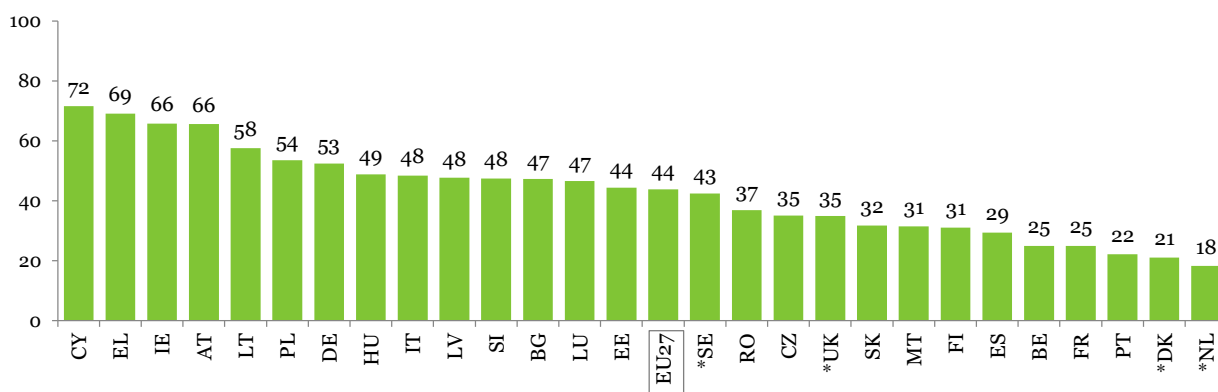
Reasons for not buying products made of recycled materials



Q11. What prevents you from buying recycled products or products containing recycled materials? Base: those who would not buy products made of recycled materials, % of mentions, EU27

Reasons for not buying products made of recycled materials

Health and safety concerns



Q11. What prevents you from buying recycled products or products containing recycled materials?

Base: those who would not buy products made of recycled materials, % of mentions by country

* Note: countries where sample size is less than 50 respondents

Women, 25-54 year-olds, respondents with the lowest level of education, manual workers and rural residents were more likely than their counterparts to refer to *health and safety concerns* for not buying products made of recycled materials. For example, 48% of women, compared to 39% of men, said that *health and safety concerns* prevented them from buying these products.

A slim majority of 15-24 year-olds (56%) and manual workers (51%) said that *quality or usability* prevented them from buying products made of recycled materials. This reason was also more frequently cited by men, 40-54 year-olds, respondents with the highest level of education and full-time students, metropolitan and urban dwellers, and the self-employed and employees.