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8th Consumer Barometer of Renewable Energy: Desire for cleaner air, but gaps in energy knowledge

The annual Consumer Barometer of Renewable Energy is appearing for the eighth time. The representative questionnaire shows that Swiss consumers are increasingly concerned about climate change and traffic emissions. 68% state that they are for a ban on the most environmentally damaging diesel vehicles in the cities. 57% of those asked, say that flying is too cheap. At the same time interest in new energy technologies is growing along with the associated financing solutions. In April 2018, 1,019 people between the ages of 15 and 74 were surveyed for the study in the German and French speaking parts of Switzerland.

Around one third of Swiss CO₂ emissions come from traffic. Besides stemming the growth in traffic, switching to electro-mobility can lower emissions. For 42% of potential car buyers, an electric car is their first or second choice. Around one third of those surveyed who are interested in buying an electric car now own a diesel vehicle. This points to considerable potential for switching from diesel to electric cars.

Swiss consumers are world-class flyers

Air traffic continues to be the problem child of the Swiss climate policy. In actual fact, aviation fuels make up to 18% of the total CO₂ balance of Switzerland, while more than 80% of flights from Switzerland are destined for somewhere in Europe. While air traffic is also increasing in other parts of the world, Swiss consumers are in second place when it comes to air miles per capita. Norway is in first place. An environmental tax on air travel could counter this trend: around a third of those surveyed state that they would change their travel plans if a surcharge of 50 francs were introduced on European flights.

Interest in investing in renewable energy

For the first time, more homeowners are interested in investing in solar modules with battery storage (64%) this year than in solar modules without storage (36%). With regard to financial innovations, 29% of homeowners state that they would be very interested in a service package where their bank, in addition to a mortgage would offer them access to a network of partners to improve the energy efficiency of their building. Another 49% would likely be interested in such an offer. 64% of those surveyed, three percentage points more than last year, express an interest in participating in community solar projects that make it possible for them to invest in solar modules even without their own roof or house. In addition, 46% of young people under 30 would be interested in investing a part of their private retirement provision (pillar 3a) in renewable energy projects.

Power mix “Made in Switzerland” is popular

Several results reflect preferences that coincide with the goals of the Swiss 2050 energy strategy, which was accepted by 58% of those entitled to vote in 2017. As part of the energy strategy, which provides for an expansion of the regenerative power generation, consumers desire domestic renewable energy. Their preferred power mix is 88% “Made in Switzerland”. In agreement with the current political discussion, 70% of those surveyed are for a liberalisation of the power market, which would allow

consumers to freely choose their suppliers.

Social acceptance of wind energy

One of the areas in which only slow progress is being made regarding achieving the goals of the 2050 energy strategy, is the realisation of wind energy projects. The results of the study provide insights into a few issues of social acceptance. While there is often talk about ecological impacts, opinions tend to diverge when it comes to the aesthetic preferences: While 75% of those surveyed think wind power plants are environmentally friendly, only 28% think they look nice. 78% of those who have already been in the vicinity of a wind park would (tend to) agree with the construction of a wind power plant near their community, while this share drops to 65% for those without their own experience.

Sketchy energy knowledge

Despite the broad discussion about the 2050 energy strategy this past year, the level of knowledge among consumers is rather sketchy in energy issues. Only 7% of those surveyed know that 75% of Swiss energy requirements (heat, electricity and fuels) are covered by imports, while the majority underestimates Switzerland's dependency on foreign fuels. The level of knowledge on this topic has risen by three percentage points compared to the year before. 87% of those surveyed continue to say that a lack of charging stations is the main reason they are not buying an electric car and yet almost half of them clearly underestimate the number of charging stations currently available in Switzerland.

You will find the detailed study results on the internet in German, English and French at:

www.iwoe.unisg.ch/kundenbarometer

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About the Consumer Barometer of Renewable Energy

Since 2011 the Consumer Barometer of Renewable Energy has established itself as one of the most comprehensive annual investigations into the preferences of the Swiss population on energy issues. The scientific management of the study lies with the Chair for Management of Renewable Energy at the University of St.Gallen (HSG). Raiffeisen Switzerland is financing the execution of the survey and supports the development of the questionnaire. The EnergieSchweiz programme launched by the Federal Council in 2001 continues to support the study. The sample is representative of the population with regard to gender, region, level of education and party preferences.

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