

## Press Release

### The consumers' perspective on the coronavirus pandemic

Brussels, 11 March 2020 - The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is proving to be the greatest socio-economic disruptor in Europe since the 2008-2009 financial crisis. Italy is in lockdown, Spain is beginning to close its schools and Belgium just recorded its first death. Between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of March, Euroconsumers' member organisations (Altroconsumo - Italy, OCU - Spain, DECO Proteste - Portugal and Test Achats/Test Aankoop - Belgium) conducted a survey in their respective countries to gauge the state of mind, level of information and confidence of citizens regarding the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Here are our main findings:

#### Level of information

In all four countries, the majority of the population is reportedly either *somewhat/well informed* about the coronavirus (transfer of the virus, mortality rate, incubation period, etc). Similarly, a large majority say that they follow, at least partly, the recommendations from their respective Health authorities regarding prevention. The least informed country is Belgium, where 38% say they are either a little informed or not informed at all. In Italy, this figure is 15%, the lowest of all four countries.

#### Level of preparation - purchase of products for virus prevention

Only in Italy has a majority of the population (60%) bought products for the prevention of COVID-19, such as masks, gloves, hand sanitisers, etc. In the other three countries, this figure is approximately 40% (the lowest being Portugal with 38%). Average spending on prevention products ranges from €20 in Portugal to €30 in Italy.

#### Changes in daily life habits

For a majority of the Italian and Spanish populations, the coronavirus is having *some/a lot of impact on their financial situation* (55% and 56% respectively). This figure is significantly lower in Portugal (27%) and Belgium (33%). Similarly, most Italians and Spaniards report that COVID-19 is having *some/a lot of impact on their social life* (62% and 53%). Again, the statistic is lower in Portugal (29%) and Belgium (37%).

The vast majority of Italians (80%) have changed their day-to-day habits, such as working from home, avoiding public transportation and staying away from crowds. In Portugal (53%) and Spain (51%), a slight majority of the population has begun changing their daily routines, whereas the opposite occurs in Belgium (45%).

#### Level of confidence

Rather alarmingly, in no country does a majority *trust public authorities to effectively handle the situation*. These figures range from 36% in Belgium to 47% in Italy. In the four countries relevant shares of the population - Portugal (51%), Belgium (44%), Italy (36%), Spain (24%) - consider their *health system not prepared to face a potential big increase in the number of infected people*.

At the same time, in all countries except for Belgium, at least 60% of the population believes that the COVID-19 outbreak will bring serious damage to the economy.

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<sup>1</sup>**METHODOLOGY & SAMPLING:** An online questionnaire was elaborated in English, then translated and adapted to the national contexts. Answers were collected through an external panel of consumers. In the four countries a representative sample of the general population ranging from 18 to 74 years old was created. Answers have been weighted in order to reflect the distribution of the national populations in terms of gender, age (18-74 years old), regions and educational level. The results can be considered representative of the national population trends. Number of valid answers collected by country: BELGIUM: 1.008, ITALY:1.016, PORTUGAL: 1.006, SPAIN:1.016

### Special Focus: Italy and Spain

Following several impactful measures taken by the Italian and Spanish government on 10 March, Euroconsumers carried out two additional surveys. The first focusing on the entire Italian territory, while the second focuses primarily on Madrid.

In the newer survey into Italians' attitudes, we found that 83% of the population *strictly followed the recommendations of public authorities, such as washing their hands frequently, keeping distance from other people...* (up from 64%). Moreover, 97% of Italians changed their day-to-day habits (up from 80%). Furthermore, while the *level of trust in the ability of public authorities to effectively manage the crisis* did not significantly change, the number of Italians who *completely agree* that the coronavirus pandemic will *bring significant economic damage to the country* increased from 57% to 68%.

We also looked into the perceptions of the people of Madrid following the closing of all schools. Interestingly, the number of people reporting to be *well informed* about the coronavirus dropped from 42% to 32%, indicating that the population of Madrid had somewhat overestimated its understanding of COVID-19. Despite this, the percentage of people who *strictly/partly followed the recommendations of public authorities* did not vary. However, average expenditure has risen from €20 to €34. Alarming, the *level of trust in the ability of public authorities to effectively manage the crisis* has fallen from 46% to 39%.

### Conclusions

On the basis of our findings, Euroconsumers strongly believes that today is a unique opportunity for the EU institutions to prove they are up to the challenge. The coronavirus outbreak is a pan-European crisis which is currently impacting countries to different degrees. Hence, a coordinated approach is in order. The EU should explore both public health and economic measures to make sure that all Member States are prepared to deal with the potentially devastating impacts of a COVID-19 pandemic.

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Gathering five national consumer organisations and giving voice to a total of more than 1.5 million people, Euroconsumers is the world's leading consumer cluster in terms of innovative information, personalised services and defence of consumer's rights. Our organisations work closely with BEUC and Consumers International to ensure safe, fair and honest relations between consumers, businesses and public authorities.

