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European consumers intent on creating a more sustainable lifestyle

Despite the cost-of-living crisis, European consumers increasingly recognise the environmental threats to planet Earth, and the need to live, and consume, in a more sustainable way

Two in three European consumers (63%) are intent on creating a more sustainable lifestyle, with more than half (58%) of consumers putting recycling at the top of the list to reduce the impact of climate change.

Despite the current challenges facing consumers, respondents in all five countries surveyed – UK, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy – agree that being sustainable has become more important. However, those in mainland Europe seem to be more committed than those in the UK, where just over half (57%) say a sustainable lifestyle is more important, compared to 69% in Italy, 67% in Spain, 66% in France and 59% in Germany.

The study, on behalf of Pro Carton, the European Association of Carton and Cartonboard manufacturers, asked more than 5,000 consumers about their attitudes towards the environment and packaging perceptions – exploring everything from deforestation and transportation, against other global concerns such as the war in Ukraine, Covid-19, and the economic crisis.

2022 – the year of inflation, extreme climates, and warfare

Among the biggest challenges identified by consumers, climate change (63%), ranked second only to the cost-of-living (71%) but ahead of warfare (59%), the economy (55%) and poverty (52%). Here, German consumers place greater concern on warfare (74%), compared to just 32% of Brits – almost certainly a



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result of their respective proximity to the ongoing conflict. In comparison, 84% of respondents in the UK are concerned about the cost-of-living, compared to 60% of German consumers.

The study also revealed that consumers across Europe have growing concerns about the environmental impact of plastic packaging (55%), while more than three-quarters (79%) admit that the cost-of-living crisis, war in Ukraine and the fallout from the pandemic are hindering a focus on a more sustainable lifestyle.

Addressing ways to combat climate change, recycling more has risen the ranks, escalating from second position in the same Pro Carton 2019 study to first place in 2022. It was closely followed by planting more trees – the previous first-place winner – and using more natural, renewable materials, which held steady in third place.

A step towards circularity

Taking action to move towards circularity, there is a clear step-change among consumers taking their own advice. Here, 58% of European consumers are recycling more than 12 months ago, while more than half (54%) say the environmental impact of a product's packaging has become more important in the last 12 months. And, the impact is being felt on brands failing to respond to this environmental call, with one in two consumers switching brands or products because of the packaging used.

When faced with a choice of two different forms of packaging, consumers further extend their preference for carton packaging. The preference rating for the economically and ecologically balanced packaging medium moved from 81% in 2019 to 86% in the 2022 study. Consumers in Spain and Germany are even more likely to purchase cartonboard-packed products, 90% and 89% respectively, while Brits fall behind with just 79%.



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Demonstrating the virtues of cartonboard, the importance of packaging recyclability was evident across the board, with 'easy to recycle' highlighted as the most important packaging feature, cited by 85% of survey respondents. Packaging made from natural, renewable materials also ranked highly, with 81% of respondents balancing this with the role of packaging to protect the product (81%). And, consumers are willing to pay for these benefits. Almost three-quarters (72%) say they would pay more for their desired product if its packaging had less impact on the environment. A quarter said they would be prepared to pay between 5-10% more, with 8% going one step further, preparing to pay between 10-20% more.

Consumers in Europe also show a strong confidence in deciding on the recyclability of packaging materials. 77% of consumers express confidence that they know which packaging materials can be recycled. Leading on the trust scale was paper and cartonboard with 82%, followed by glass (80%) and corrugated cartonboard (78%). At the lower end, only 48% believed plastic coffee cups could be recycled, and just 47% of flexible plastic packaging.

Commenting on the results of the study, **Winfried Muehling, Marketing & Communications Director, Pro Carton**, said: "The findings from our latest consumer survey demonstrate unequivocally that when it comes to recycling and respecting the planet, consumers are willing to do their bit. The research points not only to the impact of current global crises, but the steadfast attitudes of consumers since the sustainability debate came to the fore.

"The results show us that consumers are willing to play their part, but they also expect brands and producers to respond to their cry for more environmentally-friendly packaging and guidance on recycling – both of which are huge components of the merits of the cartonboard industry. The trust consumers in Europe show in the collection and recycling system for fibre-based packaging materials is particularly



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notable. The high recycling rate for paper and cartonboard packaging of 82% combined with the strong resilience of the fibres used to produce cartonboard makes the material a true circularity champion.”

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