

## **Crisis has hit companies' social responsibility, poll suggests**

Many Europeans have lost trust in the corporate world, with many citizens believing that companies are paying less attention to their impact on society and the environment than they were 10 years ago, suggests a Eurobarometer poll.

The poll, released yesterday (4 April), said that 39% of Europeans believe that companies pay less attention to their influence on society than they did 10 years ago, with 40% saying they pay more attention, putting Europe at the bottom of the international league table.

Respondents from the United States and the emerging economies claim their businesses are taking their social footprint more seriously. Some 74% of Brazilians, 65% of Chinese, 62% of Indians, and 44% of Americans believe their companies have taken corporate social responsibility (CSR) more seriously over the past decade.

"On CSR, European businesses are failing to react to the fallout of the financial crisis", said British Labour MEP Richard Howitt.

### **Consumer trust**

Of the 32,000 respondents, 79% said they were interested about companies' responsible business actions on areas such as environmental and social impacts, but only 36% felt informed.

To Howitt, the European Parliament's rapporteur on CSR, the survey suggests that Europeans have lost trust in the corporate world, due in part to the crisis and to criticism of its environmental impact.

"This is the most comprehensive survey ever carried out on this issue. Today's results have really damaging implications for citizen's trust in business", said Howitt.

According to the survey, just over half of European citizens believe that companies have a positive influence on society, while four out of ten believe they have a negative influence, a skepticism that puts them at bottom of the international table in corporate trust.

By contrast, 79% of Brazilians think that companies have a positive influence on society.

"These results should act as more than just a wake up call to policy makers and businesses on the health of CSR in Europe", said Howitt. "They must act as a piercing siren call to action. In contrast to global emerging economies we are failing abjectly to make the connection between what companies say they are doing on CSR and what our citizens want them to do."

EU citizens view job creation as the most positive impact of companies (57%), followed by their contribution to economic growth (32%).

Europeans consider corruption (41%), reducing staff (39%) and environmental pollution (also 39%) as the main negative effects of companies on society. However corruption is much more widely mentioned in India (71%) and China (65%) compared to the EU. Brazilian (65%), Canadians (60%), and Indians (57%) are significantly more concerned by the environmental impact of companies, according to the study.

Some 25% of Europeans believe that companies encourage over-consumption.

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