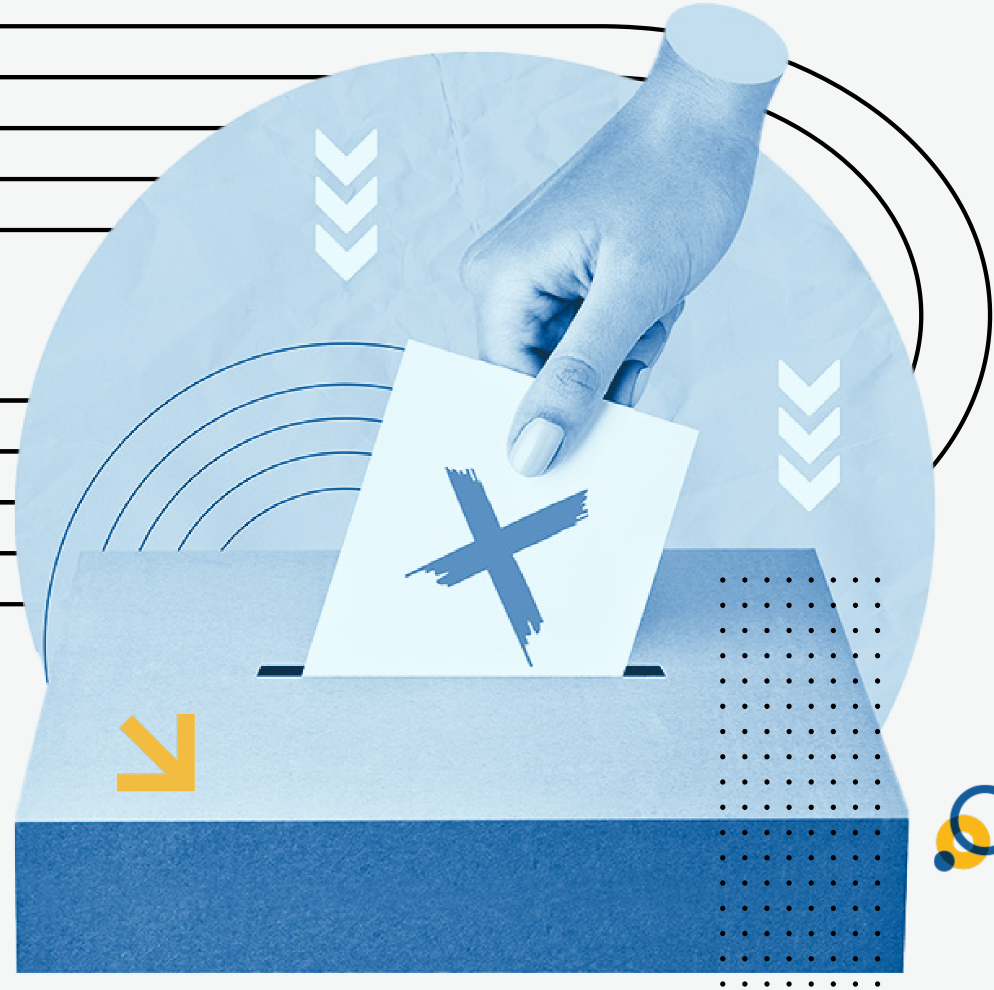
EU Election Fever: taking consumers’ temperature

With the European elections on the horizon, we are not only exploring people’s views on the European Union; we’re uncovering their hopes, fears, and everything in between.



Are EU policies hitting the mark?

? *What factors influence people’s opinions?*

X *And do they trust the EU to address their most pressing concerns?*

Dive into the survey data from Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium

euroconsumers

Empower people, improve the market.

ALTROCONSUMO DECO PROTeste ocu testachats testaankoop

Citizens heading for the EU election

Putting consumers' knowledge to the test

We ran a little true/false test on the institutions and decision-making of the EU and found that overall, 26% of respondents were well-informed, while 20% poorly. Spain comes out on top among all the countries surveyed (29% well informed, 17% poorly or not informed), while Belgium, which hosts the capital of Europe, ends up at the bottom (22% well informed, 25% poorly or not informed).

ES

29% well informed
17% poorly informed

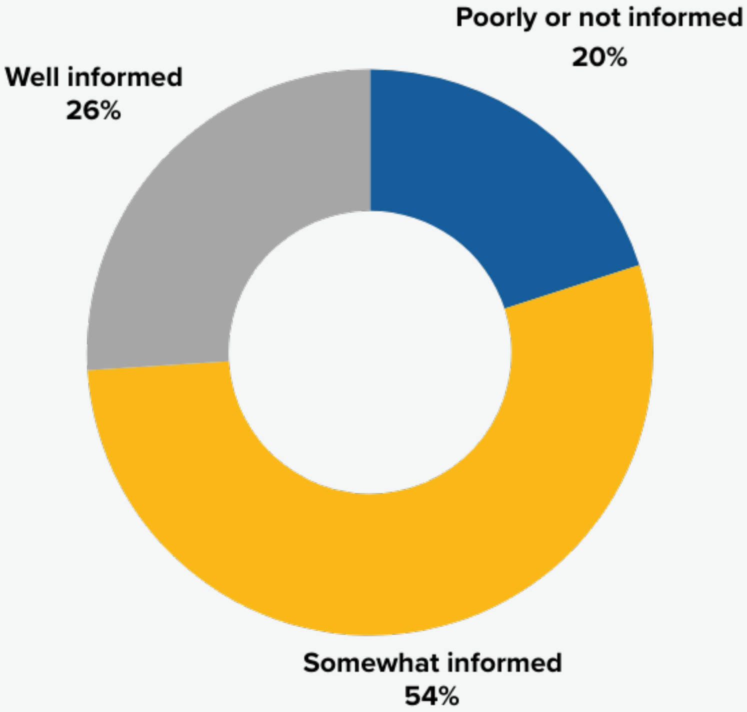
BE

22% well informed
25% poorly informed

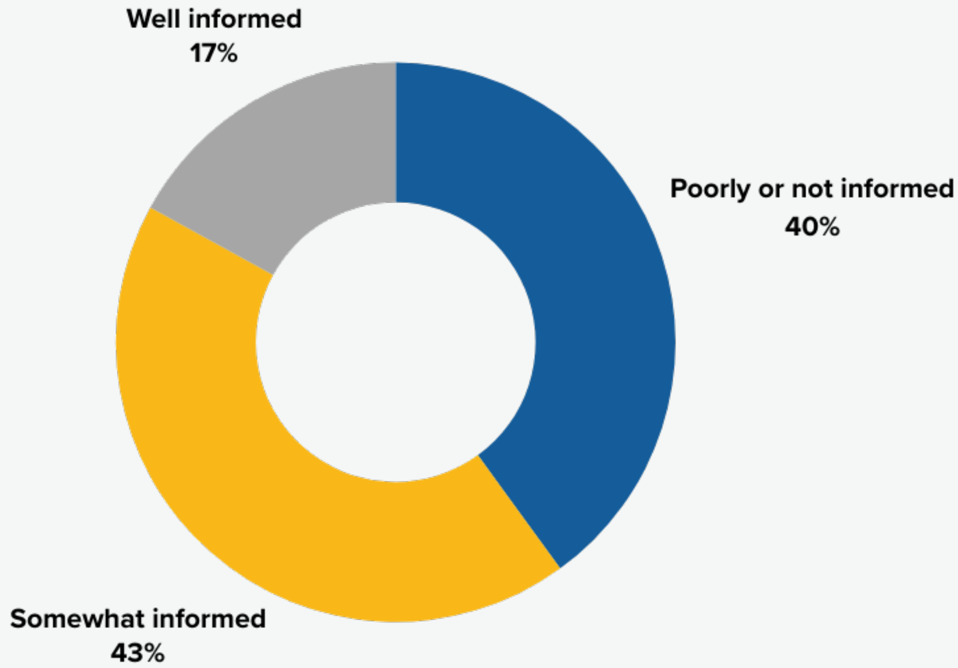
Overall, **age is the variable** that has the greatest influence on knowledge of the EU, with people over 55 years old being better informed.

This is followed by **educational level**, as high-educated individuals tend to be better informed, and gender, with males generally being slightly better informed.

Test results: level of knowledge on the instituttions and decision making of the EU



How informed do you consider yourself about the institutions and decision-making of the EU?



The knowledge test seems to match respondents' **self-perception**. When directly asked to what extent they feel informed about the institutions and decision-making of the EU, only 17% answered "well or very well informed". It doesn't look like they would be overestimating themselves.

However, it's not all on consumers. We found that only **28% considers there is enough information in the media about the EU—a gap that may fuel misconceptions or leave people in the dark about the EU's functions and decision-making processes.**

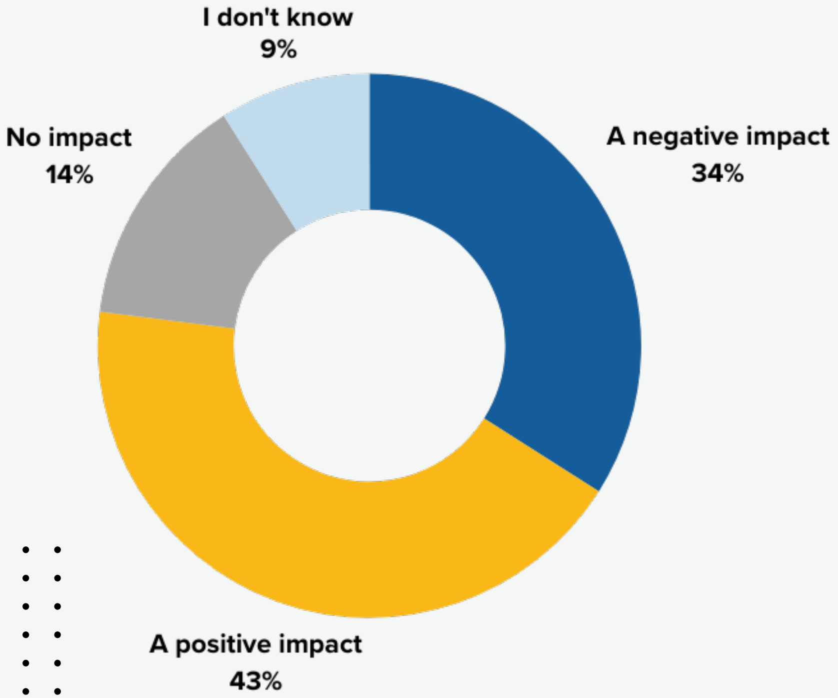
Putting EU's influence to the test

43% of respondents believe that EU policies have a positive impact on the daily lives of citizens in their country, while an almost equal amount believe the **EU has a negative or no impact on citizens' lives (48%).**

Younger people (18-34 years old) tend to view the benefits more positively, with **48% believing in the positive impact of the EU**, while only 28% perceive a negative one. There are also significant country differences: **65% of Portuguese** respondents appreciate Europe's positive impact, in **Italy 47%** believe the EU to have a negative impact.

At the same time **69% agree that Member States should act as Europeans and not only defend their national interests.**

Overall, what impact do you think the EU policies have on the daily lives of BE/IT/ES/PT citizens?



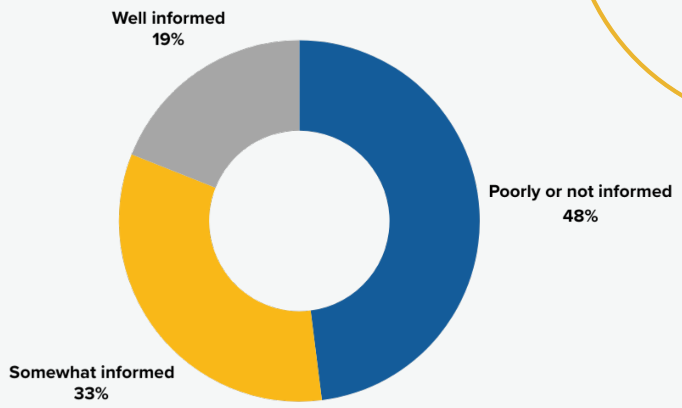
Casting the vote

Despite lack of information and awareness, people believe that EU policies - undoubtedly have an impact on their lives – whether that is for good or bad. But how does this translate into people's voting attitudes?

Are they in the know?

At the time of the collected answers (18-21st March) nearly half of respondents (48%) feel poorly or not informed about the election programs of the different political groups for the upcoming EU elections, while only 19% feel well informed about them.

Overall, younger respondents (18-34 years old) and those in a comfortable financial situation feel more informed, with 25% and 29%, respectively, considering themselves well informed about the various election programs.



What's the deciding factor?

The decision on which party to vote for will mainly be based on the party supported at the national level (33%), followed by the information people seek on the election programs (30%), and the candidate they trust (17%).

What's holding them back?

The motivations for not voting are mainly lack of trust in the EU institutions (23%), lack of information available to decide how to vote (23%), and lack of interest in politics in general (20%).

	I will choose the party I support at national level	I will look for information on the election programs of the various parties	I will choose a specific candidate whom I trust
Belgium	26%	26%	22%
Italy	43%	29%	13%
Portugal	21%	41%	17%
Spain	41%	25%	14%
TOTAL	**33%**	**30%**	**17%**

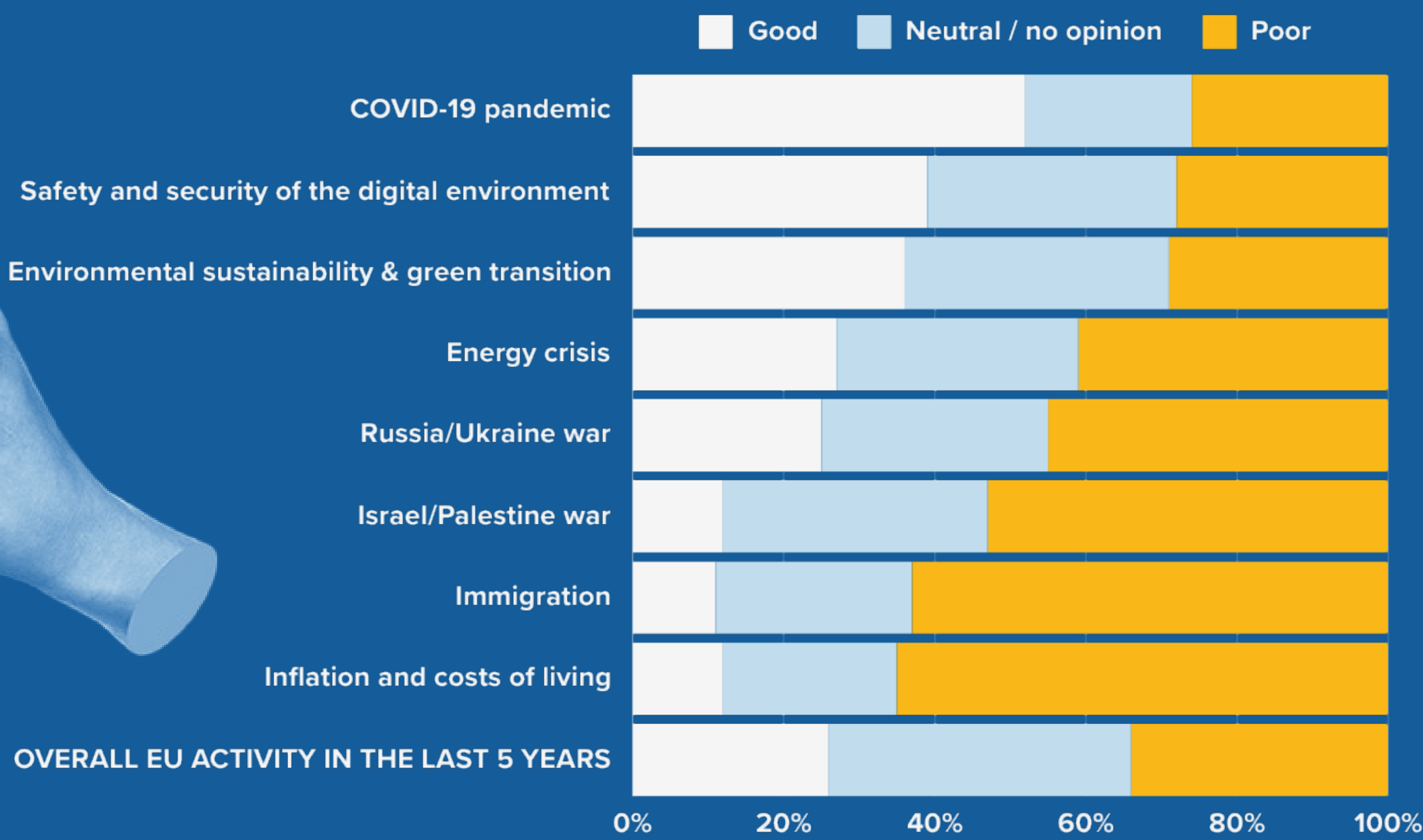
	I don't trust the EU insitutions	There is not enough information available to decide how to vote	I am not interested in politics in general
Belgium	31%	10%	17%
Italy	38%	14%	21%
Portugal	6%	33%	15%
Spain	17%	32%	25%
TOTAL	**23%**	**23%**	**20%**

What kept and what continues to keep us up at night?

Taking stock of Europe's past 5 years...

While consumers appreciated how the EU handled the COVID pandemic, and to a lesser extent, the EU's digital work and the Green Deal, there is less satisfaction with how the energy crisis or the Ukraine war was addressed.

Only 26% of respondents rate the overall activity of the EU in the last 5 years positively, while 34% rate it downright negatively. The EU found less favour among respondents on issues like immigration (11%), rising costs of living (12%), and the Israel/Palestine conflict (12%).



Across the board, immigration policies top the charts in influencing how respondents view the EU's performance over the last 5 years, followed by its efforts in the green transition, and handling of COVID.

Portugal is where the activity of the EU in the last 5 years **is best rated** (39% positively, 18% negatively). **Italy is where it is worst rated** (17% positively, 44% negatively).

Additionally, **middle-aged respondents (35-54 years old) give a worse evaluation** of the activity of the EU in the last 5 years compared to younger and older ones.

… and of Europe's next 5 years

There is no doubt about what people expect the EU to prioritise: at the time of the collected answers (18-21 March), inflation and **the rise of living costs by far top the list of people's concerns** (64% being very concerned about it), followed by the Russia/Ukraine war (47%), energy supply and prices (46%), climate change (45%), and even the possibility of a new world war (45%).

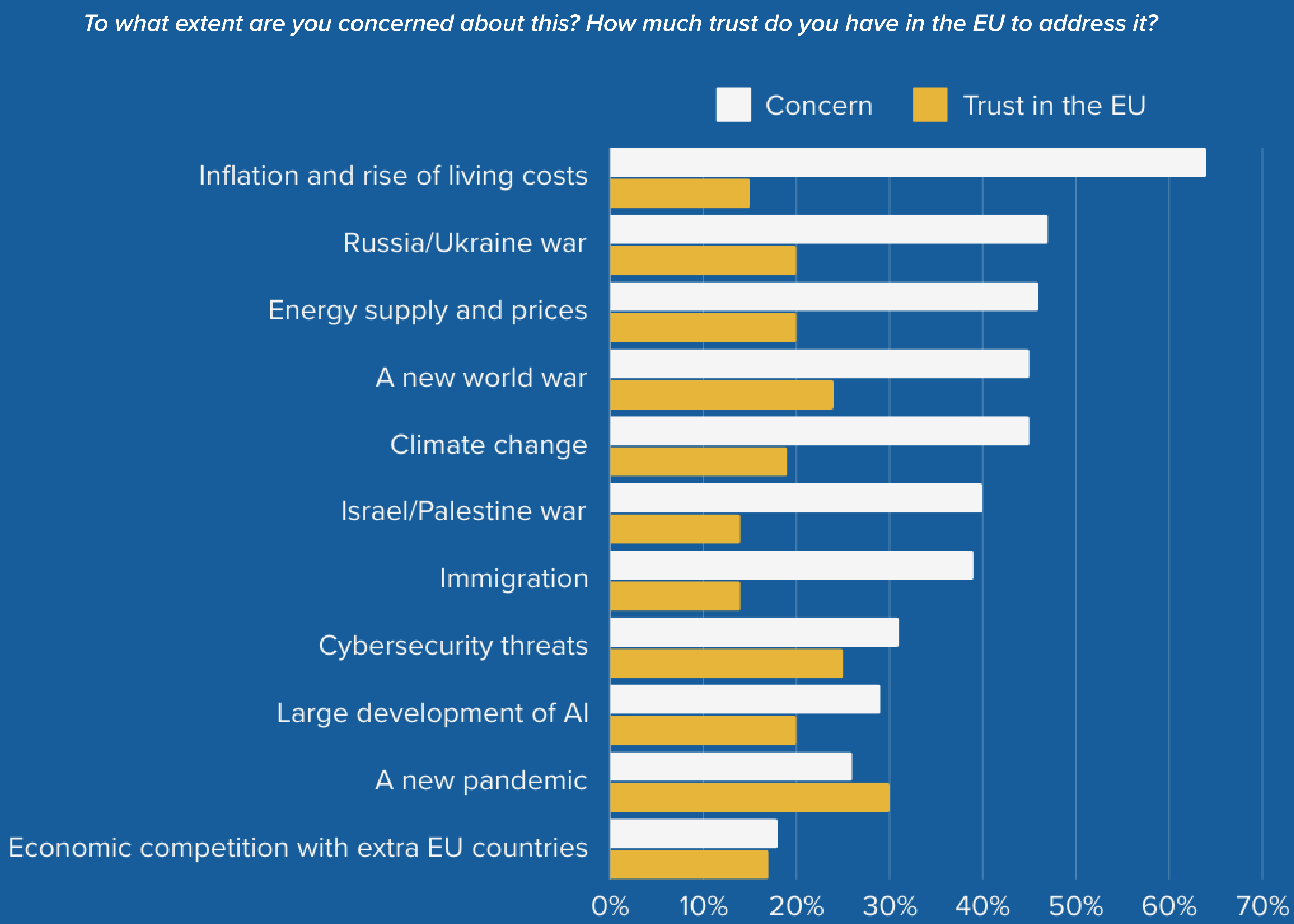
Yet, confidence in the EU's ability to tackle these challenges remains low overall. While it's viewed slightly more favourably in handling potential pandemics or cybersecurity risks, **just 15% believe the EU can effectively address the surge in living expenses.**

- Overall, the level of trust in the EU to face these broad topics is the **highest in Portugal and the lowest in Italy.**
- On all topics, **the trust in the EU is higher among younger respondents** (18-35 years) compared to older ones, and among people in a comfortable situation compared to those in a difficult financial situation

50% believes there should be more Europe, not less

57% consider EU to be a strong economic player and 54% a strong political player

65% believe EU policy on the green transition is important for consumers' future.


To what extent are you concerned about this? How much trust do you have in the EU to address it?
Concern
Trust in the EU
Inflation and rise of living costs
Russia/Ukraine war
Energy supply and prices
A new world war
Climate change
Israel/Palestine war
Immigration
Cybersecurity threats
Large development of AI
A new pandemic
Economic competition with extra EU countries
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%

Looking through the consumer lens

Do consumers feel well-protected?

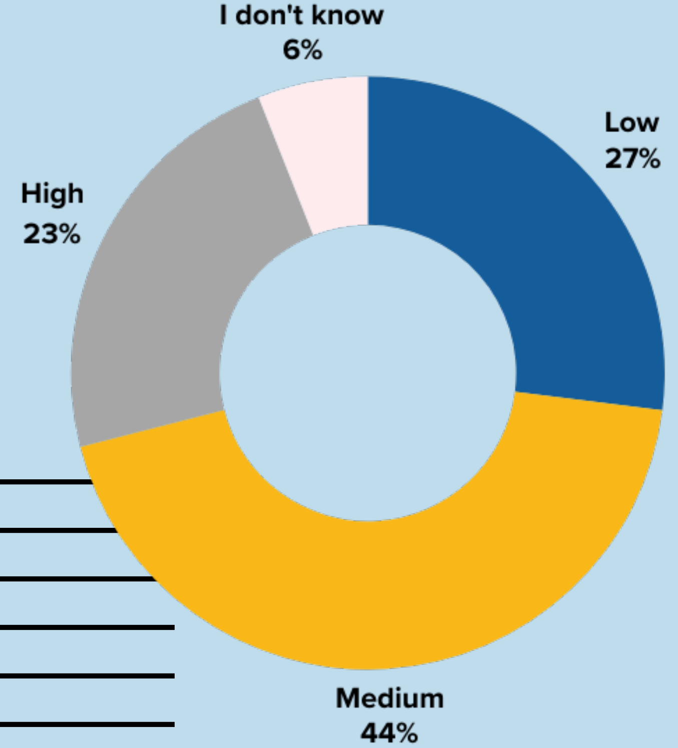
When asked about the level of consumer protection provided by the EU, **23% of respondents believe it's high, while 27% consider it low and almost half (44%) rate is as medium.**

Comparing to five years ago, 44% of respondents feel the level of consumer protection has remained unchanged, 25% believe it has increased, and 23% think it has decreased.

Here again, Portugal leads the pack with 28% rating it high and only 18% rating it low. Meanwhile, Italy struggles, with a mere 12% rating consumer protection high and a hefty 38% rating it low.

Younger individuals (aged 18-35) tend to perceive a higher level of consumer protection, with 35% considers it high.

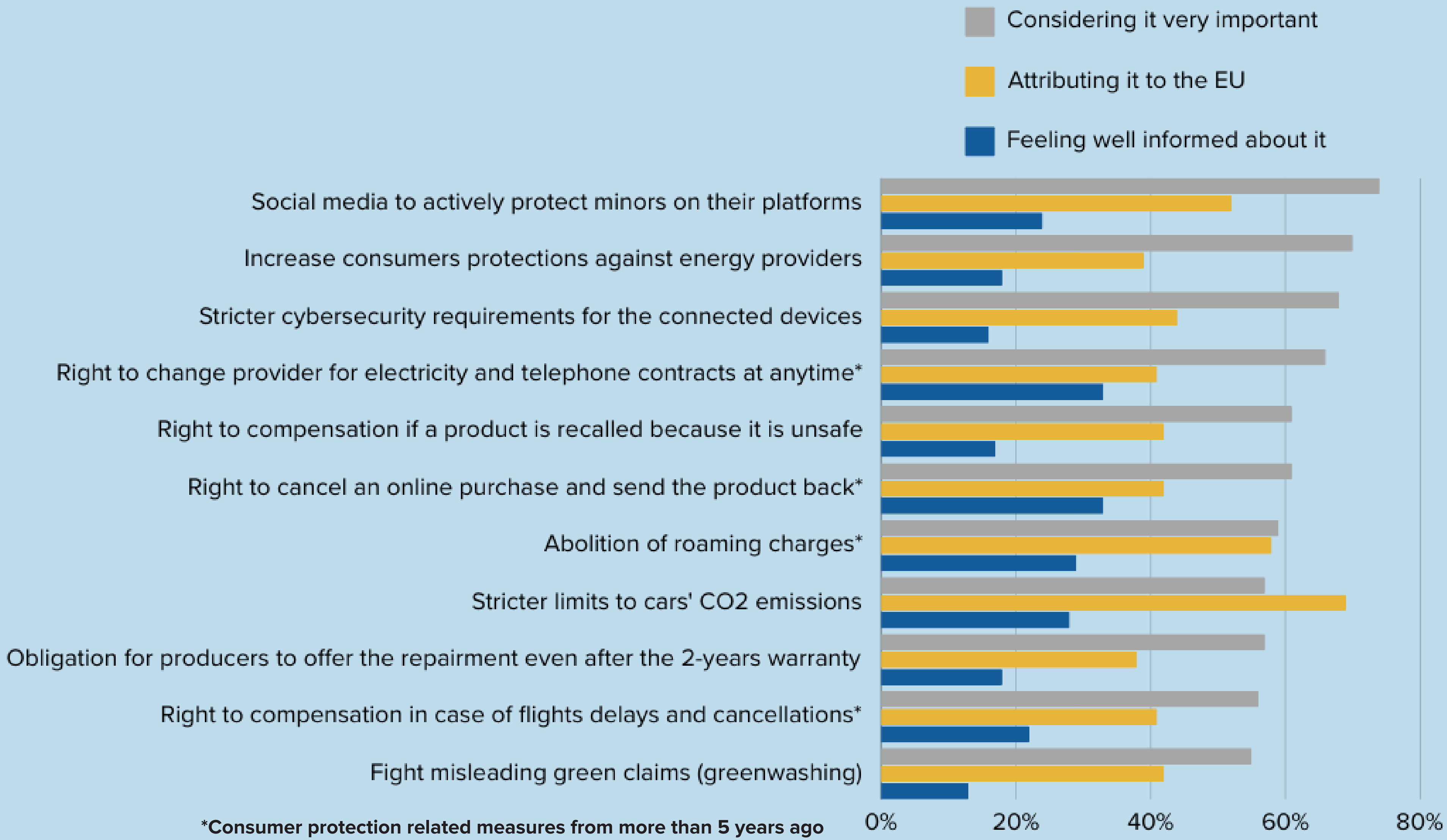
How would you assess the level of protection that European Union gives you as a consumer



However, perceptions take a sharp turn when considering concrete measures implemented by the EU in the last five years. Measures such as digital protections for minors on platforms and stricter cybersecurity for connected devices, along with better protection against energy providers, are rated as very to extremely important for consumers' lives.

Despite the great significance of these measures, the EU often flies under the radar when it comes to recognition. For instance, while 69% of consumers associate stricter CO2 limits for cars with the EU, only 38% are aware that the EU decided to grant them the right to have a product repaired.

There is a glimmer of recognition for longer-lasting consumer rights such as the right to withdrawal or abolition of roaming charges, but overall it remains relatively low, despite the high appreciation for these measures.



*Consumer protection related measures from more than 5 years ago

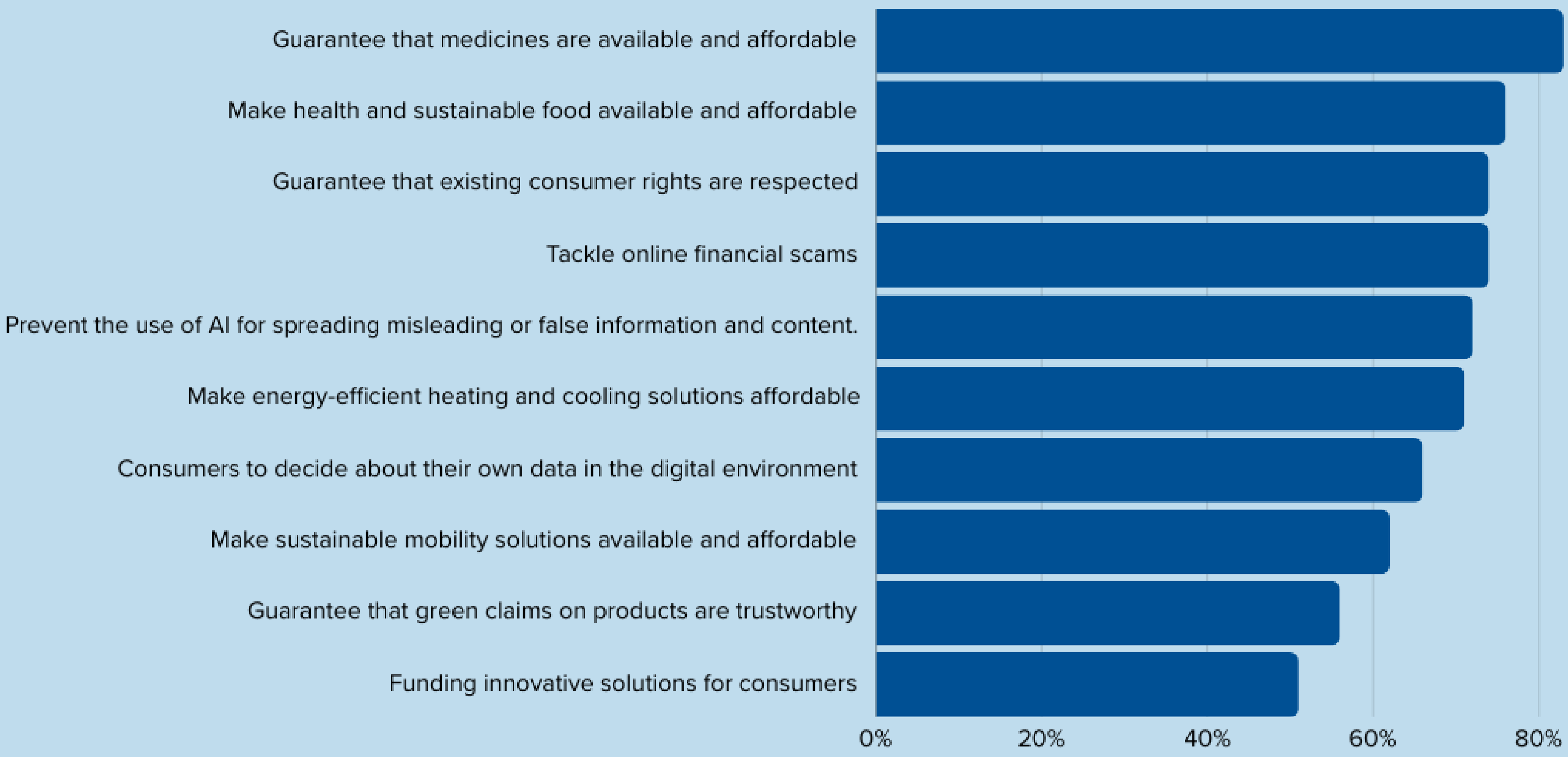
High expectations for the next 5 years

People's expectations for the EU to protect consumers in the next 5 years are equally high. With backing for key consumer demands, it's crystal clear: the EU has a mandate to prioritise and deliver on these expectations.

Every suggested consumer action outlined for the next five years garnered substantial support, with over half of the respondents labelling them as "high-priority." Leading the charge are actions like ensuring accessible and affordable medicines (83%), promoting healthy and sustainable food options (76%), upholding existing consumer rights (74%), and combatting online financial scams (74%).

Ahead of these big expectations, **overall, 44% trust the EU to protect consumers while 25% don't.** One out of 3 trusts the EU more than its national governments. On the other hand, there is also a view that EU is making consumers' lives more expensive (54% agreeing with this) and a staggering 41% think that EU serves business, not consumers (40% neither agree nor disagree)

What is the level of priority the EU should give to each of the following topics in the next 5 years?



Consumers' temperature: mixed perceptions but high expectations

High hopes amidst mixed views

EU has a strained relationship with its citizens. Few people are aware of how the EU works and what it does leaving many in the dark about its contributions to their daily lives. This lack of recognition might directly affect the trust in the EU's capacity to address various challenges, which is strikingly low.

At the same time...

When confronted with some concrete EU consumer empowering actions, the story changes and appreciation mounts significantly. We've also got high hopes for the EU, with more than half respondents considering it to be a strong economic and political player. Our expectations for the next five years are also soaring, with half of respondents wanting more EU, not less.

Easy and affordable sustainability

Despite Europe's work on environmental sustainability and the green transition receiving mixed reviews, sustainability clearly remains a top priority. Climate change weighs heavily on the minds of 45% of individuals, with a significant 65% highlighting the importance of EU policies for a green transition.

At the same time...

There is a clear call to look at the numbers. Sustainable measures calling for affordable alternatives (in food, energy and mobility) rank significantly higher in people's priority list than, for example fighting greenwashing. Although with more than half deem it a high priority, there is no doubt support is also strong in this area.

Consumers' temperature: mixed perceptions but high expectations

Money matters

Affordability is a manifest red thread throughout consumers' concerns and expectations: the cost of living reigns as the top worry, with affordable medicines and food ranking high on people's priority lists.

At the same time...

Across all countries, financial stability is also a defining factor in shaping perceptions. People in a difficult financial situation give a worse rating to EU's performance and impact on citizen's lives. Not surprisingly they also express heightened concerns about inflation, energy prices, cybersecurity threats, and economic competition from countries outside the EU.

Focus on future generations

Younger people tend to evaluate the EU's impact on the daily lives of citizens more favourably and exhibit higher levels of trust in the EU. They also tend to perceive a greater level of consumer protection.

At the same time...

An overwhelming majority (80%) found that when taking political decisions, the EU should always consider the impact of its decisions on the future generation. This highlights the significance of forward-thinking, resisting the temptation to prioritize short-term interests, and always keeping the bigger picture in mind.

Methodology

The survey was done in parallel in Belgium, Italy, Portugal, and Spain between the 18th and 21st of March 2024. Through an online questionnaire 4.005 valid answers were collected (around 1.000 per country). Respondents were selected based on pre-defined interlocked quotas for age (18-74), gender, and geographical area (according to the official statistics on the distribution of the national general population). Samples were a-posteriori weighted for age, gender, geographical area, and educational level in order to reflect the distribution of the national populations for these variables.

About Euroconsumers

Gathering five national consumer organisations and giving voice to a total of more than 1,5 million people in Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Brazil, Euroconsumers is the world's leading consumer cluster in innovative information, personalised services and the defence of consumer rights. Our European member organisations are part of the umbrella network of BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation. Together we advocate for EU policies that benefit consumers in their daily lives.