



FEAR BAROMETER 2024

NOVEMBER 2024

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What Do the People of Central Europe Fear
the Most?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **As an expert in Central Europe**, CEPER regularly conducts market and public opinion research in the countries of the region to obtain a comprehensive picture of the functioning, attitudes, preferences and opinions of the market players in the countries and societies of Central Europe. **The present analysis** is based on the data collection of the third quarter of 2024, during which we examined a representative sample of 1,000 adults per country. The countries participating in the survey are: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, North Macedonia, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- The 2024 Fear Barometer reveals that the fears of the residents of Central Europe are closely intertwined with the fluctuating socio-economic changes in the region and the world. According to the analysis, **similar patterns of worry can be observed in the examined countries**, which can partly be traced back to the common historical and economic background, as well as global changes.
- Taking into account the temporal examination of international research, we can say that the opinions formed about worries are greatly influenced by various economic, political, technological and global changes and effects. The change in people's opinions on questions about **epidemics can be measured along the spread of the coronavirus** and its **decline**.
- Growing concern as a result of the **Russian-Ukrainian conflict can be measured with regard to the "war in a nearby country" category**. While in 2020, 27 percent of the respondents made the combined categories of fear of war conflicts and international terrorism among the top three most pressing conflicts, **by 2021, this number rose to 31 percent grew**. **Our current research** shows that **nearly half of the respondents seriously afraid** of the danger of war in a neighboring country.
- Feeling more and more the intensifying effects of global **warming, fears intensified** based on the opinions that appeared. Among the countries included in CEPER's survey, we can say that they worry the most in North Macedonia (0.7), Poland (0.34) and Bulgaria (0.23), while the least in Montenegro (-0.53), the Czech Republic (-0.36) and in Croatia (-0.21).
- The faulty lines of the various concerns can be understood along with the geographical location, political system and cultural differences of the countries.

There are fears that can be clearly **segmented using demographic indicators** alone . For example, the fear of **death** or **artificial intelligence**. Based on demographic factors, the **younger generations are most** concerned about **climate change**, while in the case of the **older** age group, **the corruption fears** dominate.

- Livelihood **difficulties** continue to be prominent, especially in countries affected by economic uncertainty and in deprived social groups.
 - The analysis can contribute to the better understanding and management of the **fears and challenges of society** in Central and Eastern Europe in order to promote **sustainability** and **social stability**.
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INTRODUCTION - BEHIND OUR FEARS

In the modern world, the lessons of the past and the uncertainties of the future simultaneously shape humanity's greatest concerns. The fears of a given society are greatly influenced by the historical past, the challenges of the present, and our knowledge or lack of knowledge about future external and internal worries. As a result, generations living next to each other may have different fears. In the research, which examined regionally very similar countries, the effect arising from regional characteristics can be felt. In his theory of reflexive modernity, Ulrik Beck¹ explains that a risk society is emerging in our world today, in which the future is less similar to the past than ever before. Basically, it defines three fault lines, which are secure and uncertain, outside and inside, and political and non-political opposites.

In the current research, the respondents had to evaluate a total of 11 listed possible fears on a five-point scale, where 1 means that they are not afraid at all, and 5 means that they are very afraid. Respondents had the opportunity to select the "don't know/no answer" category for the given question. This answer option is a useful category in many cases, because it can reveal the difficulty of admitting one's concerns. In the case of all statements, we can say that there are statements to which several people could not or did not want to answer. The most difficult questions to answer were, in order: fear of artificial intelligence, death, migration and corrupt government officials. The fewest refusals to answer were seen in the questions of living difficulties and fear of global warming. Refusals to answer also showed a big difference by country, which may have a kind of cultural background in addition to methodological explanations. The majority of "don't know/no answer" categories were given by respondents from North Macedonia, with 10 percent of the possible answers for all categories, while Romanians, Czechs and Hungarians gave the least number of answers that they don't know or don't want to answer. In their case, this ratio was around 1 percent.

The international comparison of previous research is challenging from several points of view. Firstly, the group analyzed also includes countries that are not members of the European Union, so they cannot be compared with EU research. On the other hand, methodological obstacles also make comparability difficult, as the questions and categories are presented differently in many international surveys. Moreover, the technical structure of the questions can also differ in many

¹Beck, U. (2003). The risk society.

cases. In our current research, we asked the respondents on a five-point scale how afraid they are recently, while in other surveys it happened that certain categories of fear had to be selected from a long list.

Therefore, the study mainly focuses on the international comparison of our own data collection. The 11 categories can be grouped according to various aspects: personal and public safety worries, concerns about social and international conflicts, and global and technological threats.

CEPER - FEAR BAROMETER 2024 RESULTS

Fears in Central Europe

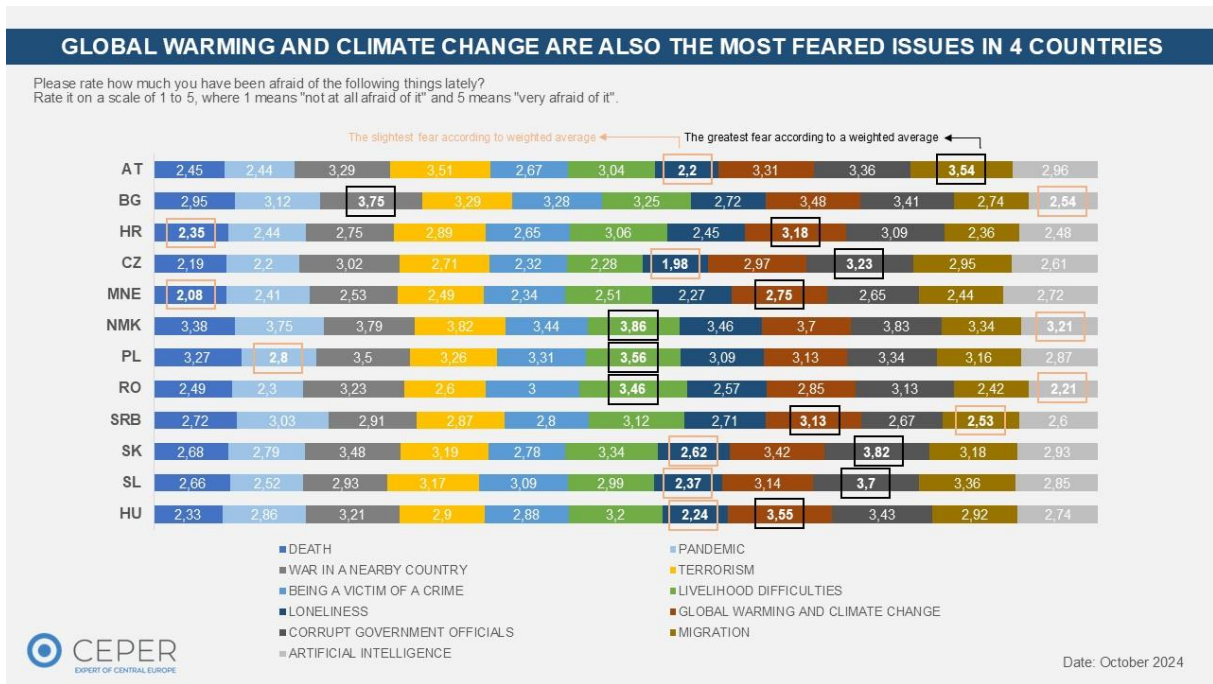
With the help of the fear index based on the 11 identified fears, it can be stated that there are significant differences in the level of fears between different countries. Montenegro (-0.53), the Czech Republic (-0.36) and Croatia (-0.21) are the countries where people are least afraid, while North Macedonia (0.7), Poland (0.34) and Bulgaria (0.23) are the states with the highest index values.

In general, men and younger generations are less afraid than older people, indicating that concerns gradually increase with age. Furthermore, those with a higher education experience less worry than those with a lower education. This trend continues according to the type of settlement, where people living in the capital are the least afraid of the fears appearing in the listed categories.

Some of our worries are related to social inequality, one measure of which is the Gini index ², which measures the level of wealth inequality. The World Bank's 2019 data are only suitable for a limited comparison of the 12 countries examined, as they did not provide a comprehensive picture in all cases. However, both Bulgaria and North Macedonia have a high fear index and Gini index. A more accurate analysis could only be obtained if only social fears were taken into account during the comparison.

Based on the results of our research, the fear of loneliness is the lowest in most countries - such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. In contrast, in Bulgaria, Romania and North Macedonia, artificial intelligence was rated as the least scary. In Montenegro and Croatia, death was the least mentioned as a source of worry, while in Poland the pandemic was highlighted.

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/si.pov.gini?end=2016&start=2016&view=map&year=2019>



At the other end of the scale are the elements that cause the greatest fear in the inhabitants of the given country. Based on our data, the fear of global warming and climate change is the greatest in most countries. Due to geographical features, climate change has multiple dimensions, including extreme weather events such as drought – as reflected by the fact that 2024 was the hottest summer in Europe³– and floods.

Climate change results in many problems, such as the destruction of farmland, the lack of clean drinking water, and the extinction of animal and plant species. Furthermore, it can be responsible for the emergence of new diseases and epidemics. According to research, climate change is also one of the main causes of migration, and according to forecasts, up to 216 million people may leave their place of residence by 2025 as a result.⁴

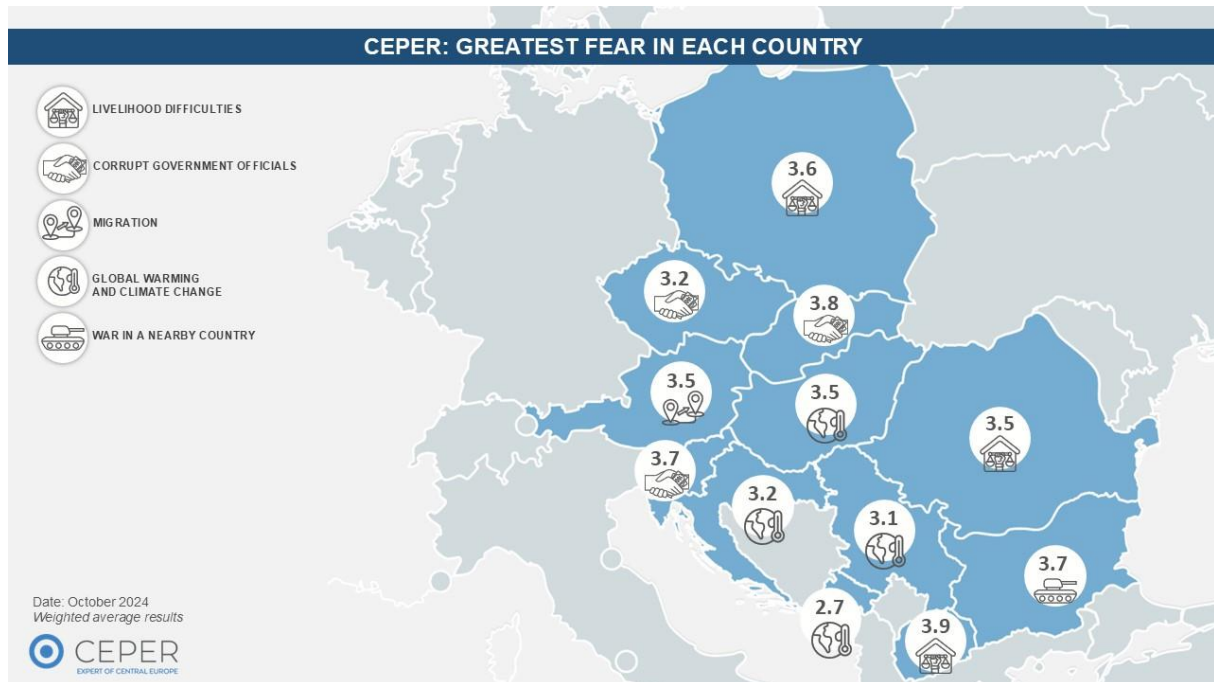
It is therefore not surprising that in our research people are specifically afraid of migration. There are many reasons behind migration, not just climate change, but our survey did not aim to explore these factors in depth.

In the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, fear of corrupt government officials was the biggest worry, while in North Macedonia, Romania and Poland, difficulties

³ <https://climate.copernicus.eu/c3s-seasonal-lookback-summer-2024>

⁴ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/2c9150df-52c3-58ed-9075-d78ea56c3267>

in making a living were highlighted. In Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Hungary, climate change was identified as the biggest source of concern.



Based on the created index, the following results are obtained by examining the four fears with the highest values along demographic variables. The research clearly points out: the fear level of women exceeds that of men in almost all categories, reflecting the different social and psychological experience of worries. At the same time, climate change is considered a serious risk by everyone, regardless of age, education, or even type of settlement. This also shows how serious a problem it is, as it has a negative effect on both the urban way of life and the village life closer to nature. At the same time, it can be observed that people are more and more concerned with climate change and its effects, so this can also contribute to the success of the solutions given to the challenges.⁵

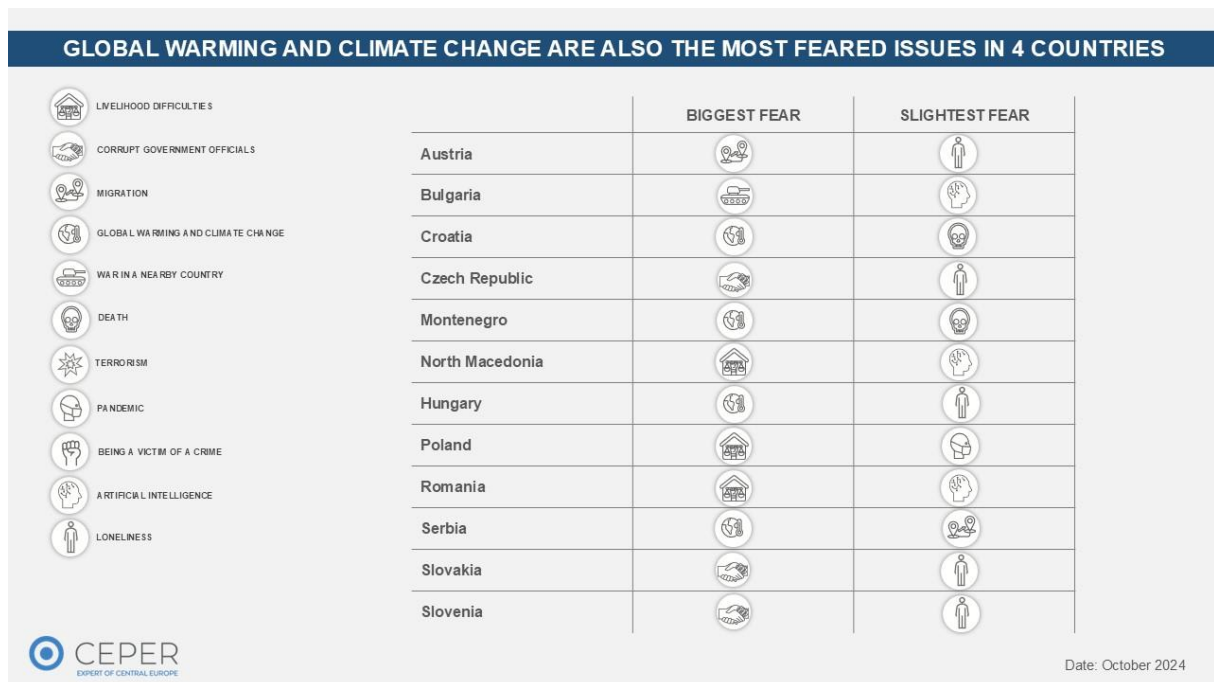
With regard to living difficulties, we can say that there is a significant correlation between fear and education, people with a lower education are more afraid than people with a high education. At the same time, the youngest and oldest are the least afraid of financial problems.

In the case of corrupt government officials, we can say that the youngest are less afraid than the older ones, but we do not see a trend along other demographic variables.

⁵ <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adj5778>

In the case of the "war in a nearby country" category, people living in smaller settlements, people with lower education and the elderly are the most afraid.

Most of the 18-29 year olds are most afraid of the effects of climate change and global warming, while older age groups are most afraid of corrupt government officials. Along the different settlement types, the previous two categories and "the war in a nearby country" received almost equally high values. The situation is similar with regard to education, those with low education are predominantly afraid of war in a nearby country, while those with high education gave higher grades for corrupt government officials.



FEARS IN CENTRAL EUROPE - AN OUTLOOK

Among the world's worries, the challenges of Central Europe stand out particularly sharply: how do regional concerns fit into global trends?

According to the 2021 Eurobarometer ⁶survey, we can say that climate change was the biggest problem facing the world even among EU countries 3 years ago. At the same time, it can also be stated that the fault lines of the fears measured in the countries are located elsewhere. In the research, the respondents selected the biggest challenge from a list of 11 points. According to 18 percent of Europeans, climate change is the biggest problem, according to 17 percent, hunger and the lack of drinking water were mentioned, as well as the spread of infectious diseases, the high values of which can be attributed to the coronavirus epidemic. Compared to the 2019 research, three new categories were added to the list, so the comparison can only be interpreted in a limited way. In light of the research period, it is not surprising that the fear of infectious diseases showed a double-digit increase in most countries. 9 of the 12 countries included in the CEPER research are members of the European Union, so they can be found in the Eurobarometer research. Based on this, we can say that in this period, with the exception of Slovenia, all countries mentioned infectious diseases as the biggest problem. Among them, this category was nominated in an exceptionally high proportion in Bulgaria and Hungary.

In August 2023, *What worries the world?* ⁷Ipsos published a research entitled, during which the responses of people between the ages of 16 and 74 were examined. One of the questions was about which of the five possible sources of danger listed are the three they are most afraid of. Most people indicated inflation at 37 percent, followed by poverty and social inequality at 31 percent. The third most mentioned answer option was crime and violence, followed by unemployment at 27 percent and financial and political corruption at 27 percent. During this period, only 18 percent named climate change, while only 5 percent of the respondents named the coronavirus on the list of most pressing concerns. Only Poland and Hungary were included in the survey, so it is not suitable for full comparability with the CEPER survey. Nevertheless, we can conclude that inflation, as an outstanding fear, is well above average for both countries.

⁶ https://climate.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-07/report_2021_en.pdf

⁷ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-08/Global%20Report%20-%20What%20Worries%20the%20World%20Aug%202023.pdf>

The World Economic Forum *Global Risks Report 2024*⁸ examined the opinions of experts in various fields and examined the various global risks. Five different risk categories were used in the study, which were as follows: economic, environmental, geopolitical, social and technological. In one of the questions, the respondents had to indicate the future challenges, which apply to the next two and ten years. The three biggest challenges of the next two years are misinformation and disinformation, followed by extreme weather problems and the polarization of societies. The responses paint a rather colorful picture in the topics of sources of danger for this period, as at least two factors from each category were included in the top ten challenges, in addition to geopolitical challenges. With regard to the estimates after ten years, the majority of answers fall into the category of environmental challenges, and only such answers are found in the first four places. Based on this, in ten years the biggest challenge will be extreme weather, followed by critical changes in the Earth's system, the reduction of biodiversity and the collapse of the ecosystem, and finally the lack of natural resources.

⁸ https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/in-full/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=ppc&utm_campaign=globalrisks&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwsoe5BhDiARIsAOXVoUstti0Lnk_lhqIs3YzEa1bDrCTEksm97SDxOZzgQR9OhUdve3WbMOgaAlyXEALw_wcB

SUMMARY

Both domestic and international research clearly indicates that we are facing humanity's greatest challenges, and the fears of Central Europe faithfully reflect this increasingly complex vision of the future. The current and future challenges of humanity will be determined mostly by the effects of climate change in terms of fears. By placing our research question in a holistic context, we can understand what we think about the future and how the challenges affecting humanity will affect our daily lives in the light of examining people's values.⁹ CEPER's research can help the decision-makers of Central and Eastern European countries to support the socialization of sustainability with the most effective means possible, based on appropriate research.

⁹ <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>

METHODOLOGY

The poll was conducted in 12 countries of the Central European region: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, North Macedonia, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia . Data collection took place between August 19, 2024 and September 5, 2024. The survey was conducted by telephone, with 1,000 respondents per country (in person in Serbia). The sample is representative in all countries according to gender, age and settlement type .

BOARD VOLUMES

Highest fear index by country

Country	Average	Fear
AT	3.54	Migration
BG	3.75	War in a nearby country
HR	3.18	Global warming and climate change
CZ	3.23	Corrupt government officials
MNE	2.75	Global warming and climate change
NMK	3.86	Livelihood difficulties
PI	3.56	Livelihood difficulties
RO	3.46	Livelihood difficulties
SRB	3.13	Global warming and climate change
SK	3.82	Corrupt government officials
SL	3.7	Corrupt government officials
HU	3.55	Global warming and climate change

Average fear index of each fear category, broken down by gender

Not	Fear	Item number	Average
Man	Death	5596	2.44
	A pandemic	5730	2.54
	War in a nearby country	5683	2.99
	Terrorism	5693	2.87
	Being a victim of a crime	5650	2.69
	Livelihood difficulties	5704	2.97
	Loneliness	5666	2.43
	Global warming and climate change	5718	3.04
	Corrupt government officials	5634	3.27
	Migration	5647	2.86
	Artificial intelligence	5534	2.61
Woman	Death	5913	2.78
	A pandemic	6044	2.88
	War in a nearby country	6033	3.39
	Terrorism	6029	3.22
	Being a victim of a crime	5986	3.05
	Livelihood difficulties	6041	3.28
	Loneliness	6039	2.66
	Global warming and climate change	6036	3.38
	Corrupt government officials	5901	3.32
	Migration	5918	2.96
	Artificial intelligence	5794	2.83

Average fear index of each fear category, broken down by age group

Circle	Fear	N	Average
18-29	Death	1889	2.53
	A pandemic	1929	2.52
	War in a nearby country	1906	2.99
	Terrorism	1922	2.81
	Being a victim of a crime	1895	2.85

	Livelihood difficulties	1911	3.03
	Loneliness	1913	2.51
	Global warming and climate change	1923	3.15
	Corrupt government officials	1876	3.06
	Migration	1890	2.58
	Artificial intelligence	1880	2.49
30-39	Death	2003	2.67
	A pandemic	2051	2.56
	War in a nearby country	2038	3.12
	Terrorism	2037	2.97
	Being a victim of a crime	2021	2.85
	Livelihood difficulties	2035	3.18
	Loneliness	2034	2.44
	Global warming and climate change	2044	3.13
	Corrupt government officials	2014	3.24
	Migration	2011	2.82
	Artificial intelligence	2007	2.63
40-49	Death	2063	2.58
	A pandemic	2121	2.52
	War in a nearby country	2116	3.11
	Terrorism	2116	2.92
	Being a victim of a crime	2104	2.84
	Livelihood difficulties	2121	3.16
	Loneliness	2101	2.44
	Global warming and climate change	2118	3.09
	Corrupt government officials	2097	3.31
	Migration	2096	2.93
	Artificial intelligence	2089	2.71
50-59	Death	1933	2.62
	A pandemic	1969	2.73
	War in a nearby country	1962	3.25
	Terrorism	1959	3.15
	Being a victim of a crime	1952	2.85
	Livelihood difficulties	1961	3.21
	Loneliness	1957	2.50
	Global warming and climate change	1970	3.21
	Corrupt government officials	1945	3.42
	Migration	1945	3.08
	Artificial intelligence	1937	2.82
60+	Death	3621	2.65
	A pandemic	3704	3.01
	War in a nearby country	3694	3.37
	Terrorism	3689	3.24
	Being a victim of a crime	3663	2.93
	Livelihood difficulties	3717	3.10
	Loneliness	3699	2.71
	Global warming and climate change	3699	3.37

Corrupt government officials	3603	3.39
Migration	3622	3.02
Artificial intelligence	3416	2.86

