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Climate Risk Perception and Green Behavior in Belarus

Understanding how people perceive climate risks and what factors influence this perception is important for a shift towards more sustainable consumer behavior and thus a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This policy brief presents the results from a survey on the attitudes to climate change and environmentally responsive behavior among the urban Belarusian population aged 18-75. The findings show that 72.7 percent of the respondents consider climate change as a threat to the country in the coming 20 years. This climate risk perception, however, does not fully result in more sustainable consumer behavior in Belarus. The survey also reveals that the mass media, with the exception of the Internet, have no influence on the formation of people's attitudes toward climate change.



Global warming constitutes one of the major threats to humanity and an obstacle to achieving sustainable development. 72 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to households (IPCC, 2022), underlining the importance of individual behavioral changes to tackle global warming.

Acknowledging climate change as a risk is a precondition to shift people’s behavior towards sustainable practices (Le Coq and Paltseva, 2021). Thus, the objective of the study underlying this brief is to analyze whether the population in Belarus considers climate change as a threat, and which factors and media channels might have an effect on such perceptions. Additionally, the brief will explore whether climate change risk perceptions actually translate into more environmentally sustainable consumer behavior.

Climate Change as a Threat

The online-survey was conducted in April, 2022 among the urban population in Belarus aged 18-75. The purpose of the survey was to collect individual data on environmentally responsible behaviors and climate change perceptions. The sample includes 1029 individuals and is representative by age, gender and region. According to the survey, 72.7 percent of the respondents consider climate change as a threat to the country in the coming 20 years.

To explore which demographic and socio-economic variables (e.g., education, age, gender, income, and mass media) influence the perception of climate change as a risk among the Belarusian population, we employ a logistic regression model. The results reveal that gender, personal experience of extreme weather events and exposure to climate change information on the Internet play an important role in forming climate change risk perceptions among Belarusians, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Determinants of Climate Change Risk Perception

Dependent variable=1 if seeing climate change as a threat, and 0 otherwise	Coefficients	Marginal effects
Education	0.039 (0.053)	0.007 (0.010)
Gender	0.325** (0.148)	0.061** (0.028)
Age	-0.003 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.001)
Income	0.030 (0.086)	0.006 (0.016)
Household size	0.059 (0.120)	0.011 (0.022)
Experience of extreme weather events	1.345*** (0.257)	0.252*** (0.047)
TV	-0.059 (0.074)	-0.011 (0.014)
Newspapers	0.141 (0.091)	0.026 (0.017)
Radio	0.022 (0.087)	0.004 (0.016)
Internet	0.292*** (0.087)	0.055*** (0.016)
Constant	-0.391 (0.485)	

Note: Media channels are measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 0 denotes “Don’t use this media”; 1 “never” up until 4, “very often”, answering the question “How often do you come across the information about climate change, environmental problems or sustainable lifestyle on the following media?”. Standard errors are in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05 and * p<0.1

Women are 6.1 percent more likely to consider climate change as a threat than men. This could be due to a higher level of empathy exhibited by women, making them more worried about consequences of extreme weather events and environmental protection and more sensitive to the risk of environmental degradation (Milfont and Sibley, 2016). Respondents with personal experience from, or those who have close persons having suffered significant damage from severe weather events such as floods or violent storms in the past two years, are 25.2 percent more likely to perceive climate change as a risk. Thus, personal experience of severe weather events is one of the main factors that impact climate change risk perception. The literature also confirms that climate beliefs are linked to these experiences (see for instance Spence et al., 2011; Dai et al., 2015; Demski et al., 2017 and Bergquist et al., 2019).



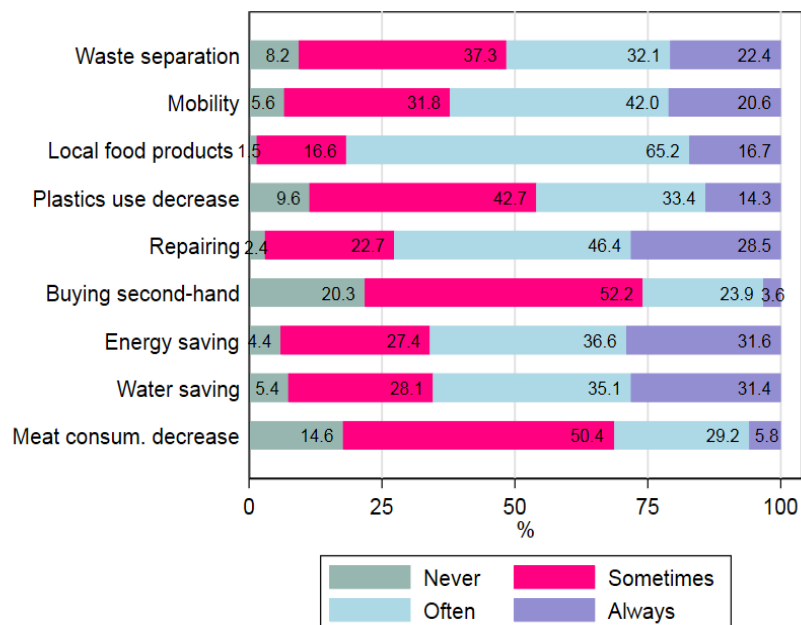
Interestingly, out of all types of mass media included in the analysis (TV, newspapers, radio and the Internet), only exposure to environmental information on the Internet makes individuals 5.5 percent more likely to take climate change seriously. This indicates that nowadays people in Belarus get independent analytical and expert information on climate problems mainly from the Internet.

Environmentally Responsible Behavior

The same survey data was used to analyze environmentally responsible behavior among the Belarusian population. Although more than 72 percent of the respondents consider environmental change as a threat, the climate risk perception does not fully project into more sustainable behaviors – even within this subgroup. As illustrated in Figure 1, this belief is

very well translated into such environmentally responsible actions as water saving, energy saving, mobility and repairing. The share of people engaged in these activities on a regular basis account for 62-73 percent. These behaviors are however financially beneficial to the practitioner, and may largely be because of economic reasons rather than an effort to minimize the impact on the environment. At the same time, the survey shows that people in Belarus less often engage in such environmentally friendly actions such as waste separation, reduced use of plastic bags or use of own bag when shopping (see Figure 1). These actions are not linked to any financial benefits and are often associated with higher time costs (e.g., waste separation) or loss of convenience (e.g., decreased plastics use). This suggests that environmentally responsible behavior among the Belarusian population is largely determined by external factors, rather than a product of intrinsic care of the environment.

Figure 1. Frequency of Environmentally Responsible Behaviors Among the Respondents who Consider Climate Change as a Risk



Note: Distribution of the answers to the question “Could you please evaluate on a scale from 1 (never) to 4 (always) how often you engage in these behaviors for environmental reasons?” Mobility represents walking, biking or using public transportation instead of a car. Repairing means choosing to reuse or repair something (e.g. clothes) rather than to throw it away.



Conclusion

Survey results show that the urban population in Belarus recognizes global warming as a serious problem, with 72.7 percent of the respondents seeing climate change as a threat to the country in the next 20 years. However, these beliefs have not yet fully projected into green consumption behavior.

With this in mind, efforts to shift Belarusians towards environmentally responsive behavior should be strengthened. Endeavors need to be made to raise public awareness of environmental issues and to promote a sustainable lifestyle among the Belarusian population. In particular, and in addition to the Internet, the role of mass media (such as television, radio and print media) to deliver the message on the need for more sustainable consumption and greater involvement in environmentally friendly actions, ought to be increased.

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