

Flash Eurobarometer on water

Summary

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This survey was requested by the Directorate General Environment, and coordinated by Directorate General Communication.

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 #261

Flash Eurobarometer on water

Conducted by
The Gallup Organisation, Hungary
upon the request of Directorate General
Environment



Survey co-ordinated by
Directorate General Communication

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THE GALLUP ORGANISATION

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Introduction

The *Flash Eurobarometer on water* (N°261) was conducted in order to examine EU citizens' awareness about various water-related problems, their perceptions about the impact of a number of factors on their country's water environment, and their willingness to take individual actions to reduce these water-related problems. In addition, the survey looked at the levels of awareness of the consultations on River Basin Management plans.

In detail, the survey examined the:

- level of knowledge about water-related problem
- seriousness of water-related problems
- perceived changes in the quality of water
- opinions about the impact of various sectors and activities on the status of water
- main threats to the water environment
- main perceived impact of climate change on water
- individual actions to reduce water-related problems
- willingness to participate in public consultations on the River Basin Management plans.

The *Flash Eurobarometer on water* (Flash N° 261) fieldwork was conducted between 26 and 31 January 2009. Over 25,500 randomly-selected citizens aged 15 years and over were interviewed in the 27 EU Member States. Interviews were predominantly carried out via fixed-line telephone, reaching ca. 1,000 EU citizens in each country (in Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta the targeted size was 500). Parts of the interviews in Austria, Finland, Italy, Portugal and Spain were conducted over mobile telephones. Due to the relatively low fixed-line telephone coverage in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, 300 individuals were sampled and interviewed on a face-to-face basis.

To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented, based on key socio-demographic variables.

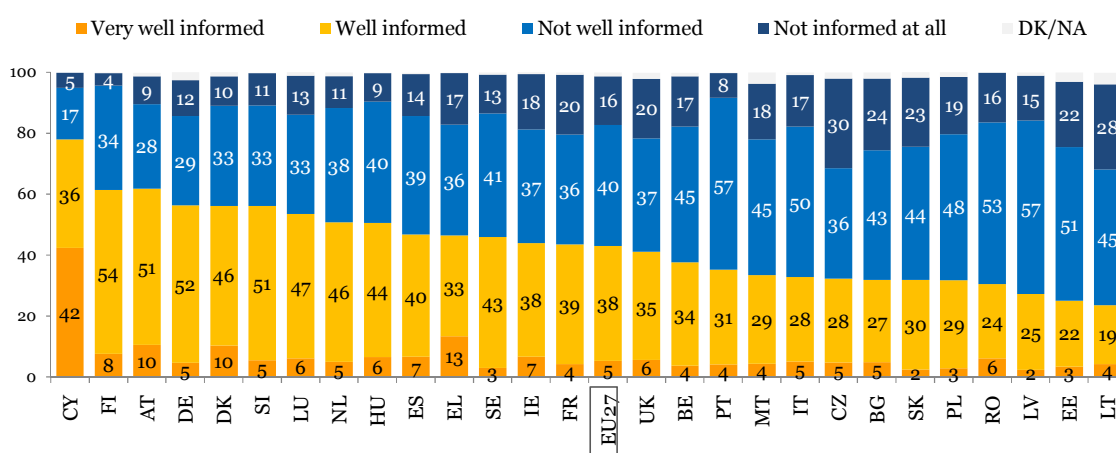
1. Level of knowledge about water-related problems

Overall, slightly more than 4 out of 10 EU citizens felt informed about the problems facing rivers, lakes and – where relevant – coastal waters in their country: 38% of respondents felt *well informed* and 5% said they felt *very well informed*. A majority of respondents, however, answered that they did not feel informed about this topic: 40% said they were *not well informed* about such problems and almost one-sixth (16%) did *not feel informed at all*.

The proportions of citizens feeling *well informed* – or *very well informed* – about the problems facing lakes, rivers and (if any) coastal waters in their countries were the highest in Cyprus (78%), Finland (62%) and Austria (61%). Respondents in Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, on the other hand, were the ones that most frequently said they did *not feel well informed*, or did *not feel informed at all*, about this topic: 73% in Lithuania and Estonia, and 72% in Latvia.

In almost all EU Member States, less than 1 in 10 respondents were *very well informed* about the problems facing lakes, rivers and (if any) coastal waters in their country. Cyprus stood out from the pack: 42% of Cypriots said they felt *very well informed* about various water-related problems facing their country – compared to an EU average of 5%. This high figure is likely to be related to Cyprus experiencing its worst water shortage for many years¹.

Being informed about problems facing lakes, rivers and coastal waters



Q1. How informed do you feel about problems facing lakes, rivers and coastal waters in your country?
Base: all respondents, % by country

The level of feeling informed about problems facing rivers, lakes and (if any) coastal waters increased with age, educational attainment and occupational status of the respondents. For example, only one-third of respondents younger than 40 felt *very well*, or *well informed* about the various water-related problems, compared to 52% of the over 54 year-olds.

¹ For example, see the web pages of the Limassol or Larnaca Water Boards:

http://www.wbl.com.cy/english/index.php?article_id=70&subject=standalone&parent_id=25

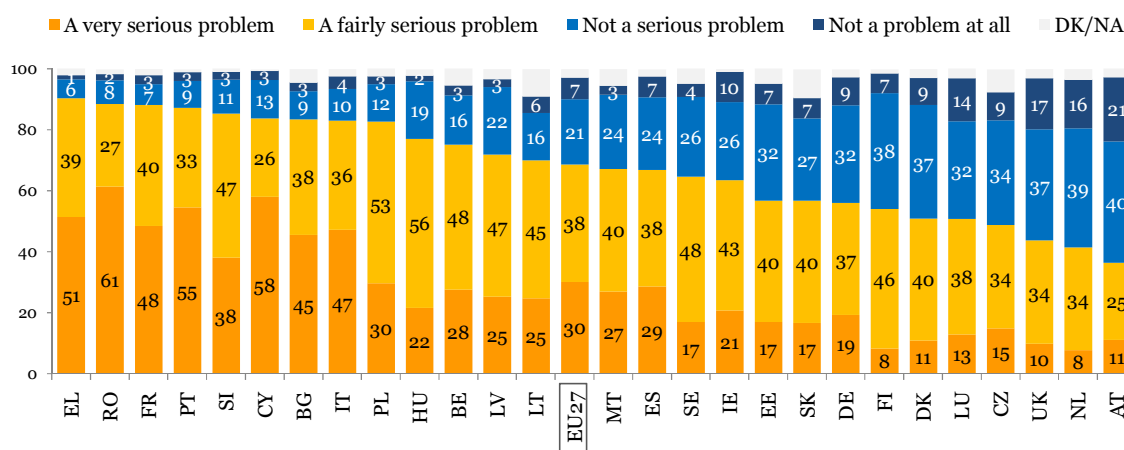
<http://www.lwb.org.cy/main/1,0,0,0-Οικοσελίδα.aspx>

2. Seriousness of water-related problems

A majority of EU citizens thought that **water quality** is a serious problem in their country; 3 out of 10 interviewees thought that it is a *very* serious problem and 38% said it is a *fairly* serious problem. Less than 3 out of 10 EU citizens said water quality is *not* a serious problem (21%) or that it is *not a problem at all* in their country (7%).

Approximately 6 out of 10 Romanian and Cypriot citizens (61% and 59%, respectively), and a slim majority of the Portuguese and Greeks (55% and 51%, respectively) thought that water quality is a *very* serious problem in their country. In sharp contrast, less than one-tenth of the Dutch and Finns shared this concern (both 8%).

Seriousness of water-related problems – **water quality**

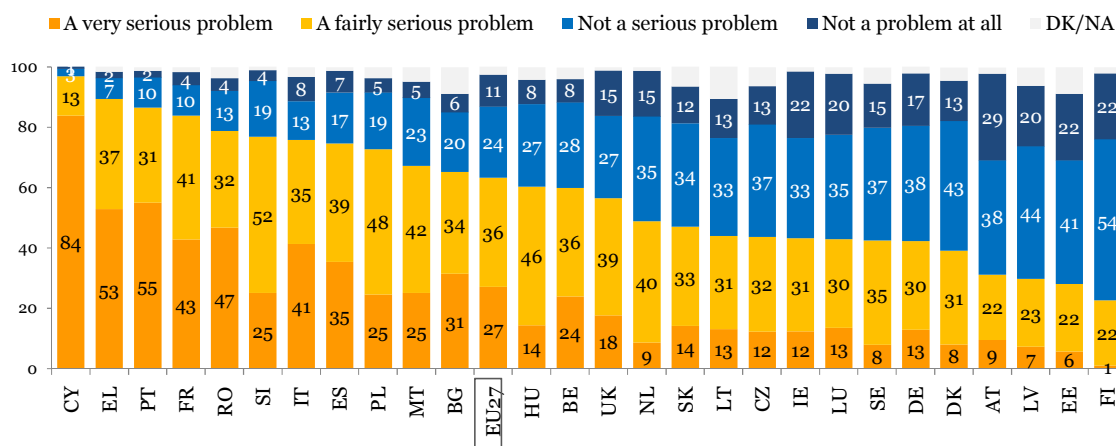


Q2. How serious is the problem of water quality in your country?
Base: all respondents, % by country

Slightly more than a quarter (27%) of EU citizens felt that the **shortage – or excess (such as floods) – of water** is a *very* serious problem and 36% of interviewees thought this is a *fairly* serious problem. Slightly more than one-third of EU citizens said that there are no problems (11%), or no serious problems (24%) with the quantity of water in their country.

Cyprus again stood out from the pack with 84% saying the quantity of water is a *very* serious problem in that country. Other Member States where a majority of respondents shared the Cypriots' opinion were Portugal (55%) and Greece (53%). In sharp contrast, virtually no Finnish respondents and less than one-tenth of respondents in Estonia, Latvia, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands thought that water quantity is a *very* serious problem.

Seriousness of water-related problems – **water quantity**



Q3. How serious is the problem of water quantity in your country?
Base: all respondents, % by country

In most countries, more respondents were concerned about water quality than quantity; at EU level, this difference was five percentage points (68% for water quality vs. 63% for water quantity). There were exceptions: in Cyprus, water quantity was perceived as a more serious problem than water quality (97% for water quantity vs. 84% for water quality); this was also the case in the UK (57% vs. 44%), Spain (74% vs. 67%) and the Netherlands (49% vs. 42%).

Respondents who felt *very well informed* about water-related problems in their country were also the most likely to perceive these problems as *very serious*: 41% of those respondents thought that water quality is a *very serious* problem in their country (vs. 32% of respondents who did *not feel informed at all*) and 39% said the same about the quantity of water (vs. 27% of respondents who did *not feel informed at all*).

The 15-24 year-olds were less likely than their older counterparts to answer that water quality is a *very serious* problem in their country (24% vs. 30% on average) and that the shortage – or excess – of water is a *very serious* problem (20% vs. 27% on average).

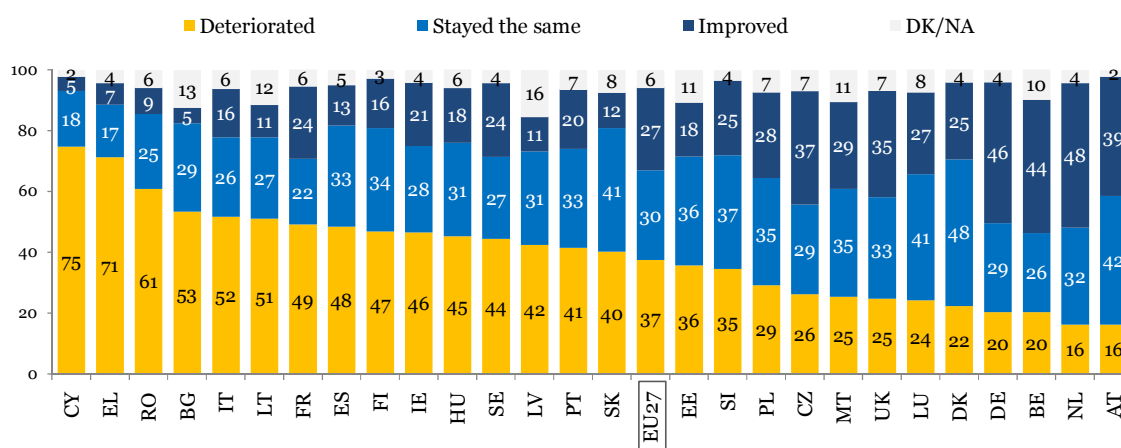
3. Changes in the quality of water

A relative majority of EU citizens surveyed thought that the quality of rivers, lakes and – where relevant – coastal waters in their country has deteriorated in the past five years (37%). A lower proportion of interviewees (30%) said that the quality of water in their country has not changed compared to five years ago and 27% thought that there has been an improvement in quality.

Cypriot, Greek and Romanian citizens were not only among the most concerned about water-related problems, they were also the most likely to think that the quality of rivers, lakes and coastal waters in their country has deteriorated in the past five years: 75% in Cyprus, 71% in Greece and 61% in Romania.

In Denmark, Austria and Luxembourg, the dominant opinion was that the quality of water in their country is unchanged compared to five years ago: 48%, 42% and 41% of citizens, respectively, selected this possibility. In the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium, on the other hand, respondents were most likely to think that water quality has improved (48%, 46% and 44%, respectively).

Changes in water quality in the past five years



Q4. Do you think that, over the last 5 years, the quality of rivers, lakes and coastal waters in your country has:
Base: all respondents, % by country

A slim majority (52%) of interviewees who thought that water quality is a *very serious* problem in their country also said that the quality of rivers, lakes and coastal waters in their country had deteriorated in the past five years. The corresponding proportion for respondents who felt that water

quality is a *fairly* serious problem was 39% and decreased to 21%-22% for interviewees who thought that there are no problems, or no serious problems with the quality of water in their country.

Women, younger respondents, the least educated ones, those living in urban areas and manual workers were more likely than EU citizens on average to say that water quality has deteriorated in the past five years. For example, 4 out of 10 (41%) manual workers shared this pessimistic view compared to only 34% of the self-employed.

Conversely, men, older respondents, those with higher levels of education, rural residents and the self-employed were most apt to answer that the quality of rivers, lakes and (if any) coastal waters in their country has improved in the past five years. For example, one-third (32%) of men selected this possibility compared to only 23% of women.

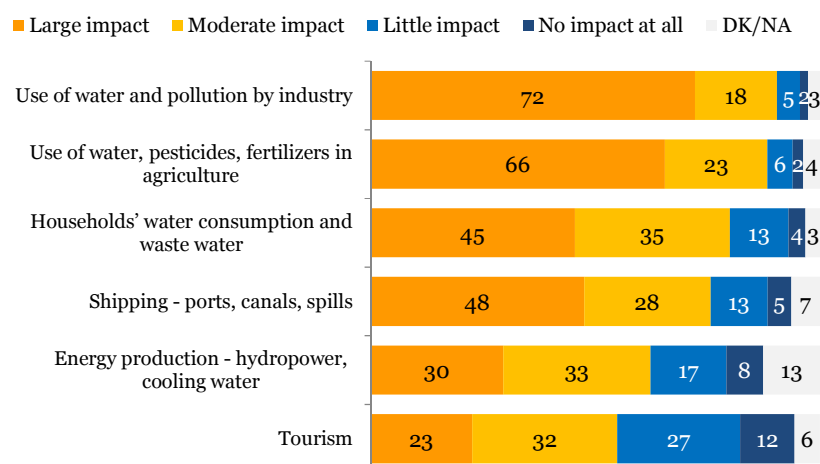
4. Impact of various factors on the status of water

When EU citizens were asked about the impact of activities in various sectors – such as industry, agriculture, households, energy production, shipping and tourism – the majority view for each of these sectors was that there is at least a moderate impact on the quality and quantity of water in their country.

Seven out of 10 EU citizens thought that industry has a *large* impact on the status of water in their country; two-thirds said the same about agriculture. EU citizens also recognised individual households' impact on the water environment of their country: 45% said that households' water consumption and waste water has a *large* impact.

A large majority of EU citizens thought that shipping (e.g. ports, canals and spills) influenced the water environment of their country, and half of them (48%) saw this as having a *large* impact. Respondents were, however, less likely to think that energy production (e.g. hydropower, cooling water) or tourism have a *large* impact on the quality and quantity of water in their country (30% and 23%, respectively). Furthermore, at least a quarter of respondents thought that these activities have *little* or *no impact* on the water environment (25% and 39%, respectively).

Perceived impact of various factors on the status of water



Q5. Can you please tell me how much impact you think each of the following has on the status of water in your country? Does it have a large impact, moderate impact, a little impact or no impact at all?

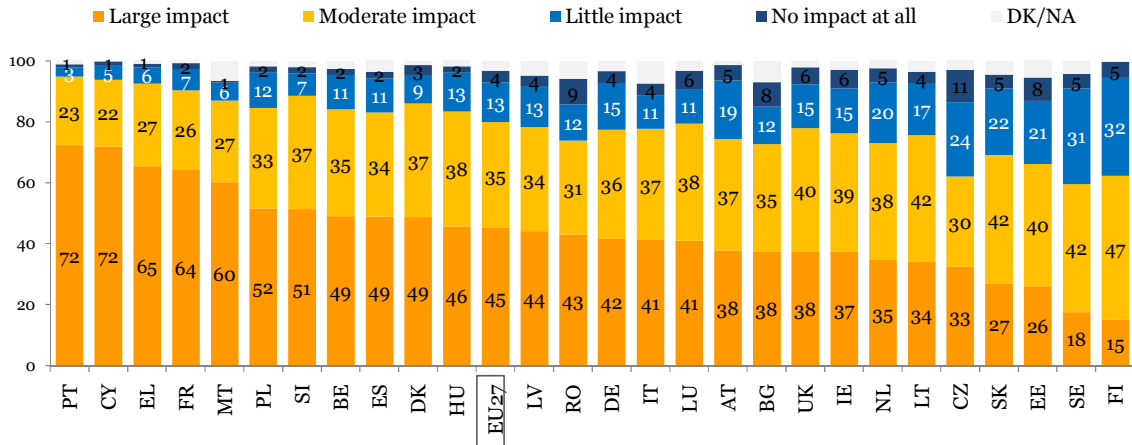
Base: all respondents, % EU27

In almost all Member States, the proportion saying that agriculture has a *large* impact on the status of water was lower than the corresponding proportion for industry. In Ireland, Denmark, Luxembourg, France and Slovenia, however, the opposite was seen. For example, while 53% of Irish citizens

thought that agriculture’s use of water, pesticides and fertilizers has a *large* impact on their countries’ water environment, only 49% thought industry’s impact is large.

Furthermore, in all EU countries – except Cyprus – respondents were less likely to say that households have a *large* impact on the status of water in their country than they were to say that industry and agriculture have a *large* impact. In Cyprus, however, more than 7 out of 10 (72%) respondents felt that households’ water consumption and waste water have a *large* impact, while only 6 out of 10 respondents thought there was such an impact from industry (63%) or agriculture (61%).

Perceived impact of various factors on the status of water – households’ water consumption and waste water



Q5. Can you please tell me how much impact you think each of the following has on the status of water in your country? Does it have a large impact, moderate impact, a little impact or no impact at all? Base: all respondents, % by country

Among the respondents in countries with coastal waters, the Spanish and Portuguese were the most likely to answer that shipping (e.g. ports, canals and spills) has a *large* impact on the status of water in their country (73% and 69%, respectively, vs. 49% on average in countries with coastal waters). In the landlocked countries – Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria and Slovakia – at least 3 out of 10 interviewees thought that shipping has a *large* impact.

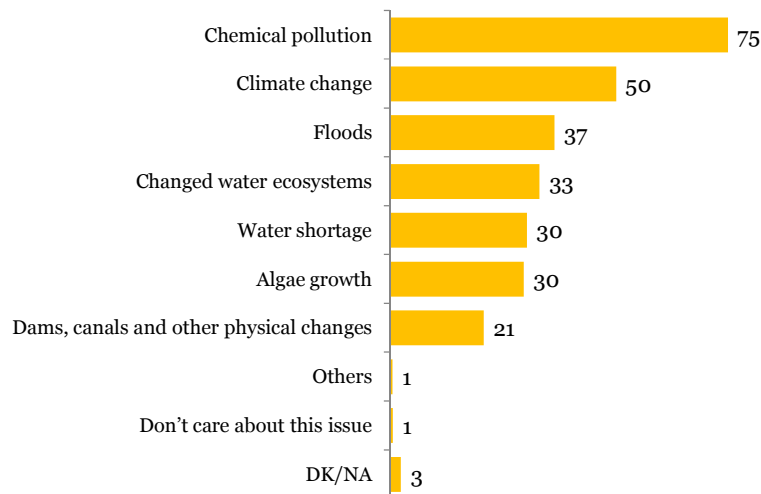
Women, the 25-54 year-olds and the most educated respondents tended to say more frequently than EU citizens on average that activities in several of the above-mentioned sectors have a *large* impact on the water environment of their country. For example, while 62% of the least educated interviewees thought that the impact of agriculture is *large*, this proportion increased to 71% of the most educated respondents.

5. Main threats to the water environment

Chemical pollution was by far the most mentioned threat to a country’s water environment – selected by three-quarters of EU citizens. The second most mentioned threat was climate change – selected by one in two respondents. These two hazards appeared among the three most important threats to a country’s water environment in all Member States.

The third most frequently mentioned threat was flooding (37% of respondents); this was followed by changed water ecosystems, water shortage and algae growth. The last-named threats to a country’s water environment were given equal weighting in importance (30%-33%). Only one in five respondents (21%) selected dams, canals and other physical changes as one of the main threats to their country’s water environment.

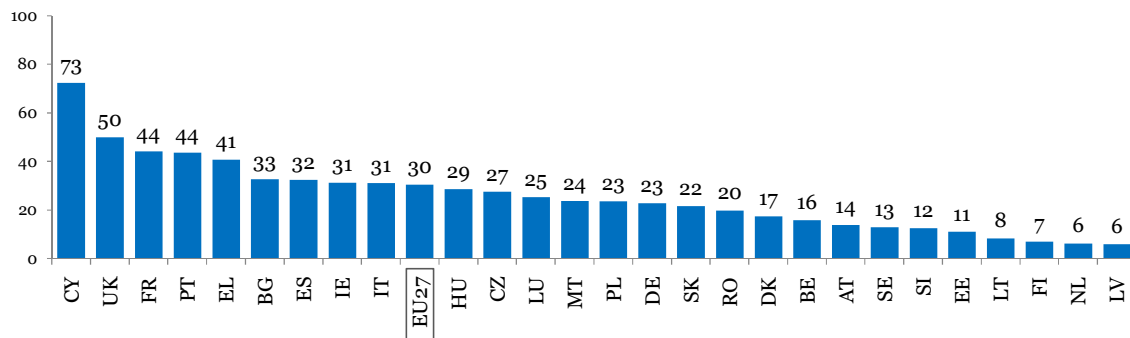
Perceived main threats to the water environment



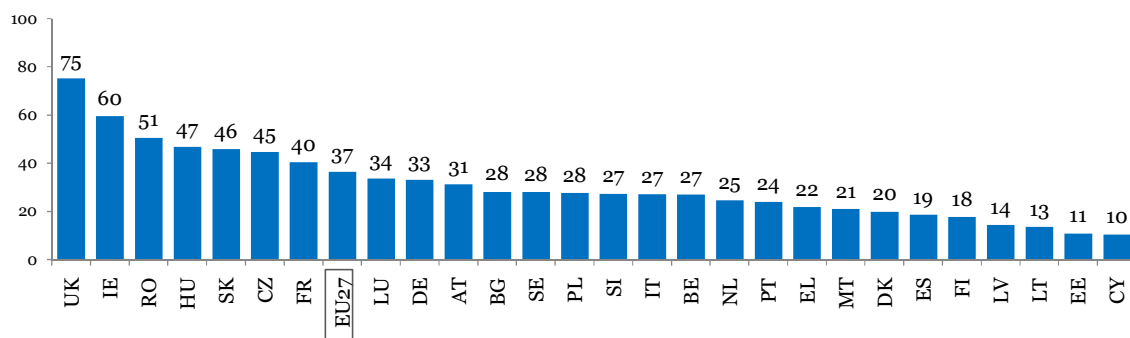
Q6. I am going to read out a list of threats. Can you please tell me which you believe are the main threats to the water environment in your country?
Base: all respondents, % EU27

Unsurprisingly, water shortage was most frequently identified as a threat to the water environment by respondents in southern European countries – e.g. Cyprus (73%), Portugal and France (both 44%) and Greece (41%). Flooding, on the other hand, appeared among the most mentioned threats in the northerly Member States: e.g. the UK (75%) and Ireland (60%).

Threats to the water environment – water shortage



Threats to the water environment – floods



Q6. I am going to read out a list of threats. Can you please tell me which you believe are the main threats to the water environment in your country?
Base: all respondents, % by country

Algae growth was especially seen as a threat in North Sea countries (selected by 37% on average), followed by the Mediterranean Sea and Baltic Sea countries (28% and 27%, respectively). In all the Baltic Sea countries – except Poland – the level of concern was above the EU average of 30%. In the Black Sea countries – Bulgaria and Romania – only one-tenth of respondents selected this threat. On average, a quarter of respondents in landlocked countries thought that algae growth was one of the main threats to the water environment of their country.

The most educated respondents were less likely than those with lower levels of education to select water shortage or flooding as the main threats to their country’s water environment, but they were more likely to mention changed water ecosystems, algae growth, climate change or chemical pollution. For example, only 28% of respondents in the lowest educational category thought that changed water ecosystems were one of the main threats to the water environment; this proportion increased to 38% for the most educated respondents.

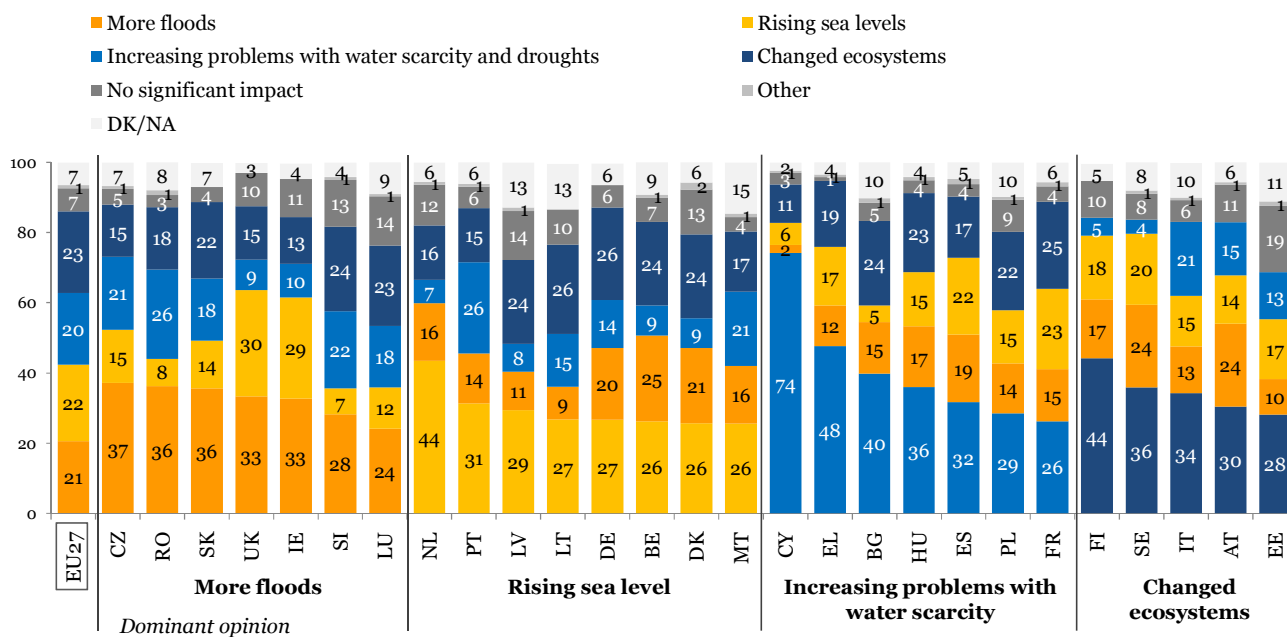
6. Impact of climate change on the water environment

EU citizens were divided in their opinion about the most important impact of climate change on their country’s water environment. Each of the potential consequences (as listed in the survey) – changed ecosystems, rising sea levels, more flooding, increasing problems with water scarcity and droughts – was selected by approximately one-fifth of respondents.

Although in the EU overall, each of the potential consequences of climate change on the water environment of a country were given equal weighting in importance, this was not the case when looking at the individual country results:

- British, Irish and Dutch citizens were the most likely to think that climate change would lead to an excess of water – i.e. rising sea levels or flooding – in their countries (63%, 62% and 60%, respectively).
- The Cypriots and the Greeks were the ones mainly identifying water scarcity as the major impact of climate change (74% and 48%, respectively, compared to e.g. one-third or less in Spain, France and Italy).
- Finnish respondents, on the other hand, were the most apt to say that climate change would have a major impact on the ecosystems in their country (44%).

Most important impact of climate change on the status of water



Q7. Please tell me, from the following list, what you think will be the most important impact of climate change on water in your country?
Base: all respondents, % by country

Only 7% of EU citizens answered that climate change would not have a significant impact on their country’s water ecosystem. Nevertheless, in some countries at least twice as many respondents expressed this opinion: Estonia (19%), Luxembourg and Latvia (both 14%).

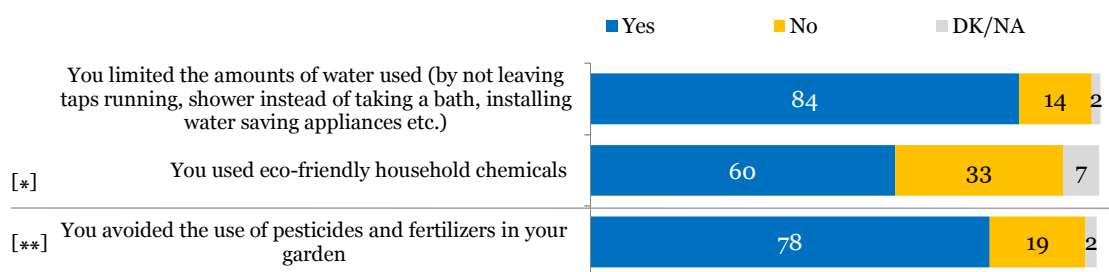
The 25-54 year-olds, the most educated respondents, those living in metropolitan areas, the self-employed and employees were somewhat more likely than EU citizens on average to think that climate change would have a major impact on the water ecosystems in their country (e.g. 29% of the most educated and 27% of the 25-39 year-olds vs. 23% for the EU average).

7. Taking individual actions to reduce water-related problems

More than 8 out of 10 (84%) EU citizens had been actively trying to reduce water-related problems in the last two years by using less water (e.g. by not leaving taps running, by taking a shower instead of a bath, by installing water-saving appliances).

A majority (60%) of EU citizens said they had used eco-friendly household chemicals in the past two years. More than three-quarters (78%)² had avoided the use of pesticides and fertilizers in their gardens.

Personal involvement in reducing the various water-related problems



Q8. There are different ways to reduce water problems. In order to reduce these problems have you done any of the following in the last two years?

Base: * all respondents/ ** excluding respondents who said this was not applicable, % EU27

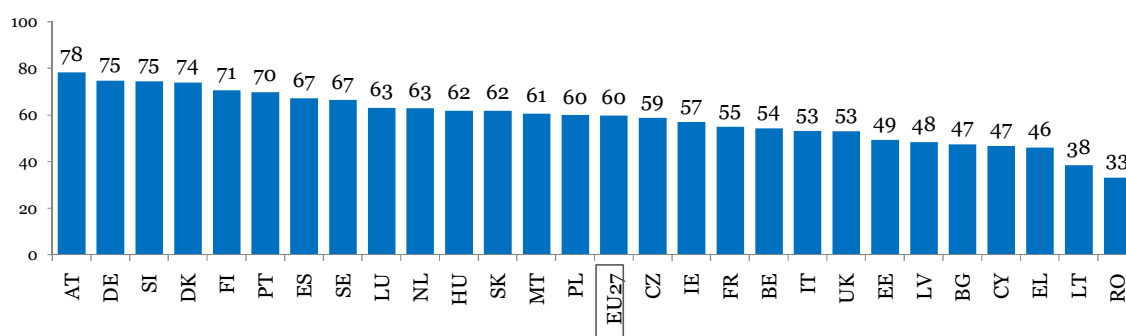
A majority of citizens in all EU Member States said they had been actively trying to reduce water-related problems by using less water in the past two years; they had not left taps running, had taken showers rather than baths or had water-saving appliances installed.

Respondents in Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania were not only the least likely in the EU to have limited their water consumption in the past two years (between 56% and 67%), they were also among the least likely to have used eco-friendly household chemicals in the past two years (between 33% and 47%).

Although Finnish respondents were very unlikely to say they had used less water in the past two years, they were among the most likely – together with respondents in other Nordic countries (Danes and Swedes) – to have used eco-friendly household chemicals (71%, 74% and 67%, respectively). Respondents in Austria (78%), Germany and Slovenia (both 75%) were the most likely to have used eco-friendly household chemicals.

² Note: when presenting results for this question on the use of pesticides and fertilizers in gardens, respondents who said this question was not applicable were not included in the analysis (e.g. those without a garden or respondents who do not work in their garden).

Reducing water-related problems – used eco-friendly household chemicals



Q8. There are different ways to reduce water problems. In order to reduce these problems have you done any of the following in the last two years?

Base: all respondents, % "Yes" by country

A majority of respondents³ in all EU Member States said they had avoided the use of pesticides and fertilizers in their gardens in the past two years. The Lithuanians and Maltese were the least likely to have been actively trying to reduce water-related problems by avoiding the use of pesticides and fertilizers in their gardens (both 59%). In Greece, Germany, Austria and Slovenia, on the other hand, slightly less than 9 in 10 respondents had tried to reduce water-related problems in this way (between 86% and 87%).

Women, older respondents, the more educated ones and those feeling well-informed about water-related problems were more likely than EU citizens on average to have been actively trying to reduce water-related problems over the past two years: by using less water or eco-friendly household chemicals, or by avoiding the use of pesticides and fertilizers in their gardens. For example, 64% of the over 54 year-olds had used eco-friendly chemicals compared to only 48% of the 15-24 year-olds.

8. Consultations on the River Basin Management plans

The Water Framework Directive⁴ establishes a legal framework to protect and restore clean water throughout the EU; by 2015, all water in the EU should be of "good or high quality". Proposals are currently being put forward by all EU Member States as to how these goals could be reached for the rivers, lakes and coastal waters in their territory. During 2008, several Member States started a public consultation process aimed at giving all interested parties a chance to express their views and to influence the future River Basin Management plans – these consultations were still ongoing at the time of the survey⁵.

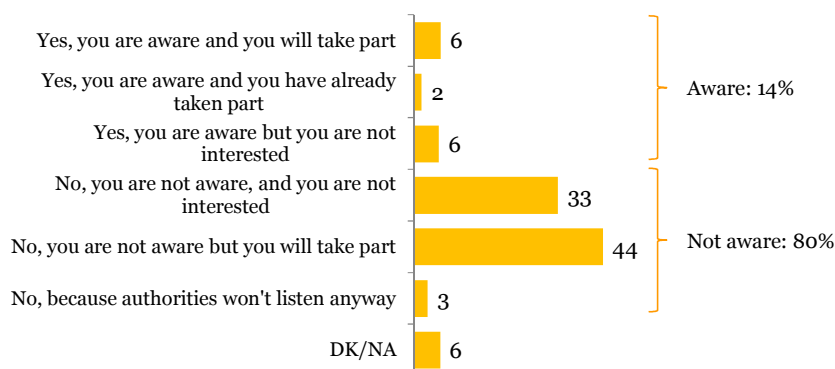
Only 14% of EU citizens were aware of the public consultation process in the framework of the River Basin Management plans; hardly anyone had already taken part in the scheme (2%). Nevertheless, one in two EU citizens were ready to take part in the scheme: 6% of interviewees were aware of the plans and intended to express their views and 44% would take part in the public consultation process although they were not aware of the scheme at the time of the survey.

³ Note: when presenting results for this question, respondents who said this question was not applicable were not included in the analysis.

⁴ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/participation/map_mc/map.htm

Awareness of, and participation in, public consultations on the River Basin Management plans



Q9. Are you aware of a consultation by the authorities on the river basin management plans where you live? And are you planning to express your views in this consultation?
Base: all respondents, % EU27

Awareness of the public consultation process in the framework of the River Basin Management plans was the highest in Poland (28%), the Czech Republic and the Netherlands (both 22%). While the consultation process was completed at the time of the survey in the Czech Republic, it was still ongoing in Poland and the Netherlands.

Less than 1 out of 20 respondents in all Member States – with the exception of the Czech Republic – had expressed their views about the River Basin Management plans at the time of the survey. In the Czech Republic, 5% of respondents said they had taken part in the scheme; as mentioned earlier, this was the only country where consultations had been completed by the time the survey was conducted.

As with the results obtained for the EU27 overall, in half of the Member States, more respondents were willing to take part in the scheme than those who rejected the idea. Respondents in Malta, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Denmark showed the least interest in the public consultation process in the framework of the River Basin Management plans: two-thirds of Maltese and Czech interviewees (both 68%), and almost 6 out of 10 Lithuanians and Danes (58% and 57%, respectively), said they were not interested in participating in the scheme.

Awareness of the public consultation process in the framework of the River Basin Management plans increased with age and the educational level of the respondents. The 15-24 year-olds and the least educated respondents were also the least likely to consider taking part in the consultations (45% and 48%, respectively vs. 52% on average).

Interviewees who felt *very well informed* about water-related problems, on the other hand, were the most likely to consider taking part in the consultations: while only 41% of respondents who felt *not informed at all*, almost 6 out of 10 (58%) respondents who felt *very well informed* had this intention.