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THE EUROPEAN UNION ECOLABEL AS A CROSS-BORDER ECO-TRUSTMARK: EVIDENCE FROM THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES

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Consumers in the Visegrad (V4) countries are increasingly confronted with the European Union (EU) Ecolabel as a cross-border eco-trustmark in the single market. This study analyses how they perceive and use it. The aim is to assess awareness of the logo, trust in its environmental message, self-reported purchases of EU Ecolabel products and the importance of environmental impact in purchase decisions, with a particular focus on Slovakia. The analysis uses microdata from Flash Eurobarometer 535 for EU-27 residents aged 15 and over and applies official survey weights to produce descriptive country, V4 and EU-27 estimates, complemented by cross-tabulations for Slovakia. Among EU-27 consumers who recognise the EU Ecolabel, around three quarters (75%) say they trust its environmental claim and around two in five (38%) report that they buy products with the EU Ecolabel at least sometimes. In Slovakia, awareness is strongly associated with higher trust and more frequent purchases. The findings indicate that low awareness, rather than lack of trust, is the main barrier to wider use of the EU Ecolabel in Central Europe.

Keywords: EU Ecolabel; ecolabelling; environmental labelling; consumer behaviour; Visegrad

Introduction

Ecolabelling has emerged as a policy response to the environmental impacts of everyday consumption and to persistent information problems in consumer markets. Consumers increasingly care about the environmental consequences of their product purchases, use and disposal, but often lack clear, credible information at the point of sale. Eco-labels, or "green" product label standards, have therefore been developed both to support more eco-friendly consumer behaviour and to give firms a way to differentiate products with better environmental performance (Ihemezie et al., 2018; Teisl et al., 2002). In the broader context of the EU's circular economy and bioeconomy agendas, such labels are expected to help align production and consumption patterns with environmental objectives (European Commission, 2018).

From an economic perspective, eco-labels address a specific type of market failure linked to information asymmetry (Akerlof, 1970): producers possess much more information about the environmental impact of their products than consumers. Many environmental characteristics are "credence" attributes that cannot be verified even after purchase and use. Eco-labels and brands function as signals that make such otherwise invisible attributes more transparent, similar to how the European Union Energy Labels for washing machines and light bulbs turn energy consumption into usable decision information (Sammer and Wüstenhagen, 2006). Sustainability-related labels aim to reduce information asymmetry along the supply chain and to enable more informed consumer choices (Asioli et al., 2020).

Seen from this angle, eco-labels are not only marketing tools but also instruments of public policy. Eco-labelling programmes are used by governments and non-governmental organizations to educate consumers about the environmental impacts of production, use and disposal, and to shift purchasing behavior towards less harmful products (Teisl et al., 2002). Informational instruments of this kind are attractive to policymakers because they can promote environmental objectives while relying on market mechanisms rather than command-and-control regulation, and they can be designed to comply with international trade rules. The OECD's work on environmental labelling and information schemes similarly places eco-labels within a broader portfolio of environmental policy instruments, including their use in public procurement and efforts to harmonize fragmented labelling practices (Prag et al., 2016).

Whether such labels work in practice depends on several psychological and behavioral mechanisms. Thøgersen et al. (2010) propose an adoption-of-innovation framework in which consumers move from exposure and understanding to trust and final adoption. First, consumers must notice the label and grasp at least the basic meaning of the environmental information it conveys. Green labels introduce "green" as a product attribute and help consumers distinguish more sustainable products from conventional ones, thus making it easier to integrate environmental considerations into everyday decisions (Ihemezie et al., 2018). Research also documents a "halo effect", where eco-labelled products are perceived as having additional positive attributes, such as better taste or health benefits, purely because of the label (Asioli et al., 2020).

At the same time, eco-labels face well-known challenges. Eco-labels must overcome the attitude-behavior gap, that is, the mismatch between what consumers say they value and what they actually do. Green labels can increase knowledge and strengthen intentions to buy eco-friendly products, but the presence of a label does not automatically translate into "green" purchasing (Ihemezie et al., 2018). In some studies, consumers remain strongly guided by price, brand and perceived product quality and are unwilling to sacrifice these factors for environmental attributes (Thøgersen et al., 2010). Even when consumers buy eco-labelled products, unsustainable patterns of use and disposal may limit overall environmental benefits (Ihemezie et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there is concrete evidence that eco-labels can change market outcomes: Teisl et al. (2002) show that the dolphin-safe label for canned tuna increased the market share of labelled products, providing market-based evidence that consumers are willing to pay to avoid personally contributing to environmental harm.

These micro-level findings are embedded in a more complex labelling landscape. Ecolabelling is a form of environmental labelling that uses a logo or seal to signal that a product meets specified environmental standards. Many eco-labels operate as voluntary schemes in which producers apply for a licence and pay to use the label (Jørgensen and Moen, 2015). Over recent decades, the number of eco- and green-labelling schemes has grown rapidly, and in some sectors hundreds of labels communicate ecological, ethical

or sustainability attributes (Jørgensen and Moen, 2015). This proliferation raises concerns about consumer confusion and "greenwashing", where environmental claims are perceived as exaggerated or misleading (Ihemezie et al., 2018), and has prompted calls to rationalize and coordinate labelling schemes at national and international levels (Prag et al., 2016).

International standards provide a common frame for such schemes. The ISO 14020 series set general principles for environmental labels and declarations, including the requirement that they provide accurate, scientifically based, and non-misleading information, encourage demand and supply of environmentally preferable products, and avoid creating unnecessary obstacles to international trade (Ming, 2021). Within this framework, ISO 14024:2018 defines Type I environmental labelling as voluntary, multiple-criteria-based, third-party programmes that award a license to use an environmental label indicating overall environmental preferability within a product category, based on life-cycle considerations "from cradle to grave" (Ming, 2021). ISO 14024 specifies key elements such as independent criteria-setting, verifiable compliance, transparent procedures, and regular review of criteria (Ming, 2021).

The European Union Ecolabel (Figure 1) is a prominent Type I scheme situated at the intersection of environmental policy, trade, and consumer behavior. It was established in 1992 as a voluntary scheme for products and services that demonstrate higher environmental performance throughout their life cycles, and revised in 2010 following an impact assessment that identified low awareness and slow uptake. The revised regulation emphasizes the dual objective of promoting products with reduced environmental impact and providing consumers with accurate, non-deceptive and science-based information (Council of the European Union, 1992; European Parliament and the Council, 2010; Ming, 2021). Legally, the EU Ecolabel is treated as a "standard" under the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade and is considered unlikely to constitute an unnecessary obstacle to international trade (Ming, 2021). Criteria focus on the most significant environmental impacts within each product group, including climate change, biodiversity, resource use, waste and hazardous substances, and the scheme is administered by the European Commission, the EU Eco-Labelling Board, and national competent bodies (Ming, 2021).

Figure 1 European Union Ecolabel
Source: European Commission Directorate-General for Environment, 2023

Strategy documents and case studies indicate both the potential and the limitations of Type I schemes such as the EU Ecolabel. The European Commission's strategy study highlights limited visibility on retail shelves, modest promotion by retailers and constrained availability of EU Ecolabel products, even among consumers with high stated interest in environmentally friendly products (European Commission, 2020). At the same time, it notes that retailers' active promotion and the use of the EU Ecolabel in green public procurement could substantially increase uptake (European Commission, 2020). A consumer-oriented case study on indoor paints further illustrates how the proliferation of labels, complex technical criteria and limited differentiation can reduce decision-making value and undermine trust, even where substantial resources are invested in labelling systems (Thøgersen, 2000). Monitoring of Type I ecolabel performance remains limited: most schemes track input indicators such as the number of licences and labelled products, and only occasionally consumer recognition, while market share or environmental benefits are rarely measured due to data and resource constraints (European Commission, 2020).

Against this background, the EU Ecolabel can be viewed as a consumer-facing instrument within the EU's emerging bioeconomy and circular economy frameworks, functioning as a cross-border eco-trustmark in the single market. However, relatively little empirical evidence is available on how consumers in Central and Eastern Europe perceive and use this label. Existing monitoring focuses mainly on counts of licenses and products and on headline recognition figures, with limited attention to how awareness, trust and buying behavior interact in less mature ecolabelling markets (European Commission, 2020; Ihemezie et al., 2018).

This paper addresses this gap by analyzing Flash Eurobarometer 535 microdata for the Visegrad countries (V4). It examines consumer awareness of the EU Ecolabel logo, trust in its environmental message, self-reported purchases of EU Ecolabel products and the perceived importance of environmental impact in purchase decisions, with a specific focus on conditional relationships in Slovakia. In doing so, it contributes to the literature on eco-labels as information-based policy tools by providing new evidence on the EU Ecolabel as a cross-border eco-trustmark in Central Europe and by linking consumer responses to broader debates on sustainable consumption and the bioeconomy.

Material and Methods

Data Source

The empirical analysis is based on data from Flash Eurobarometer 535: The EU Ecolabel, collected for the European Commission in September 2023 (European Commission, 2023) by Ipsos European Public Affairs (GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, 2023). The survey covers residents aged 15 and over in the 27 Member States of the European Union, using a multi-stage, random-probability sampling design and computer-assisted telephone interviews. The dataset was obtained from the GESIS data archive (Version 1.0.0) by author of this work on 23. of October 2023 and includes standard socio-demographic variables, country identifiers and a set of questions on awareness, trust and use of the EU Ecolabel and other environmental labels.

For this paper, the analysis focuses on four key questions:

a) awareness of consumers the EU Ecolabel logo;
b) trust of consumers that EU Ecolabel products have a lower environmental impact than similar products;

c) self-reported frequency of buying products with the EU Ecolabel by consumers;
d) perceived importance of the environmental impact of products in purchase decisions.

All variables are used in their original categorical form as provided in the Eurobarometer codebook.

Country Groups and Analytical Sample

The primary unit of analysis is the individual respondent. From the full EU-27 sample, four country subsamples are distinguished: Slovakia, Czechia, Hungary and Poland. These four countries are also grouped into the Visegrad Group (V4) for descriptive comparison. In addition, an EU-27 total is reported to place V4 results in a broader context. For each indicator, the analytical sample consists of all respondents with valid (non-missing) answers to the question of interest and a valid weight. Respondents with "Don't know" answers are retained as a separate category in the distributions, but are excluded from some of the derived summary measures (for example, the share that "agrees" with a statement).

All estimates are weighted. For country-level and V4 results, the analysis uses the post-stratification weight w1, which aligns the sample with the socio-demographic structure of each national population. For the EU-27 average, the dedicated EU weight w87 is applied. This weight combines post-stratification within countries with population-based weighting across countries and reproduces the official EU-27 figures reported in the Flash Eurobarometer 535 factsheets. Using w87 for the EU-27 total and w1 for national and V4 estimates ensures consistency with the official Eurobarometer results while allowing a focused analysis of the Visegrad region. Weighted percentages are computed by summing the weights of respondents in each response category and dividing by the sum of weights over all valid responses to the question. For example, the share of respondents who have seen the EU Ecolabel logo is the weighted sum of "Yes" responses divided by the total weighted number of respondents with valid responses to the awareness question. All percentages reported in the tables and figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Derived Indicators and Slovak Sub-Analysis

For interpretation, several composite indicators are constructed from the original response categories. Trust in the EU Ecolabel is summarised as the percentage of respondents who "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement that EU Ecolabel products have a lower environmental impact than similar products. Buying behaviour is summarised as the percentage who report buying EU Ecolabel products "often" or "sometimes", as opposed to "rarely", "never" or "don't know". The importance of environmental impact in purchase decisions is summarised as the share of respondents who consider this aspect "very important" or "rather important". In addition to EU-27 and V4-level comparisons, a more detailed sub-analysis is conducted for Slovakia. Here, awareness of the EU Ecolabel logo (seen vs. not seen) is cross-tabulated with trust and buying frequency. For each awareness group, the weighted percentages across trust categories and buying-frequency categories are calculated so that the row totals sum to (100%). This allows us to compare, within the Slovak sample, how trust in the EU Ecolabel and self-reported purchasing of EU Ecolabel products differ between respondents who recognise the logo and those who do not. All analyses are descriptive and were carried out in Python using standard data manipulation and aggregation procedures.

Results and Discussion

This section presents weighted descriptive results for awareness, trust, buying frequency and the perceived importance of environmental impact, followed by conditional analyses for Slovakia.

Awareness of the EU Ecolabel

The weighted results (see Table 1, response to the question Q1: "Please take a close look at the logo shown below. Have you seen this logo before") show that awareness of the EU Ecolabel logo remains limited in the European Union as a whole and even lower in the Visegrad region. At the EU-27 level, (38%) of respondents' report having seen the logo before, while (48%) answer "No" and (14%) "Don't know". In the Visegrad countries taken together, only about one quarter (25%) recognise the logo, compared with (57%) who have not seen it and (18%) who are unsure.

Within the Visegrad group, Slovakia, Czechia and Hungary all report relatively low awareness. In Slovakia, (23%) of respondents say that they have seen the EU Ecolabel logo, compared with (23%) in Czechia and (21%) in Hungary. Poland stands out with higher awareness: (34%) of Polish respondents recognise the logo, which is close to the EU-27 average. Overall, the results suggest that the EU Ecolabel remains a relatively unfamiliar symbol across most of the V4 region, with a sizeable share of citizens who have never seen the logo or are unsure whether they have encountered it.

Trust in the EU Ecolabel

Despite modest awareness, reported trust in the EU Ecolabel is high once respondents are aware of it. As shown in Table 2 (response to the question Q7_1: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I trust that products with the EU Ecolabel truly have a lower environmental impact than similar products on the market?"), at the EU-27 level, around (75%) of respondents "somewhat" or "strongly" agree with the statement that products with the EU Ecolabel truly have a lower environmental impact than similar products on the market. Only around (15%) disagree, while about (11%) answer "Don't know".

In the Visegrad countries as a group, trust levels are very similar. Approximately (75%) of respondents in the V4 say that they trust the environmental promise of the EU Ecolabel, while about (12%) disagree and (13%) do not have a clear opinion. Looking at individual countries, trust is somewhat lower in Slovakia and especially in Czechia, and higher in Hungary and Poland. In Slovakia, around (72%) of respondents agree that EU Ecolabel products have a lower environmental impact, compared

Table 1 Results for question Q1 (%)

Response	Yes	No	Don't know
EU-27 (w87)	38.11	47.92	13.98
V4 (w1)	25.17	56.56	18.26
SK (w1)	22.99	57.69	19.32
CZ (w1)	22.70	57.27	20.04
HU (w1)	21.05	63.59	15.36
PL (w1)	33.78	47.93	18.29

Data source: European Commission. 2023. Flash Eurobarometer 535 (The EU Ecolabel) (ZA8766; Version 1.0.0)
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Table 2 Results for question Q7_1 (%)

Response	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
EU-27 (w87)	28.24	46.39	9.99	4.81	10.57
V4 (w1)	25.88	48.93	8.15	3.97	13.06
SK (w1)	22.70	48.92	9.91	5.11	13.36
CZ (w1)	18.17	47.33	10.73	4.80	18.97
HU (w1)	36.76	45.00	5.94	3.26	9.03
PL (w1)	26.04	54.30	6.01	2.70	10.96

Data source: European Commission. 2023. Flash Eurobarometer 535 (The EU Ecolabel) (ZA8766; Version 1.0.0)
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

with (66%) in Czechia, (82%) in Hungary and (80%) in Poland. These figures indicate that, conditional on some level of awareness, citizens in the V4 region broadly accept the basic promise of the EU Ecolabel, even if they differ in how strongly they express this trust.

Buying Frequency of Products with the EU Ecolabel

Self-reported buying frequency of products with the EU Ecolabel, as shown in Table 3 (response to the question Q3_2: "How often do you buy products with the EU Ecolabel"), is lower in the Visegrad region than in the EU as a whole. In the EU-27 sample, around (38%) of respondents say that they buy products with the EU Ecolabel "often" or "sometimes", while about (18%) choose "rarely" and (10%) "never". A relatively large group, about (33%), answer "Don't know", which suggests that many consumers are not sure whether the products they buy carry the label.

In the Visegrad countries taken together, only about (26%) report buying products with the EU Ecolabel often or sometimes, while (17%) say "rarely" and (16%) "never". Again, around (41%) choose "Don't know". In Slovakia, approximately (24%) of respondents report buying EU Ecolabel products often or sometimes, very similar to Hungary (23%) and Czechia (22%). Poland again differs from the other V4 countries: around (36%) of Polish respondents say that they often or sometimes buy products with the EU Ecolabel, which is close to the EU-27 average. These patterns are consistent with the awareness results: countries with higher awareness of the logo also tend to report more frequent purchases.

Importance of Environmental Impact in Purchase Decisions

The survey also asked respondents how important the environmental impact of a product is when making purchase decisions; selected results are shown in Table 4 (response to the question DX1_1: "How important are the following aspects when making a decision on what products (goods or services) to buy? The impact on the environment of the product"). At the EU-27 level, around (73%) of respondents consider this aspect "very important" or "rather important", while about (19%) describe it as "rather not important" and (6%) as "not at all important". Approximately (2%) answer "Don't know". If we look only at the most committed group, (23%) of EU-27 respondents say that the environmental impact of the product is "very important".

In the Visegrad countries as a group, the share of respondents who consider the environmental impact very or rather important is lower, at around (66%). Within the V4, Slovakia is at the bottom of this distribution: only about (59%) of Slovak respondents say that the environmental impact

Table 3 Results for question Q3_2 (%)

Response	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know
EU-27 (w87)	8.08	30.21	18.01	10.43	33.27
V4 (w1)	4.65	21.76	17.47	15.57	40.54
SK (w1)	4.09	19.50	21.03	15.24	40.14
CZ (w1)	3.37	18.80	14.49	19.70	43.65
HU (w1)	3.69	19.51	17.25	17.10	42.45
PL (w1)	7.38	29.11	16.91	10.48	36.13

Data source: European Commission. 2023. Flash Eurobarometer 535 (The EU Ecolabel) (ZA8766; Version 1.0.0)
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Table 4 Results for question DX1_1 (%)

Response	Very important	Rather important	Rather not important	Not at all important	Don't know
EU-27 (w87)	23.36	49.51	19.14	6.14	1.86
V4 (w1)	16.41	49.34	24.61	7.01	2.63
SK (w1)	12.50	46.16	28.63	10.09	2.62
CZ (w1)	14.59	46.67	27.72	8.09	2.94
HU (w1)	16.11	52.59	25.28	4.29	1.73
PL (w1)	22.46	52.02	16.85	5.47	3.20

Data source: European Commission. 2023. Flash Eurobarometer 535 (The EU Ecolabel) (ZA8766; Version 1.0.0)
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

of the product is very or rather important when deciding what to buy, compared with (61%) in Czechia, (69%) in Hungary and (75%) in Poland. The share of respondents who consider the environmental impact "very important" is (13%) in Slovakia, (15%) in Czechia, (16%) in Hungary and (22%) in Poland, compared with (23%) in the EU-27. These results suggest that environmental impact is recognised as a relevant consideration, but only a minority of consumers in the V4 region place it at the very top of their decision criteria, and Slovakia lags behind both Poland and the EU average.

Awareness, Trust and Buying Behaviour in Slovakia

The Slovak subsample allows a closer look at how awareness of the EU Ecolabel relates to trust and self-reported buying behaviour. Among Slovak respondents (Table 5, conditional results Q1 vs. Q7_1 for Slovak respondents) who have not seen the EU Ecolabel logo before, about (62%) nevertheless "somewhat" or "strongly" agree that products carrying the label have a lower environmental impact, while roughly (7%) strongly disagree. Among those who have seen the logo, the share of respondents who agree rises to about (88%), while those who disagree are much fewer. Recognising the logo is thus associated with a significantly stronger expressed trust in its environmental promise.

A similar pattern (Table 6, conditional results Q1 vs. Q3_2 for Slovak responders) appears for buying frequency. Among Slovak respondents who say they have not seen the logo before, only around (11%) report that they buy EU Ecolabel products often or sometimes, while almost half of them choose "Don't know". Among those who recognise the logo, the share of "often" or "sometimes" buyers increases to around (60%), and the share of "never" is much lower. In other words, Slovak consumers who are aware of the EU Ecolabel are not only more likely to trust it, but also much more likely to report that they buy eco-labelled products in practice.

Taken together, these findings indicate that low awareness is a key bottleneck for the EU Ecolabel in the V4 region, and particularly in Slovakia. Where awareness exists, trust in the label is relatively high and is accompanied by more frequent purchases of eco-labelled products. This supports the view of the EU Ecolabel as a potentially powerful "eco-trustmark", whose impact in Central and Eastern Europe is currently constrained more by visibility and communication than by a lack of underlying trust.

The findings of this study offer new insights into the performance of the EU Ecolabel in the Visegrad region, revealing a distinct pattern of "low awareness, high potential". The results confirm that while the EU Ecolabel has not yet achieved mass recognition in the V4 countries (with the partial exception of Poland), it successfully functions as a credible signal of environmental quality for those consumers who are familiar with it. This duality supports the theoretical view of eco-labels as tools to reduce information asymmetry (Akerlof, 1970), but also underscores the barriers identified in the adoption-of-innovation framework (Thøgersen et al., 2010).

Specifically, the low general awareness in Slovakia (23%), Czechia (23%) and Hungary (21%) suggests that the first stage of adoption – exposure and perception – remains the primary bottleneck. However, the high levels of trust among informed consumers (around 75% across the V4) indicate that the label's underlying certification mechanism is perceived as credible. This contrasts with concerns about consumer confusion and "greenwashing" often found in markets saturated with unregulated green claims (Ihemezie et al., 2018). The strong association found in the Slovak subsample – where recognition of the logo significantly increases both trust and purchase frequency – suggests that the EU Ecolabel effectively transforms "credence" attributes into usable decision cues once the information barrier is overcome.

From a bioeconomy and circular economy perspective, these findings have important policy implications. The EU Ecolabel is designed to act as an important instrument for guiding demand towards more sustainable, including bio-based and circular, products (European Commission, 2018; European Commission, 2020). However, its current low visibility in Central Europe limits its ability to contribute to this transition. The fact that Polish consumers show higher awareness and purchase frequency suggests that market maturity and promotional activities can make a difference within the region. For policymakers in Slovakia and the wider V4, this implies that passive availability of eco-labelled products is insufficient.

To unlock the potential of the EU Ecolabel as a cross-border eco-trustmark, a coordinated effort is needed. First, informational campaigns should focus not just on the existence of the label, but on its link to specific benefits such as health and quality, exploiting the "halo effect" (Asioli et al., 2020) to broaden its appeal beyond niche green consumers. Second, retailers play a crucial gatekeeper role; their active promotion of the label – through shelf placement, in-store communication and integration into private-label strategies – could bridge the gap between latent environmental concern and actual purchasing (European Commission, 2020). Finally, public institutions should lead by example through Green Public Procurement (GPP), creating a stable market demand that encourages local producers to adopt the scheme (European Commission, 2020). Without these active measures, the attitude–behaviour gap is likely to persist, leaving the potential of the EU Ecolabel as a driver of sustainable consumption in the Visegrad region and other emerging ecolabelling markets largely untapped.

Table 5 Trust in the EU Ecolabel conditional on label awareness of Slovak respondents (%)

Response	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
No	17.55	44.32	12.77	7.05	18.30
Yes	36.68	51.78	6.58	2.05	2.91

Data source: European Commission. 2023. Flash Eurobarometer 535 (The EU Ecolabel) (ZA8766; Version 1.0.0)
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Table 6 Buying frequency conditional on label awareness of Slovak respondents (%)

Response	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know
No	1.06	10.41	17.78	21.43	49.33
Yes	14.41	45.46	30.66	4.73	4.74

Data source: European Commission. 2023. Flash Eurobarometer 535 (The EU Ecolabel) (ZA8766; Version 1.0.0)
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Conclusion

This paper examined awareness, trust and use of the EU Ecolabel in the Visegrad countries, and analyzed how logo recognition in Slovakia is associated with trust and self-reported purchases. The results show that the EU Ecolabel is still relatively poorly known in the V4 region: only about one quarter of respondents in the Visegrad countries recognize the logo, and awareness in Slovakia, Czechia and Hungary remains clearly below the EU-27 average. Poland is the only V4 country where awareness is close to the European mean. At the same time, the results of this survey indicate that trust in the EU Ecolabel is high once respondents know the label. Around three quarters of respondents in both the EU-27 and the V4 agree that EU Ecolabel products have a lower environmental impact than similar products. In Slovakia, respondents who recognize the logo are much more likely to trust it and report buying EU Ecolabel products at least sometimes. This suggests that low consumer awareness, rather than a lack of trust, is the main bottleneck for the wider diffusion of the EU Ecolabel in the V4 region.

From a marketing perspective, these findings imply that firms and retailers in Slovakia and the neighbouring V4 markets could benefit from treating the EU Ecolabel as a common "eco-trustmark" that works across borders. In practical terms, this means giving the logo greater visibility on packaging and in-store communication, integrating it into simple, credible messages about environmental benefits, and targeting consumers who already consider environmental impact important but may not yet know the label. Coordinated communication between producers, retailers and public institutions can help turn latent environmental concern into actual purchases of EU Ecolabel products, and thereby strengthen both the commercial and environmental impact of the scheme in Central and Eastern Europe.

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