

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

