



Special Eurobarometer 481

Summary

Attitudes of Europeans towards Biodiversity

Fieldwork
December 2018
Publication
May 2019

Survey requested by the European Commission,
Directorate-General for Environment
and co-ordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication

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Special Eurobarometer 481 – Wave EB90.4 – Kantar Public Brussels

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Attitudes of Europeans towards Biodiversity

December 2018

Survey and report by Kantar Public Brussels on behalf of Kantar Belgium at the request of the European Commission,
Directorate-General for Environment

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

Project title	Special Eurobarometer 481 – December 2018 "Attitudes of Europeans towards Biodiversity"
Linguistic version	Summary EN

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<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>

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INTRODUCTION

We all depend on nature for our food, air, water, energy and raw materials. Nature and biodiversity make life possible, provide health and social benefits and drive our economy. Healthy ecosystems are essential in mitigating climate change as well as in coping with its impacts.

However, natural ecosystems are under immense pressure from intensive land-use practices, urban sprawl, over-fishing, pollution, invasive alien species and climate change. As a result, vital benefits that flow from nature to people – “ecosystem services” – are also deteriorating, both in the EU and globally.

In line with the EU’s international commitments, the EU biodiversity strategy¹ to 2020 aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The strategy sets out 6 targets and 20 actions to achieve these objectives by 2020.

The EU Birds and Habitats Directives, (EU Nature directives), forms the backbone of the EU’s biodiversity policy and the legal basis for our nature protection network. The EU Nature directives aim to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of Europe’s most vulnerable species and natural habitats. This is achieved through designation and protection of areas of high biodiversity value, which form the EU Natura 2000 network², and species protection provisions for all wild birds that occur in Europe and protected fauna and flora in the EU.

Today the network stretches across all Member States and currently covers more than 18% of the EU’s land area and 9,2 % of its seas. However, the Natura 2000 network is based on a much broader concept than nature reserves. It promotes sustainable development that is in line with nature conservation objectives. The EU Green Infrastructure strategy aims to re-connect natural areas, restore ecosystems, deliver a range of ecosystem services and allow species to thrive across their entire habitat³. The EU pollinators initiative⁴ aims to address the dramatic decline of pollinators in the EU by improving knowledge, addressing the root causes of pollinator decline and engaging stakeholders. To protect biodiversity, the Commission also seeks to further integrate biodiversity conservation objectives into its agriculture, forest and fisheries policies, to combat invasive alien species. Efforts to support global biodiversity require both the mobilisation of biodiversity funding as well as addressing trade in key commodities and consumption and production patterns.

This survey was designed to explore European citizens’ awareness of and views on biodiversity and nature. It follows a previous survey on the same issues which was conducted in May-June 2015 and published in October 2015 (Special EB 436)⁵, and this report includes trend comparisons with the 2015 survey. This survey was designed to explore:

- Awareness of the term “biodiversity”;
- Perceptions of the biggest threats to biodiversity;
- Perceptions of the reasons for stopping the loss of biodiversity;
- What the EU should do to prevent the loss of biodiversity;
- Awareness about the Natura 2000 network, the perceived importance of nature protection areas, and attitudes to developments that may damage these areas.

This summary gives the main findings of this Special Eurobarometer survey. Detailed results can be found in the full Report.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/strategy/index_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

³ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index_en.htm

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/index_en.htm

⁵ Flash Eurobarometer surveys were also carried out on the topic of biodiversity in 2007 (FL219), 2010 (FL290) and 2013 (FL379) by telephone. However, due mainly to a change in methodology (from telephone to face-to-face interviews), the findings from these surveys are not directly comparable to the current survey.

This survey was carried out by the Kantar Public Brussels network in the 28 EU Member States between the 4th and 20th of December 2018. Some 27,643 respondents from different social and demographic groups were interviewed face-to-face at home in their mother tongue. The methodology used is that of Eurobarometer surveys as carried out by the Directorate-General for Communication (“Media monitoring, media analysis and Eurobarometer”)⁶. A technical note on the manner in which interviews were conducted and the methods and confidence intervals considered are included as annexes to the full Report.

Note: In this study, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations 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	United Kingdom	UK
European Union – weighted average for the 28 Member States			EU28

* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 28 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 EU28 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 <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>

KEY FINDINGS

The understanding of the meaning of the term “biodiversity” has increased since 2015, with two in five Europeans now saying that they have heard of the term and know what it means

- Over seven in ten Europeans (71%) have heard of the term “biodiversity”. This includes 41% who have heard of it and know what it means, an increase from the 2015 survey (+11 percentage points).

Two thirds of Europeans totally agree that looking after nature is essential in tackling climate change

The biggest perceived threats to biodiversity mentioned are air, soil and water pollution, man-made disasters and climate change

- More than half of respondents say that biodiversity is very much threatened by ‘air, soil and water pollution’ (67%), ‘man-made disasters’ (63%) and ‘climate change’ (58%).
- There is widespread agreement that it is important to halt the loss of biodiversity. Regarding the reasons, the highest level of total agreement in all countries is with the statements: ‘we have a responsibility to look after nature’ (77% for the EU), followed by ‘looking after nature is essential for tackling climate change’ (71%).
- Strength of agreement has increased since 2015 for all statements, with the largest increases observed in the proportions of those who totally agree that ‘biodiversity is indispensable for the production of goods such as food, fuel and medicines’ (+8 pp) and that ‘biodiversity and healthy nature are important for long-term economic development’ (+6 pp).

Three in ten people are aware of the Natura 2000 network.

- Awareness has increased slightly since 2015 (+4 pp).

The overwhelming majority of Europeans are unwilling to accept damage to protected nature in exchange for economic development

- Almost half of the respondents consider that economic developments which cause damage to nature in protected areas “should be prohibited” (45%), while a further 45% are of the opinion that such damage is only acceptable for “projects of major public interest, and if the damage is fully compensated for”. Just 6% consider that “economic development takes precedence”.
- At least two thirds of respondents consider that nature protection areas are very important in ‘protecting endangered animals and plants’ (71%), ‘preventing the destruction of valuable nature areas on land and at sea’ (68%) and ‘safeguarding nature’s role in providing food, clean air and water’ (67%).

Respondents say that the most important actions for the EU to take in order to protect biodiversity are to restore nature and biodiversity to compensate for damage and to better inform citizens about the importance of biodiversity.

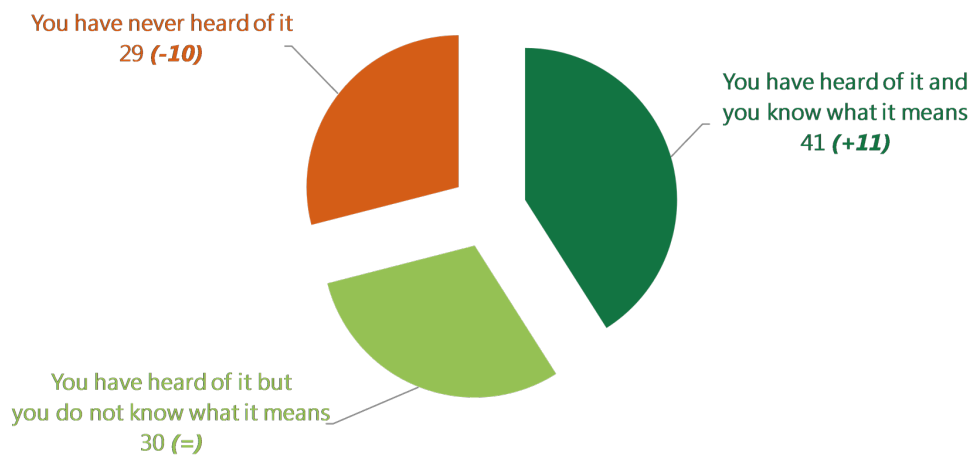
I. AWARENESS OF BIODIVERSITY

Both recognition of the term “biodiversity” and comprehension of its meaning have increased since 2015

Overall, 71% of respondents have heard of the term “biodiversity”⁷. Around two in five (41%) say they have heard of the term and know what it means, while 30% have heard of it but do not know what it means. Around three in ten (29%) have never heard of the term “biodiversity”.

The proportion of those who are familiar with the term “biodiversity” but do not know what it means stayed the same across the waves, but the proportion of respondents who say that they know what the term means has increased since 2015 (+11 percentage points).

QA1 Have you ever heard of the term “biodiversity”?
(% - EU)



(Dec. 2018 - May-June 2015)

Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

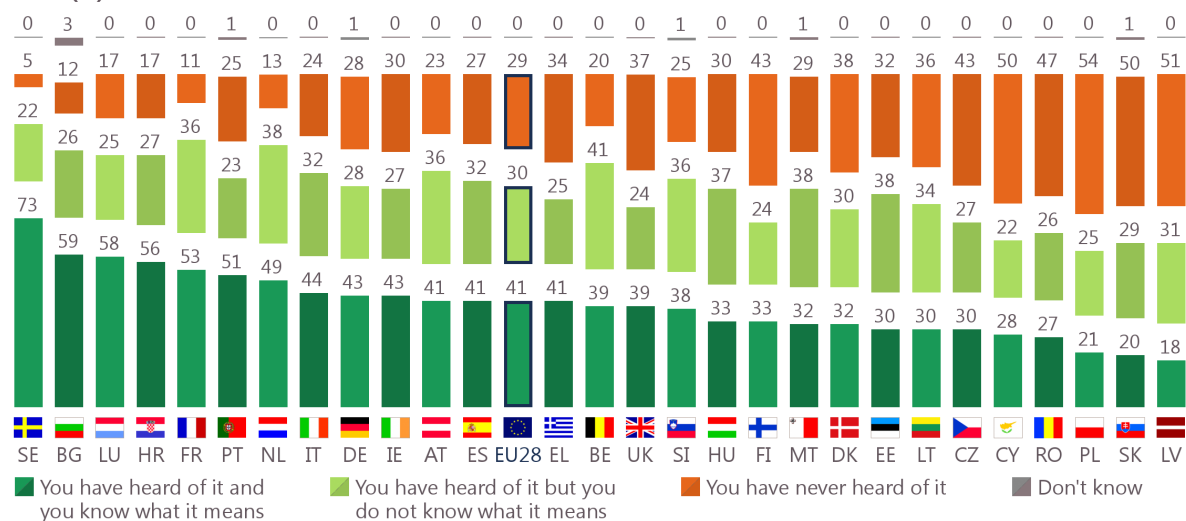
⁷ QA1: Have you ever heard of the term “biodiversity”? You have heard of it and you know what it means; You have heard of it but you do not know what it means; You have never heard of it; Don’t know.

Comprehension of the meaning of the term “biodiversity” is highest in Sweden, where 73% of respondents know what it means. There are five other countries where more than half of respondents know the meaning of the term: Bulgaria (59%), Luxembourg (58%), Croatia (56%), France (53%) and Portugal (51%). At the other end of the scale, less than a quarter of respondents in Latvia (18%), Slovakia (20%) and Poland (21%) say that they have heard of the term and they know what it means.

Recognition of the term “biodiversity”, (with or without understanding of its meaning), is stated by at least 80% of respondents in seven countries : Sweden (95%), France (89%), the Netherlands (87%), Bulgaria (85%), Luxembourg, Croatia (both 83%) and Belgium (80%).

By contrast, there are four Member States where at least half of all respondents have never heard of the term “biodiversity”: Poland (54%), Latvia (51%), Slovakia and Cyprus (both 50%).

QA1 Have you ever heard of the term "biodiversity"? (%)



Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

The **socio-demographic** analysis shows that those aged 40-54 are the most likely to have heard of biodiversity and to know what it means (48%), while those aged 55 or over are the least likely to do so (36%).

The longer respondents stayed in education, the more likely they are to know the meaning of the term “biodiversity”. Those who stayed in education until the age of 20 or above are most likely to say they have heard of the term and know what it means (59%), while the proportion is much lower among those who left education at the age of 15 or below (20%).

Pollution and man-made disasters are considered the biggest threats to biodiversity

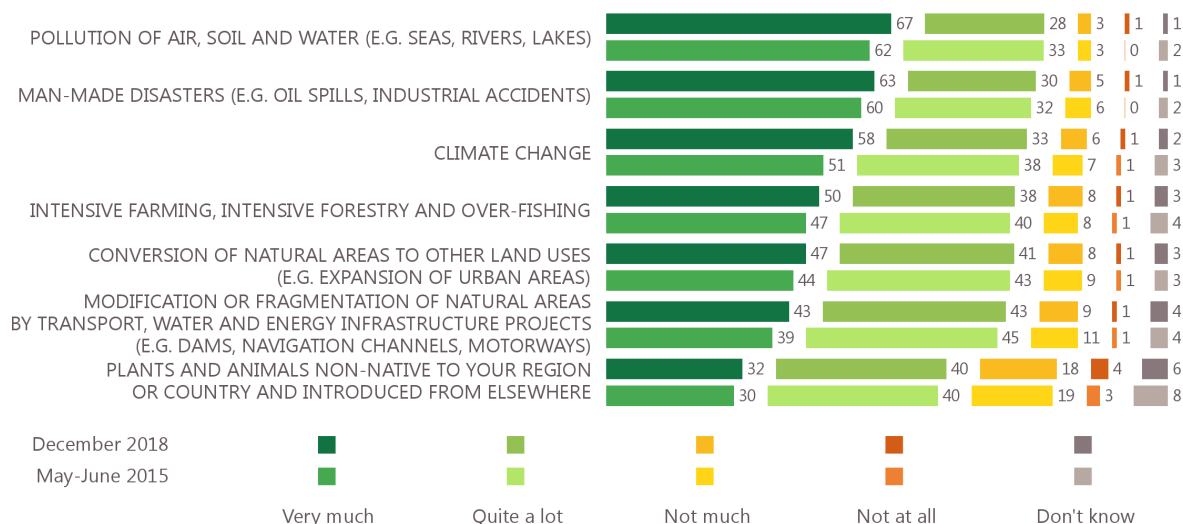
All seven threats to biodiversity listed in the questionnaire are seen by respondents as very significant. For each of them, more than seven in ten respondents say it threatens biodiversity, either ‘quite a lot’ or ‘very much’.

More than six in ten respondents say biodiversity is ‘very much’ threatened by *pollution of air, soil and water* (67%) and *man-made disasters* (63%).

At least half of the respondents say biodiversity is ‘very much’ threatened by *climate change* (58%) and *intensive farming, intensive forestry and over-fishing* (50%), while slightly lower proportions say this about the *conversion of natural areas to other land uses* (47%) and *modification or fragmentation of natural areas by transport, water and energy infrastructure projects* (43%). Around a third (32%) say that biodiversity is ‘very much’ threatened by *non-native invasive plants or animals*.

For all seven threats to diversity considered, there has been an increase since 2015 in the proportion of respondents that consider them major threats. The largest increase is in the proportion of those who say that climate change is a major threat to biodiversity (+7 percentage points).

QA3 In your opinion, in general, to what extent is biodiversity threatened by the following? (% - EU)



Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

II. PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

Europeans believe even more strongly than in 2015 that it is important to stop biodiversity loss

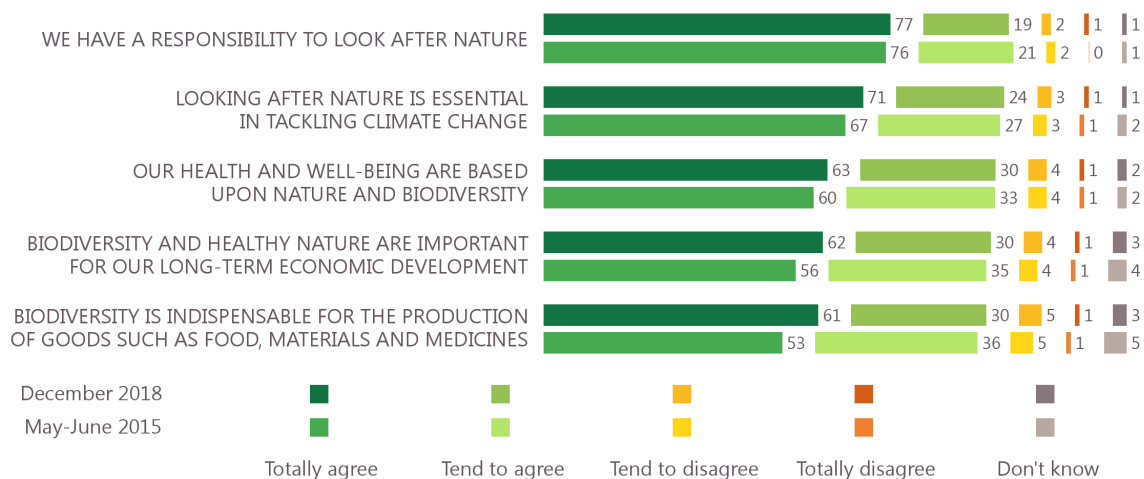
Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with a range of reasons for stopping the loss of biodiversity⁸. In general, there is widespread agreement with all of the reasons: more than nine in ten respondents agree to some extent with each of the reasons for halting the loss of biodiversity.

Looking at the proportions of respondents that ‘totally agree’, more than three quarters (77%) ‘totally agree’ that *we have a responsibility to look after nature*, while over two thirds ‘totally agree’ that *looking after nature is essential for tackling climate change* (71%).

More than six in ten respondents ‘totally agree’ that *our health and well-being are based upon nature and biodiversity* (63%), that *biodiversity and healthy nature are important for long-term economic development* (62%), and that *biodiversity is indispensable for the production of goods such as food, fuel and medicines* (61%).

For each of the reasons, the proportion of respondents that totally agrees has increased since the 2015 survey. The largest increases are in the total agreement that *biodiversity is indispensable for the production of goods such as food, fuel and medicines* (+8 percentage points) and that *biodiversity and healthy nature are important for long-term economic development* (+6 pp).

QA2 I will read some statements about why it might be important to halt the loss of biodiversity. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with them.
(% - EU)



Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

⁸ QA2: I will read some statements about why it might be important to halt the loss of biodiversity. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with them. We have a responsibility to look after nature; Our health and well-being are based upon nature and biodiversity; Biodiversity is indispensable for the production of goods such as food, fuel and medicines; Biodiversity and healthy nature are important for our long-term economic development; Looking after nature is essential in tackling climate change: Totally agree; Tend to agree; Tend to disagree; Totally disagree; Don't know.

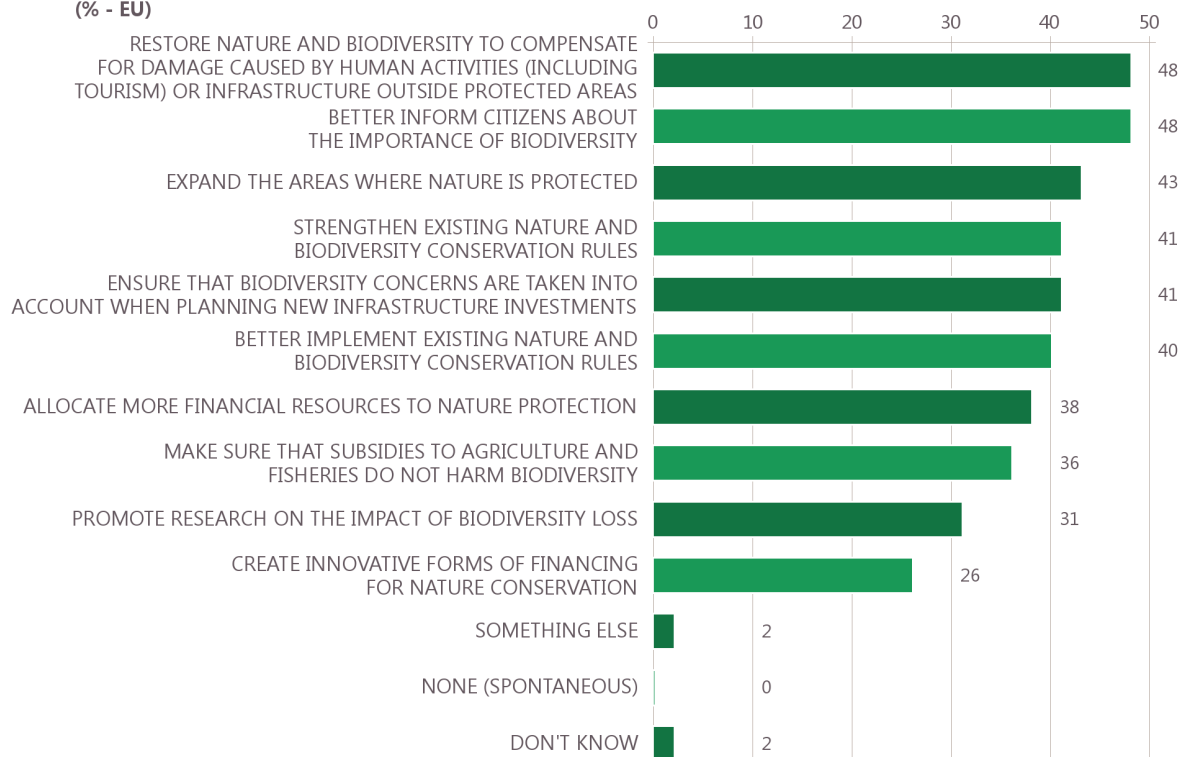
The actions most mentioned as important for the EU to take in order to protect biodiversity are to restore nature and biodiversity to compensate for damage, and to better inform citizens about the importance of biodiversity

The most frequently mentioned actions are to *'restore nature and biodiversity to compensate for damage caused by human activities or infrastructure outside protected areas'* and to *'better inform citizens about the importance of biodiversity'* (both chosen by 48%).

The third most popular action is to *'expand the areas where nature is protected'* (43%), while around four in ten respondents choose the following options: *'strengthen existing nature and biodiversity conservation rules'* (41%), *'ensure that biodiversity concerns are taken into account when planning new infrastructure investments'* (41%) and *'better implement existing nature and biodiversity conservation rules'* (40%).

More than a third of respondents say that the EU should *'allocate more financial resources to nature protection'* (38%) and *'make sure that subsidies to agriculture and fisheries do not harm biodiversity'* (36%), while just under a third (31%) say it is important *'to promote research on the impact of biodiversity loss'*. Around one in four think it is important that the EU *'create innovative forms of financing for nature conservation'* (26%).

QA4 Please tell me which, if any, of the following actions would be most important for the EU to take in order to protect biodiversity. (MAX. 5 ANSWERS)
(% - EU)



Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

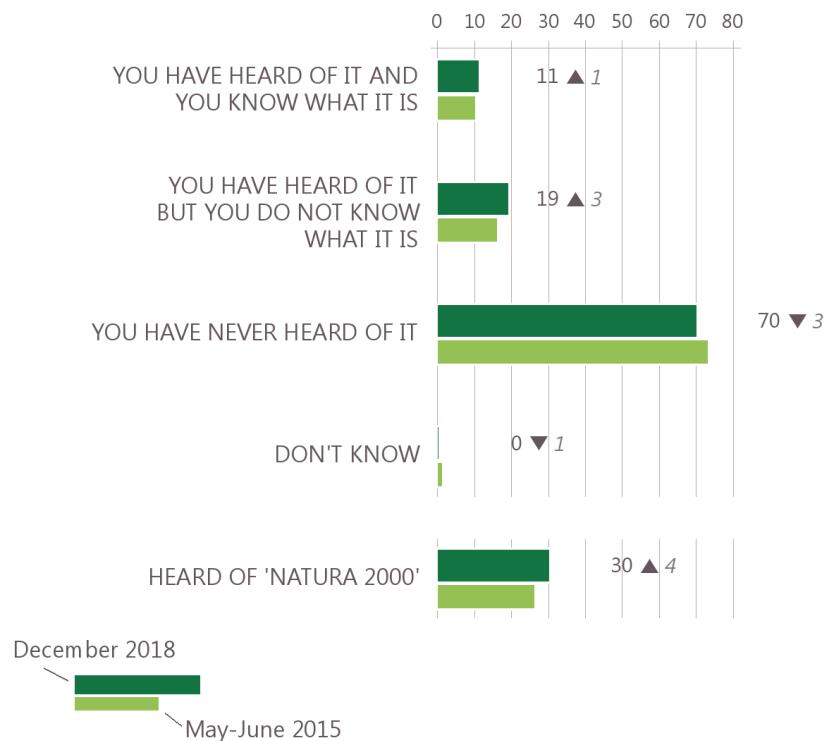
III. NATURE PROTECTION AREAS

Three in ten Europeans are aware of the Natura 2000 network

Three in ten respondents (30%) say that they have heard of the Natura 2000 network; specifically, 11% say they have heard of it and also know what it is, while 19% have heard of it but don't know what it is. The majority (70%) have never heard of the Natura 2000 network⁹.

Awareness of what the Natura 2000 network means has increased slightly since the 2015 survey, while the proportion that has never heard of it has decreased (-3 pp).

QA5 Have you heard of the Natura 2000 network?
(% - EU)



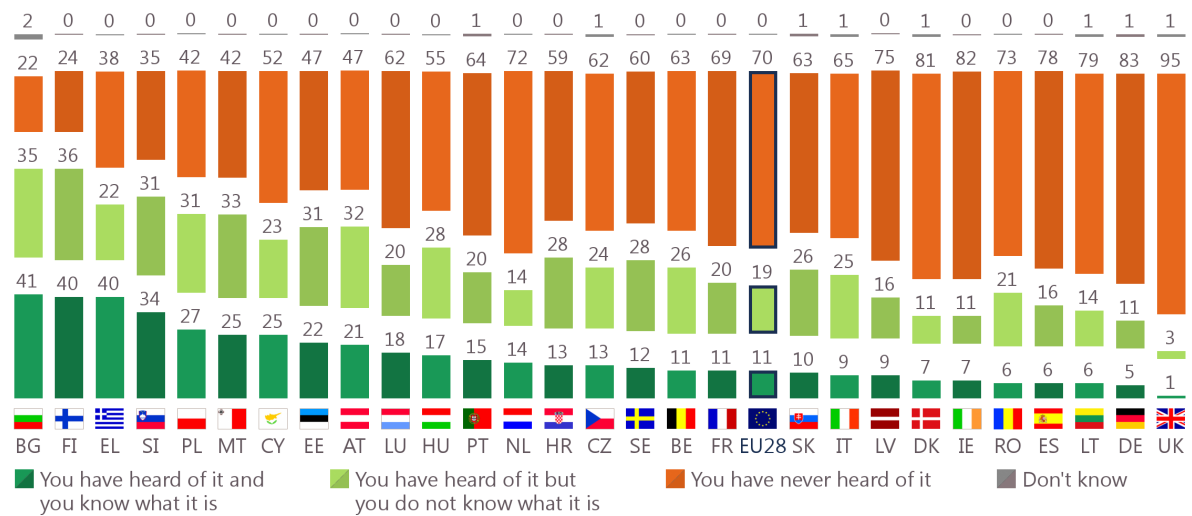
Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

⁹ QA5: Have you heard of the Natura 2000 network? You have heard of it and you know what it is; You have heard of it but you do not know what it is; You have never heard of it; Don't know.

Awareness of the Natura 2000 network varies widely across Member States. There are nine Member States where a majority have heard of the Natura 2000 network, with the highest awareness seen in Bulgaria and Finland (both 76%). These are also the countries with the highest proportions of respondents that say that they have heard of the Natura 2000 network and know what it is (41% and 40% respectively), along with Greece (40%).

In sharp contrast, just 4% in the United Kingdom have heard of the Nature 2000 network (including just 1% who know what it is) and 16% in Germany have heard of it (including 5% who know what it is).

QA5 Have you heard of the Natura 2000 network? (%)



Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

A large majority of Europeans think nature protection areas are important for biodiversity, as well as for socio-economic reasons

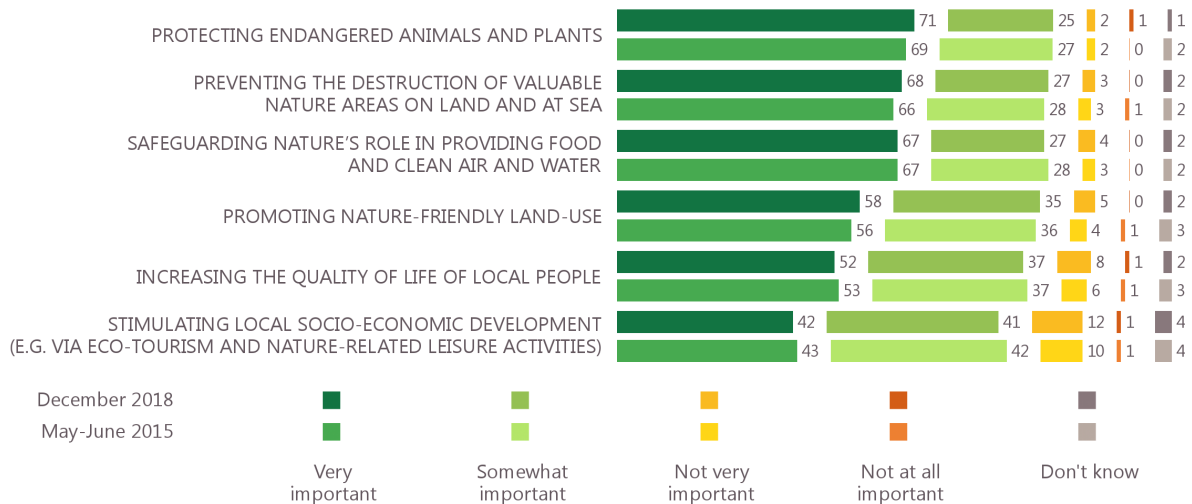
There is a high level of general agreement that such protection areas are important for all aspects evaluated; the main differences can be observed in the proportions who consider them to be ‘very important’.

At least two thirds of respondents consider that nature protection areas such as Natura 2000 are ‘very important’ for ‘*protecting endangered animals and plants*’ (71%), ‘*preventing the destruction of valuable nature areas on land and at sea*’ (68%) and ‘*safeguarding nature’s role in providing food and clean air and water*’ (67%).

More than half of respondents say nature protection areas are ‘very important’ for ‘*promoting nature friendly land use*’ (58%), and ‘*increasing the quality of life of local people*’ (52%). More than four in ten say these areas are ‘very important’ for ‘*stimulating local socioeconomic development*’ (42%).

The proportions that say the various aspects are ‘very important’ are similar to those observed in the 2015 survey. There have been slight increases in the proportions that say the following aspects are ‘very important’: ‘*protecting endangered animals and plants*’, ‘*preventing the destruction of valuable nature areas on land and at sea*’ and ‘*promoting nature friendly land use*’.

QA6 Natura 2000 is a network of more than 27,500 nature protection areas all over the EU. How important do you think nature protection areas are for the following?
(% - EU)



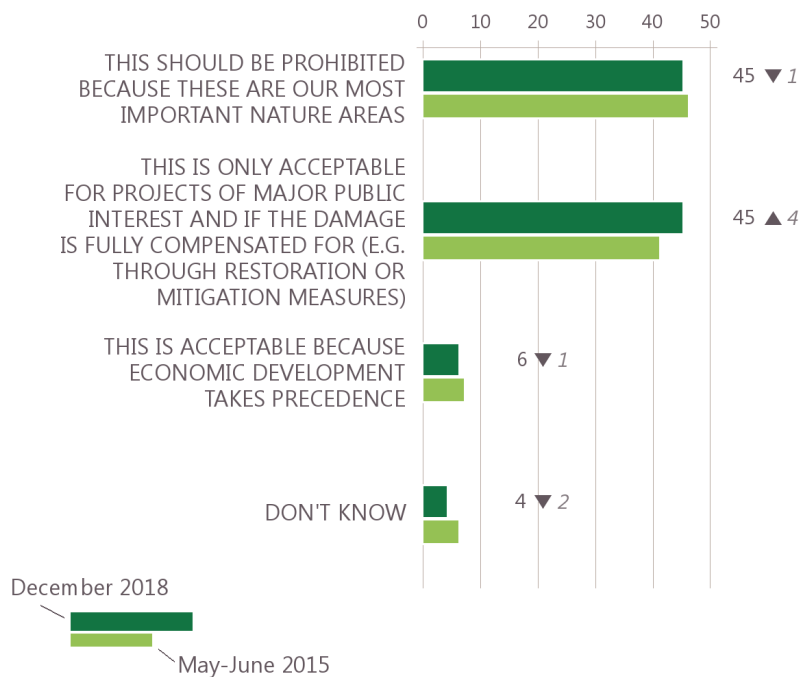
Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

Most Europeans are unwilling to trade damage or destruction to nature in protection areas for economic development

Most respondents are unwilling to accept damage to protected nature in exchange for economic development: almost half of respondents consider that such kind of developments ‘*should be prohibited, because these are our most important nature areas*’ (45%). The same proportion (45%) consider this ‘*acceptable only for projects of major public interest and if the damage is fully compensated for*’. Just 6% consider this kind of *economic development should take precedence over nature in protected areas*.

These findings are similar to those observed in the 2015 survey, although there has been a slight increase in the proportion of respondents who say that ‘*damage or destruction of Nature is acceptable only for projects of major public interest and if the damage is fully compensated for*’.

QA7 Sometimes economic development results in damage or destruction of nature in protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites. Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?
(% - EU)



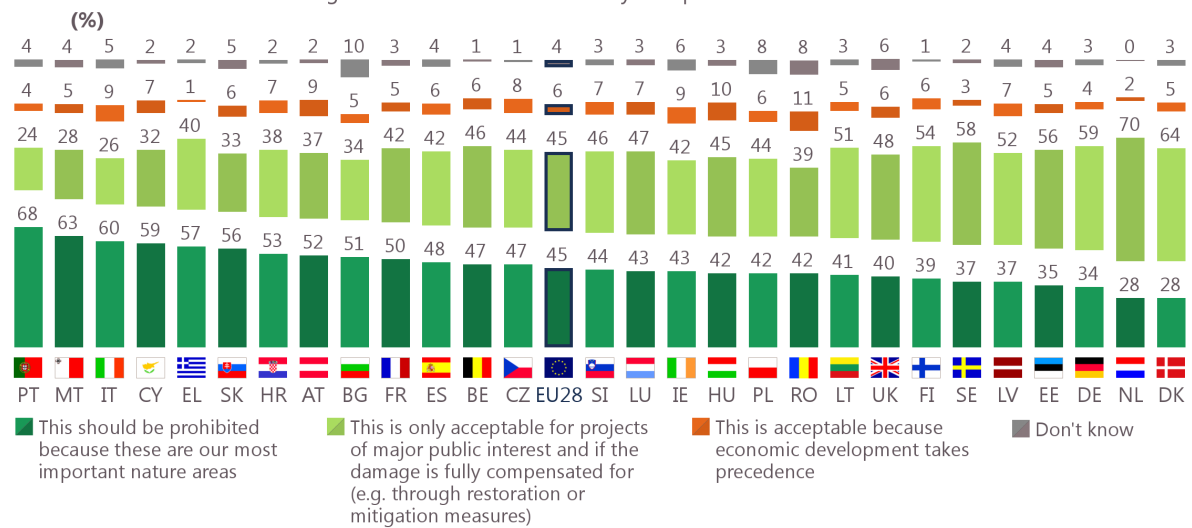
Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

In ten Member States, at least half of respondents say damaging economic development in these areas should be prohibited, and this is particularly the case for those in Portugal (68%), Malta (63%) Italy (60%) and Cyprus (59%). At the other end of the scale, 28% of respondents in the Netherlands and in Denmark say the same.

Respondents in the Netherlands are the most likely to say that this kind of development is only acceptable for projects of major public interest, and if the damage is fully compensated (70%); in addition, 64% in Denmark, 59% in Germany and 58% in Sweden share this view.

Romania (11%) and Hungary (10%) are the only Member States where at least one in ten say that this kind of development is acceptable because economic development takes precedence.

QA7 Sometimes economic development results in damage or destruction of nature in protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites. Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?



Base: all respondents (N= 27,643)

CONCLUSION

The EU Biodiversity Strategy aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU and help stop global biodiversity loss by 2020. It reflects the commitments taken by the EU in 2010, within the international Convention on Biological Diversity. This survey provides information on public awareness of and attitudes towards biodiversity, updating the findings from the 2015 survey.

Since 2015, comprehension of the meaning of the term “biodiversity” has increased, although the majority of Europeans still either haven’t heard of biodiversity or don’t know what it means. There is also considerable variation by country: in six countries (most notably Sweden), the majority of respondents have heard of the term and know what it means, but this applies to under a quarter of respondents in Latvia, Slovakia and Poland.

There is widespread agreement that it is important to halt the loss of biodiversity, most commonly because ‘we have a responsibility to look after nature’ and ‘because looking after nature is essential for tackling climate change’.

An increasing proportion of respondents also see climate change as a major threat to biodiversity, alongside pollution and man-made disasters. While there is generally high awareness of the range of threats to biodiversity, more “acute” threats such as man-made disasters and pollution tend to be more prominent in the public view than other key drivers, such as intensive land use.

According to respondents, the priorities for the EU in protecting biodiversity are to restore nature and biodiversity, to compensate for damage, and to better inform citizens about the importance of biodiversity.

Awareness of Natura 2000 has increased slightly since 2015 (+4 percentage points), although only one in nine Europeans know what it is and the majority have not heard of it. There is considerable variation in awareness, from 76% in Bulgaria and Finland to 4% in the United Kingdom.

However, there is strong agreement on the importance of nature protection areas such as Natura 2000, particularly in protecting endangered animals and plants, preventing the destruction of valuable nature areas on land and at sea, and safeguarding nature’s role in providing food, clean air and water. Views have remained similar to those seen in the 2015 survey.

There is also little change since 2015 in views on economic development that may result in damage or destruction of nature in protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites. Almost half of respondents (45%) say that developments that result in damage or destruction of nature in protected areas should be prohibited, and the same proportion consider this acceptable only for projects of major public interest and if the damage is fully compensated. As in 2015, a small minority (6%) consider this acceptable on the basis of economic development taking precedence.

Overall, the survey indicates that Europeans place very high value on nature and biodiversity and they are concerned over its loss, with awareness increasing since 2015. However large proportions still remain unaware of biodiversity loss and of the existence of Natura 2000.