

German Environment Agency

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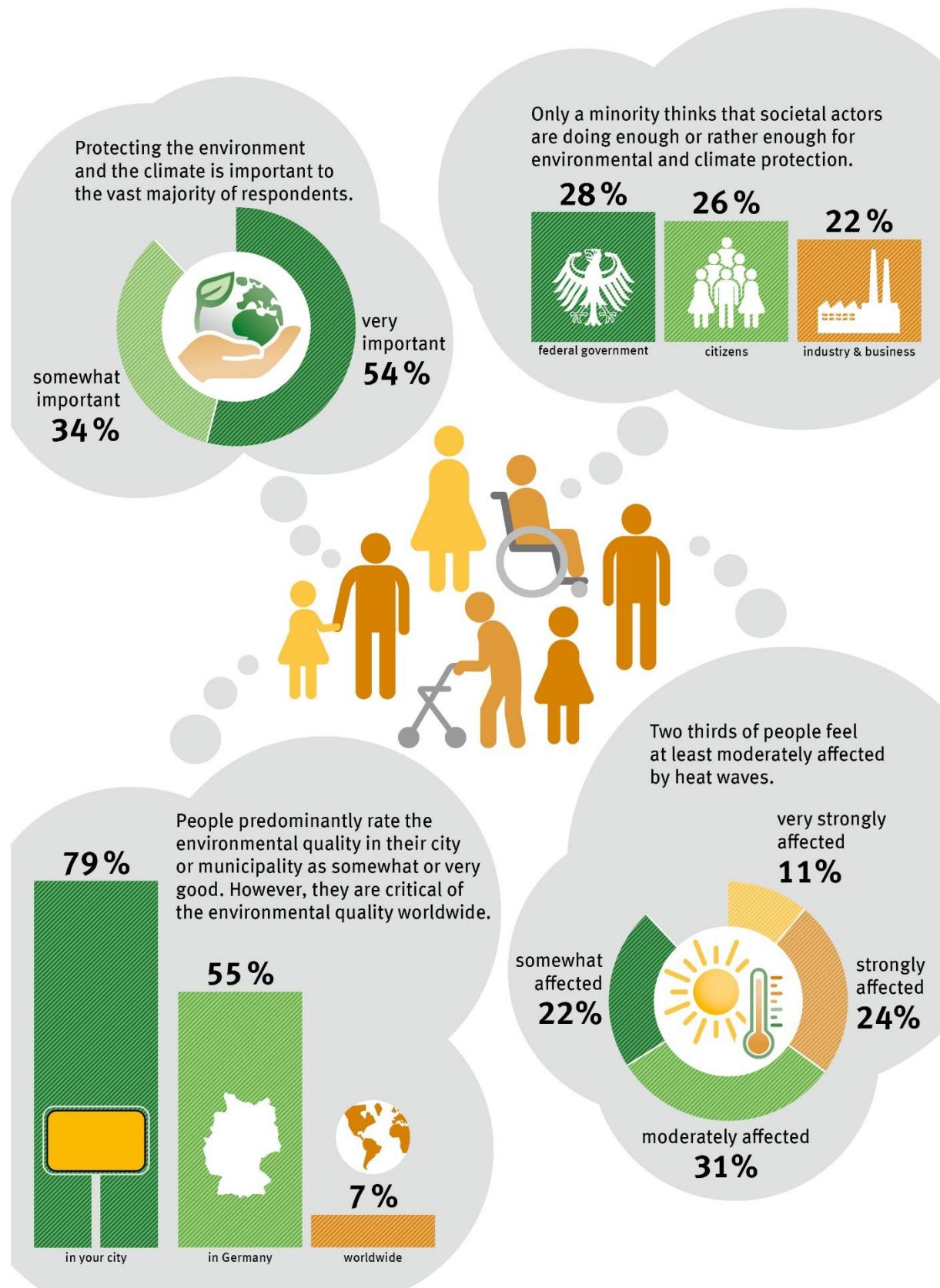
Federal Ministry  
for the Environment, Climate Action,  
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

## Environmental Awareness in Germany 2024

### Survey report



# The Environmental Awareness Study 2024 at a Glance



# 1 About the Study

The Environmental Awareness Study has been conducted every two years since 1996. It analyses the environmental awareness as well as environmental policy attitudes of the German population. The core of the study is a representative population survey in Germany. Some questions are asked on a recurring basis in order to track the development of environmental awareness as a time series and to identify trends. In addition to the recurring questions, each survey focuses on an additional key topic. In 2024, the survey investigated how people in Germany think about the relationship between the environment, health and quality of life.

The survey was conducted between September 4 and November 14, 2024. A total of 2552 citizens aged 18 and older from all over Germany participated. The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. The results can be seen in detail in the German [Chartbook](#).

In 2024, the PostDirekt method was used for the first time to select survey participants. A random sample from the Deutsche Post address pool was contacted (covering almost all private addresses in Germany). The primary mode of data collection was an online questionnaire. Alternatively, a paper questionnaire or a telephone interview was offered. The sample is representative with regard to age, gender and the distribution across the federal states of Germany.

**Table 1 Weighted sample of the Environmental Awareness Study 2024**

Figures in per cent; numbers not adding up to 100 percent result from missing data.

<b>Age</b>	18-29	16
	30-49	29
	50-64	25
	65 and older	26
<b>Gender</b>	female	50
	male	48
	other	<1
<b>Region</b>	New German states (without Berlin)	15
	Old German states (with Berlin)	85
<b>Origin</b>	with immigrant background	19
	without immigrant background	79
<b>Level of education</b>	Low: no school certificate, elementary/secondary school certificate or POS (8th/9th grade)	13
	Medium: mittlere Reife, Realschulabschluss or POS (10th grade)	45
	High: Abitur, vocational baccalaureate, university entrance qualification, university, university of applied sciences degree	37
<b>Household income (monthly)</b>	under 2.000 €	13
	2.000 € to < 4.000 €	36
	4.000 € to < 6.000 €	20
	6.000 € and above	9
	Prefer not to say	22

## 2 Recurring Topics: Environmental Awareness and Political Issues

Several topics are measured repeatedly over the course of the study since 1996. A selection of the most interesting results is presented in the following sections: the importance of political topics, satisfaction with societal actors and the standardised indicator for environmental awareness.

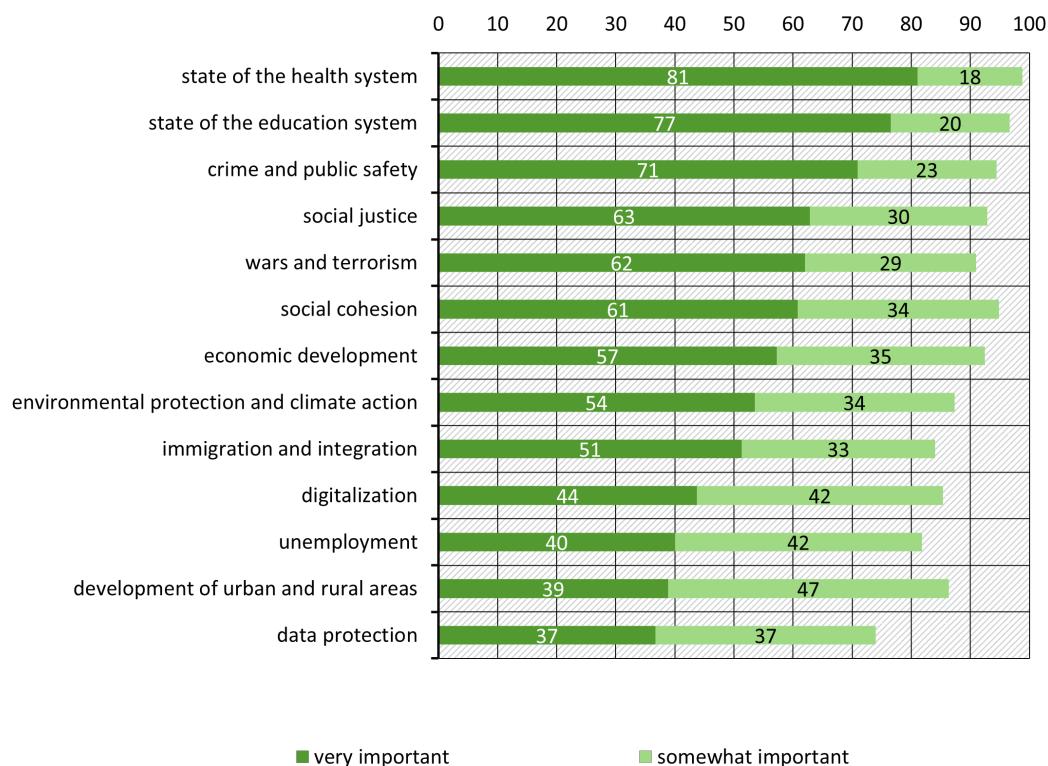
### How important are the environmental and climate issues compared to other political issues?

- ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND CLIMATE ACTION ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO MORE THAN HALF OF THE PEOPLE, BUT OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES ARE BECOMING MORE SIGNIFICANT.

Environmental protection and climate action are very important to 54% of people, and somewhat important to a further 34% (Figure 1). While in 2020, the topic's importance peaked at 65 % of respondents finding it very important, it is now back to the level of 2016 (53 %).

**Figure 1: Importance of political topics**

Question: "On the following list you will find topics that concern our country today. Please indicate how important or unimportant you consider each of the following topics to be'; figures in per cent.



As in previous years, the state of the healthcare system and the education system are rated as the most important. While the relevance of environmental protection and climate action has decreased slightly in 2024, the topics of healthcare, crime and public safety as well as economic development have become significantly more important compared to 2022 (Chartbook, Slide 7). These findings reflect current social developments and debates. On closer inspection, older respondents consider environmental protection and climate action to be more important than younger respondents. Women tend to find the topic generally more relevant than men.

Respondents with a high level of education are also more likely to rate environmental protection and climate action as very important. However, there is no clear correlation with income.

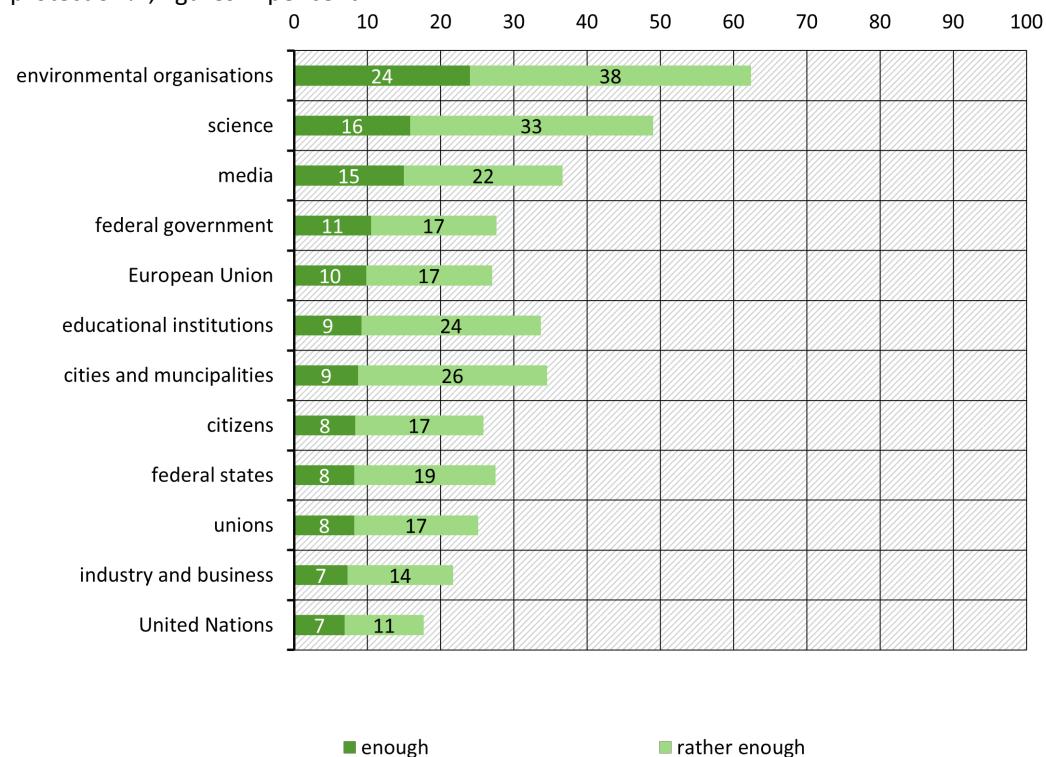
Participants were asked how important they consider various environmental policy measures. Well over half of the respondents rate all tasks mentioned as important (Chartbook, Slide 12). They consider the reduction of plastic waste and plastic discharges into nature (79%), the safe disposal of nuclear waste (73%), the promotion of the circular economy (70%) and the protection of forests, peatlands and other ecosystems (61%) to be particularly important.

**How satisfied are respondents with societal actors when it comes to environmental protection and climate action?**

- **MOST RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT POLITICIANS, ADMINISTRATIONS, BUSINESSES AND CITIZENS ARE NOT DOING ENOUGH TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CLIMATE.**

**Figure 2: Satisfaction with societal actors**

Question: "In your opinion, are the following societal actors doing enough for environmental and climate protection?"; figures in per cent.



As in previous editions of the study, only around a quarter of respondents believe that businesses and industry (22 %), the federal government (28 %) or citizens (26 %) are doing enough for environmental and climate protection. Only two actor groups receive predominantly positive ratings: 62 percent of respondents believe that environmental NGOs are doing enough, while 49 percent rate the commitment of the scientific community positively (Figure 2).

In 2024, respondents were also asked: "To what extent are you convinced that we in Germany can overcome the problems resulting from climate change?". Just under a third of respondents are completely or fairly convinced of this. This is the lowest result in this time series, which has been collected since 2002 (Chartbook, Slide 18). At the same time, the relevance that

respondents attribute to environmental and climate protection in other policy areas has also declined in comparison to previous years (Chartbook, Slide 20).

#### **How is the environmental awareness in Germany?**

- ▶ **ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS SHOWS A SLIGHT DECLINE COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS YEARS, BUT IS STILL STRONG.**

Since 2018, environmental awareness has been measured with a standardized indicator comprising the three sub-indicators of environmental cognition, affect and behaviour. These indicators range from 0 = little environmental concern to 10 = high environmental concern. Environmental cognition captures how people think about environmental and climate issues and remains relatively high at 7.2 in 2024. However, there has been a slight downward trend since 2018 (7.9). The value for environmental affect - i.e. how people react emotionally to environmental issues - has also fallen slightly from 7.2 to 6.5 in 2024. Environmental behaviour remains largely constant at an average level of 4.6.

### **3 Key Topic: Environment, Health and Quality of Life**

Environmental quality, quality of life and health are closely linked: The state of the natural, social and built environment influences people's quality of life. At the same time, high environmental quality, e.g. the condition of water, soil and air as well as access to basic infrastructure, is important for people's health.

#### **What significance does the environment have for people's quality of life and health?**

- ▶ **SATISFACTION WITH THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY DEPENDS ON THEIR SOCIAL SITUATION: PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOMES FEEL MORE BURDENED BY ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES.**

The majority of people in Germany consider the environmental quality in their local area to be good. In 2024, almost 90 percent rated it positively (Chartbook, Slide 45). It is also evident that people with higher incomes generally rate the environmental quality in their immediate neighbourhood more favourably. Four out of five respondents described the environmental quality in their own city or municipality as good or very good.

When asked about the overall environmental quality in Germany, half of the respondents perceived it as good. However, environmental quality on a global scale is rated significantly lower than that of the immediate surroundings: only 7 percent consider global environmental quality to be good. This contrast between the perception of local environmental conditions and the state of the global environment has also been observed in previous years.

- ▶ **TWO THIRDS OF RESPONDENTS FEEL THAT HEATWAVES PUT A STRAIN ON THEIR HEALTH.**

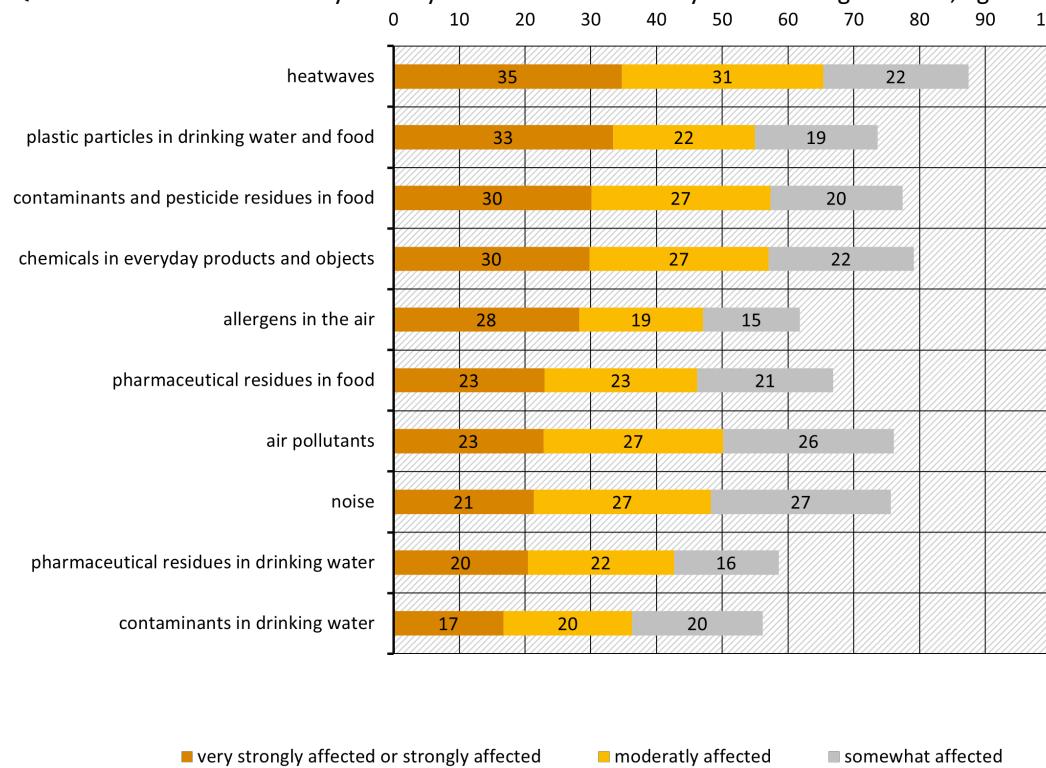
31 per cent of respondents feel that their health is severely or very severely affected by environmental pollution and pollutants overall (Chartbook, Slide 50). Respondents also rated how potential environmental stress factors affect their personal health (Figure 3). Most factors are perceived as having at least a moderate impact by more than one-third of respondents. A comparatively large number of people (35%) feel extremely or very affected by heatwaves. Heatwaves are directly perceptible stress factors. In contrast, slightly fewer people feel extremely or very affected by non-directly perceptible factors such as plastic particles in food and drinking water (33%), chemicals in everyday products (30%) and pesticide residues in food (30%).

More people from the lowest income segment (< €2,000 per month per household) feel that their health is extremely or heavily burdened by environmental factors than from the highest income segment (€6,000 +). This primarily relates to heatwaves (low income: 45% / high income: 26%), pharmaceutical residues in drinking water (30% / 14%) and food (28% / 14%).

Noise also has an impact on well-being. In 2024, as in previous years, the perceived health impact of noise was therefore studied. Around half of respondents (48%) stated that they felt at least moderately affected by noise (Figure 3). Once again, people with a low income (< €2,000) feel that their health is more affected by noise than people with a high income (€6,000 +).

**Figure 3: Health risks due to various environmental factors**

Question: 'To what extent do you feel your health is affected by the following factors?'; figures in per cent.



► **ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE FOOD, HOUSING AND LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT IS KEY TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE.**

Participants further rated 14 goals for a better quality of life in Germany (Chartbook, Slide 49). At least half of the respondents rated the following environmental and health-related areas as very important:



Improving access to healthy and affordable food: 59 per cent very important, 33 per cent somewhat important (total: 92%)



Improving access to climate-friendly and affordable housing: 61 per cent very important, 28 per cent somewhat important (total: 89%)



Improving the quality of drinking water: 56 per cent very important; 30 per cent somewhat important (total: 86%)



Improving public transport connections: 50 per cent very important, 37 per cent somewhat important (total: 87%)

## 4 Summary: Environmental Awareness in a Shifting Political Context

The Environmental Awareness Study 2024 shows that environmental protection and climate action remain (very) important to the majority of people in Germany. However, issues such as healthcare, crime and public safety have gained importance compared to previous surveys. This shift is also reflected in the slight decline of two out of three sub-indicators for environmental awareness.

The findings must be seen in the broader societal context: The political and social climate is shaped by the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, Russia's war against Ukraine, geopolitical tensions, rising energy prices and living costs, as well as economic uncertainty. These challenges are perceived as more urgent than environmental concerns. Additionally, public debates – for instance on the climate activist group "Letzte Generation" or the "Building Energy Law" – have further polarized public opinion on environmental and climate protection. There has also been an evident rise in right-wing narratives – which can include climate change denial – as reflected in the recent success of the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD).

For environmental policy, this means that the different realities of people's lives—and especially social aspects—must be taken into account more intensively. Political actors need to emphasize that ambitious environmental policy can make a significant contribution to securing prosperity, strengthening social cohesion, and improving quality of life for everyone.

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### Imprint

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