

Policy Brief

Public Awareness and Biosecurity Behaviour for Urban Tree Health in Europe



The problem

Public behaviour plays a critical role in preventing the introduction and spread of pests and diseases increasingly threaten Europe's urban and peri-urban forests. This policy brief presents key findings from a Europe-wide public survey "Tree health matters!" conducted online between February and July 2025. The survey collected 2346 valid responses from the general public across 31 European countries, excluding professionals in forestry, horticulture and gardening.

The survey examined what people in Europe know and think about tree health. Respondents were asked whether they recognize common tree pests and diseases, how concerned they are about their impact on urban trees, and where they obtain information. The survey also explored the use of basic biosecurity practices—such as avoiding the transport of plants from abroad, purchasing certified plants, and cleaning footwear after visiting forests—as well as respondents' willingness to support and follow such measures in the future. Basic background information about the participants was collected as well.



Key findings

Awareness is widespread but shallow

- 63.8% had heard about pests and diseases affecting trees, but most knew very little about the topic.

The term "biosecurity" is poorly understood

- 76% of respondents did not know the meaning of biosecurity in the context of tree health.

Citizens are highly concerned about tree pests and diseases

Strongest concerns focused on:

- Air quality reduction (70%)
- Human health impacts (64.5%)
- Loss of carbon capture (64.1%)
- Biodiversity loss (61.8%)
- Loss of tree species (60%)

Knowledge of introduction pathways is uneven

Most respondents recognised major pathways (e.g., plant trade), but fewer identified:

- construction timber
- firewood
- wood packaging
- animals

Strong support for preventive and environmentally friendly measures

Public strongly supports:

- Enhancing urban tree biodiversity
- Increasing monitoring and early detection
- Planting resistant species
- Biological control and physical removal of pests
- Environmentally friendly chemical treatments

Recommendations for Policymakers

Immediate Actions (2026–2027)

- Launch an EU-wide public biosecurity awareness campaign.
- Provide municipalities with standardized tree health communication kits.
- Integrate tree health and biosecurity into school environmental curricula.

Short-to-Medium Term (2028–2035)

- Support citizen science tools for reporting tree pests and diseases.
- Strengthen border and internal trade controls on high-risk plant material.
- Encourage the production and planting of resistant and locally adapted species.
- Integrate urban forest biosecurity into national climate adaptation strategies.

Long-Term (2035+)

- Develop city-level tree health resilience plans.
- Ensure stable funding for monitoring and early detection networks.
- Promote Europe-wide harmonised standards for urban biosecurity.

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