



## **EUROBAROMETER 57.1**

### **EUROPEANS AND THE EURO**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Prepared by the European Opinion Research Group EEIG  
For the Directorate-General Health and Consumer Protection

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**Introduction:**

This survey of the twelve countries in the euro zone was undertaken in early 2002 and seeks to find out how people found out about the euro, how they accepted its arrival, the changes they have noted in their daily lives and overall impressions of this major economic and social change in Europe.

**Sources of Information:**

The first part of the survey looks at the various sources of help people received at the introduction of the euro.

While there were some broad general characteristics that emerged across the euro zone, there were also substantial variations in the figures from different countries.

The most important level of help was given by the media. Across the euro zone, an average of 45% of those polled quoted this as a source of help.

Apart from the Irish respondents (26%), the figures across the zone were broadly consistent ranging from 35% to 56%.

There must have been a high level of discussion during the introduction period as the second most important source of help was family and friends.

The average across the zone was 35% with the Portuguese (52%) being the best communicators while the Dutch (19%) were the most reticent.

Just behind the communication from family and friends was information received from banks (35%).

There was, however, a very wide variation of response ranging from Greece (16%) through Ireland (28%) to Austria, Belgium, Finland and Germany who all recorded polls of more than 40%.

A relatively high degree of independence was seen in the survey with an average 7% saying they didn't receive any help and 14% stating they didn't need any help.

In this latter group, Luxemburgers showed a high level of self-sufficiency with 24% in this category.

**Campaign for special groups:**

Across the euro zone, special information campaigns were run for particular groups such as the elderly, blind, deaf, mentally handicapped, etc.

A relatively high proportion (39%) of euro zone citizens were aware of these campaigns which indicated the high level of awareness generated by this programme.

The figures for those claiming to have benefited from this campaign were also high at 28%.

**Dual pricing:**

On the question of dual pricing, there appears to have been a broad acceptance of the euro throughout the countries surveyed in this exercise in the few months since the euro became the official currency of the twelve countries of the euro zone.

On average, 43% of people always looked at prices in euros and their old currency, while 11.5% only looked at the prices in euros – this total of 54% compares with an average of 15.6% who still look at the price in the old national currency.

France – the country with the largest percentage of those polled only looking at prices in their old currency (21%) also had the smallest percentage only looking at prices in euros.

At 6%, this figure was virtually half that of the euro zone average of 11.5%.

The importance of dual pricing was interestingly seen differently from a subjective and an objective viewpoint. Whereas when asked if you thought dual pricing was essential, 24% of the population believed it to be true.

However, when the question was rephrased to ask if people in general believed dual pricing was essential, the figure rose to 30%.

This implies that individual responders believed they were accepting the new currency better than their peer groups. As these figures were replicated across virtually the whole sample, and assuming the sampling techniques gave a fair representation of the countries' beliefs and opinions, then the data generated from the subjective opinions would appear to reflect opinions generally.

Again, the French figures show a strong attachment to their old currency with 43% on an individual basis believing it essential to have dual pricing compared with a euro zone average of only 24%.

The habit of converting cost into the old currency when looking at the price of an everyday product was substantially more frequent than when actually making the purchase.

This is probably due to the fact that the evaluation of the 'real price' is made prior to the actual moment of purchase.

Again, the French (46%) were most likely to convert to their old currency when looking at prices and the Irish (24%) least likely so to do.

Overall, there was less incidence of people looking back to the old prices when they were actually paying for everyday products.

When hearing a price expressed only in euros, an average of 40% of those polled across the euro zone always converted it to their old currency.

However, this figure hides a wide range of varying attitudes.

Irish people who always did this calculation represented marginally more than one in five of the population (21%), while one in two French people (51%) always calculated in this way.

When faced with dual pricing, by far the largest group of euro zone citizens (43%) always looked at both prices, while the second largest group (28%) sometimes looked at both prices.

What might be deemed full acceptance of the euro, i.e. where respondents only looked at the euro price, varied substantially across the euro zone where the average figure was 12%.

Comfort with the new currency in Greece where the people were giving up the drachma, Europe's oldest currency, was shown by the fact that more than one person in five (21%) now looked only at prices in euros.

The figure was also relatively high for the new currency in both Ireland (19%) and Portugal (15%).

At the other end of the spectrum, only 6% of the French sample looked solely at the new currency whereas 21% looked only at the 'old prices' shown in French francs.

The question of the importance of dual pricing was initially asked on an individual subjective basis, i.e. for you, how do you view dual pricing.

The practice of displaying both prices on items was raised and respondents were asked what they saw as the importance of showing the "old" and "new" price of a particular item.

Patterns of behaviour and attitudes to the new currency already established in the response to previous questions continued in this section.

Again, a large percentage of Greek respondents were seen to be early adopters of the new currency with 26% believing dual pricing to be "totally useless".

This compares with an average of 12% having the same view across the whole euro zone and only 4% in France.

Likewise, earlier patterns of behaviour were confirmed when an average 24% of respondents across the euro zone believed dual pricing to be essential compared with 43% in France.

### **How do you believe other people react to the euro?**

When this question was rephrased to ask what people in general required, a less adventurous stance in terms of accepting the new currency was taken.

Those considering the exercise of dual pricing to be either "fairly useless" or "totally useless" more than halved across the euro zone from being 28% of those polled to just 13%;

While the average figure for people across the euro zone believing dual pricing to be essential rose from 24% to 30% the figure in France rose from 43% to 52% - more than half the population.

Again, the comments made previously apply here and the author believes that if the sampling for the survey is structured to give an accurate cross section of the population in each euro zone country, the true indicator of euro zone attitude is based upon the first set of personal figures.

The fact that responders project a different pattern of behaviour from a larger group of which they are a "typical" member perhaps indicates that the individual subjective figures give a more accurate picture than the projections made about other people's behaviour.

### **The price of everyday items**

When looking at the price of an everyday product, responders were asked whether they ever thought in terms of their past national currency.

The largest percentage of the people polled(36%) said they always thought in their old currency. In France, this figure was 46% - the highest in the euro zone.

It is interesting to compare this attitude with a country such as Ireland where the transition from national currency to the euro seems to have been relatively painless with only 24% of those polled stating that they always thought in the old currency.

Looking at the figures from the reverse angle, the number of people across the euro zone who never thought in their old currency when looking at the price of an everyday product was on average 7%.

However, the Irish respondents in this category at 15% were more than twice the European average, and the Greeks and the Portuguese also showed signs of relatively high acceptance of the new currency as their figures were both 12%.

### **The price at the time of purchase**

The question was repeated but this time the moment of potential comparison with the old currency had passed to the moment of paying.

Expensive or luxury items have a relatively complex buying process often featuring a high degree of comparative shopping and price analysis.

However, when looking at the moment of paying for an everyday product the figures dropped here in comparison with those when the price was being looked at. This is probably because there is either no decision making process or it has already been made at the price assessment stage.

Compared with the 7% average of Europeans who never considered the cost in the old currency when they were looking at the price of everyday products, the 14% who never considered the cost in the old currency at the moment of purchase is a major shift.

### **Converting from euros to old currency**

Respondents in the euro zone were asked to what extent they converted to their old national currency when confronted with a sum in euros.

This is the real test of acceptance of a currency when it has a meaning and value in its own right and does not have to be set against more familiar reference points.

The same process is seen when people move from assessing heat in either centigrade or Fahrenheit or distance in miles or kilometres.

Once again, the average figures hide substantial country-by-country variations.

The average number of euro zone responders who always converted to their old currency when seeing or hearing a value in euros was 40%.

However, this figure hides a wide range of figures running from 21% in Ireland to 51% in France.

What gives a broader perspective is to look at those people who generally go through this exercise, i.e. those who "always" or "often" make the calculation.

In France, this group accounted for more than three-quarters of those polled and at 78% was substantially higher than the euro zone average of 68% and nearly twice as much as the 40% recorded in Ireland.

Those who never make the calculation are obviously totally at ease with the value and usage of the new currency.

Unsurprisingly, the previous French characteristics in this area emerge again with one in twenty (5%) not making the conversion compared with one in five (21%) in Ireland.

## How people make the calculations

The mechanics of doing the conversion range from mental arithmetic to electronic calculators.

The most popular way was by mental conversion with an average of one in two euro zone citizens (50%) always using this method.

A further 31% often used this method of calculation making a total of 81% in this category.

The data which stood out as the exception to the figures were the Irish figures where only 29% always used mental conversion. Although 26% often used the technique, the resulting figure was a relatively low total of 55%.

These low figures may be a reflection of the fact that a high percentage of Irish people did not have a need to convert from the euro as they felt at ease with the new currency.

8% of all Irish respondents said they never did mental calculations compared with a euro zone average of 3%;

It will be interesting to see in the future if, and by how much, the use of different techniques for calculating back from the euro to the old currency will decrease as the new currency becomes more accepted and familiar.

A relatively small percentage of people in the euro zone used a converter or pocket calculator to work out the prices in the old currency.

On average, only 8% of those polled always used this method of calculation; however a notable exception to this was France where 18% always used a calculator and 31% often did. Whether this is a reflection of suspicion over rates or a high level of distribution of purpose-built calculators is difficult to assess.

Although the Irish generally were unlikely to always or often use a calculator, the 37% who said they sometimes did was substantially above the average of 15%.

Use of a conversion table was of small significance in the euro zone and on average less than 8% of those polled always or often used them.

However, as in the example of the occasional use of a calculator in Ireland, more than 22% of the Spanish and Austrians and 28% of the Irish sometimes used a conversion table.

Overall, however, nearly three-quarters (74%) of those polled never used them.

Ultimately, pricing in euros will, for the great majority of people, become as natural as using the old currency and the techniques for calculating from euros to the old national currency are likely to fade away.

This process of change can be speeded up by steadily removing references to the old currencies thereby giving people no option but to work with the new currency.

### **Time scales on dual pricing**

The question as to how long dual pricing should be continued in shops brought a generally similar picture across the euro zone with the notable exception of France.

The overall feeling was that there was no need to have prices shown in the old currency any more.

Asked whether they needed dual pricing to be continued, 36% of those polled in the twelve member states of the euro zone said they didn't need pricing in their old national currency.

In six of the twelve countries, the figure exceeded 40%. This statistic makes the French figure of 17% stand out very strongly.

In fact, in France, the most popular time scale chosen by 33% of those polled was that dual pricing should continue for more than 6 months. This compares with a euro zone average of 19% for the same option.

Looking at the ultimate period for retention of dual pricing – always(!) – the euro zone average was 9%.

However, in France, one in five of those polled (20%) believed that where prices were displayed in shops, the French franc should be permanently retained in joint pricing with the euro.

The question of dual pricing was then looked at for a number of services – banks and utilities bills (electricity, phones etc).

The average figures across the euro zone showed a slight increase in those who said that dual pricing could be stopped immediately when compared with shops; this may be because these were more trusted suppliers of services than normal retail outlets or because there was more time to study the prices.

However, the French reaction from more than 20% of those polled for both banking and utilities was that dual pricing should continue for ever. This compares with an average figure of 10% across the whole euro zone.

### **Recognising the various euro coins**

The ability of the sample to recognise the various new coins differs substantially across the euro zone.

For example, when respondents were asked whether they found it very easy to recognise the different euro coins, the average across the zone was 24% - about a quarter of those polled.

However, this global figure bundles together just 14% of the Germans and the Dutch, 17% of the Belgians and the Irish, with 46% of the Spanish and a very large proportion (61%) of the Greeks.

When those respondents who found the new coins fairly easy to recognise were added to those who found them very easy to recognise, an average of more than two-thirds of citizens in the euro zone (68%) placed themselves in this category.

However, a quarter of those polled (25%) found the coins fairly difficult to recognise and in this group higher than average figures were noted for France (29%), Germany (36%), the Netherlands (34%) and Ireland (30%).

The group of responders who that recognising the different euro coins was very difficult constituted an average of 6% of all euro zone responders.

In this group experiencing the most difficulty, Ireland and France both had 12% of their sample which is a significant figure representing as it does one in eight of their population.

### **Recognising the various euro notes**

From the results of this survey, euro notes were much easier to distinguish than the coins.

On average, 42% of euro zone citizens found them very easy to recognise and 49% found them fairly easy.

These two groupings represent more than 90% of the euro zone population – substantially higher than the comparable figure of 68% gathered when looking at euro coins.

Only 7% found recognising the notes to be fairly difficult, a figure that again compares very favourably with the 25% who experienced the similar level of difficulty when recognising coins.

### **Difficulty in using coins to pay**

The survey then looked at the actual process of payment and asked respondents to assess the difficulty in actually using coins to settle bills.

As people become more used to recognising and handling the new European coins, and countries remove their old coinage from everyday usage, these figures are bound to improve. However, in the first few months of the coins' circulation the figures are relatively encouraging.

On average, more than a quarter of those polled (26%) found them very easy to use.

The Greeks, in particular, found the new coinage presented no problem and 59% were in this category.

At the other end of the scale, however, only 17% of Germans and Dutch found the coins very easy to use.

An average of 6% across the euro zone found using the new coins to pay was very difficult.

Substantially higher than the average were the figures collected from the Irish (12%) and the French (11%).

#### **Difficulty in using notes to pay**

When attention was focused on the difficulty of using euro notes to pay bills, the figures reflected the general ease of recognition achieved by the paper currency which is detailed in the previous section.

Accordingly, the use of notes to pay bills was seen to be easy or very easy by 91% of the euro zone.

#### **Number of coins**

One of the concerns expressed by many people across the euro zone was the number of coins in circulation with the new currency.

The results of Eurobarometer 57.1 show that the level of concern was very varied across the countries polled.

A quarter of the euro zone sample believed that having eight euro coins was not at all complicated and a further 34% believed this to be not very complicated.

However, 31% still found it fairly complicated and 9% very complicated.

It is difficult to assess whether these variations are based upon the number of coins that were previously in circulation in the particular local currency or whether the physical design (shape, size and colour) of the new euro currency made it difficult to distinguish between different coins.

As has been seen throughout this report, there were the usual divergences in this figure. For example, 32% of Greeks believed that having eight coins was not at all complicated while this figure falls to 14% in Belgium.

The Belgians were the largest group of people (48%) who believed that the new coins were fairly complicated. This may be because prior to the introduction of the euro, they had only to deal with five coins.

The percentage of those polled who found the new coins very complicated was 9% across the euro zone, with the Luxemburgers (21%) being marginally ahead of the Irish (20%) in this category. Although this total European average is less than 10%, the fact that one in five people in both Ireland and Luxembourg believe having eight coins is very complicated is a significant finding.

### **Small denomination coins**

As a possible reaction to both the number of coins in the euro zone wallet and the possibility that by eliminating the two smallest coins and thereby simplifying small financial operations, there has been a groundswell of opinion that the 1 and 2 cent coins should be withdrawn.

Across the euro zone, excluding the 6% of those polled who did not express an opinion, those who committed themselves were split on this question with 39% wishing to remove the two smallest denomination coins from circulation and 61% wishing to retain them.

It seems surprising that after only a few weeks usage of the new currency, more than one-third of the euro zone polled would happily see the demise of the two smallest coins.

In fact, in Greece and Luxembourg (57%), the Netherlands (56%), Ireland (55%), Austria (52%) and Belgium (51%) having the smallest euro coin in one's pocket being the 5 cent would be a decision welcomed by more than half of the population.

A counter-argument would be most keenly presented by Germany where 83% of the population who expressed a view believed that having the two coins was necessary to pay the exact amount and to stop prices going up.

### **Aesthetic qualities**

When asked whether it was a good thing to have a national side on euro coins, 58% of those polled believed it to be a good thing. Only 4% viewed it as being a bad thing, 6% didn't know and a surprisingly large number (32%) spontaneously said it didn't make any difference.

The countries which most strongly viewed the national symbol as 'a good thing' were the Luxemburgers (76%) and the Greeks (71%).

### **The mobile coin**

The euro had only been in circulation for a few weeks when this survey took place and people were asked whether they had seen euro coins from other countries.

Leaving aside the 12% of people whose off-the-cuff comment was that they didn't pay attention to this nor a similar group (3%) who said that they didn't even know that it existed, surprisingly, more than half those polled in the euro zone had seen coins from other countries.

This comprised those who had seen them very often (8%), fairly often (16%) and not very often (32%) and together presents strong visual evidence of business and social movement across the euro zone.

The place to be in order to see euro coins from other countries most frequently was Luxembourg where 33% of those polled said they saw them very often.

### **Rounding up? Rounding down?**

When the survey assessed people's personal opinions as to whether prices have been rounded up or rounded down following the introduction of the euro, there was a strong conviction that prices had been generally rounded up in all areas.

Across the euro zone, more than two-thirds of those polled (69%) were of this opinion and, in the Netherlands, this figure increased to 90% of the population.

By contrast, people in Austria believing this statement constituted only 41% of the population.

The poll then looked at specific retail and service areas to see if there were any noticeable variations from sector to sector or by different types of outlet.

When those polled looked at the retail and service sectors there was little difference between supermarkets (68%), small food shops (78%), other small shops (75%) and services, such as hairdressers and taxis (78%), all of which were judged to have either always or most often rounded up their prices.

Prices of products in vending machines and leisure activities, such as cinemas and swimming pools, were seen not to have increased quite as much with 62% of those polled saying the prices had either always or most often been rounded up.

In these last two areas, there was a degree of uncertainty about the whole question of price changes and the numbers of people unsure whether prices had changed represented 25% of those polled throughout the euro zone.

The don't knows also represented more than a quarter of those polled (27%) when the poll looked at bank charges. Relative to other businesses, the banks emerged fairly well with only 53% of the sample believing prices had been rounded up.

Public transport also emerged relatively well from these results.

Across the euro zone, 55% of those polled believed prices were always rounded up (24%) or most often rounded up (31%). Don't knows again featured strongly in these figures at 23% of the whole survey.

In the above sectors, there were no significant variations on a country-by-country basis.

The area where the highest percentage of those polled saw evidence of prices being rounded up was in cafés and restaurants.

In this domain, 41% of the total of those polled across the euro zone said that in the conversion to the new currency prices had always been rounded up and 43% said this had happened in most cases.

This gives a total of 84% of those polled believing prices had been rounded up in this business sector.

### **The euro logo**

Part of the campaign to promote the euro across Europe featured a special logo. This did not appear in Germany, Austria or the Netherlands, and, in the rest of the euro zone where it appeared, it had mixed results.

In Spain, the logo was seen by 61% of those polled, whereas in Greece only 27% of those polled noticed it.

Overall, the logo was seen by 50% of those polled with 45% saying they had not seen it – the balance did not know whether they had seen it or not.

### **Overall view on the changeover to the euro (people generally)**

The overall reaction to the changeover to the euro was researched towards the end of this survey.

When asked how the switch to the euro took place for people generally, the overall euro zone response was favourable.

While 58% of those polled said the change took place with some temporary difficulties, 20% said it took place without any difficulty.

Taking a negative viewpoint were fewer than one person in 20 (4.8%) who said the changeover took place with great difficulty.

The next least positive group (those who said it took place with some long-term difficulties) represented only 15% of those polled.

The average figures, however, hide some substantial variations on a country-by-country basis.

Amongst those who believed the changeover took place without any difficulty, the figures by country ranged from a very positive Ireland where 39% of those polled saw no problems in the changeover to a less than satisfied Italy where only 8% subscribed to this view.

However, when the responders who said the changeover took place with some temporary difficulties were counted, 66% of the Italian sample were in this camp while the Irish figure was 53%.

Among the countries who believed the changeover included some long-term difficulties were Portugal (31%) and France (24%) whose opinion was more negative than the euro zone average of 15%.

The smallest group to believe the changeover would bring some long-term difficulties came from Ireland where only 4% envisaged problems of this nature.

#### **Overall view on the changeover to the euro (for you personally...)**

When the same question was asked, but this time on a personal basis, an even brighter picture was painted.

Now, across Europe the changeover to the euro went without any difficulty for 35% of those polled compared with 20% in the previous formatting of the question.

This increase was shown in a decrease of both those who saw temporary difficulties (now 49% instead of 58%) and those who saw some long-term difficulties (now 11% instead of 15%).

Asking people their own personal feelings rather than asking them to project the views of their peer group should in theory give an accurate reflection of views held if the sampling criteria are correct.

**Introduction of the euro generally**

When asked on a subjective basis about the success of the introduction of euro notes and coins, 64% of the euro zone said that it went fairly well.

Regional variations were small in this group apart from Luxembourg and Ireland where the figures were lower at 43%.

However, this can be explained when the percentage of responders in these two countries who believed that the introduction went very well, produced exceptionally high figures of 51% - more than half of those polled.

The euro zone average for those who believed the introduction went very well was 18% but again this hides substantial variations ranging from 10% in Spain to the high levels of Ireland and Luxembourg detailed above.

Among those who took a contrary view and believed the change went fairly badly were 13% of the Spanish sample and 11% in France.

**Overall impressions of joining the euro zone**

When asked on a personal basis whether they were pleased that the euro had become their national currency, there was a wide variety of opinion across the euro zone.

While on average across the euro zone 14% of those polled said they were very pleased by the change, this figure contains a very wide diversity of opinion.

At one end of the spectrum, 34% of the Dutch respondents and 29% of the Irish were very pleased; however, this figure falls to 5% to the Portuguese, 8% for the French and 11% for the Greeks.

Similarly, in the fairly pleased category which had an overall average of 46%, individual country figures ranged from 59% to Portugal to 36% in Luxembourg.

The spontaneous answer that none of the options offered as responses to the question applied and that the euro was just a part of being European was cited by 9% of those polled.

Within this euro zone average was a substantial part of the French poll (22%) showing a general level of unhappiness with this aspect of the poll

### **Feeling European**

Across the euro zone, 36% of those polled tended to agree that by using euros instead of their national currency they felt more European than before.

Those who totally agreed were 12% of the euro zone population but this hides variances of between 32% in Luxembourg and 7% in Portugal.

Amongst those who did not feel more European were 24% of the Greek sample and 35% of the Dutch. On average, across the euro zone, 13% of those polled subscribed to this feeling.

A spontaneous response given by 20% of the whole euro zone sample was that it has nothing to do with how European we feel.

### **Being attached to the euro**

While the changeover has generally been seen to have been well-managed and people are becoming rapidly accustomed to using the new currency, the euro itself has not become a family friend for most euro zone inhabitants.

While 32% of those polled feel fairly attached to the euro, those that they feel very attached number only 8%.

On the other hand, those who are not very attached form 31% of the sample and those who are not at all attached total 23%.

These figures total more than half the euro zone inhabitants surveyed.