

# **Survey of the interest in food safety and risk perception in Switzerland**

## **Management Summary**

**1 March 2021**

From 9 September to 11 October 2020 DemoSCOPE, on behalf of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office FSVO, carried out a survey on “the interest in food safety and risk perception in Switzerland”. The methodology of the survey involved the “Mixed-Mode-Design CAWI<sup>1</sup>/CATI<sup>2</sup> and thus optionally telephone or online questionnaires. The content of the survey followed that of the Eurobarometer 2019 on food safety<sup>3</sup>, carried out on behalf of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) between 9 and 26 April 2019 in 28 EU Member States. Consequently, the study planned by the FSVO is intended to offer insights into similar topics in order not only to determine the situation in Switzerland but also to enable comparisons between Switzerland and neighbouring EU countries. The focus of the research interest is, in analogy with the Eurobarometer 2019, the overall interest of the Swiss population in food safety, including those factors that affect decisions relating to food, the main information channels on food-related risks, changes in behaviour and views on the complexity of communication about food-related risks. In addition, it is intended to keep sight of the awareness and risk perceptions when it comes to food safety topics, the trust in different sources of information and understanding of the Swiss food safety system. A total of 1107 people throughout Switzerland and aged above 15 were questioned. The questionnaire was carried out in accordance with the Standards SWISS INSIGHTS and ESOMAR.

The major findings are summarised below and compared point by point with those of Switzerland’s neighbouring countries<sup>4</sup> in the EU.

**In spite of a high personal interest in the topic of food safety, it is less important than other factors for the Swiss population when buying food.**

- By far the most important factor for people living in Switzerland when buying foodstuffs is the origin of the food (70 %). Other important aspects are the taste (48 %) and the cost (46 %).
- Nutrient content is considered slightly less important (39 %), while food safety at 33 per cent and ethics or beliefs at 31 per cent (e.g. considerations of animal welfare, environmental concerns or religion) rank lower in importance .
- Nonetheless, 74 per cent of the Swiss population say that they are personally interested in the topic of food safety. Moreover, two out of three respondents (65 %) currently consider that a healthy diet is important. When they envisage the situation in 10 years, then three out of 4 respondents (74 %) consider a healthy diet to be important.
- As a determining selection factor when buying food, with reference to Switzerland’s neighbouring countries<sup>5</sup>, food safety achieves a figure (32 %) in Austria comparable to that in Switzerland. With the exception of Italians (61 %), the Germans (50 %) and the French (46 %) have a similar response to that of the average European (50 %).

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<sup>1</sup> CAWI = Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (Online-Interview)

<sup>2</sup> CATI = Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (telephonic interview)

<sup>3</sup> see. Eurobarometer 91.3, Food Safety in the EU, April 2019. Link to the publication: [https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate\\_publications/files/Eurobarometer2019\\_Food-safety-in-the-EU\\_Full-report.pdf](https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/Eurobarometer2019_Food-safety-in-the-EU_Full-report.pdf) [Last consulted 15.01.2021].

<sup>4</sup> Namely Germany, Austria, France and Italy.

<sup>5</sup> see Eurobarometer 91.3, Food Safety in the EU, April 2019. Link to the data sheets of Germany, Austria, France and Italy: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/de/corporate/pub/eurobarometer19> (Last consulted: 15.01.2021). All further references and comparisons with the Swiss neighbouring countries refer to this data source.

**About one out of ten persons in Switzerland stated that food safety is their major concern when choosing foodstuffs.**

- Slightly more than one tenth of the Swiss population (12 %) stated that safety is their main concern when choosing foodstuffs.
- Almost one third (31 %) described food safety as one of several concerns when choosing foodstuffs. Only a small proportion of respondents (5 %) stated that safety does not concern them, because they assume that their body can handle food safety risks.
- Almost half of the respondents (49 %) stated that they take it for granted that the food sold is safe. In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, this view was significantly more frequent than in the other language regions.
- In comparison, food safety in Switzerland's neighbouring countries was the greatest concern of respondents in Austria (13 %), Germany (16 %), Italy (24 %) and France (25 %) when choosing foodstuffs. In this regard, people resident in Switzerland consequently showed a similar response to that of the Austrians.

**The Swiss population has a very high level of awareness of food safety topics. The three most frequently reported concerns relate to antibiotics, hormones and steroids in meat, pesticide residues and environmental pollutants.**

- The resident population in Switzerland has a very high level of awareness of food safety topics. Seven out of ten respondents (69 %) have heard about at least 8 of the 15 topics listed. Almost two fifths of the respondents (39 %) even knew at least 12 of the 15 topics. In contrast, 55 per cent of Europeans had heard of at least 8 of the 15 topics. Thus, in comparison to the Europeans, the awareness of food safety in Switzerland is above the average.
- Respondents are most likely to be concerned about antibiotic, hormone or steroid residues in meat (62 %), followed by pesticide residues in food (56 %) and environmental pollutants in fish, meat or dairy products (43 %). A good third of the Swiss population is concerned about additives such as colorants, preservatives or flavours in foods or drinks, and microplastics found in food.
- Less than half of the respondents (45 %) think that food products are full of harmful substances.
- The ranking of the three most worrying issues of concern in relation to foodstuffs in Switzerland is all in all identical with that from the Eurobarometer Study 2019. However, they have lower per cent values: for the Europeans the figures for antibiotics, hormones and steroids in meat were 44 per cent, for pesticides 39 per cent and environmental pollutants 37 per cent.

**Television, newspapers and magazines as well as the internet (excluding social media) are the three most frequent information sources about food risks for people resident in Switzerland.**

- More than half of the Swiss population state that television (56 %), newspapers and magazines (54 %) and the internet, excluding social media, (53 %) are among their main sources of information on foodstuffs. They are followed by family, friends and neighbours (45 %), the radio (31 %) and technical journals (27 %). A quarter of the respondents (25%) cited social media as their main source of information.
- Young people in Switzerland mention social media more often than older respondents (49 % of 15-24 year olds, falling to 16 % of those aged 55 or over) and other information from the internet (64 % vs. 40 %). However, older people are more likely to mention television (68% of those aged 55 or over, falling to 33 % of 15-24 year olds), newspapers and magazines (69 % vs. 34 %) and radio (39 % vs. 17 %).

**Three quarters of the Swiss population have changed their consumption behaviour as a result of information on food risks**

- Three quarters of the resident population in Switzerland (76 %) say that they have changed their consumption behaviour as a result of information that they have heard or read about a food risk. Specifically, 45 % made a permanent change and 31% changed their consumption behaviour for a while.
- Permanent changes in consumption behaviour are observed to be more common among women (51 % of women vs. 39 % of men), persons older than 40 (53 % of those older than 40, decreasing to 21 % of 15-24 year olds) and those with higher levels of education (54 % of higher educated persons, decreasing to 29 % of less educated persons).
- Both in the overall comparison with all 28 EU countries (66 %) and in the direct comparison with neighbouring countries (DE: 75 % / AT: 62 % / FR: 69 % / IT: 61 %), the information on food risks has the greatest influence on permanent or temporary consumption behaviour in Switzerland (76 %) and in Germany (75 %).

**In Switzerland, scientists and consumer organisations are the most trusted sources on food risks.**

- People resident in Switzerland are most likely to trust consumer organisations (86 %) and scientists (83 %) for information on food-related risks. Other information sources are Swiss institutions (80 %), national authorities (80 %), farmers (69 %) and non-governmental organisations (53 %).
- A minority of respondents say they trust supermarkets and restaurants (46 %), journalists (41 %), food industries (28 %) and celebrities, bloggers and influencers (7 %).
- Europeans also consider scientists and consumer protection organisations (82 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) as the most trusted sources of information.

**In Switzerland, people are well aware of the existence and functionality of the food safety system.**

- Just over seven out of ten people in Switzerland (72 %) know that the federal administration, when deciding how risky the consumption of a foodstuff could be, is instructed by the advice of scientists.
- Two out of three respondents (67 %) say 'there are regulations in place to make sure that the food you eat is safe'.
- Almost every second person (48 %) knows that the federal administration has a separate institution that provides scientific advice on the safety of food.
- Both in comparison to the neighbouring countries (DE: 49 % / AT: 42 % / FR: 36 % / IT: 32 %) and to the European average (43 %), Switzerland is more aware of the relevant rules and regulations (67 %) and the general functioning of the food safety system.

**The coronavirus has little influence on the majority of the Swiss population in regard to their perception of food safety.**

- Three out of four residents in Switzerland (75 %) state that their perception of food safety has not changed since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. For more than a fifth (22 %), their perception of food safety has been influenced since the beginning of the first wave of the pandemic.