

## What People Know and Think About the Sustainable Development Goals

Selected Findings from Public Opinion Surveys  
Compiled by the OECD Development Communication Network (DevCom)  
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### Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are often called the people’s goals. Government institutions seeking to achieve the SDGs need to engage with citizens, listen to them and mobilise them into action. Understanding what different constituencies know and think about the SDGs is a crucial starting point.

This document presents selected results from the international surveys on the SDGs. The results underline how much work lies ahead for SDG advocates. They also reveal the gaps in our knowledge about public attitudes to the SDGs.

### How well do people know the SDGs?

Using different methods and covering different sets of countries, surveys find that **between 35 and 45 per cent of people have heard of the goals**. AIESEC’s Youth Speak report (2016) suggests that young people have a higher level of SDG awareness than average, a finding that is generally replicated in demographic analyses of other surveys.

SDG *awareness* does not necessarily translate into *knowledge*. Glocalities (2016) finds that, **across 24 countries, only around 1 in 100 citizens know the SDGs ‘very well’**, while 25% say they know the name only.

According to the latest Eurobarometer (2017), just



Source	Awareness of SDGs	Knowledge of SDGs
Eurobarometer (2016)	36%	10%
Eurobarometer (2017)	41%	12%
Globescan Radar (2017)	35%	n/a
AIESEC Youth Speak Global Report	45%	n/a

over **1 in 10 Europeans know what the SDGs are**.

There are major disparities between countries. Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson (2016) find that in Germany and France, 2 in 10 citizens say they are not aware of the SDGs, compared with about 4 in 10 citizens in the United Kingdom and United States.

It is important to note that the findings of these surveys need to be treated with caution. “Social desirability bias”, in particular, will lead many people to overreport their awareness or knowledge of the SDGs.

Nonetheless, **awareness that there is a global set of goals appears to be on the rise**. Both Eurobarometer and Globescan find that awareness of the SDGs is generally greater today than awareness of the Millennium Development Goals was in earlier surveys.

## Do people support the SDGs? Which ones?

IPSOS (2015) asked people in 16 countries which individual SDGs they considered to be important. There is **strong support for all SDGs in all countries**. IPSOS also found that **support is stronger in emerging economies** than established aid donor countries. This echoes Globescan's finding that citizens in non-OECD countries are more likely than OECD citizens to see themselves as "global citizens".

**Eradicating global poverty, ending hunger, and accessing clean water and sanitation** are top SDG priorities in most surveys. Providing access to quality education is also seen as important.

Almost 10 million people have participated in the **MyWorld Survey** (as of June 2017), identifying the issues that matter most to them. Overall, **education, health** and an **honest and responsive government** matter to everyone. Better **job opportunities** matter in most countries, but are of lower priority in countries that rank high on the Human Development Index (HDI). **Environmental issues** tend to take on increasing importance as a country's HDI increases.

## Who is responsible for the SDGs?

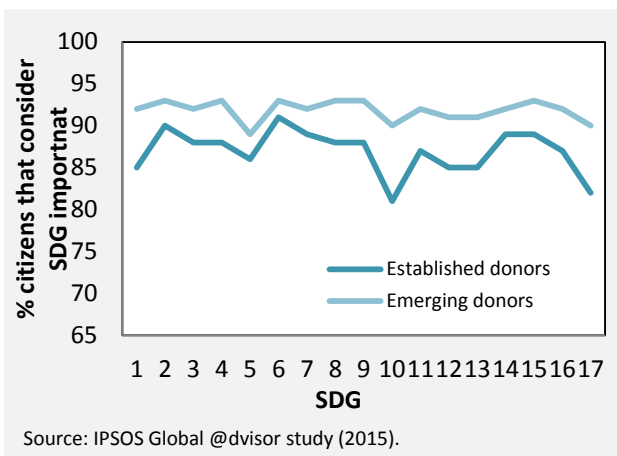
IPSOS asked citizens who should fund the SDGs. Nearly **4 in 10 citizens believe that all governments should fund the goals**. Some people specifically assign responsibility to governments in wealthy countries (2 in 10) or developing countries (1 in 10). **Only 5% of citizens say that the private sector should pay** for the goals.

Responding to a PwC survey, a large share of businesses (49%) and citizens (44%) said that governments bear core responsibility for achieving the SDGs. However, **90% of citizens think that it is important for businesses to sign up to the SDGs** (59% think it is "very important").

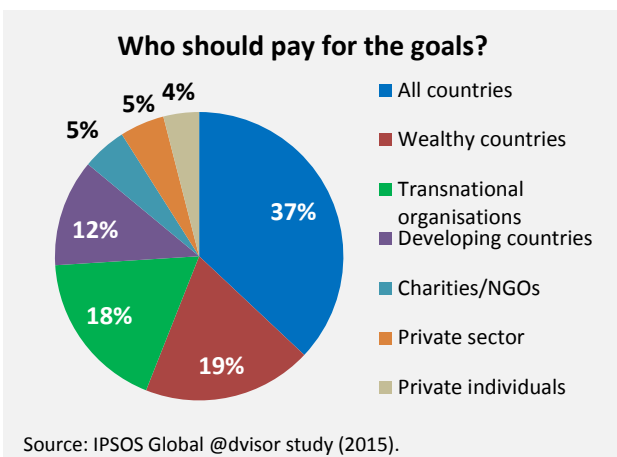
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stresses the importance of partnerships. In a 2016 survey, Accenture and the UN Global Compact

## Information about Sources

Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson (2016); survey of 6,000-8,000 individuals in France, Germany, UK & US. (Fieldwork: YouGov, 12/2015)  
*Globescan Radar* (2017); nationally representative samples of approx. 1,000 adults in 16 countries. (Fieldwork: 12/16-05/2017)  
*Glocalities: Towards 2030 Without Poverty* (2016); 56,000 respondents in 24 countries. (Fieldwork: 12/2015-2/2016)  
*Special Eurobarometer 441* (2016) 27,672 individuals surveyed across 28 EU Member States. (Fieldwork: 11-12/2015)  
*Special Eurobarometer 445* (2017) 27,929 individuals surveyed across 28 EU Member States. (Fieldwork: 11-12/2016)  
*IPSOS Global @dvisor*. (2015) Nationally representative survey of 12,906 individuals in 16-country study. (Fieldwork: 2015)  
*MyWorld UN Global Survey for a Better World*.  
*YouthSpeak Global Report* (2016) 160,227 individuals surveyed globally. (Fieldwork: 10/2015-2016)



Citizens may believe that goals are important, but not be hopeful about their achievement. Glocalities finds that only 13% of people think ending global poverty by 2030 is likely. Hudson and vanHeerde-Hudson find that even the most engaged US citizens see ending global poverty and hunger as unattainable. **Providing access to clean water and sanitation is seen as both important and attainable.**



found that **84% of CEOs want more collaboration** between business and government on SDG action plans.