

## Health and the home arena

# The home is a key health driver, according to Europeans

If we are to remain healthy, we are deeply dependent on the qualities offered by our homes. Europeans rank the home arena above exercise and tobacco in terms of importance for their health.

Avoid tobacco. Do some exercise. And eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Years of campaigning have made Europeans keenly aware of these important guidelines to staying healthy.

Even though indoor air quality is a major health concern for Europe<sup>16</sup>, the home arena has not enjoyed anything that comes close to this level of attention in public campaigning. Europeans nevertheless attribute equal or greater importance to quality sleep, fresh air and daylight when asked what they find important in order to stay healthy.

Fresh air and daylight are two key attributes of the healthy home. They help prevent adverse conditions like humidity, mould growth and concentration of unhealthy chemicals from consumer products or the surroundings. They also contribute directly to the vital biological processes that sustain us as human beings.

In fact, the home has even greater significance due to its impact on those same biological processes. According to Europeans, sleeping well at night is the most important for their health of the nine indicators surveyed (see indicator I). Among the factors that has a strong influence on the quality of our sleep is controlling the light in order to sleep in complete darkness and enjoying a healthy indoor climate at night with comfortable temperatures and good air quality. The healthy home, in other words, directly contributes to sleep quality.

# 86%

of all Europeans attribute plenty of daylight above average importance

<sup>16</sup>Health & Consumer Protection Directorate-General: "Opinion on risk assessment on indoor air quality", 2007.

### Indicator 1: What does healthy living mean to Europeans?

A healthy home is of primary importance for healthy living in the eyes of Europeans.

51 % of Europeans assign the highest importance to ventilating their home to let in fresh air. Specifically, they assign the score 7 on a scale ranging from 1 to 7. 90 % see it as being of above average importance by assigning either score 5, 6 or 7.

42 % of Europeans assign the highest importance to having plenty of daylight in the home. 86 % see it as being of above average importance.

In comparison, 88 % assign above average importance to eating plenty of fruit and vegetables, 76 % assign above average importance to avoiding tobacco, and 76 % assign above average importance to exercising regularly.

Women play a larger role compared to men in driving the focus on the healthy home. Fresh air and daylight together with eating fruit and vegetables and – to a lesser extent – sleep constitute a cluster where the gender difference is largest.

**59 %**  
**of all Europeans express above average concern for unhealthy indoor air quality**

#### Indicator 1

##### To which extent do you find the following important for your health?

The Home arena is of primary importance for healthy living in the eyes of Europeans. Europeans have been asked to score nine health factors from 1 to 7, where 1 is "Not important" and 7 is "Very important". All factors have a score above average (4). Three of the four top drivers relate directly to the home arena: sleeping well, ventilating for fresh air and plenty of daylight. All four factors related to the home arena have been given the color red. Three are related to people's intake and are marked with the color blue, while two are related to being active have been given the color gray.



## Indicator 2: How concerned are Europeans about an unhealthy home?

Unhealthy indoor air quality is a concern for Europeans. 24 % of Europeans are very concerned, and 59 % have above average concern. They rank this concern at the same level as financial and job insecurity.

Seen in terms of the healthy home, it is just as significant to note the top three concerns of the Europeans: becoming ill, feeling stress or fatigue, and one's own children becoming ill. These are the highest scorers of the seven options surveyed. All of these can be undesirable side effects of living in an unhealthy home<sup>17</sup>.

### Indicator 2

#### How concerned are Europeans about an unhealthy home?

Unhealthy indoor air quality is a concern for Europeans. They rank this concern below their concern for illness, stress and fatigue but at the same level as financial and job insecurity.

# 4.7

## Europeans' concern about living with unhealthy indoor air quality on a scale from 1 to 7

## Indicator 3: Who are responsible for ensuring healthy buildings?

Healthy buildings are seen first and foremost as a private responsibility related to ownership and role in the house construction value chain. 42 % of Europeans assign owners the highest level of responsibility.

Several assumptions can underlie this assessment. First, that the idea of healthy buildings is primarily understood in relation to the design, construction and operation of the individual building rather than to overall social and political goals and conceptions of the common good.

Ultimately, this may lead to a situation where only issues managed by the occupant changing behaviour and/or immediate benefits – e.g. comfort improvements and energy renovation – are handled, while issues that can only be addressed through industry collaboration, legislation or structural changes – e.g. reducing the environmental impact of the entire building life cycle or ensuring that the indoor climate is not only perceived as good, but is in fact good – are left unaddressed.

The second assumption underlying the assessment is that responsibility is not tied strongly to occupancy as tenants are ranked significantly lower. Interestingly, current owners and tenants are fully aligned when it comes to assigning responsibility between the two groups.

Finally, there seems to be a way to go before the possible dynamics are clear to Europeans in terms

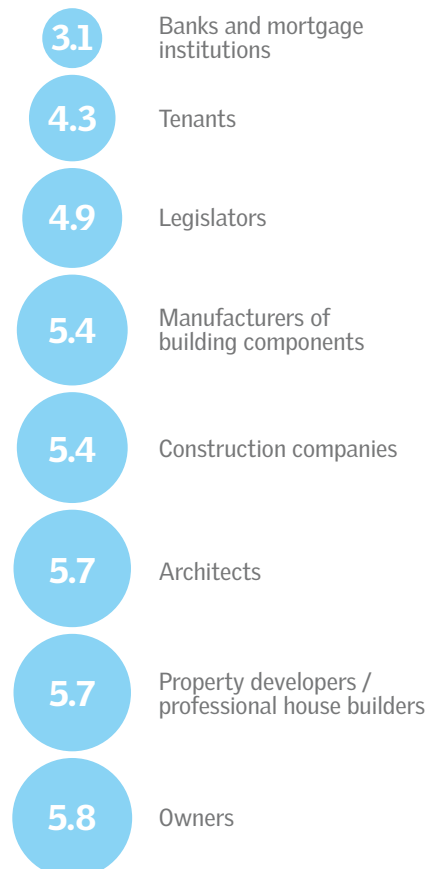
of the role banks and mortgage institutions can play. These are known to take a keen interest in the quality of the homes they finance including assessing home improvement projects before deciding to extend credit. However, this wider institutional dynamic is not strongly appreciated by Europeans.

This all points toward a health potential hidden in ensuring healthy buildings and healthy home behaviour regarding indoor air quality and access to daylight. Unlocking this potential will require political awareness as well as attention from the building industry.

### Indicator 3

#### Who of the following are responsible for ensuring that the buildings we live in are healthy?

Healthy buildings are seen as a private responsibility related to ownership and role in the house construction value chain.



<sup>17</sup>Mendell, M. J., Mirer, A. G., Cheung, K., Tong, M. Douwes, J.: "Respiratory and allergic health effects of dampness, mould and dampness-related agents: a review of the epidemiologic evidence." *Environmental Health Perspectives*, p. 119 (2011). And: E.g.: Hägerhed-Engman, L., Bornehag, C. G., Sundell, J.: "How valid are parents' questionnaire responses regarding building characteristics. Mouldy odour and signs of moisture problems in Swedish homes?", *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, p. 35 (2007). And: Foster, R. G.: "Body Clocks, Light, Sleep and Health", *Daylight & Architecture*, p. 15 (spring 2011).