



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on October 10, 2011

European Poll: Fiscal Woes Take Back Seat to Climate-Change Fears

Europeans are more concerned about climate change than they are about their financial affairs, according to a new Eurobarometer poll conducted on behalf of the Climate Change Programme of the European Commission (EC). More than two-thirds of the public believe climate change is a serious problem, and nearly 80 percent say that tackling it will boost the economy and create jobs.

Pollsters tallied responses from almost 27,000 residents of the 27 European Union countries. They found that most Europeans view climate change as second only to poverty, hunger, and lack of drinking water (counted as a single concern) in terms of serious problems facing today's world. The global economic recession placed third on the list. In addition, 68 percent of respondents support the idea of taxing people based on energy use.



EU policy makers are jubilant, especially because these numbers are all up from a [similar survey](#) in 2009. "The fact that more than 3 out of 4 Europeans see improving energy efficiency as a way to create new jobs is a strong signal to Europe's decision makers," said Connie Hedegaard, European Commissioner for [Climate Action](#) (pictured, above left). "I see this poll very much as an encouragement also for us in the Commission to continue fighting for ambitious and concrete climate action in Europe."

Hedegaard unveiled the survey results Friday, the same day the EC published its [annual report](#) on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. It brags that as of last year "the EU succeeded in cutting emissions by 15.5% since 1990 while the economy grew by 41% over the same period."

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) paints a slightly different picture. [MMD Newswire](#) reported last week that Executive Secretary Ján Kubiš complained that Europe is the hardest-hit area of the world in what he called the "great recession." Moreover, he said carbon emissions increased during the past two decades in industrialized areas of Europe, though they decreased in developing countries. Kubiš called for a "new growth model ... that would have high human development and a light ecological footprint."

ECE's version of the economic situation in Europe may help explain why lawmakers in Great Britain are backpedaling on their former enthusiasm for environmental action. At his party's annual conference last week, Conservative leader George Osborne [observed](#), "Now we know that a decade of environmental laws and regulations are piling costs on the energy bills of households and companies." He still



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supports an international agreement but grumbled that Britain's feet are held to the fire even though its contribution to worldwide GHGs is less than two percent. "We're not going to save the planet by putting our country out of business," he declared, and therefore he committed to cutting emissions "no slower but also no faster than our fellow countries in Europe."

Even Prime Minister David Cameron, who has pledged to make his the "[greenest government ever](#)," made only passing mention of "green engineering" in his [closing address](#) to the conference. He is obviously aware that the red ink on his constituents' personal financial statements means more to them than his green message, now that the average annual household energy bill is almost £1,300 (more than \$2,000). The financial advisory service [Money Expert](#) surveyed UK households earlier this year and found that 69 percent believe "the government has not got it right when it comes to affordable energy and 'going green.'"

Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at [uSwitch](#), warns, "We are now just £207 or 14% away from hitting an affordability ceiling after which consumers will start rationing their usage as though they are living in the third world." Research by uSwitch, an online price comparison service, found that most people in the UK blame government's carbon-cutting policies for their huge energy bills. Robinson says UK politicians have a "£200 billion shopping list" of upcoming environmental projects. "Unfortunately for consumers," she adds, "British households can expect to be footing the bill."



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