What do Europeans think about the environment?

1999

THE MAIN RESULTS OF THE SURVEY CARRIED OUT IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROBAROMETER 51.1
What do Europeans think about the environment?

DG XI
Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection

in conjunction with

DG X Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media

The main results of the survey carried out in the context of Eurobarometer 51.1

European Commission
The European Commission takes no responsibility for the contents of this report.

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (http://europa.eu.int).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

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Citizens are at the heart of European environmental policy. As core beneficiaries of and participants in this policy, it was important to survey their perception of the environment, the extent of their knowledge, their concerns and hopes. Such was the aim of the survey carried out across the European Union in the Spring of 1999, the main thrust of which is reported here (the comprehensive results are the subject of another publication).

As with all public opinion surveys, even when they are conducted, as is the case in this instance, rigorously and on the basis of representative samples of the European population, it is important to remember the limit of any interpretations and extrapolations which may be drawn on the basis of the statistical results.

The following data relate to the opinions and perceptions expressed by interviewees. They are not necessarily a faithful reflection of practices adopted by those who express them nor the objective reality of the facts. It is well known that in this type of exercise replies perceived as ‘worthwhile’ tend to be over-emphasised while the opposite is true of seemingly more ‘negative’ replies.

That said, important and indisputable trends emerge from this survey. Each of us will analyse them in the light of our own experience. Yet they deserve closer attention from those who, to varying degrees, are called upon to act for the environment and sustainable development. The mobilisation of citizens and, ultimately, their ability to act will depend on their awareness, the extent to which they are informed and the trust they place in public authorities and other operators. We hope that this survey helps provide the various operators with food for thought.
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A few words about the survey

This publication contains the results of an opinion poll which was carried out between 12 April and 18 May 1999 within the framework of Eurobarometer n° 51.1. The survey was carried out at the request of the European Commission's Directorate General for the Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection (DG XI) with support from the Directorate General for Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media (DG X).

The intention of the survey is to provide a clearer picture of how the people of Europe perceive the various aspects of the environment. It is an extension of five other similarly conceived Eurobarometer surveys carried out in 1982, 1986, 1988, 1992 and 1995. However, we would point out that the 1999 survey is made up of 15 new questions and seven amended questions. These changes have made some comparisons impossible, but they have allowed the questions to be phrased with the required clarity and simplicity.

The survey was organised as follows: in each of the 15 Member States the same range of questions was put simultaneously to a representative sample of the population aged 15 or over. In total 16,144 people were surveyed giving an average of 1,000 people per country with the exception of Germany (total 2,000: 1,000 in the new Länder and 1,000 in the old ones), the United Kingdom (total 1,300: 1,000 in Great Britain and 300 in Northern Ireland) and Luxembourg (600). In general we have used the term “Europeans” to designate all those who took part in the survey. Obviously this includes the opinions of both European men and women.
INRA Europe (International Research Associates European Coordination Office, Brussels) dealt with the overall coordination of the survey, the data processing and analysis.

As for the questionnaire, the full survey report gives a complete range of information about the organisations involved in the research work, technical information (survey dates, sample selection, weighting, etc.) together with an in-depth analysis of the answers to the various questions. The full report can be obtained from DG XI.5, Information and Communication Unit, Boulevard du Triomphe 174, 1160 Brussels. E-mail: dgxiweb@dg11.cec.be

We would point out that in some graphics and tables the total of the percentages exceeds 100 % when the respondents were given the opportunity to give several answers to a single question. Similarly the total may not be exactly 100 %, but very close to it due to the rounding off of figures.

The following abbreviations have been used to designate the countries:

B Belgium
DK Denmark
D Germany
GR Greece
E Spain
F France
IRL Ireland
I Italy
L Luxembourg
NL Netherlands
A Austria
P Portugal
FIN Finland
S Sweden
UK United Kingdom
How do Europeans see the environment?

One in two Europeans is concerned about the deterioration of the environment and similarly that the future of our planet now involves profoundly changing our way of life. Ever more people are demanding these changes as a matter of urgency!

One European in two is concerned about the environment

When Europeans are asked what are their chief five worries, they acknowledge that they are more troubled by things which affect their quality of life directly, rather than distant threats about the global economy, Third World, or the future of genetic engineering. As a result, the environment, with its very real consequences for the living conditions of individuals, concerns one European in two.

The other threats which find a place among the immediate worries of Europeans are violence (79%), health problems (66%) and drugs (48.3%), as are attacks on the physical and mental functioning of individuals. Europeans are also worried about unemployment (64.9%) and poverty (56.2%) with their impact on income and social inclusion.

The special case of the failure to respect human rights takes its place in a different sphere, namely ethics, while global economic problems, genetic engineering and the under-development of the Third World are among the worries which fall under the more peripheral spheres (more distant physically or inaccessible due to their scientific nature). In accordance with this logic the diminishing quality of
the education system, which came at the bottom of this table of worries, falls within a sphere which is more distant in terms of time (because it will affect future generations).

We would specify that this classification, which gives an important place to violence, could have been influenced by the context of the war in Kosovo, a period of exceptional insecurity for Europeans.

**The chief concerns of Europeans**

79 % ○ Violence
66 % ○ Health problems (AIDS, cancer, epidemics, ...)
64.9 % ○ Unemployment
56.2 % ○ Poverty/social exclusion
48.3 % ○ Drugs
45.7 % ○ Damage to the environment
39.5 % ○ Non respect of human rights
28.2 % ○ Global economic problems
18.1 % ○ Things being genetically modified
17.7 % ○ Underdevelopment in the Third World
17.3 % ○ Lower standards of education and training

**Commentary:**

- Violence worries all EU citizens the most, with the exception of the Danes and Spanish, who class it in second place, and the Greeks, who give it fourth place. The Greeks and Spanish say they are worried about unemployment above all, while the Danes put the deterioration of the environment at the head of the subjects which worry them. This issue is also among the five main concerns of the Swedes, Dutch, Finns, Belgians, Germans, Austrians and British.

- Women fear violence more than men, while men are most apprehensive of unemployment and poverty. Violence also worries older people more. The fear of poverty affects people with different educational levels, while the more educated fear violence and unemployment least. Europeans in the highest income bracket are less sensitive to the threats posed by these three issues than other people.

Europeans were invited to choose from a list of eleven potential fears, those five which concern them most.
Changing the way we live

Eight out of ten Europeans are aware that they live on a planet in danger, and in the view of five out of ten EU citizens, that implies a change in attitude. In their view, it is necessary to “fundamentally change our way of life and development if we want to halt the deterioration of the environment.” In summary, they have adopted the concept of sustainable development. This attitude places them alongside those who have understood the need to produce differently and reconcile economic interests and the protection of nature.

The understanding of the danger also leaves three Europeans in ten feeling “very worried”. They feel that the current development of human activities is leading to “disasters” and endangering the environment. However, they do not imagine that they are able to influence the course of events personally.

Only one European in ten is not at all worried and rejects the idea that our mode of growth could damage the ecological equilibrium of the planet. They think that “the current development of human activity is not basically in conflict with the environment”.

Which of these opinions is closest to yours?

Commentary:

- These results show considerable uniformity throughout the EU. In all countries the desire to take action outweighs the recognition that the current situation is disastrous or demonstrating a lack of concern.

- The opinion that it is necessary to change our habits correlates to level of household income and educational. This conviction is held mainly by managers and clerical workers.
This growing awareness is confirmed by the fact that eight out of ten Europeans “completely agree” (38%) or “tend to agree” (43%) with the idea that environmental protection policy must also take economic and social effects into account. This responsible opinion is held throughout the entire European Union, with the average figure in each country being very close to the European average.

**Must an environmental protection policy also take into account social and economic effects?**

- **Completely agree**: 37.7%
- **Tend to agree**: 43.4%
- **Don’t know**: 10.9%
- **Tend to disagree**: 5.5%
- **Disagree**: 2.5%
“Protecting the environment means creating jobs as well” say some Europeans, showing the importance they attach in practice to the potential economic effects of a policy of this kind.

*In your opinion, does environmental protection policy tend to lead to...*

- *more jobs* 38%
- *don’t know* 23%
- *less jobs* 16%
- *neither less nor more* 23%
An immediate and urgent problem

Seven out of ten Europeans believe that environmental protection and fighting pollution represent "an immediate and urgent problem".

The same proportion as for the previous point, i.e. approximately one European in four, was found to adopt a more transitional fatalistic position. Although this group of citizens agrees that the earth is under threat, they believe that it is a problem whose management will be passed on to the future generations. Finally there are those people, in a very small minority (less than one European in ten), who quite simply deny the existence of a veritable ecological problem, or concede they have no opinion on the matter.

Some people are concerned about environmental protection and the fight against pollution. In your opinion, is it...?

- don't know 3.3%
- not really a problem 4.1%
- more a problem for the future 23.1%
- an immediate and urgent problem 69.1%

Commentary:

More marked nuances are found in the opinions expressed throughout the Member States. The Greeks feel urgency most strongly (90.8%) while the French feel it least (52.3%). On the other hand among those who feel that environmental problems are more a matter for future generations, the French lead (40%) followed by the Belgians, while the Greeks and Swedes are at the bottom of the ranking with 8 and 9% respectively. Compared with the European average, there are twice as many people who deny the existence of an ecological problem in the Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland.

The feeling of urgency is seen most clearly among Europeans aged between 25 and 54, managers and the most educated of our citizens. This feeling grows in line with educational level and income.
Are Europeans worried?

"National and world-wide" environmental problems are a major worry for Europeans, and they do not feel much more reassured concerning the threats which hang over their future health. Strangely, only their immediate living environment seems more bearable to them.

Our fears in the face of global environmental threats

The destruction of the ozone layer, the disappearance of tropical rain forests, the greenhouse effect - these and similar issues are very relevant subjects of concern for Europeans. Indeed it was found that compared with five years ago, Europeans are more worried about the state of the planet. The threats which are felt more acutely include air, water and soil pollution and the destruction of the ozone layer. Then in descending order come the disappearance of the rain forests, nuclear power stations, global warming, the exhaustion of natural resources, reductions in biodiversity, the use of genetically modified organisms and urban problems.

What are the causes for this increase in unease within the population? It can be explained by a number of hypotheses: the increase in the number of natural disasters, the recent excesses of industrial society and the pillaging of natural resources, a more discreet but no less devastating phenomenon.
At present, are you very worried, somewhat worried, not very worried or not at all worried about the following issues?

Overall concern:

Are you more or less worried than five years ago about the following issues?

Response: 'more worried'
- Air, water and ground pollution: 70.6%
- The destruction of the ozone layer: 68.4%
- Global warming (greenhouse effect): 65.6%
- Disappearance of tropical forests: 64.4%
- Use of genetically modified organisms, like genetically modified corn in other food product: 61.9%
- Nuclear power stations and radioactive waste processing: 60.8%
- Using up natural resources throughout the world: 60.8%
- Disappearance of plants, animal species and habitats: 60.4%
- Urban problems (traffic, noise, pollution): 59.9%

The Europeans interviewed claim that they are more concerned than five years ago about the nine potential dangers listed.

Commentary:
- The two issues which cause the most worry are air, water and soil pollution and the destruction of the ozone layer. These subjects obtained a fairly broad consensus among those surveyed in the 15 Member States. These two issues also bring together the highest concentration of people who say they are more worried today than five years ago. On the other hand the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is an issue which generates more divergent opinions. The Finns and Belgians are not very worried by it, the Swedes and British are somewhat worried, and the Greeks are very worried. The same applies to the impoverishment of biodiversity, where the two extreme positions are supported by the same protagonists, while this time it is the Danes who occupy the central position.

- There are also the "continually worried" and "convinced optimists". For example, with the exception of the question on the destruction of the tropical rain forests, it is always the Greeks and Portuguese questioned who say they are most concerned. The Swedes often share the same feeling but less markedly, except when it is a matter of the management of nuclear power stations and urban problems, which worries them the most. The Finns and Dutch show a more constant optimism in judging the issues as a whole.

- As a general rule, it is women, people in the intermediate age bracket (25-54), managers and the most educated and prosperous Europeans who express most worry.
People’s fears are nearly as strong at the national level

When the citizens of the European Union are asked about their views in terms of their own country rather than the world-wide level, anxiety predominates once again. Most of the issues covered (and no longer the overall issues, as at the global level) provoke a very worried response. As at the international level, air, water and soil pollution occupy first place among their concerns, while the issue of industrial waste, introduced at this level, climbs to second place. However, the ecological impact of tourism, hunting and motor sports leaves them relatively indifferent.

**Commentary:**

- The Portuguese and Greeks in the survey show the highest level of anxiety concerning virtually all the issues considered. If the range is expanded to include four countries, it is often the citizens of the four Member States in southern Europe, namely Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece, who show the highest level of concern. They are regularly joined by the British, French and Irish. The Swedes questioned say they are “not very worried” about the consequences for their environment of the production of nuclear energy and urban problems. The Dutch are “very worried” on only one single subject, i.e. the risk to nature resulting from motor sports.

- No matter what kind of problem is envisaged, women again say they are more worried.

- The survey also examined the fears which might be caused by natural disasters occurring when Europeans find themselves in a European Union country other than their own. It was found that close to 35% of those questioned had the same confidence in foreign civil protection forces as in their own country. Out of the 46% who did not have the same level of confidence, 13% said this was because they were not acquainted with the risks in the country, 12% said it was due to not knowing the local language, 11% thought the intervention services were less well organised, 10% answered that it would depend on the country, and 6% said it was because instructions and signs would be different from at home.
A more bearable local environment

Very strangely, whereas Europeans are relatively worried about the damage to the environment at the global and national levels, they say they have "not much reason to complain" about the quality of their local environment. Nevertheless they are more preoccupied when it comes to considering road traffic nuisance or breathing polluted air. These two issues are the two main subjects of their discontent. They then place the following in regularly descending order: damage to the landscape, waste, noise, quality of water for swimming, the organisation of civil defence faced with disasters, food product quality, the lack of green spaces and tap water quality.

Where you live, do you have very much reason, quite a lot of reason, not very much reason or no reason at all to complain about…?

Commentary:

- When the various aspects of the living environment of Europeans are reviewed, it is found that once again out of all those surveyed, the Greeks are the most critical. The only occasion when they show less clear-cut views is with regard to the lack of green spaces, where they are overtaken by the Spanish. The Italians, French and Spanish frequently appear in this group of rather discontent citizens. At the other end of the scale the Danes and Dutch say they are the least worried citizens in the EU on six and two subjects respectively.

- Once again women express more reason to complain about potential threats to their local environment. It was also found that the higher a person's level of education, the more complaints they expressed concerning the quality of their local environment.

- The top five concerns identified in 1999 were the same as those found in the previous survey carried out in 1995.
Health: Worries for the future

Europeans establish an evident link between their health and the environment. Among a series of potential threats, it was the diffuse threat represented by chemicals which they feared most. Air, food and water quality are also identified by a majority of Europeans as possibly affecting their health in the future. However, in their view nothing is truly harmless, be it waste, climate change, noise or building materials. On the contrary, they are convinced that in the future each of these elements could seriously compromise their health. Once again they acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of air pollution and more unexpectedly, they take a relatively critical view of the quality of food products - even before the dioxin crisis broke out in Belgium.

 Commentary:

- Here too, major national disparities are found depending on the categories concerned. Nevertheless, in the case of six of the eight factors which could affect the health of Europeans, the Finns are the least pessimistic. The Finns lose first place to the Belgians in the survey when it comes to building materials, and by the French for climate change.

 At the other end of the scale the nationals of the four southern Member States (Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece) are among the most alarmist citizens, five times out of eight. They are joined by the Dutch when it comes to waste and the Germans as regards building materials and climate change.

- No matter which potential threats are envisaged, women judge them to be more dangerous than men.
Are Europeans informed?

Europeans are major consumers of the mass media, and say they are very distrustful of most sources of information when it comes to the environment. But they also show little inclination to make an effort towards becoming better informed. Nevertheless their level of "general and practical" information requires upgrading as a matter of urgency.

General information needs to be improved

What does the term "global warming" mean exactly for Europeans? Do they closely follow the progress made to their own cars? Do they know what is being done by their local authority or country to safeguard the environment? These questions and many others receive little response from most Europeans. The majority recognise the fact that they have a low level of environmental information. "Major global environmental problems" and "more immediate environmental problems" stand out from the classification somewhat as the two subjects which they understand best. They are followed in descending order by "scientific and technical developments", "steps taken by national and local government to protect the environment" and "steps taken by the European Union". Therefore better general information is urgently needed to reverse this trend.
For each of these issues, can you tell me if you feel very well, fairly well, fairly badly or very badly informed?

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<th>Very well</th>
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<tr>
<td>Major global environmental problems</td>
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<td>Steps taken by environmental protection organisations</td>
<td>What to do in case of an emergency</td>
<td>Steps taken by the European Union to protect the environment</td>
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**Commentary:**

- The Greeks in the survey said they had the lowest level of information for virtually all the problems considered. They are generally followed by the Spanish or Portuguese. In two cases, "what to do in case of an emergency" and "major global environmental problems", the Irish and Portuguese questioned had the lowest average scores respectively. On the other hand, the Danes find themselves among the three best informed Member States on six occasions. The Finns and Dutch are found alongside them fairly frequently. The Danes only recorded a very low score on one occasion, when asked what do in an emergency.

- In general men display a better level of information than women for all the subjects covered. The same applies to managers and the more educated. This level of information grows proportionally with income and educational level. The inhabitants of less urban zones also say they are better informed than their fellow citizens on steps to protect the environment by the public authorities (local, national, or European) and environmental associations.
Half of all Europeans "know enough" to take action

Although Europeans agree that their "general" level of knowledge is never very high, their opinions prove to be more positive where judging the degree of "practical" information at their disposal. Indeed it was found that 53% of those questioned stated that they knew enough "to contribute to protecting the environment in their daily lives", compared with 40% who admitted they did not have this knowledge.

**Do you know enough about what you have to do in your daily life to contribute to protecting the environment?**

**Commentary:**

- It will come as no surprise to find that it is the citizens of the countries who say they are the best informed about environmental problems who also say they know how to contribute to protecting the environment.

- Once again it is mainly men, managerial staff and most educated Europeans who say they "know enough" to take action. The higher their level of urbanisation, income, and educational level, the better informed they say they are.

The replies given by EU citizens reveal major contrasts. Hence, there is a discrepancy of over 40 points between those who most claim an awareness of how to act to protect the environment in their daily lives, namely the Dutch, and those who claim to be the worst informed, namely the Spanish. Moreover, the latter also rank below the European average of the Portuguese, Irish, French, Greeks, Italians and British.
People prefer television, newspapers and radio

Information about the environment is available to Europeans through a wide range of media. We learn here, as elsewhere, that once again the mass media, i.e. television, written media and radio, are most favoured by the public. However, those questioned seem to pay considerable attention to what friends and neighbours can teach them and class this direct source of information in fourth place. It is followed by publications by environmental protection associations and school and university textbooks. Although the use of the Internet is constantly increasing, it can also be pointed out that with its European score of 6.2% its effectiveness as a medium is dependent on the rate of penetration of the technology. However, the Internet is more appreciated and used by students (16.8%) and managers (13.3%). Twice as many men (8.1%) as women (4.4%) use the Internet to get information about the environment.

When you are looking for information on the environment, which of the following sources do you use?

[Diagram showing percentages for different information sources]

**Commentary:**

- It was found that television, the written media and radio are the most appreciated information channels in virtually every country. Only the Italians surveyed gave greater importance to conversations with friends and neighbours than the radio, so that their ranking is “television, written media, conversations, radio”.

- Primarily men, managers and people with high levels of income and education designated the press and radio as favoured information sources. It was also found that young people discuss questions connected with the environment more with friends and neighbours, and use television less as a source of information.

- The lowest scores as regards the various communication channels considered are always recorded in rural areas.
Scepticism about the information sources

If a comparison is made between the results of the 1995 and 1999 surveys, it is found that people have become more distrustful about a large number of the information sources currently available. Even though the trust placed in the environmental protection associations has been eroded significantly, they still retain the most confidence of Europeans. It was found that only one third of those surveyed trust scientists, a little less than one third trust consumer organisations, and little over a quarter trust the media. Teachers, the ecological political parties and public authorities follow in descending order. The trade unions, political parties in general and industry, who are judged to be more prone to propaganda, are relegated to the categories inspiring least confidence.

**Commentary:**

- In Member States, the people in the survey placed the environmental protection organisations at the top of the list of bodies they trust the most. This order is not respected by the Danes, who prefer consumer associations, or by the Swedes and Finns, who prefer scientists.

- The propensity to show confidence in the environmental protection organisations increases with the level of education and income, as well as the degree of urbanisation.

*Way ahead of other sources of information are environmental protection agencies who enjoy the highest confidence rating, even if here too, confidence has declined by comparison with 1995.*
Few Europeans seek to become better informed

Given the general scepticism and low general rate of information, it comes as no surprise therefore to learn that six out of ten Europeans acknowledge that they make no personal effort to find out more about the environment. Among the citizens who do take initiatives, one quarter choose more focused television programmes, and one fifth select newspaper articles on environmental issues.

**Do you make particular efforts to get information about the environment?**

- 80%
- 70%
- 60%
- 50%
- 40%
- 30%
- 20%
- 10%

None, no particular efforts
Yes, watching specific television programmes
Yes, reading specific newspaper articles
Yes, searching for information on a specific environmental topic (via the Internet, in libraries, etc.)
Yes, subscription to a specialised magazine
Yes, following your children’s school courses
Don't know
Yes, subscription to a consumer magazine
Other efforts

**Commentary:**

- Ireland, Spain, the United Kingdom, Portugal and Greece head of the countries whose citizens say they make no effort to get information. On the other hand the Dutch appear to be the most dynamic in choosing more specific television programmes and newspaper articles, but also by seeking out information on a specific environmental subject or subscribing to a specialist magazine. These last two activities get their highest scores in the Netherlands (15% compared with a European average of 6% in the first case and 4% in the second case).

- It is primarily pensioners, elderly people, the less well educated and home workers who say they make no effort to get information. This trend increases in inverse proportion to income.

- The lower the level of urbanisation, the higher the tendency to state that no effort is made to get information.
Are Europeans committed?

Are Europeans really willing to change their way of life and contribute to the environment? In any case, they say they would agree to pay a little more for certain goods and services which are more environmentally friendly.

What we are doing today

At present Europeans state that they regularly carry out a series of activities aimed at protecting the environment. For example they pay attention to saving electricity (72%) and water (67%), or participate in recycling efforts, either by sorting household refuse (66%) or buying products with recyclable packaging (57%). They say they use public transport (44%), check carbon dioxide emissions from their cars (42%) or drive slower (33.2%). Finally they buy biological products (32.8%), make compost (29.7%) and to a lesser degree, practice emergency procedures (17.3%). In fact all these statements are more revealing of how citizens perceive their daily commitments, rather than their concrete contributions to protecting the environment. This gap between “good will” and “reality” is particularly visible in the case of making compost, which reaches a level of 30%! Its real prevalence is probably well below that expressed by Europeans in the survey.
Do you regularly...?

Electricity and water savings in addition to the sorting of domestic refuse are the three responses most commonly adopted by Europeans as an environmental protection measure.

**Actions**

**Electricity savings**
- The Netherlands, Germany, Portugal
- Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands
- Germany, Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands

**Water savings**
- Sweden, The Netherlands, Luxembourg
- Greece, Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg
- Germany, Luxembourg, Austria

**Sorting domestic refuse**
- Luxembourg, France
- Denmark, Austria, Sweden
- Germany, Austria
- Denmark, Austria, Luxembourg

**Buying products with a packaging which can be recycled**
- Sweden, The Netherlands, Luxembourg
- Greece, Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg
- Germany, Luxembourg, Austria

**Travel by public transport**

**Check the level of gas emission from vehicles**

**Driving car slower**

**Buying organic products**

**Making compost**

**Practicing emergency procedures**

**Commentary:**

- It was found that Germans are the most enterprising when it comes to protecting the environment in their daily lives. On five occasions they placed themselves among the countries with the highest percentages who take action. The Austrians, Luxembourgers and Dutch also qualified for this classification on three occasions, and the Danes, on three occasions. The Dutch, like the Germans, are stand out in actions leading to savings, as well as recycling.

- Women feature among the categories of those who save most energy, sort household waste, buy less polluting products and use public transport, while men appear to be mainly concerned with better control of the carbon dioxide emissions of their cars and reducing their driving speeds.

- The higher the degree of urbanisation, the higher the survey results as regards sorting household waste, using public transport and controlling carbon dioxide emissions from cars. Conversely, the lower the degree of urbanisation, the more people state they make compost with garden or household refuse and drive slower.
What we are prepared to do in the future

A majority of Europeans say they are prepared to sacrifice a part of their budget in order to spend it on the environment. In practice that means they will accept paying more for products which are less harmful to the environment. But they set limits to their generosity; in general the increase should not exceed 10% approximately.

They also appear to be selective concerning the kind of goods or services for which they would be prepared to pay a little more than at present. They designated the following in descending order: food products, water, household waste removal and processing, public transport, fuel, lighting and heating their homes, private vehicles and finally aircraft journeys.

For which of the following products and services would you be prepared to pay a little more than now so that they are less harmful to the environment?

![Diagram showing percentages of respondents for various products and services]

Commentary:

- People aged over 55, pensioners and manual workers are the main categories who would agree to pay up to 10% more for certain products. The likelihood of paying more increases proportionally with income.

One third of interviewees reject the idea of any additional financial sacrifice. The others identify products or services for which they would be prepared to pay more: foodstuffs (33%), water (31%), the collection and treatment of household rubbish (27% and 21% respectively), public transport (18%), fuel, lighting and heating the home (16% each), specific vehicles (14%) and lastly flights (12%).
Which solutions do Europeans suggest?

How should the environment be improved?

According to Europeans first strengthen legislation and then more vigorously apply the “polluter pays” principle.

In the specific case of cities, and particularly car traffic, the solution also involves improving public transport. In parallel the population wants the public authorities to strengthen their actions in favour of the environment.

Stricter laws to combat pollution

The preferred solutions are stricter legislation with heavy fines for those who do not respect it. The proposal of a “policeman and a big stick” lacks imagination but is highly valued and was preferred by close to half of those questioned from a choice of four possible solutions. Another quarter of the population opted for applying the principle known as “the polluter pays”. In other words polluters have to pay for the damage they cause. Finally, less than one European in ten chose to “rely on initiatives from industry, farmers, scientific progress, etc.” or “make everyone pay more”.

In your opinion, which one of these would make it possible to most effectively solve environmental problems linked to pollution?

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<th>Solution</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making regulations stricter, with heavy fines</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only taxing sources of pollution</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on initiatives from the industry, farmers, scientific progress, etc.</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making everyone pay more in taxes, prices, etc.</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commentary:**

The solution which was cited most frequently was: 

- Inhabitants of rural areas supported the solution of relying on initiatives from industries, farmers, scientists, and people in the two higher income brackets.
- The Europeans who chose the second option were primarily male, people with average and higher levels of education, managers, and people in the two higher income brackets.
- The “polluter pays” principle is popular at the level of the Member States with the exception of France, where those surveyed preferred the “pollutes pays” principle. As a second option, the “polluter pays” principle also appealed particularly strongly to the Belgians and Dutch.

**CHAPTER V: Which solutions do Europeans suggest?**
More public transport means fewer traffic problems

Another subject which very much preoccupies people is pollution and traffic congestion in towns. When it is borne in mind that the urban population represents approximately 50% of the global population, it is important to find out which solutions Europeans are prepared to support in order to reduce the impact of these urban problems. Among eight possible solutions, the priorities they supported were improving public transport, creating pedestrianised areas and restricting car traffic in towns. Making drivers pay tolls at the entrance to towns and increasing the price of fuel, two solutions which would demand increased financial contributions by citizens, did not appeal to them greatly. The idea of creating more cycle lanes was appealing.

Commentary:

- Overall, the same proposals appear in all the Member States. Everywhere except Greece, where citizens prefer restricting road traffic, the solution of improving public transport got most support. The Portuguese and Finns surveyed also attach considerable value to this more radical solution and put it in second place.

- The choice of the first option (public transport) increased in line with education and income levels. It had a marked peak among managers. Proportionally it is preferred by fewer women. The creation of pedestrianised areas is clearly preferred by women, young people aged 15-24, people with an average level of education, office workers and home workers. Reducing road traffic is a solution supported by more women, young people aged 15-24, people aged over 55 and the self-employed.

- The idea of making drivers pay a toll at the entry to towns, increasing fuel prices and improving public transport received more support as urbanisation increases. On the other hand the lower the degree of urbanisation, the more people want to restrict road traffic and build new rapid urban roads.

In your opinion, which one of these would make it possible to most effectively solve environmental problems linked to traffic in towns?

An improvement in public transport was voted by 68% of interviewees, the creation of more pedestrian areas by 46% and traffic restrictions by 42%. The other solutions gain lower scores, especially those entailing the financial contribution of citizens.
The actions of the public authorities receive a severe verdict

It is also interesting to find out what Europeans think of the solutions which the public authorities have implemented so far in order to protect the environment. However, it should be emphasised that a major event occurred between the 1995 and 1999 surveys in the form of the acceptance of the International Charter on Climate Change by 152 nations in Kyoto on 11 December 1997. The EU is now committed to reducing its emissions of greenhouse gases by 8% in 2012 compared with 1990. The event received a lot of media coverage and could have had an impact on the opinions expressed here.

One obvious point is that no matter the level of the public authority considered, be it local, regional, national, European or world-wide, proportionally more Europeans always answer “no” rather than “yes” to questions concerning the effectiveness of the actions undertaken by public bodies to protect the environment.

**Commentary:**

- It was found that the percentage of people who say they are unable to judge the effectiveness of public bodies as regards the environment is at its lowest at local level. That figure increases by a few points at the regional or national levels, and then makes a considerable jump at European and world-wide levels. Remark: the greater the geographic distance from a person’s own environment, the less they know about the actions undertaken by public bodies.

- The Danes and Austrians responded most positively to the activities of public bodies at both the local and regional levels, while the Greeks and Italians in the survey were the most critical in their judgement. Once again it was the Danes, and also the Finns, who said they were most satisfied concerning the actions taken by public bodies at the national level, while the Greeks and Portuguese judged them most severely. At European Union level, the most favourable judgement concerning public measures came from the Irish, Luxembourgers, Finns and British. Conversely the most critical are once again the Greeks, but also the Danes, Swedes and French. The citizens of the latter four countries together with Finland also take a severe view of the actions of public bodies at world-wide level, while the Luxembourgers and British approve of them.

- Overall, for all levels of public authority together, it was mainly people aged 25-54, the self-employed and managers who judged that public bodies were not acting effectively.
Proportionally the percentage of people who think public authorities are working effectively is highest in areas with low or average level of urbanisation.

It was found that compared with the 1995 survey, Europeans currently judge public bodies to be acting less effectively for all the levels of government taken into consideration.
Public authorities must do better

Overall, Europeans judge the environmental work carried out severely. Similarly in overall terms, they also call for increased intervention by public bodies in this domain. They expect more from the public authorities at local, world-wide and national levels. Everyone has to do better, but the message is louder for some.

In your opinion, at which of these levels should the authorities get most involved in protecting the environment?

- Local 29%
- EU 7%
- Regional 10%
- National 22%
- Don’t know 8%
- World-wide 24%

Commentary:

- When asked to comment on public bodies which should be more involved in protecting the environment, nearly 30% of Europeans choose local level. The regional level ranges between 4% (Sweden) and 12% (Greece, Austria and Germany), national level gets between 16% (Luxembourg and Austria) and 32% (Netherlands), European level gets between 5% (United Kingdom) and 15% (Netherlands), while world-wide level receives between 11% (Ireland) and 37% (Denmark).

- Those who think that action should be taken at local level as a priority were found to include more women, elderly people (aged 55 and over), pensioners, home workers, the self-employed and citizens belonging to the lowest income bracket. Among those who believe that world-wide level should become a priority field of action, more young people (15-39) were found, together with those with a higher level of education and managers and office workers. Men and pensioners are found among the citizens who believe that the national level deserves this attention. Among those who designate the European Union as the priority level for taking action, more men, people aged 40-54 and citizens with higher incomes were found.

- The lower the degree of urbanisation, the more citizens believe that efforts should be intensified at local level, and with far less support for global level.

29% of Europeans feel that public authorities should become involved as a priority at local level, 24% at world level and 22% at national level. The importance placed on the increased involvement of public authorities at global level corroborates the assumption that Europeans perceive environmental problems as global.
European Commission

What do Europeans think about the environment?

The main results of the survey carried out in the context of Eurobarometer 51.1

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