The general public and climate change 2008

The general public’s knowledge of and attitude to climate change, with the focus on people’s own actions and the responsibilities of companies
The questions relating to the general public’s knowledge of and attitude to climate change, including acceptance of measures, were put to 1 000 people between 8 and 22 September 2008. Equivalent questions have been asked every year since 2002. The term “greenhouse effect” has been replaced by “climate change” since the 2007 survey.

The questions concerning the views of the general public on the efforts of companies to deal with climate change were asked between 15 and 18 September 2008, the questions concerning attitudes and consumer behaviour between 22 and 26 September 2008 and the question concerning how people wish to receive information was asked between 15 and 21 October 2008. All these questions were put to 1 000 people as part of an omnibus (multi-purpose) survey.

Data were collected for all the questions by telephone interview.

The survey company ARS Research AB carried out the various opinion surveys presented in this report on behalf of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency.

Worries over a financial downturn may have influenced views on the significance of the issue of climate change in all the surveys. The global financial crisis of the autumn of 2008 began in the United States on Monday 15 September.

This summary and the background reports and tables on which it is based can be downloaded from www.naturvardsverket.se/klimat.

This report is also available in Swedish: ISBN 978-91-620-5904-0 and ISSN 0282-7298.
Foreword

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has surveyed the Swedish population’s knowledge of and attitude to climate change since 2002. The results of the new survey in 2008, which are presented in this report, can be summarised as follows:

- The readiness of Swedes to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions has continued to increase, despite the issue of climate change not being considered quite as important as in 2007, when it dominated media reporting. At the same time, the general public want more information on how emissions can be reduced.

- Swedes are prepared to support those companies that take the lead in dealing with climate change, but they regard companies as poor at marketing their climate efforts and express a wish for climate-friendly products and services to be labelled.

- Swedes consider it “very important” that people in Sweden take measures to deal with climate change.

The general conclusion from the 2008 survey is that the level of commitment of the general public on the issue of climate change remains high and that people are now prepared to move on from words to action.

Jessica Cederberg Wodmar, project leader for climate communication at the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, was responsible for this assignment.

Stockholm, November 2008
Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
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What prevents you from living in a climate-aware way?
In brief, did you know that…

… 100 per cent of respondents spontaneously acknowledge having “heard mention of” climate change, up from 96 per cent in 2002 (when the question related to “the greenhouse effect”).

… 96 per cent believe that Sweden has already been or will be affected by climate change, up from 92 per cent in 2002.

… 55 per cent of the above think that we have already been affected, up from 48 per cent in 2002.

… 71 per cent consider it very important that we in Sweden take action to deal with climate change, down from 76 per cent in the record year of 2007 but up from 63 per cent in 2002.

… 84 per cent think that we in Sweden can do something to curb climate change, down from 88 per cent in 2007 but up from 82 per cent in 2002.

… 80 per cent think that we in Sweden can do something to curb climate change, down from 81 per cent in 2007 but up from 68 per cent in 2002.

… at least 50 per cent can “definitely” imagine taking action to reduce emissions in 13 out of 14 listed areas.

… 86 per cent can “definitely” imagine buying energy-efficient domestic appliances (compared with 84 per cent in 2007) and 76 per cent taking a train instead of flying (compared with 71 per cent in 2007).

… 67 per cent feel that more information to households on climate change would be useful in persuading households to choose goods and services that reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

… 67 per cent would like to receive information on how they can reduce their climate impact through news in the media, while there is demand for other information channels from between 21 and 46 per cent.

… 58 per cent consider that extra taxes and duties, for example on petrol, oil and aviation, would be good or quite good, down from 64 per cent in 2007 but up from 51 per cent in 2002.

… 62 per cent “definitely” or “probably” prefer to buy goods from companies they know to make efforts to limit climate change, down from 69 per cent in 2007.

… 76 per cent can “definitely” or “probably” imagine paying more for an article or service if they know that the company that produces it makes efforts to limit climate change, down from 82 per cent in 2007.

… 82 per cent think that it will become “more important” for companies to make a commitment to reduced emissions, down from 88 per cent in 2007.

… 51 per cent think that the costs to companies of emitting greenhouse gases will increase, down from 57 per cent in 2007.

… 68 per cent think that companies are poor at reporting what they do to limit greenhouse gas emissions, down from 78 per cent in 2007.

… 91 per cent think that it would be useful to have ecolabelling of goods and services with low greenhouse gas emissions, down from 92 per cent in 2007.

… 91 per cent consider themselves environmentally aware.

… 52 per cent sometimes have a bad conscience about doing something that may have a negative climate impact.

… 69 per cent feel that it is important in the circles they mix in to be aware of their climate impact.

… 84 per cent have taken at least one measure to reduce their climate impact in the past two years.

… 68 per cent make the actual choice of often or sometimes choosing a product or service with less environmental impact.

… 74 per cent mention price as the greatest obstacle to choosing environmentally friendly and climate-friendly alternatives.
Knowledge of climate change
Awareness of climate change

“Have you heard mention of climate change?”

The proportion who are spontaneously aware of climate change is 97 per cent in 2008, up from 89 per cent in 2002 (when the question related to “the greenhouse effect”).

If those who state that they have “heard mention of” climate change are included, the proportion rises to 100 per cent, up from 96 per cent in 2002.

Will we in Sweden be affected, and if so when?

“Do you think that climate change is something that affects those of us who live in Sweden now or will do so in the future?”

The proportion who “definitely” think that we in Sweden have been affected or will be affected is 80 per cent in 2008, marginally lower than in the previous four years and substantially higher than in 2002. If those who responded with “yes, maybe” are included, the proportion in 2008 is 96 per cent.

Those who answered the above question with “yes” were also asked when they thought we would be affected. 55 per cent responded with “already affected now”, 10 percent “in a few years”, 18 per cent in 10-20 years and 9 per cent in 30–50 years.
Action on the climate issue and on other social issues

“How important do you consider it to be that we in Sweden take action in various social areas? How important is it that we try to deal with...”

The proportion who think that it is “very important” that we in Sweden take action to deal with climate change has steadily increased every year since the baseline year of 2002, the only area where this has happened.

The proportion rose from 63 to 69 per cent between 2002 and 2006. There was a sharp rise to 76 per cent in 2007, during heavy reporting on climate issues, and in 2008 the proportion was 71 per cent.

In 2008, 78 per cent of women and 64 per cent of men considered action to deal with climate change to be “very important”.

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What is possible and what targets and instruments are required?
Is there anything we in Sweden can do?

“Do you think that there is anything we in Sweden can do to curb climate change?”

The proportion who “definitely” think that there is something we in Sweden can do to curb climate change is 58 per cent in 2008. The proportion has been higher in the past three years than in the four preceding years.

The overall proportion who responded with “definitely” or “yes, maybe” is 84 per cent.

The proportion was 90 per cent among women and 79 per cent among men.

Is there anything you can do yourself?

“Do you feel that there is anything you yourself can do to curb climate change and changes to the Swedish climate?”

The proportion who “definitely” feel that they themselves can do something to curb climate change and changes to the Swedish climate is 51 per cent in 2008, down from 55 per cent in 2007, but up on previous years.

The overall proportion who responded with “definitely” or “yes, maybe” is 80 per cent.

The proportion was 84 per cent among women and 74 per cent among men.
Acceptance of action people can imagine for themselves

“Climate change arises principally as a result of emissions of carbon dioxide, from households and elsewhere. Which of the following could you imagine doing to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and curb climate change?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Yes, definitely</th>
<th>Yes, maybe</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>No, hardly</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buying energy-efficient domestic appliances the next time I replace them</td>
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<td>Driving in a more fuel-efficient way, eco-driving</td>
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<td>Taking a train instead of flying, if possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Car-sharing on the way to work/school or for leisure</td>
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<td>Reducing electricity consumption in the home</td>
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<td>Choosing a more environmentally friendly product even if it is more expensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choosing a more environmentally friendly car next time</td>
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<td>Travelling more by public transport</td>
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</table>

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The combined proportion who responded to the various questions with “definitely” is substantially higher in 2008 than in previous years. A majority can “definitely” imagine taking action in 13 of the 14 enumerated areas. The most popular choices would be to buy energy-efficient household appliances (86 per cent), drive in a more fuel-efficient way (77 per cent) and take a train instead of flying (76 per cent), while the least popular choices are travelling more by public transport (54 per cent) and eating less meat (40 per cent).

The actions for which acceptance has increased most quickly over the past year are travelling more by public transport (from 45 to 54 per cent) and taking a train instead of flying (from 71 to 76 per cent). Increased acceptance of car-sharing more (from 54 to 59 per cent) and driving less (from 53 to 57 per cent) can also be noted.

The actions for which acceptance has increased most throughout the seven-year period are driving less (from 33 to 57 per cent), lowering the temperature indoors (from 36 to 59 per cent) and driving more slowly (from 41 to 63 per cent). The areas in which acceptance has increased least are choosing a more environmentally friendly product (from 59 to 67 per cent) and car-sharing more (from 53 to 59 per cent).

Women generally take a more positive view of action to reduce their own emissions.
Government instruments aimed at limiting carbon dioxide emissions

“How could we curb climate change?” Here are three suggestions.

**Information to households**
Would it be useful or not useful to provide households with more information on climate change and persuade them to choose goods and services that reduce carbon dioxide emissions? Would it be useful, quite useful or not useful?

**Grants/lowered taxes**
Would it be useful or not useful if the government used tax money to provide grants or lowered taxes for the purchase of goods and services that reduce carbon dioxide emissions? Would it be useful, quite useful or not useful?

**Extra taxes and duties**
Would it be useful or not useful if the government charged extra taxes and duties on goods and services that are not as environmentally friendly, for example on petrol, oil and flights that produce large carbon dioxide emissions? Would it be useful, quite useful or not useful?

There have been relatively stable replies relating to the three areas throughout the survey period, but it may be noted that the proportion of respondents who consider the three instruments mentioned to be useful was slightly down in 2008 on the previous year.
How do people wish to receive information about reduced climate impact?

“Increased knowledge can contribute to the general public reducing their climate impact, for example by reducing their energy use. How would you like to receive information from authorities about how to reduce your impact on the climate?”

As many as 67 per cent would like to receive information about how they can reduce their climate impact through “news in the media”. This is down on the figure for 2007 but up on 2006. There is demand for other information channels from between 21 and 46 per cent.
The climate efforts of companies

Note that the questions relating to the climate efforts of companies were put to the general public between 15 and 18 September 2008, and that the global financial crisis began on 15 September. The financial crisis may have influenced responses.
Willingness to buy from companies that make efforts to limit climate change

“When you buy goods or services, do you prefer to buy them from a company you know to make efforts to limit climate change?”

A combined total of 62 per cent of respondents state that they “definitely” (18 per cent) or “probably” (44 per cent) prefer to buy goods from companies they know to make efforts to limit climate change, while 32 per cent state that they do not prefer to do so.

More women respond with “definitely” (21 per cent) than men (15 per cent).

The proportion answering this question with yes was lower in 2008 than in the three previous years.

Willingness to pay more when buying from companies that make efforts to limit climate change

“Could you imagine paying slightly more, let’s say 5 per cent more, for an article or service if you know that the company that produces it makes efforts to limit climate change?”

A combined total of 76 per cent state that they “definitely” (33 per cent) or “probably” (43 per cent) can imagine paying more for an article or service if they know that the company that produces it makes efforts to limit climate change.

The proportion who can “definitely” imagine paying more fell in 2008 in comparison with 2007 and is now down to roughly the same level as in 2006.

Women are generally somewhat more inclined to pay extra for an article or service.
Importance of companies making a commitment to reduced emissions

“Do you think that, over the next 5–10 years, it will be more important, less important or just as important as today for companies to make a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions?”

The proportion who think that it will be “more important” for companies to make a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is 82 per cent, while 12 per cent reply “equally important” and only 3 per cent “less important”.

The proportion who think it will be “more important” fell in 2008.

Costs to companies of emitting greenhouse gases

“Do you think that the costs to companies of emitting greenhouse gases should be increased, reduced or unchanged in comparison with today?”

The proportion who think that the costs to companies of emitting greenhouse gases should be increased was 51 per cent, while 26 per cent think that the costs should be unchanged and 11 per cent that they should be reduced.

The proportion who want the costs to be increased was down in 2008.
Are companies good at marketing their climate efforts?

“Do you think that companies are good or poor in reporting what they do to limit greenhouse gas emissions in their marketing of their goods and services?”

One in four people consider companies to be very good (2 per cent) or quite good (23 per cent) at reporting what they do to limit greenhouse gas emissions, while more than two-thirds of people consider companies to be very poor (21 per cent) or quite poor (47 per cent) at doing so.

The proportion who consider companies to be good is up on previous years.

Ecolabelling for low greenhouse gas emissions

“Would it be useful or not useful for there to be ecolabelling so that you can tell which goods and services are produced with low greenhouse emissions?”

As many as 91 per cent think that it would be useful to have ecolabelling of goods and services with low greenhouse gas emissions. 64 per cent reply “very useful” and 27 per cent “quite useful”.

Among women, 68 per cent consider that it would be very useful, while the equivalent proportion for men is 59 per cent.
Attitudes and consumer behaviour
Are you climate-aware?

“Do you regard yourself as a person who is climate-aware?”

Nine out of every ten respond that they regard themselves as climate-aware. One in four respond with “yes, definitely” and two-thirds respond with “yes, to some extent”.

More men (29 per cent) than women (23 per cent) “definitely” regard themselves as climate-aware.

Do you have a bad conscience about your climate impact?

“Does it happen that you have a bad conscience when you do things you believe have a negative impact on climate?”

Half reply that it happens that they have a bad conscience when they do things they believe have a negative impact on climate. Of these, 10 per cent reply that they often have a bad conscience because of this and 42 per cent reply that they sometimes do.

Despite a higher proportion of men than women considering themselves climate-aware, a substantially lower proportion of men reply that they have a bad conscience if they do things that have a negative impact on climate.
**Is it important among your friends to be climate-aware?**

“Is it important or unimportant among the people you mix with to be aware of and think about your climate impact?”

Seven out of every ten respondents say that it is important in the circles they mix in to be aware of and think about their climate impact. 12 per cent respond with “very important” and 57 per cent “important”.

The replies of women and men to this question are roughly the same.

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**How have you reduced your climate impact?**

“Have you done anything in your everyday life to reduce your impact on climate in the past two years, for example with regard to...”

As many as 84 per cent separate their waste more. 78 per cent of respondents say that they have done something about their energy consumption in the home. Two-thirds (62 per cent) have done something with regard to daily transport and an equal number (62 per cent) with regard to re-using things. Four out of every ten (43 per cent) have changed their meat consumption and one-third (33 per cent) have changed their holiday travel.

The difference between the genders is marginal in most areas. A lower proportion of women (35 per cent) than men (41 per cent) respond with “yes, definitely” when asked whether they have done anything about their energy consumption in the home, and more women (47 per cent) than men (40 per cent) respond that they have reduced their meat consumption.
How often do you think about climate in your choice of product or service?

“How often do you make the actual choice of opting for a product or service you believe to have less negative impact on climate?”

68 per cent respond that they often (24 per cent) or sometimes (44 per cent) make the actual choice to opt for a product or service they believe to have less negative impact on climate. 23 per cent respond that they rarely do so and only 7 per cent respond that they never do so.

Among both men and women 24 per cent respond with “often”, while a larger proportion of women (46 per cent) respond with “sometimes” than men (41 per cent).

What prevents you from living in a climate-aware way?

“You will now be asked a few questions about what may prevent you from living in a way that reduces your climate impact.”

The greatest obstacle appears to be considering environmentally friendly and climate friendly alternatives usually to be more expensive. 74 per cent regard this as an obstacle. In second place, and perhaps linked to the first, it is stated that there are too few environmentally and climate friendly alternatives to choose from. 66 per cent respond in this way.

65 per cent respond that it is their own ingrained habits that prevent them living in a way that reduces their climate impact, while half (49 per cent) respond that they lack information on how best to reduce their climate impact.

45 per cent of men and 52 per cent of women respond that lack of information is an obstacle.
The general public and climate change 2008

The general public’s knowledge of and attitude to climate change, with the focus on people’s own actions, consumer behaviour and the responsibilities of companies

- The readiness of Swedes to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions has continued to increase, despite the issue of climate change not being considered quite as important as in 2007, when it dominated media reporting. At the same time, the general public want more information on how emissions can be reduced.

- Swedes are prepared to support those companies that take the lead in dealing with climate change, but they regard companies as poor at marketing their climate efforts and express a wish for climate-friendly products and services to be labelled.

- Swedes consider it “very important” that we in Sweden take action to deal with climate change.

The general conclusion from the 2008 survey is that the level of commitment of the general public on the issue of climate change remains high and that people are now prepared to move on from words to action.