



Special Eurobarometer 524
Summary

Attitudes of Europeans towards Air Quality

Summary

Fieldwork: March-April 2022

Survey conducted by Kantar at the request of the European Commission,
Directorate-General for the Environment (DG ENV)

Survey co-ordinated by the European Commission,
Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM "Media monitoring and Eurobarometer Unit")

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Special Eurobarometer 524
Attitudes of Europeans towards Air Quality

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INTRODUCTION



Special Eurobarometer 524

Attitudes of Europeans towards Air Quality

This report presents the analysis of the findings of the Special Eurobarometer survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards Air Quality conducted in the 27 Member States of the European Union in March 2022.

Air quality has been a priority of the European Union over the last forty years. Clean air is indeed essential to people's health and the environment, and EU policies have delivered significant improvements. Notably, between 2000 and 2020, where emissions of the main air pollutants have decreased by between 13% and 84%, depending on the pollutant¹. Despite these improvements, air pollution remains the most important environmental threat to human health in the EU, and significantly damages ecosystems.

EU clean air policy relies on three main pillars: air quality standards to be achieved throughout all Member States, national emission reduction commitments, and policies to reduce pollution from key sources (such as transport, energy generation, industrial production, and agriculture). As part of the European Green Deal, the European Commission has announced that it will revise EU air quality standards to align them more closely with the recommendations of the World Health Organization. This revision also aims to improve overall EU legislation for clean air, building on the lessons learnt from the 2019 evaluation ('fitness check') of the Ambient Air Quality Directives.² This Special Eurobarometer survey is the follow-up of the Special Eurobarometer survey 497 conducted in September 2019.³ However, since some of the questions and items have been modified, the differences of such questions observed between the two surveys can only be considered indicative. They are noted in this report, but by way of an indicative comparison. Some of the questions in the 2019 Eurobarometer Special were asked in the 2012 Eurobarometer Flash, as well as the Special Eurobarometer on Attitudes of Europeans towards the Environment⁴ conducted in December 2019.

The current survey covers the following areas:

- The perceived changes in the quality of air over the past ten years;
- Awareness of EU air quality standards and opinions about these standards;
- The perceived level of knowledge about air quality problems;
- The perceived seriousness of air quality-related problems;
- The perceived role of different actors in promoting good air quality;
- The perceived most effective ways of tackling air quality problems;
- The preferred level of action at which to address air quality problems;

Context

It is worth noting that climate change and environmental pollution are growing concerns in public opinion. In the recent Eurobarometer Standard conducted in winter 2021-2022⁵, environment and climate change was identified as the most important issues facing the EU. 26% of the respondents mentioned these issues. In 2019, the last time questions about air quality were asked, it was considered the second most important issue, mentioned by 46% of respondents. The increased prominence of climate change and environmental issues is an important factor to be taken into account when analysing the results of this survey.

¹ European Environment Agency : National air pollutant emissions data viewer 1990 – 2020; <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/dashboards/national-air-pollutant-emissions-data>

² https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air/air-quality_en

³ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2239>

⁴ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2257>

⁵ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2553>

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Methodology

This survey was carried out by the Kantar network in the 27 EU Member States between 21 March and 20 April 2022. Some 26,509 respondents from different social and demographic groups were interviewed in their mother tongue. This survey was commissioned by the European Commission, Directorate General for the Environment (DG ENV).

The methodology used is that of Eurobarometer surveys as carried out by the Directorate-General for Communication ("Media monitoring and Eurobarometer" Unit). Given the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent health safety measures, face-to-face methodology was either not possible or only partially so in some Member States. In 17 Member States all interviews were conducted face to face. Face-to-face was supplemented by online interviews in Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Slovenia, and Slovakia. Lastly, in Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland, and Sweden⁶. A technical note on the manner in which the interviews were conducted by the institutes within the Kantar network is appended as an annex to this report. Also included are the interview methods and the confidence intervals.

Note: In this report, Member States are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations used in this report correspond to:

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

European Union – weighted average for the 27 Member States	EU27
BE, FR, IT, LU, DE, AT, ES, PT, IE, NL, FI, EL, EE, SI, CY, MT, SK, LV, LT	Euro area
BG, CZ, DK, HR, HU, PL, RO, SE	Non euro area

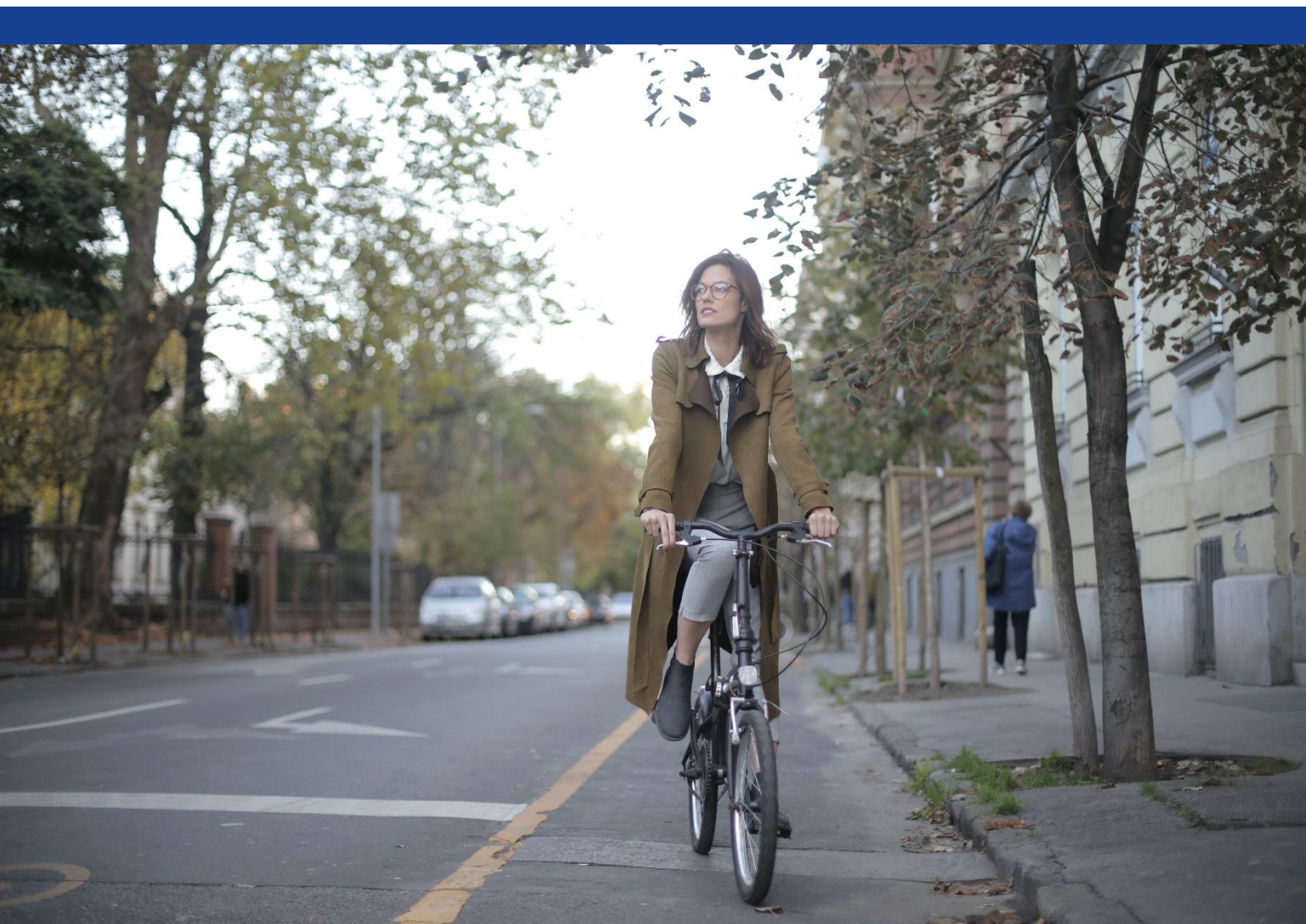
* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 27 European Union Member States. However, the *acquis communautaire* has been suspended in the part of the country which is not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. For practical reasons, only the interviews carried out in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus are included in the "CY" category and in the EU27 average.

We wish to thank the people throughout the European Union who have given their time to take part in this survey.

Without their active participation, this study would not have been possible.

⁶ Online interviewing took the form of probabilistic panels and access panels, depending on what is available in the country.

I. VIEWS ON CHANGES IN AIR QUALITY IN THE LAST TEN YEARS



Special Eurobarometer 524 Air Quality in the European Union

Nearly half of Europeans think that air quality has worsened over the last 10 years

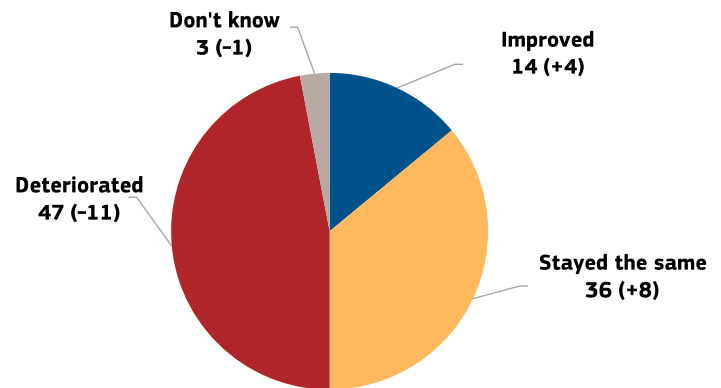
- **Close to half (47%) think that air quality has deteriorated in their country over the past ten years**, while more than one in three (36%) believe it has stayed the same, with 14% saying it has improved.
- Compared to 2019, across the EU respondents are notably less likely to say that air quality has deteriorated, with a considerable drop of 11 percentage points.

At the national level, substantial differences can be noted among different Member States. In 12 countries, more than half of respondents say that air quality has deteriorated, most markedly in Malta and Cyprus (both 67%), and France (66%), where around two thirds say this.

Between 2019 and 2022, in 24 Member States the proportion of respondents who think that air quality has deteriorated has decreased, with 16 countries seeing at least a ten percentage point drop.

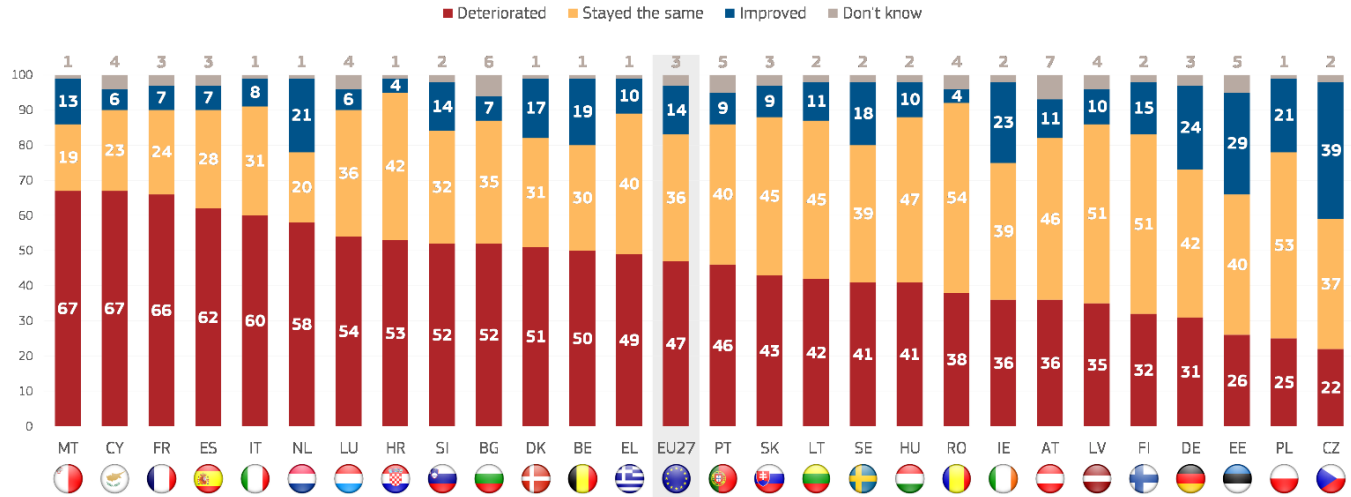
Women are more likely than men to think that air quality has deteriorated (51% vs 43%).

QB2 Do you think that, over the last 10 years, the air quality in (OUR COUNTRY) has ...?
(% - EU)



(Mar-Apr 2022 - Sep 2019)

QB2 Do you think that, over the last 10 years, the air quality in (OUR COUNTRY) has ...?
(%)



II. THE EU AIR QUALITY STANDARDS

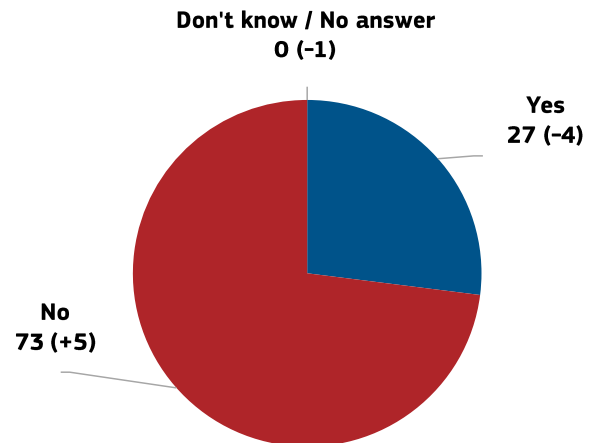


Special Eurobarometer 524 Air Quality in the European Union

A majority of Europeans have not heard of the EU air quality standards

Respondents were asked whether they had heard of the EU air quality standards⁷. **More than seven in ten (73%, +5 percentage points since 2019) indicate that they have not heard of them** while nearly one in three (27%, -4) say that they have.

QB8 Have you heard of the EU air quality standards?
(% – EU)



(Mar-Apr 2022 – Sep 2019)

More than seven in ten respondents aware of the EU air quality standards say that they are not adequate

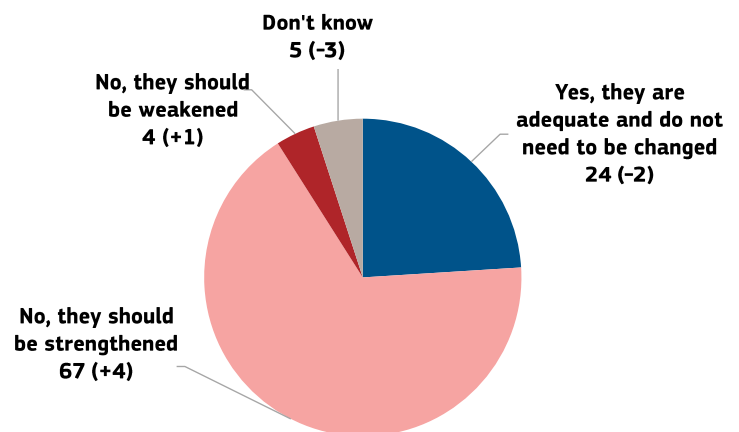
Respondents who say that they are aware of the EU air quality standards were asked whether they believe that these standards are adequate or not.

- Just over two thirds of respondents (67%, +4 percentage points since 2019) say that they are not adequate and that they should be strengthened.
- Nearly a quarter believe that they are adequate (24%, -2) with a very small proportion thinking that they should be weakened (4%, +1). Among the respondents, 5% (-3) indicate that they don't know.

In all but five Member States, more than half of the respondents believe that the EU air quality standards should be strengthened. In four countries, at least eight in ten say this: Greece (88%), Malta and Slovakia (82% both), and Italy (80%).

In Member States where there is a higher proportion of respondents who say that the air quality has deteriorated, there is also a higher proportion of respondents who say that the EU air quality standards should be strengthened.

QB9 Do you believe that the existing EU air quality standards are adequate or not?
(% – EU)



(Mar-Apr 2022 – Sep 2019)

Respondents who have heard of EU air quality standards (n = 7070)

⁷ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air/air-quality/eu-air-quality-standards_en

III. LEVEL OF INFORMATION ABOUT AIR QUALITY PROBLEMS



A majority of Europeans do not feel informed about EU air quality problems in their country

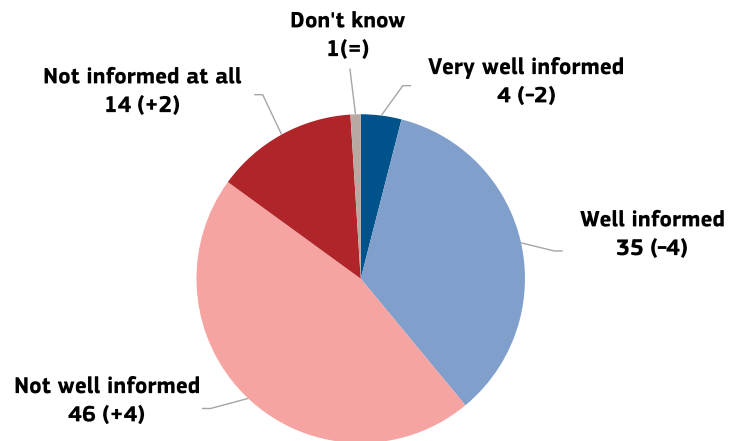
- **Three in five (60%) say that they do not feel informed about air quality problems in their country**, a higher proportion (+6) than in a previous report in 2019. Among this group, nearly half (46%) say that they are not well informed about air quality in their country, a slightly higher proportion (+4) than three years ago.
- The proportion of respondents who feel not informed at all has also seen a small uptick (14%, +2) since 2019. Nearly two in five (39%, -6) say they feel informed, with around a third (35%, -4) feeling well-informed, and 4% (-2) feeling very well-informed.

A **national** analysis shows that in all but three Member States, a majority of respondents do not feel informed about air quality problems. In four countries, more than seven in ten give this answer: Portugal (79%), Romania (77%), Estonia (73%), and Latvia (71%), considerably more than the European average (60%).

In seven Member States, at least one in five say they do not feel informed at all about this issue, most notably in Romania (23%), Estonia (22%), and Austria and Portugal (both 21%).

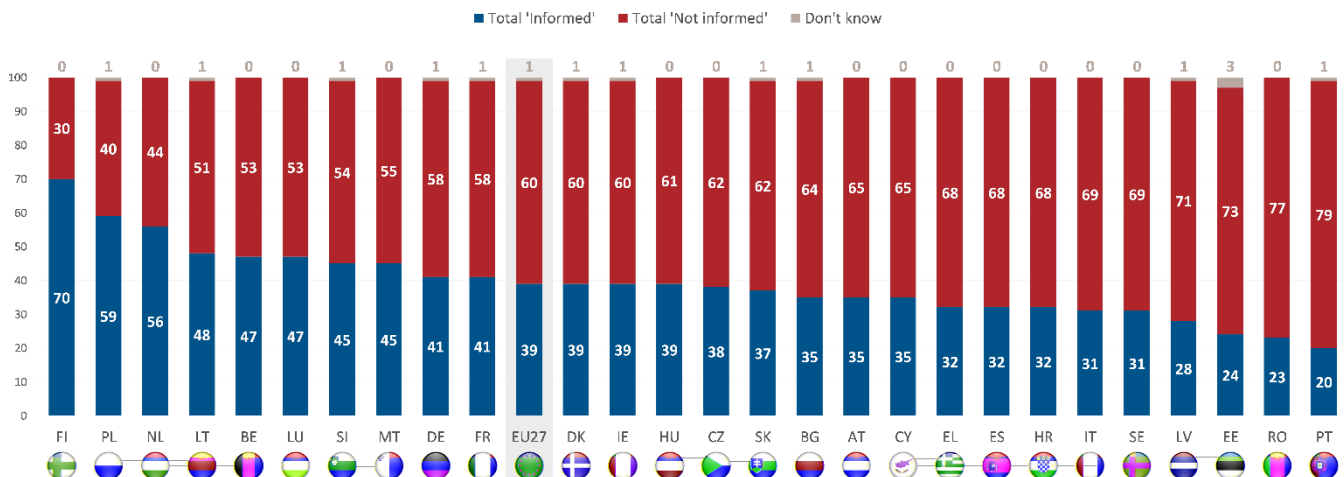
Respondents who finished their education by the age of 15 are more likely to say that they feel uninformed (72%) than those who completed their education between the ages of 16 and 19 (62%) or those who enjoyed a higher education (51%).

QB1 How informed do you feel about air quality problems in (OUR COUNTRY)?
(% - EU)

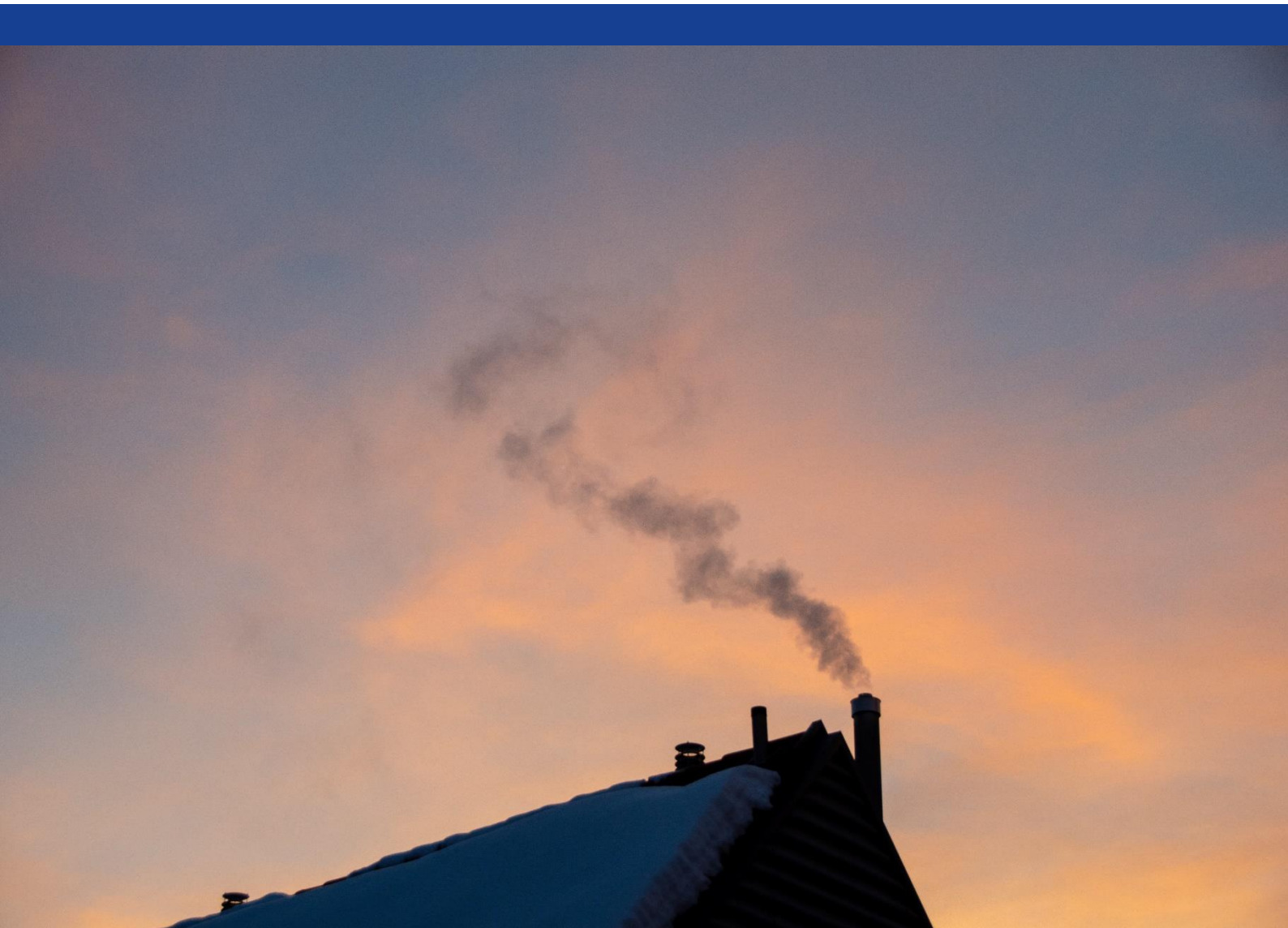


(Mar-Apr 2022 - Sep 2019)

QB1 How informed do you feel about air quality problems in (OUR COUNTRY)?
(%)



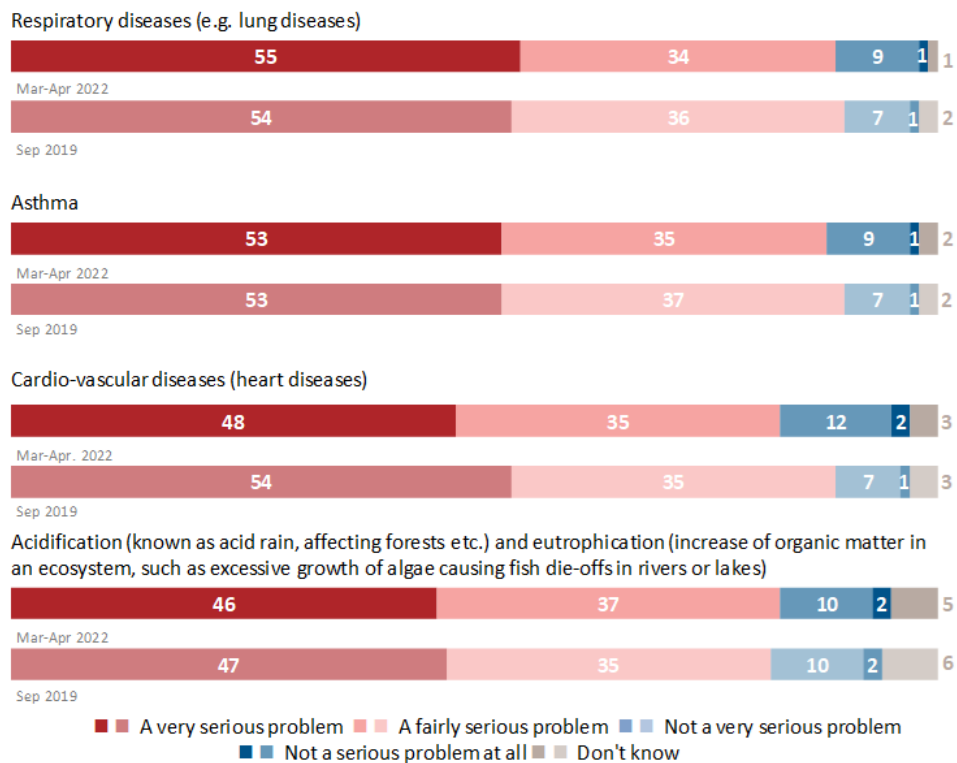
IV. SERIOUSNESS OF AIR QUALITY PROBLEMS



The majority of Europeans think that respiratory diseases, and asthma are very serious problems in their respective countries

- The majority of Europeans consider **respiratory diseases** to be a serious problem in their country (89%), slightly less (-1) since the previous Special Eurobarometer survey on the same topic in 2019.
- The same is true regarding **asthma**, considered a serious problem by most Europeans (88%, -2).
- A large majority (83%) of Europeans also consider **cardio-vascular diseases** to be a serious problem, though this has decreased slightly since 2019 (-6).
- Europeans are equally likely (83%) to consider **acid rain and eutrophication**; for example, excessive algae growth causing fish die-offs, a serious issue, a slight rise (+1) since 2019⁸.

QB3. Would you say that the following consequence of air pollution is a very serious problem, a fairly serious problem, not a very serious problem or not a serious problem at all in (OUR COUNTRY)?
(% - EU)



⁸ This item was defined for respondents as follows: Acidification (known as acid rain, affecting forests etc.) and eutrophication (increase of organic matter in an ecosystem, such as excessive growth of algae causing fish die-offs in rivers or lakes)

V. THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT ACTORS IN PROMOTING GOOD AIR QUALITY

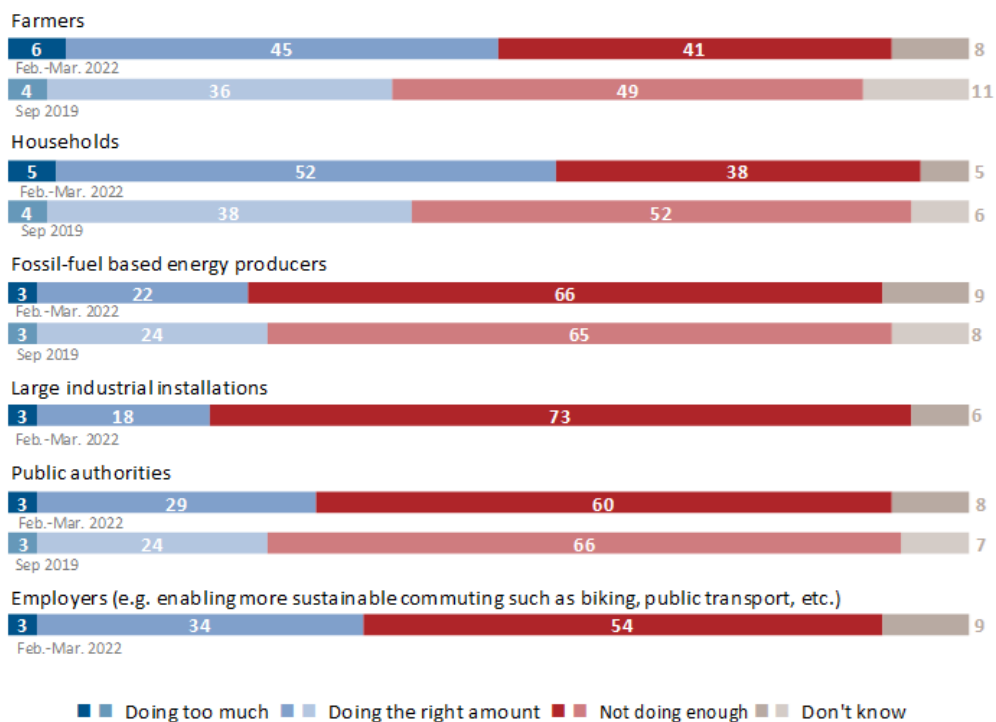


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A majority of Europeans think that large industrial installations, fossil-fuel based energy producers, public authorities, and employers are not doing enough to promote good air quality.

- **Large industrial installations**⁹ are considered by respondents as doing the least effort, with three quarters (73%) saying they are not doing enough.
- As regards **fossil-fuel based energy producers**, two thirds (66%) say that they are not doing enough, while only one in five (22%) think they are doing the right amount.
- A solid majority (60%) among respondents think that **public authorities** are not doing enough.
- More than half (54%) respondents think that **employers** are not doing enough, while one in three (34%) think they are doing the right amount¹⁰.
- Just over four in ten (41%) think that **farmers** are not doing enough, while 45% think they are doing the right amount, and 6% think they are doing too much.
- More than half (52%) of respondents in the European Union think that **households** are doing enough to promote good air quality, while 38% think they are not doing enough.

QB5. In your opinion, is each of the following currently doing too much, doing about the right amount or not doing enough to promote good air quality in (OUR COUNTRY)?
(% - EU)



⁹ This category was also not included in the 2019 report.

¹⁰ This category was not included in the 2019 report so no comparison is available.

VI. PERSONAL ACTIONS TO REDUCE HARMFUL EMISSIONS

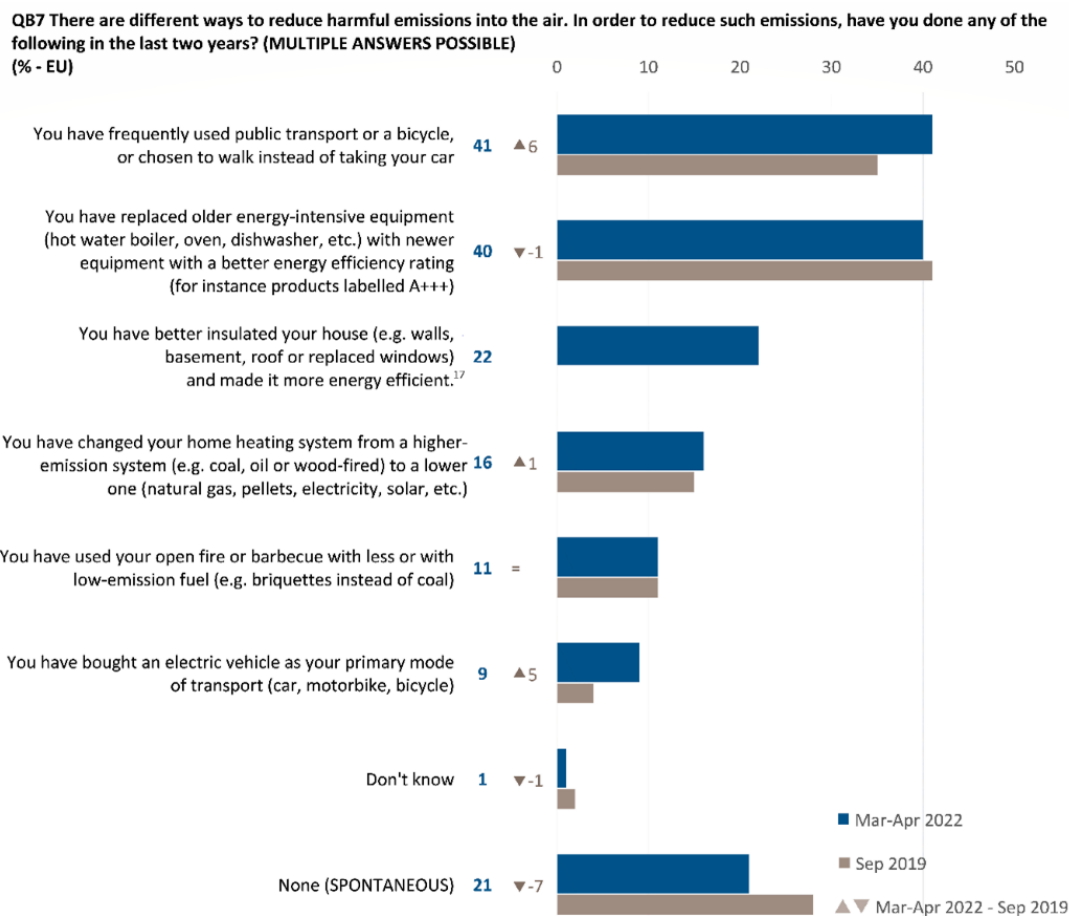


The use of public transport, a bicycle, or walking is the most frequent method Europeans use to reduce harmful emissions into the air

- When asked whether they have taken any action to reduce harmful emissions, just over four in ten (41%) respondents say they **have frequently used public transport or a bicycle, or chosen to walk instead of taking their car**, a sharp uptick of 6 percentage points compared to the 2019 survey.
- Roughly the same proportion (40%, -1) say they replaced older energy-intensive equipment with newer equipment with a better energy efficiency rating
- Over one in five (22%) say they better insulated their house and made it more energy efficient¹¹.
- Among those polled, 16% say they changed their home heating system to a lower one, a small increase (+1) compared to 2019. Just over one in ten (11%, =) bought a low-emission product to fuel their open fire or barbecue, while nearly one in ten (9%) say they bought an electric vehicle, which includes cars as well as motorbikes and bicycles, as their primary mode of transport, nearly double (+5) compared to 2019.

- Finally, over one in five 21% of respondents spontaneously said they had taken none of these actions, which is a decrease of 7 percentage points since the 2019 survey, continuing the 7 percentage point drop registered between 2017 and 2019.

National results show that in fifteen countries the most frequently mentioned action is to have **frequently used public transport, a bicycle, or chosen to walk instead of taking their car**, with the highest proportions in Sweden and the Netherlands (both 59%), Estonia, Luxembourg, and Finland (all 50%).



¹¹ This item did not come up in the 2019 survey, so a comparison could not be made.

VII. MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO TACKLE AIR QUALITY PROBLEMS



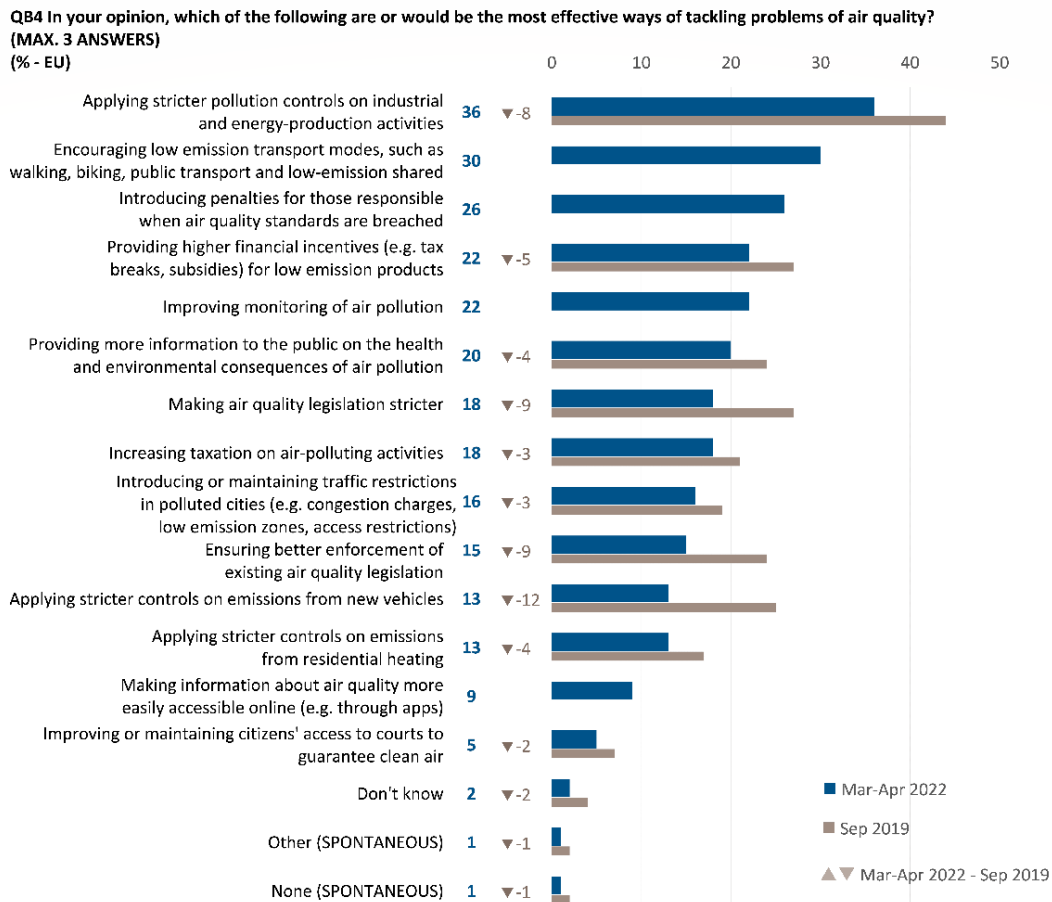
Special Eurobarometer 524 Air Quality in the European Union

Europeans are most likely to think that stricter pollution controls on industrial and energy-production activities is most effective in tackling air quality problems

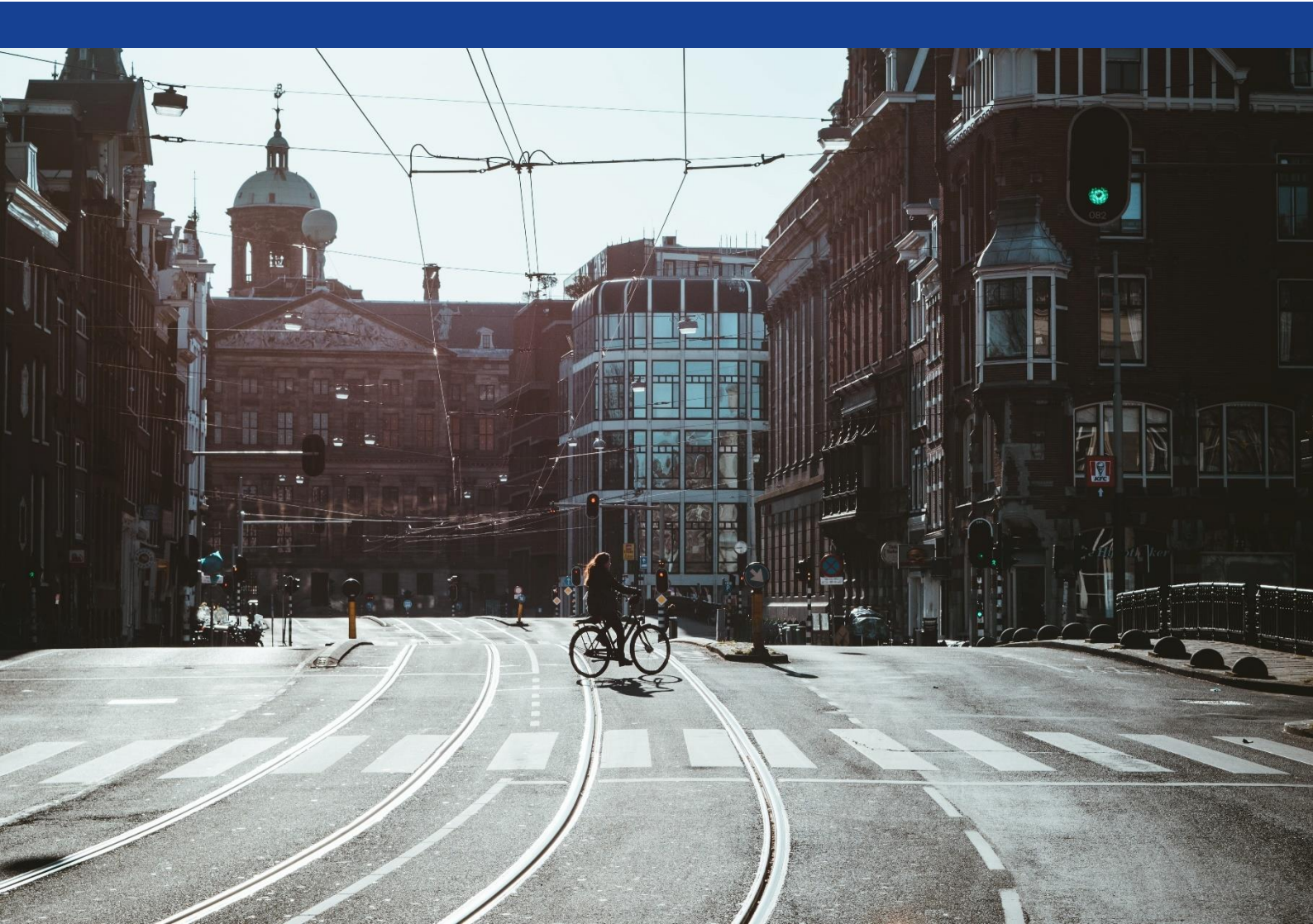
- In 2022, nearly four in ten (36%) of respondents say that the most effective way to tackle air quality problems is to **apply stricter pollution controls on industrial and energy-production activities**.
- The second answer, a newly introduced item mentioned by nearly one in three (30%) respondents, is **encouraging low emission transport modes, such as walking, biking, public transport and low-emission shared vehicles**.
- More than one in four (26%) respondents think that the most effective way to tackle air quality problems is to **introduce penalties for those responsible when air quality standards are breached**.
- More than one in five (22%, -5) think the most effective way would be to **provide higher financial incentives for low emission products**. The same proportion (22%) think **improving monitoring of air pollution**, also a new item, is the most effective way.
- One in five (20%, -4) think that the most effective solution is to **provide more information to the public on the health and environmental consequences of air pollution**.

- Just under one in five (18%) believe in **making air quality legislation stricter**, a modified item, and increasing taxation on air-polluting activities (18%, -3).
- Nearly one in six (16%, -3) of respondents think that **introducing or maintaining traffic restrictions in polluted cities** is one of the most effective ways of tackling problems of air quality, while 15% (-9) believe this about **ensuring better enforcement of existing air quality legislation**.
- More than one in ten believe in **applying stricter controls on emissions from residential heating** (13%, -4) as well as **on emissions from new vehicles** (13%, -12).
- Finally, less than one in ten respondents say that **making information about air quality more easily accessible online** (9%) and **improving or maintaining citizens' access to courts to guarantee clean air** (5%, -2) is one of the most effective ways to tackle air quality problems

National results show that in nineteen countries **applying stricter pollution controls on industrial and energy-production activities** is the most frequently mentioned action, with respondents most likely to mention this in Greece (50%), the Netherlands (48%), and Belgium and Sweden (both 46%). **Encouraging low emission transport modes, such as walking, biking, public transport and low-emission shared vehicles**, a newly introduced item, is respondents' first choice in four Member States.



VIII. PREFERRED LEVEL OF ACTION TO ADDRESS AIR QUALITY PROBLEMS



Special Eurobarometer 524 Air Quality in the European Union

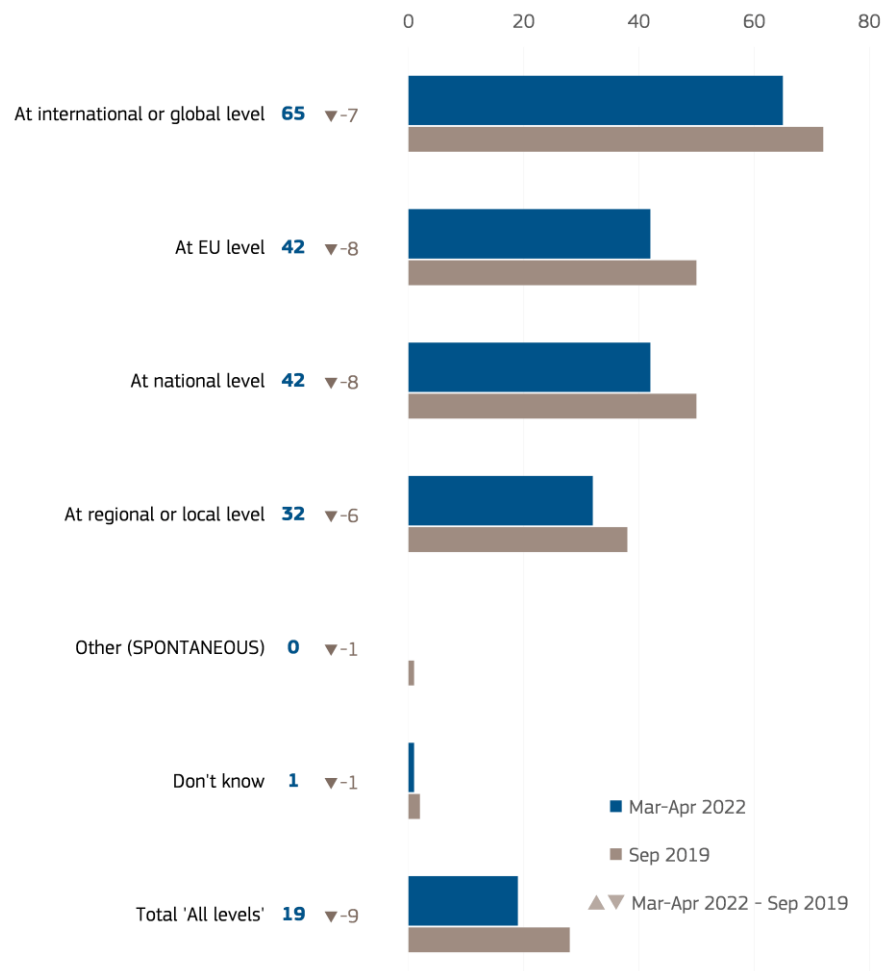
A large majority of Europeans think air pollution should be addressed at the international level

- Just under two thirds (65%) of respondents think air pollution should be addressed at the **international or global level**, a significant drop compared to 2019 (-7).
- Over four in ten (42%) believe that this problem is best addressed at the **EU level**, while in 2019 half of the respondents said this (-8). The same is true regarding the **national level** (42%, -8).

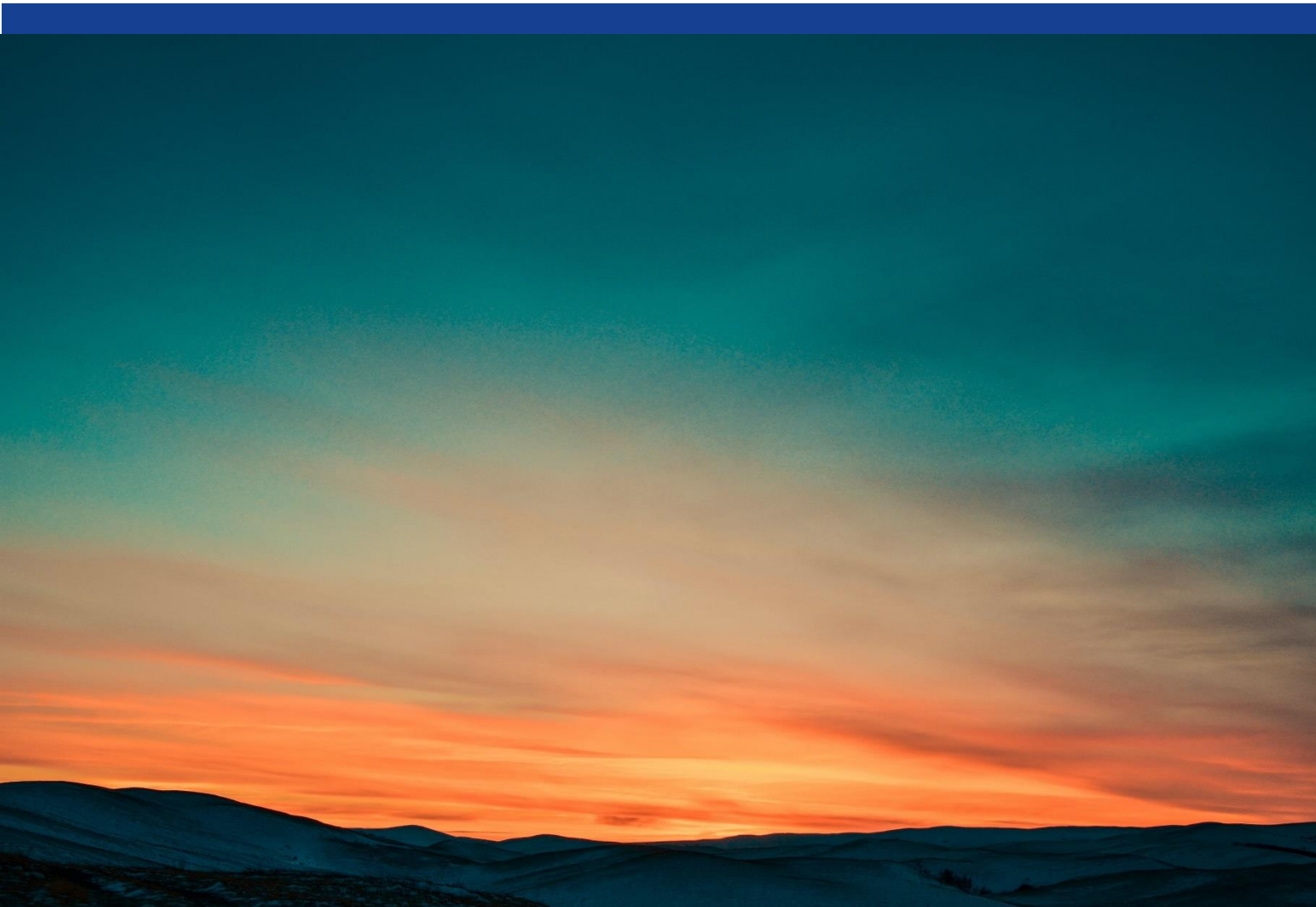
- Around a third think air pollution should be addressed at the **regional or local level** (32%, -6).

In terms of the results per country, the **international or global level** is the most mentioned answer in 23 countries. In three countries, the **national level** is the most mentioned answer: Ireland (53%), Romania (50%), and Bulgaria (49%). In Poland, the **EU level** is tied with the national level as the most mentioned answer (52%).

QB6 In your opinion, at what level should the issue of air pollution be addressed? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)
(% - EU)



CONCLUSION



Special Eurobarometer 524

Air Quality in the European Union

Overall, the results of this survey reveal that air quality is still a serious concern for European citizens. While Europeans do not feel well-informed, nearly half hold the view that that **air quality has deteriorated** in the last ten years (47%). However, they are less likely to say this than before, an 11-percentage point drop since 2019. In 12 Member States, half or more of the respondents agree. The more they feel informed about air quality, the less likely they are to think that air quality has deteriorated.

A minority of Europeans have heard of the **EU air quality standards** (27%). A large majority of the respondents who have heard of them, however, say that they **should be strengthened** (67%). In all but five Member States, more than half of the respondents think this way.

A majority of Europeans still **do not feel informed** about air quality issues in their countries (60%), an increase since the Eurobarometer conducted 2019. Increases are also seen in 23 of the 27 Member States.

Concerns about **the health and environmental consequences** attributable to air quality issues were investigated. Most Europeans think that respiratory diseases (89%), asthma (88%), and cardiovascular diseases and acidification and eutrophication (both 83%) are serious problems in their countries.

Europeans feel that **not enough is being done** about air quality issues. A large majority of respondents think that large industrial installations (73%), fossil-fuel based energy producers (66%) and public authorities (60%) are not doing enough.

Despite the fact that **a majority of respondents have taken some action to reduce harmful emissions**, they still believe that not enough is being done and that actions should be carried out at a more international or global level. While a majority think households are doing enough, **respondents are more likely to have taken one action than in 2019**.

Additionally, 54% think that employers are not doing enough, with around four in ten thinking the same of farmers (41%) and households (38%). Conversely, a majority (52%) of respondents think that households are doing enough, a substantial increase (+14) compared to 2019. Nearly eight in ten respondents (78%) have carried out **at least one action to reduce harmful emissions into the air**. This represents a positive trend: an increase of 8 percentage points compared to 2019, building on an identical increase between 2017 and 2019.

This increase is mostly due to the increased proportion of respondents who say they **have frequently used public transport or a bicycle, or chosen to walk instead of taking their car** (41% of the respondents, +6 percentage points since 2019), or by **replacing older energy-intensive equipment with new equipment with a better energy rating** (40%, -1). The more informed respondents feel about air quality, the more likely they are to have taken actions to address this issue.

The most effective measure to address air quality issues according to respondents is **stricter pollution controls on industrial and energy-producing activities**. This is mentioned by 36% of the respondents and is the first answer in 19 Member States.

Europeans' preferred level of action is the **international level** (65%) followed by the European and the national level (both 42%), and the regional or local level (32%). The international level is the main level of action mentioned in 23 Member States. A significant proportion of the respondents believe that actions should be carried out at all levels (19%) simultaneously.

