

# SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN THE FACE OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES: OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES

## *Findings of the DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2022*

### Key findings

- The majority of the general public is aware that their own consumption behaviour has an impact on living conditions in the Global South.
- Although the majority of the population already consumes sustainably at least in part, there is potential to further increase sustainable consumption.
- People are likely to consume more sustainably if they have a sense of being able to make a difference with their actions (what is known as self-efficacy). However, citizens assess their self-efficacy as low.
- The general public believes that policy-makers and the private sector have an obligation to promote sustainable consumption by establishing suitable conditions.

Sustainable consumption contributes to sustainable global development. Due to the interdependencies between consumption behaviour in industrialised countries and people's living conditions in countries of the Global South, the issue is also highly relevant to development policy. Up to now, however, there is hardly any evidence with regard to the extent that citizens perceive their own consumption as having a global impact. The DEval Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2022 (Schneider et al., 2022) looked into this question (see the text box for details of the methods used).

The study revealed that the general public does recognise connections between their consumption behaviour and sustainable global development when asked, but spontaneously tends to rather associate sustainability with the situation in Germany. A large proportion sees sustainable consumption as a possible way of reducing the negative effects of producing, using and disposing of goods both in Germany and on a global scale. 58 percent of the respondents

reported that their consumption is at least partly sustainable. Sustainable consumption covers various areas such as food, clothing and finance, and comprises various aspects – purchase considerations and possibly the decision not to purchase certain items, disposal, and consumption policy engagement – that go beyond simply purchasing and using sustainable products. Moreover, there is a previously untapped potential for increasing sustainable consumption, as 71 percent of respondents stated that they would like to make their consumption more sustainable – especially in terms of clothing.

### Methods for analysing sustainable consumption



1. A representative online survey (N = 2,010) in November 2021 established the general public's consumption behaviour and corresponding attitudes.



2. Focus group discussions allowed us to record the unfiltered and subjective view on sustainable consumption and spontaneous associations with this issue.



3. A survey experiment in June 2022 (N = 2,000) informed half of respondents, selected at random, about the economic effects of the Ukraine war on Germany, but not the other half. Both groups were then asked to what extent they were willing to purchase sustainable products.

### Self-efficacy as an important influencing factor

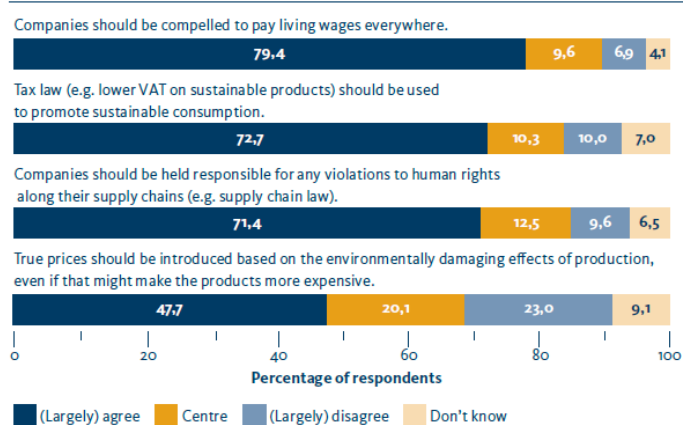
How can this potential be fully harnessed? An analysis based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1992) shows that (1) a pronounced sustainability concern, (2) a sense of being able to consume sustainably (known as perceived behavioural control), (3) a social environment with clear norms regarding sustainable action

and (4) higher perceived personal influence on (consumption) policy – referred to as (consumption) policy self-efficacy – boost sustainable consumption.

However, both the perceived behavioural control and the sense of self-efficacy are not very pronounced among the general public. Development policy actors could increase the latter by (1) expanding low-threshold engagement offers and communicating them accordingly, (2) harnessing the social visibility of engagement and (3) demonstrating individual opportunities to contribute to collective action – for example in organisations and initiatives.

## The population sees politics and the private sector as being responsible

**Figure 1. Support for consumption policy measures**



Source: DEval, own visualisation based on data collected by the market research institute Respondi in November 2021. N = 2,010.

## Literature

Ajzen, I. (1992), "Theory of Planned Behavior", *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 50(2), p. 179–211.

Schneider, S. H. et al. (2022), *Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2022. Development engagement in times of global crises and challenges*, German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.

The general public generally welcomes rules with which political decision-makers promote sustainable consumption behaviour by establishing favourable framework conditions. Almost three quarters of respondents agreed that greater obligations should be placed on companies, for instance in terms of paying living wages and taking responsibility for the adherence to human rights along the entire supply chain (see Figure 1). Even measures that could have a direct negative impact on their own purchasing power – such as introducing "true" prices – meet with the endorsement of nearly half the population.

## War in Ukraine leads to further challenges

Overall, the Opinion Monitor 2022 reveals broad support among the general public for sustainable consumption and possible ways of promoting corresponding consumption behaviour. In a supplementary survey experiment in June 2022, however, it became apparent that external crises can have a negative impact on people's willingness to consume sustainably. In cases where the survey first drew the attention of respondents to the Ukraine war and its economic consequences (such as inflation and rising energy prices), they stated a slightly lower willingness to purchase sustainable products compared to a control group (amounting to a difference of around 0.6 points on a scale from 1 to 7). This illustrates the challenge that such global crises may present for efforts to boost individual contributions to sustainable global development and indicates that political measures to promote sustainable consumption patterns are particularly necessary during times of crisis.



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