

3 out of 4 Europeans demand regulation to reduce air pollution from road transport

A new pan-European opinion poll, conducted by OpinionWay for Tallano Technologies, finds that Europeans are highly concerned about air pollution from road transport but feel underinformed about its sources – and want regulators to take action.

In June 2022, the OpinionWay polling institute surveyed **Europeans in 5 EU Member States** (Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and Netherlands) to assess public perception of air pollution, and transport-related air pollution in particular. The survey also investigated public expectations for legislation and regulation that would help reduce transport-related air pollution.

The survey, which was commissioned by Tallano Technologies, found that a vast majority of Europeans are worried about air pollution and the negative impact it has on their personal health and the environment. While most respondents said they feel underinformed about the sources, the different types of pollutants, and the impact of air pollution, a majority of respondents believe that the transport sector is one of the main sources of air pollution. **Some 75% of the survey respondents are therefore in favour of European, national, regional/local policymakers introducing regulation** that helps improve air quality and combat fine particle emissions from road vehicles.

The results of this opinion poll therefore provide a **strong and timely mandate to political decision makers in the European Union to take action** and regulate road transport pollution. It comes as the European Commission prepares to present a proposal to set new emissions standards for cars, vans, lorries and busses (Euro 7) on 12 October.

Research by the European Environment Agency (EEA) demonstrate that regulation on air pollution is a matter of urgency as it is "the biggest environmental health risk in Europe"¹. According to the EEA, fine particulate matter emissions, a large portion of which originates from the transport sector from brake and tyre abrasion, are particularly hazardous to human health, **killing more than 300,000 people per year across the European Union**².

Road transport is one of the main sources of fine particulate emissions. However, only about 20% of road transport emissions are currently regulated in the EU – those emissions that originate from exhaust pipes of internal combustion engines. **The remaining 80% of fine particle emissions from vehicles are currently outside the scope of European regulations.**

Brakes alone emit about **6 times more particles** than the limit set for exhaust gases under the Euro 6 standard: **30 mg/km compared to 4.5 mg/km** for an average passenger car, half of which are suspended in the air, contributing to air pollution and damaging health, and half of which are projected onto the ground, polluting the environment. Electric and hybrid vehicles are also affected by this issue. They are responsible for air pollution through the emission of brake particles due to their weight, which is on average higher than that of combustion vehicles.

¹ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air>

² Euronews, Air pollution in large cities: a French and European scandal, 14 January 2022; European Environment Agency, Air Quality in Europe, 2021; European Commission, press release, 15 November 2021.

If the European Commission wants to live up to its Zero Pollution Strategy and protect citizens' health and the environment, it must therefore present an ambitious Euro 7 proposal on 12 October that sets strict limits on fine particle brake emissions. This new standard could come into force as early as 2025.

Highlights of the survey

1. A strong demand for regulation on air pollution from transport, particularly at the European level
 - The introduction of regulations to limit air pollution and combat fine particle emissions from cars and other transport vehicles is **supported by around 75% of the respondents**. In Italy, this figure peaks at **88%** and in France at **77%**. Citizens in the other countries surveyed are at similar levels, with 75% of Germans, 74% of Belgians and 73% of Dutch citizens in favour of regulations to limit air pollution and combat fine particle emissions from petrol, diesel and electric vehicles. Younger citizens are particularly supportive of the introduction of these regulations, with the 18-24 and 25-34 categories being the most supportive (91% and 81% in favour in France, respectively).
 - The study clearly shows that Europeans expect **decisions and actions from both private companies and public actors**. These two actors are identified in the first two places of the actors who should be most involved in the fight against pollution and the improvement of air quality by more than 50% of the citizens of the countries surveyed. While Germans and Italians put governments in the first place (57% in both countries), the French, Belgians and Dutch put transport companies in the first place (with 57%, 52% and 51% respectively).
 - Respondents are in favour of putting in place an arsenal of measures to combat outdoor air pollution, ranging from controlling the discharge of industrial waste to setting up awareness-raising and prevention campaigns to explain the risks associated with air pollution. **Among the most popular actions is a ban of vehicles that have a negative environmental and public health impact due to their emissions of fine particles – some 80% of Europeans respondents were in favour of this. (89% of Italians, 82% of Dutch, 77% of Germans, 78% of Belgians and 75% of French).**
2. Air pollution (especially outdoor air pollution), is a key health and environmental concern for Europeans
 - **Health** (and well-being) is the **primary concern amongst the Europeans surveyed**: 92% in Italy, 87% in the Netherlands, 86% in Belgium, 85% in France and 70% in Germany. The environment is also one of the main concerns of the Europeans surveyed (for example, 89% of people in Italy are very or fairly concerned about it).
 - More than three quarters of respondents in Italy (79%) consider air pollution (outdoor, indoor or in confined areas) to be a very worrying issue among environment-related topics ("extremely" or "very")³. This compares to more than two-thirds of French respondents (69%). This is slightly less the case but still significant in Germany (60%) and the Netherlands (56%).

³ More specifically, 46% of the Italian people consider air pollution to be 'extremely' worrying, which puts the issue above water and soil pollution (45%) and waste management and recycling (41%).

- **Outdoor air pollution** is the most frequently mentioned concern among European respondents. Among Italian respondents, for instance, 80% consider outdoor air pollution to be very concerning, compared to 73% for air pollution in confined areas (metro stations, trains) and 69% for indoor air pollution in houses or buildings.
3. Outdoor air pollution is a subject of concern for Europeans
- **At least 80% of Europeans surveyed are concerned about the risks associated with outdoor air quality. The concern is the highest in Italy (91%), followed by France and Belgium (83%), the Netherlands (79%) and Germany (72%).** While 33% of French and Belgians respondents are very concerned, and the Dutch 31%, the Italians and Germans represent the poles of high and low concern, with 53% of Italians responding very concerned, versus 27% of Germans.
 - This feeling of concern about the risks related to outdoor air quality may be explained by the fact **that the negative effects of pollution are directly felt by the Europeans surveyed on their own health or that of their relatives.** Nearly one in two French people (48%) have experienced or have seen relatives experiencing discomfort or problems related to outdoor air pollution. This is also the case for 46% of Dutch respondents, 46% of Belgians, 38% of Germans and 31% of Italians.
4. Lack of transparency and information regarding air pollution and fine particle emissions
- **On average, only one in two Europeans surveyed feel well informed about the health risks linked to air pollution and fine particle emissions from vehicles.** 1 in 2 French people feel badly informed (48%), while Germans (65%) and Italians (80%) feel well informed. Belgians and Dutch also note a lack of information: 45% of Belgians and 47% of Dutch respondents consider that they are badly informed.
 - According to the study, air pollution in general, and fine particle emissions specifically, are subjects that Europeans hear about in the media (87% and 82% in Germany) or that they often talk about with those around them. This is slightly less the case for Dutch respondents (76%).
5. Fine particles, transport and braking
- Europeans in the countries surveyed identify transport as the sector most responsible for outdoor air pollution. In all countries surveyed, more than 80% of citizens rank transport and road traffic among the top three reasons for outdoor air pollution, alongside industrial activities and pollution from homes. More than a third rank transport in the first place.
 - However, with the exception of exhaust pipe emissions, **respondents felt they don't have sufficient information about the origin of transport-related pollution.** Less than half of European respondents (40%) are aware that both exhaust emissions and particulate emissions from brakes and tires contribute to transportation-related air pollution. Nearly half French people (43%) and Italian people (44%) believe that vehicle exhaust fumes primarily cause air pollution.
 - Air pollution stems from both vehicle exhaust fumes, and non-exhaust emissions such as brake & tyre wear particulates. However, knowledge of both sources differ greatly: while 43% of French respondents believe that vehicle exhaust fumes are a primary contributor to

air pollution, **only 8% recognised non-exhaust emissions as a primary contributor**. This shows the necessity to increase awareness of the contribution of non-exhaust emissions to transport-related air pollution.