

THE SUSTAINABILITY REALITY CHECK

Will climate urgency become
an everyday reality?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article draws on the [Ipsos Market Essentials Sustainability Report Will Climate Urgency Become an Everyday Reality?](#) (September 2026), based on research across 15 countries.*

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Concern about climate change remains high.** But the sense that immediate action is needed has softened and the perceived threat is shifting from personal to global.
- 2. Cost-of-living pressures are reshaping what people are willing to do.** Sustainable choices that also save money are holding steady, while costlier, more demanding behaviours are declining.
- 3. People increasingly expect governments and businesses – not individuals – to lead,** and want organisations to demonstrate action on their behalf.
- 4. Sustainability is becoming increasingly connected to health, wellbeing and trust,** making it more relevant to everyday consumer decisions.
- 5. For businesses, the opportunity lies in making the sustainable choice easier, more affordable and more directly relevant** to what people already care about.

*Ipsos Essentials surveys 500 respondents per month in Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom, and 1,000 respondents per month in the U.S. and Canada.



The following sections unpack each of these shifts in more detail.

INTRODUCTION



This summer, climate change has felt less like a distant future and more like a disruption to everyday life.

Across the northern hemisphere, exceptional heat, wildfires, and prolonged drought have brought the consequences of a changing climate into sharper focus. [Ipsos research conducted for AXA](#) finds that three-quarters of the public now feel vulnerable to climate change in their daily lives, while a majority in almost every country surveyed say their infrastructure is not sufficiently adapted to future climate change.

Yet there is a paradox at the heart of the sustainability landscape in 2026. As climate change becomes more tangible, the urgency to act is competing with something equally tangible: the realities of everyday life. Cost of living, economic uncertainty, health, and security are all shaping what people feel able and willing to do.

Sustainability is being renegotiated.



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CLIMATE CHANGE IS BECOMING MORE TANGIBLE – BUT ALSO MORE DIFFICULT TO PRIORITISE

A summer marked by extreme weather appears to have interrupted a longer-term softening of urgency to act on climate change. In the Ipsos Market Essentials Sustainability Report [Will Climate Urgency Become an Everyday Reality](#) the share who say we must act now on the environment has been falling steadily from 49% in August 2022 to 40% in May 2026. But following the severe weather experienced by many over the summer, this proportion rebounded to 43% in August 2026.

Similarly, whilst we've seen an increase in recent years in the segment of the population most disengaged with sustainability, the most recent data shows that this growth has slowed. The share of those who believe there is still time to act has also risen from 29% (August 2022) to

34% (August 2026), suggesting that direct experience of the impacts of climate change has renewed attention to sustainability (even if it has not yet translated into widespread behavioural change).

Despite obvious evidence of climate disasters, citizens have psychologically distanced themselves from climate risks: only 17% see climate change and natural disasters as a high risk to them personally, compared with 52% who see it as a high risk to the world. Climate change, in other words, is still more likely to be experienced as a global threat than a personal one.

[Recent Ipsos polling in Great Britain](#), conducted during the summer heat, illustrates this clearly. Seven in ten people were already concerned about climate change before the summer, rising to 74% today. 87% think Britain is likely to experience similar heatwaves in future summers, while 56% say this summer's weather has affected their ability to carry out normal activities such as working, exercising or sleeping.



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The cost of living has changed the sustainability equation

The economics of sustainability are becoming increasingly difficult to separate from the economics of everyday life.

Sustainability becomes **easier to sustain when it also makes economic sense.**

Recent [Ipsos Market Essentials](#) research shows that rising prices and inflation continue to dominate consumer concerns globally, revealing the extent to which financial pressures are shaping everyday decision-making. In this environment, asking consumers to pay more for sustainable products or make costly lifestyle changes is increasingly difficult. **43% say sustainable options are too expensive, unchanged since August 2025 and 56% say governments should focus on helping the economy first and foremost, even if it means taking actions that could be bad for the environment.**

Yet people have not simply stopped making sustainable choices. They are making choices that feel more realistic. Behaviours that combine environmental and economic benefits – such as recycling, using low-energy lightbulbs, hang-drying clothes and reducing car use – are holding up better. More demanding behaviours, including avoiding air travel, buying renewable

energy or adopting a mostly plant-based diet, are proving less resilient.

At the same time, the cost of climate change is becoming harder to ignore. This summer's extreme heat offers a glimpse of what that can mean in everyday life: households are considering investments to keep their homes cool, but **almost two in five people who are not planning further cooling measures say effective options are simply too expensive.**

Climate change is becoming an affordability trap, as the costs of trying to address it seem out of reach, while inaction brings with it its own hidden costs of adaptation.

For businesses, this shifts the question. It is no longer simply about persuading consumers to pay for sustainability. It is about making sustainable and resilient choices economically viable in the first place.

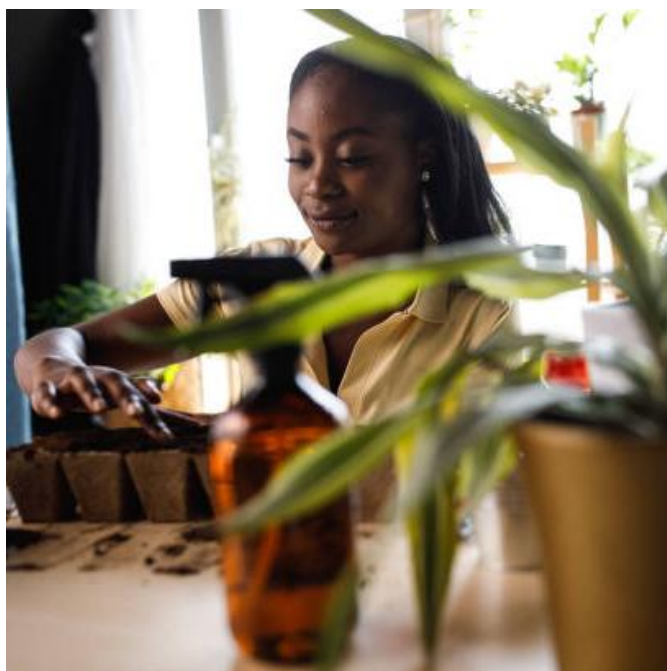
The paradox is becoming clearer: **people can increasingly see the effects of climate change, while simultaneously having less capacity to respond to them.**

That matters for how sustainability is understood and for how organisations approach it.

People still want action, but they need someone else to make it possible

Just as climate risk is felt at a national or global level rather than a personal one, so too is the responsibility to act. People are increasingly looking to governments and businesses, not individuals, to lead, particularly where action involves significant financial or behavioural trade-offs. Findings from the [Ipsos Market Essentials Sustainability Report](#) point to a persistent gap between responsibility and action: governments and businesses are seen as holding the most responsibility for tackling climate and societal challenges, yet many believe these institutions are falling short, while consumers tend to believe they and their families are already doing their part.

Individuals are overwhelmed, and it is increasingly up to organisations to show how they are acting on consumers' behalf. The message for companies is not that consumers have stopped caring. It is that **they are less willing to carry the burden alone.**



Connecting to health makes it personal

Perhaps the most important shift is happening in **the meaning of sustainability itself.**

According to the [Ipsos Market Essentials Sustainability Report](#), consumers increasingly connect environmental choices with their own health and wellbeing. 75% say that non-toxic or "clean" ingredients matter when choosing household or personal care products, 70% say environmental factors directly affect their personal health, and 65% agree that sustainable products are generally healthier for them.

This creates a different route into sustainability.

For some consumers, the environmental benefit remains the primary motivation. For others, the more immediate entry point is health: what they eat, breathe, put on their skin, bring into their home, or expose their family to.

The distinction matters.

Sustainability has often been communicated as something that benefits the planet in the long term. Increasingly, consumers are looking for benefits they can understand and experience in the present: cleaner products, safer ingredients, lower energy bills, more resilient homes, greater transparency, and better health.



The environmental proposition does not disappear; it becomes connected to something closer to home.



TRUST BECOMES PART OF THE VALUE EQUATION

As sustainability becomes more personal, the question of whether consumers believe companies becomes increasingly important.

The latest data from the [Ipsos Market Essentials Sustainability Report](#) shows that while price is the biggest barrier to sustainable purchasing, it isn't the only one. 30% of consumers say they don't know which products are sustainable, while 19% say too many of the products they care about do not align with the sustainable choices they would like to make, making confusion and access the second- and third-largest barriers after cost. Qualitative feedback also points to a desire for greater transparency about what products contain and how they are produced. This is particularly important in a context where people are already sceptical of institutions and businesses.

Consumers do not necessarily expect every purchase to be perfect. But they **increasingly need to understand what they are buying**, what the claim actually means, and whether the additional cost is justified.

The sustainability conversation therefore moves beyond “How green is this product?” towards a broader set of questions:

Is it credible? Is it transparent? Is it worth it? And what does it do for me?

Getting those questions right matters for a simple reason: it determines whether sustainability reaches beyond the most committed consumers to the much larger group who are still open to acting, provided the barriers are removed and the benefits are clear and believable.



FROM ASKING CONSUMERS TO HELPING THEM ADAPT

Taken together, these shifts point towards a different phase of sustainability.

People are still making sustainable choices, but they are less willing to absorb the cost of doing so. At the same time, climate change is creating new pressures on the way people live, work, travel, consume, and spend.

This changes what people expect from companies.

Increasingly, sustainability is about more than helping consumers make greener choices. It is about helping them navigate the consequences of a changing world: making products more affordable, reducing energy costs, improving resilience, protecting continuity of service, and making claims easier to understand and trust.

In this context, resilience becomes part of the sustainability proposition.

The companies that are best placed to build engagement may be those that can connect environmental progress with something people already value: affordability, health, security, convenience, or peace of mind.



Sustainability is no longer simply about asking people to change their behaviour. Increasingly, it is about changing the systems around them so that the sustainable choice becomes easier to make – and easier to afford.

The sustainability reality check



The picture in 2026 is therefore neither one of retreat nor one of renewed enthusiasm.

It is more complicated and arguably more useful.

People remain concerned about climate change. They recognise its consequences. They continue to make sustainable choices. But their capacity to prioritise sustainability is being shaped by the same pressures affecting almost every other part of their lives: money, uncertainty, health, security, and trust.

For businesses, this changes the strategic question.

The future of sustainability will not be built by asking consumers to care more. It will be built by understanding **what they already care about and making sustainability part of the answer.**

Sources

- i. *Will Climate Urgency Become an Everyday Reality? An Ipsos Sustainability Report (September 2026)*
- ii. *Ipsos Market Essentials Monthly Report, Wave 111, Global (Aug 4-7, 2026).*
- iii. *Ipsos Extreme Heat Polling, Great Britain (July 31 - Aug 4, 2026).*
- iv. *Ipsos People and Climate Change Report 2026.*
- v. *Ipsos Energy Transition Barometer.*



Explore the full picture

[The Ipsos Market Essentials Sustainability Report Will Climate Urgency Become an Everyday Reality?](#) (September 2026) explores whether the heightened climate concern of summer 2026 will translate into sustained changes in consumer attitudes and behaviours – or fade as other immediate pressures take centre stage.

As climate change becomes increasingly tangible, the report examines whether sustainability is becoming an enduring decision driver for consumers, and what this means for businesses navigating shifting priorities.

The report sources data from [Ipsos Market Essentials](#), our monthly global tracking study that monitors shifts in consumer attitudes and behaviours in 15 countries during these times of crises and adaptation. To find out more about the report or discuss purchasing access, contact essentials@ipsos.com.

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