



# Over two-thirds of EU citizens want their country's 2030 climate target raised

Results of a survey in 12 EU countries

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April 2021

## Summary

Public opinion in the EU strongly supports more ambitious national climate targets, according to a poll conducted in 12 European countries. The online poll commissioned by T&E from leading institute YouGov reveals that 68% of respondents with an opinion want their country's climate target to be increased, while 84% want increased climate efforts in the transport and buildings sectors to be delivered through new standards and regulations.

The survey results come at a time when the European Commission is debating the continued existence of the so-called Effort Sharing Regulation, which sets binding national climate targets for each Member State and regulates 60% of EU emissions. T&E is calling on the European Commission to listen to citizens and stop casting doubt on the continued responsibility of national governments to jointly deliver on the EU's 2030 climate target. Instead the Commission should propose increased national targets as part of its June 'Fit for 55' package.

Southern European countries, Italy (85%) and Spain (79%), show the strongest support for increased national emissions targets. In Eastern European countries where national climate targets have so far been very low, support for government action is very high, Romania (73%), Poland (68%) and Hungary (67%). Support is less outspoken in Northwestern European countries. Yet, even in the Netherlands (46%) and Denmark (49%), the only two countries with no outright majority in favour of increased national targets, 84% and 85% of respondents with an opinion support, at a minimum, maintaining current national climate targets.



## Majority in most EU countries wants increased national 2030 climate targets



There is also overwhelming support among EU citizens (84% of respondents) to implement new measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as road transport zoning and minimum sales of electric vehicles, both at the national and EU-level. Respondents are more reserved when it comes to a new EU-level pricing instrument that would make transport and heating fuels more expensive for consumers, such as the proposed extension of the EU's carbon market to these fuels would do. While 41% of respondents with an opinion support such an instrument, 59% oppose it.

T&E thinks this illustrates that shifting responsibility for delivering on the EU's 2030 climate target from countries to the EU's carbon market, is a high risk, low reward strategy. If the EU does decide to press ahead with a carbon market for transport and heating fuels despite low public support, it should address the social impacts both within and between EU Member States. The European Commission should also build on the overwhelming public support for new climate standards to prioritise increased ambition in high-impact EU measures such as CO2 standards for cars and vans. Ambitious policies at EU-level also help member states to more easily reach their targets.

### 1. Political context and methodology

As we enter a new decade of climate action, the European Commission is contemplating an overthrow of the EU's climate architecture. The Commission's aim is to bring all EU and Member State level policies in line with the newly established EU-wide climate target of at least -55% net emissions reductions by 2030. The Commission will present this new climate

architecture in June as part of its so-called 'Fit for 55' package. The question at hand is how much of the rules will be changed in June.

One of the most contested issues is the accountability for emissions reductions in the road transport and buildings sectors. Should national governments remain accountable, with increased and binding national climate targets as the logical consequence? Or do we set up a new emissions trading system at the EU-level for road transport and buildings? Under the second set-up, Member States would no longer have domestic responsibility for the emissions of these two sectors. They would be deducted from their Effort Sharing targets or national targets would disappear altogether. The responsibility for delivering on the new 2030 target would then lie solely with the EU's carbon pricing instrument. Transport & Environment thinks that this is a high risk, low reward strategy. The price within the system would need to go as high as needed to deliver on the emissions reduction target, thereby posing socio-economic challenges both between and within Member States. T&E shares most Member States' position that rather we should stick to the current climate architecture with increased national targets for these two sectors and with a strengthening of the existing high-impact sectoral policies at the EU-level, such as CO2 standards for cars and vans, the Alternative Fuels and Infrastructure Directive, the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, etc.

T&E decided to gauge public support for increased national climate targets, as well as for new national and EU-level norms and regulations in the road transport and buildings sector. T&E also gauged public support for a new EU-level pricing tool for these sectors. A representative survey was carried out online by leading research institute YouGov between 11th and 20th February 2021. The total sample size was 13,324 adults across 12 EU countries (Romania, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Poland, France, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Hungary and Spain), covering 84% of the EU's population.

## 12 EU Member States covered in the survey



Note: The total sample size was 13,324 adults across these 12 countries. The polling results have been given a weighting reflecting the size of the population of each country aged 18+ to be representative of this country group as a whole.



Figure 1: Map of the countries surveyed

When providing EU-wide results, they were given a weighting reflecting the size of the population of each country aged 18+ to be representative of this country group as a whole. T&E then filtered out the respondents that did not have an opinion to illustrate the net support and opposition for the surveyed measures.

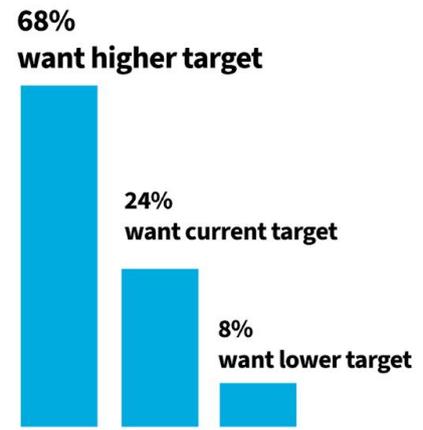
## 2. Main findings

### 2.1. Wide support for increased national climate targets

The results show a strong support among EU citizens for their government to lead on increased climate action. An impressive 88% of EU citizens polled had an opinion on the subject. Out of those with an opinion, 68% of EU citizens think that their national government should increase its effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions now that EU leaders have agreed to a new EU-wide target of at least -55% emissions reduction by 2030. Another 24% of respondents with an opinion think that their national target should be maintained at its current level, while only 8% think that their government should do less than today.



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N = 13,324 adults in 12 EU countries.  
Respondents without an opinion were filtered out.

Figure 2: EU-wide results for the level of 2030 national climate targets

Respondents from Southern and Eastern European countries feel strongest about this. In Spain (79%) and Italy (85%), over three quarters of respondents with an opinion think their national 2030 climate target should be increased. It is remarkable that support for strong government action is so high in the Eastern European countries, as national climate targets in these countries were set at very low levels (between -2% and -7% by 2020 compared to 2005 levels) in the previous compliance period (2013-2020). The support of 73% of respondents with an opinion in Romania, 68% in Poland and 67% in Hungary is a strong signal that there is a demand for more national climate action.

# Majority in most EU countries wants increased national 2030 climate targets

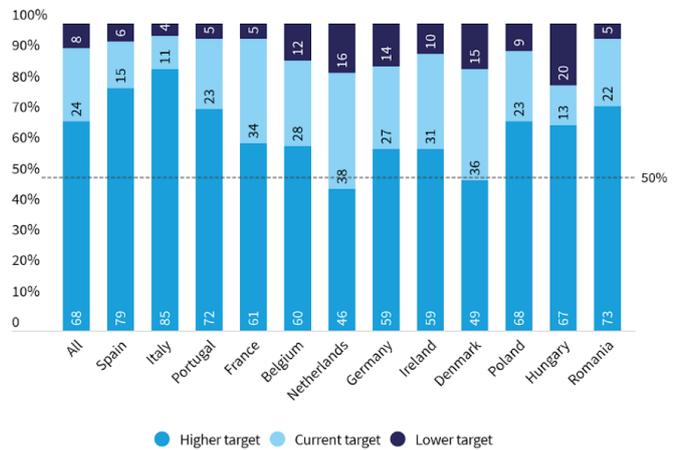


Figure 3: National-level results for the level of 2030 national climate targets

Only in the Netherlands and in Denmark there is no majority amongst respondents for increasing national targets. There is however a strong majority in these countries (resp. 84% and 85% out of those with an opinion) for at least maintaining and maybe increasing national targets. Support to at the very least maintain current national climate targets does not drop below 80% in any of the Member States.

Support to increase national targets is the highest amongst females. Out of those with an opinion, 72% of female citizens support higher national targets compared to 64% of male respondents. Across all age groups, over 66% of respondents with an opinion are in support of increased government action.

## 2.2. Citizens prefer new norms and regulations over new EU-level pricing tools

There is overwhelming support among EU citizens (84% of respondents with an opinion) to increase climate efforts in the transport and buildings sectors via new norms and regulations such as road transport zoning and minimum sales of electric vehicles, both at the national and EU-level. Respondents are more reserved when it comes to a new EU-level pricing instrument that would make transport and heating fuels more expensive for consumers, such as the proposed extension of the EU's carbon market to these fuels would do. While 41% of respondents with an opinion support such an instrument, 59% oppose it.

## Overwhelming majority of EU citizens supports new climate norms and regulations

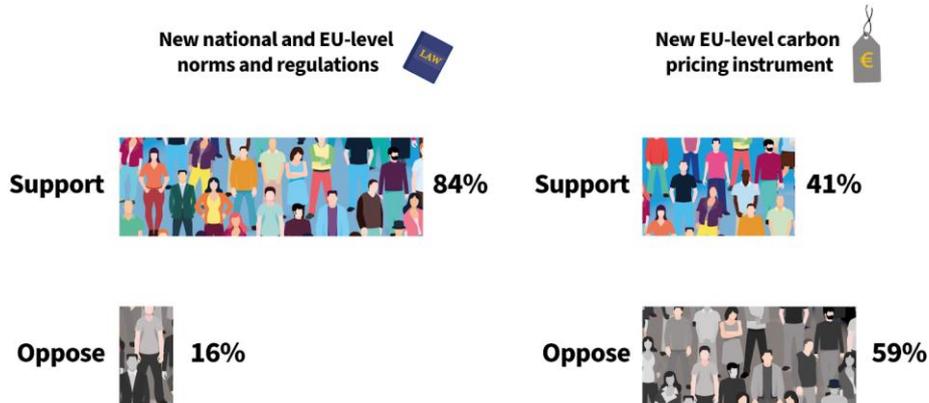
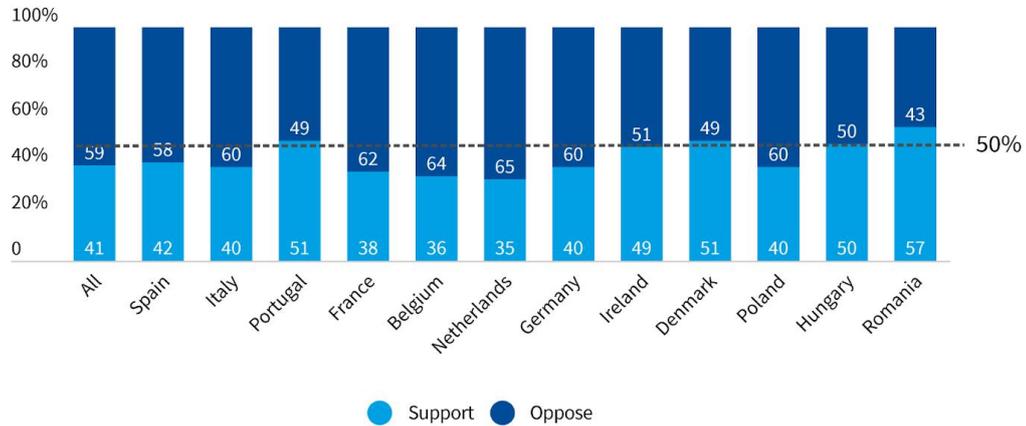


Figure 4: Support for new norms and regulations versus a new EU-level pricing tool for road transport and buildings

Especially respondents with an opinion from the Netherlands (65%), Belgium (64%), France (62%), Germany (60%), Italy (60%) and Poland (60%) show reservations about such a new EU-level pricing instrument for road transport and buildings emissions. Romanians stand out as one of the only countries relatively receptive to the proposal, with 57% out of those with an opinion in support. Support is slightly higher in the younger age groups of 18-24 years old and 25-34 years old. Note that the survey did not gauge public support for national-level carbon pricing instruments, but only for a new EU-level tool.

## EU citizens reserved on new EU-level carbon pricing tool for road transport and buildings



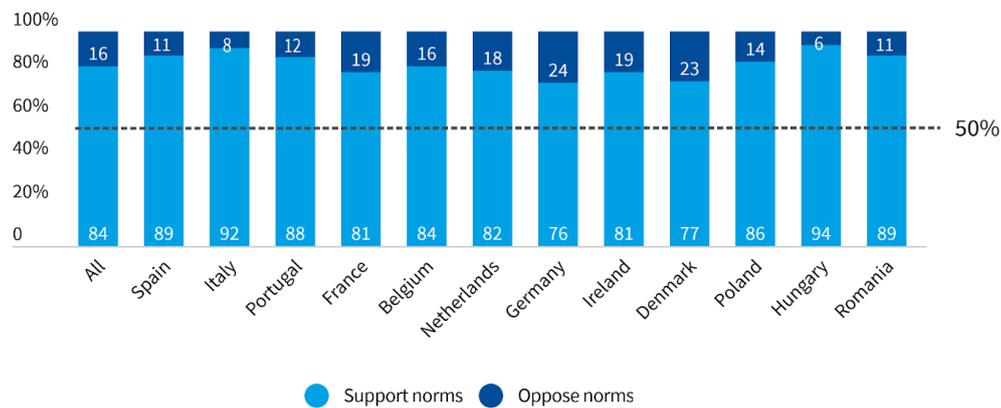
**Source:** YouGov online poll. **Note:** N = 13,324 adults in 12 EU countries. Respondents without an opinion were filtered out.


[transportenvironment.org](https://transportenvironment.org)

Figure 5: National-level support for a new EU-level pricing instrument for road transport and buildings

When it comes to new climate norms and regulations for the road transport and buildings sectors, support is overwhelming across the EU. Respondents show especially high levels of support in Eastern and Southern European countries, with between 86% and 92% of respondents with an opinion from these countries in support. In no country does support drop below 76% of those with an opinion.

## Overwhelming majority of EU citizens supports new climate norms and regulations



Source: YouGov online poll. Note: N = 13,324 adults in 12 EU countries. Respondents without an opinion were filtered out.



Figure 6: National-level support for new national and EU-level norms and regulations in the road transport and buildings sectors

### 3. Conclusions

This representative survey carried out in 12 EU countries clearly shows that the majority of Europeans with an opinion covered by the survey (68%) want their national government to lead on increased climate action. Support for strong government action is very high in the eastern European countries where national climate targets have been very low so far. The survey also revealed that there is overwhelming support (84%) among EU citizens with an opinion to increase climate efforts in the transport and buildings sectors via new norms and regulations, both at the national and EU-level. EU citizens are more reserved when it comes to a new EU-level pricing instrument that would make transport and heating fuels more expensive, such as the proposed extension of the EU's carbon market to these fuels would do, with 41% in support and 59% opposing such a new EU-tool.

In T&E's views this means that:

- The European Commission should take heed of this and finally **make clear that national binding climate targets are here to stay** as one of the main pillars of the EU's climate architecture. National governments can tailor policies to investment needs and socio-economic realities on the ground, allowing for a much more impactful and a much more just transition.
- The Commission's June 'Fit for 55' package should contain an **increase of each individual Member States' national climate target** under the so-called Effort Sharing Regulation, as these targets are a key driver for national climate action and clearly widely supported by EU citizens.
- The European Commission should build on the overwhelming public support for new climate norms and regulations to **increase ambition in high-impact EU sectoral**

- policies** such as CO2 standards for cars and vans. An ambitious policy mix at the EU-level also supports Member States to more easily reach their targets.
- If the EU does decide to include some sort of carbon pricing in the policy mix, it should **duly address the social impacts** both within and between EU Member States. The mechanism should be designed as a supportive policy that helps Member States to more easily comply with their Effort Sharing targets, rather than replacing national targets.

More detail on each of these points can be found in T&E's 2021 briefing 'Why increasing ambition under the ESR is unavoidable', available on T&E's website [here](#).

## **Further information**

Sofie Defour  
Climate Manager  
Transport & Environment  
sofie.defour@transportenvironment.org  
Mobile: +32(0)479 57 28 93