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PERCEPTION OF ECOLOGICAL PRICE ACCEPTANCE: CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND PRICE JUSTIFICATION FOR ECOLOGICAL PRODUCTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract. The impact of eco-pricing on the formation of consumers' purchasing decisions is becoming increasingly decisive, influencing the level of adoption of ecological products. In the context of growing concerns for environmental protection and a healthy lifestyle, ecological products are attracting rising interest; however, price levels remain one of the main barriers to the expansion of consumption. The study aims to highlight how consumers perceive the price difference between ecological and conventional products, the degree of acceptance of eco-costs, and the factors that influence their willingness to pay a higher price. The research methodology is based on a quantitative study conducted through a questionnaire applied to a sample of 231 respondents, with data analysis carried out using descriptive statistical tools and the Likert scale. The results indicate that interest in ecological products is high, predominantly manifested at an occasional level, being conditioned by price sensitivity and the level of information. Consumers acknowledge the benefits of ecological products, particularly those related to health and safety, and accept a moderate price premium ranging between 0–20%. The conclusions emphasize the need for pricing strategies oriented toward perceived value, clear communication of eco-costs, and transparent labeling capable of stimulating the consistent adoption of ecological consumption.

Keywords: *ecological products, eco-pricing, consumer behavior, perceived value, willingness to pay, eco-costs, ecological marketing, sustainable consumption.*

Abstract. Impactul prețului ecologic asupra formării deciziilor de cumpărare ale consumatorilor este tot mai hotărâtor, influențând nivelul de adoptare a produselor ecologice. În contextul intensificării preocupărilor pentru protecția mediului și pentru un stil de viață sănătos, produsele ecologice câștigă un interes tot mai mare, însă nivelul prețurilor rămâne una dintre principalele bariere în extinderea consumului. Studiul își propune să evidențieze modul în care consumatorii percep diferența de preț dintre produsele ecologice și cele convenționale, gradul de acceptare a eco-costurilor și factorii care influențează

disponibilitatea de a plăti un preț mai ridicat. Metodologia cercetării se bazează pe un studiu cantitativ realizat prin chestionar, aplicat unui eșantion de 231 respondenți, iar analiza datelor a fost efectuată utilizând instrumente statistice descriptive și scala Likert. Rezultatele indică faptul că interesul pentru produsele ecologice este ridicat, manifestându-se preponderent la nivel ocazional, fiind condiționat de sensibilitatea la preț și de nivelul de informare. Consumatorii recunosc beneficiile produselor ecologice, în special cele legate de sănătate și siguranță, și acceptă un suprapreț moderat, situat în intervalul de 0–20%. Concluziile subliniază necesitatea unor strategii de preț orientate spre valoarea percepută, a unei comunicări clare a eco-costurilor și a unei etichetări transparente, capabile să stimuleze adoptarea constantă a consumului ecologic.

Cuvinte cheie: *produse ecologice, preț ecologic, comportamentul consumatorului, valoare percepută, disponibilitatea de plată, eco-costuri, marketing ecologic, consum sustenabil*.

1. Introduction

Human beings are entities that, in order to exist and develop, require a wide spectrum of products, needs that can be hierarchically structured across distinct levels, from fundamental to higher-order ones. Thus, throughout the entire life cycle - from birth to the end of existence - the individual manifests as an active consumer of various categories of goods.

In the contemporary context, alongside industrial development and the intensification of technological processes involved in the production, cultivation, and manufacture of consumer goods, there has been a significant increase in productivity and in the diversity of products available on the market. At the same time, modern industry frequently relies on the use of chemical substances intended to enhance yield, apparent quality, and the shelf life of agri-food products.

Nevertheless, in order to maintain health, consumers are increasingly oriented toward natural agri-food products, namely ecological products. These have been used since ancient times and are characterized by cultivation or production under strict conditions, without the use of synthetic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, or growth hormones.

Ecological products are obtained through production methods that comply with rigorous environmental protection standards, contribute to the preservation of biodiversity, and ensure a high level of quality of the final product. In recent years, both consumption and consumer interest in this category of products have increased, with such goods being marketed through various channels, including specialized retail networks, supermarkets, and pharmacies.

In this context, the need arises for an in-depth analysis of issues related to the pricing of ecological products, as well as of the pricing strategies applicable to this category. Producers, processors, and distributors - whether wholesalers or retailers - must take into account not only the nutritional and qualitative value of ecological products, but also the need to satisfy consumer requirements and to ensure the profitability of all stages involved in the distribution process. This objective can be achieved through the establishment of appropriate prices, grounded both in cost analysis and in research into consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward the prices of ecological products.

2. Materials and Methods

Domestic and international literature sources concerning the assessment of consumer attitudes toward the pricing of ecological products are used, and the systemic approach is applied to the study of market phenomena.

A questionnaire was developed to understand how consumers in the Republic of Moldova perceive the pricing of ecological products. The research was conducted between 08.01.2025 and 10.01.2025 [1]. The study sample consists of 231 respondents with the following socio-economic and geographical characteristics:

- ✓ by age: under 20 years – 130 respondents (56.3%), 21–30 years – 86 respondents (37.2%), 31–40 years – 4 respondents (1.7%), 41–50 years – 6 respondents (2.6%), over 60 years – 5 respondents (2.2%);
- ✓ by gender: female – 152 respondents (65.8%), male – 79 respondents (34.2%);
- ✓ by level of education: secondary – 59 respondents (25.5%), higher education – 158 respondents (68.4%), postgraduate – 14 respondents (6.1%);
- ✓ by net monthly household income: under 5,000 MDL – 43 respondents (18.6%), 5,001–10,000 MDL – 59 respondents (25.5%), 10,001–15,000 MDL – 51 respondents (22.1%), over 15,000 MDL – 78 respondents (33.8%);
- ✓ by type of place of residence: rural – 90 respondents (39.0%), urban – 141 respondents (61.0%);
- ✓ by region of residence: north – 38 respondents (16.5%), center – 164 respondents (71.0%), south – 29 respondents (12.5%).

3. Results

The study presented in this article is based on a survey conducted among consumers in the Republic of Moldova, aimed at analyzing their perceptions and the level of acceptance of eco-pricing. The sample is predominantly composed of young respondents, with the majority being under 30 years of age and having a higher level of education. The gender distribution is relatively balanced, with a moderate predominance of women, reflecting their increased interest in ecological consumption. Participants' income levels are diverse; however, the largest share is represented by individuals with medium and above-average incomes. Respondents originate from both rural and urban areas, proportionally covering the northern, central, and southern regions of the country. Such a sample structure allows for the formulation of relevant conclusions regarding consumer behavior and attitudes toward the prices of ecological products.

The results of the survey related to the thematic questions are presented below. The questionnaire began with a question aimed at confirming the purchase of ecological products, and the distribution of responses is illustrated in Figure 1.

The distribution of responses presented in Figure 1 outlines a predominantly occasional consumption behavior among respondents. The largest category is "occasionally," comprising 145 individuals or 62.8%, which indicates that a substantial share of consumers choose ecological products only in certain situations, without this behavior constituting a consistent habit. This is followed by the segment of respondents who purchase such products monthly, represented by 44 individuals or 19%, reflecting a moderate level of interest that is still insufficient to indicate loyalty to these products. Consumers who integrate ecological products into their routine consumption are fewer in number, namely 26 respondents or 11.3% who report weekly purchases, while the segment of daily buyers is negligible, with only 10 respondents or 4.3%.

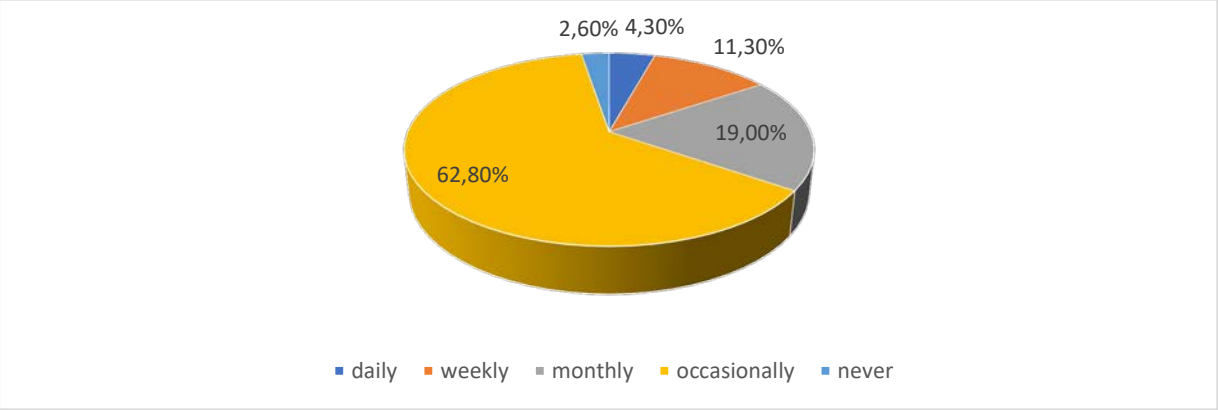

Figure 1. Respondents' answers to the question "How often do you buy organic products?"

This situation confirms that the consistent integration of ecological products into daily consumption remains limited, most likely due to higher prices, limited accessibility, or perceptions regarding their immediate utility. There are also 6 respondents or 2.6% who state that they have never purchased ecological products; this share remains marginal and indicates that complete rejection is relatively rare.

Overall, the data presented in Figure 1 suggest that interest in ecological products does exist but is manifested predominantly at an occasional level. The current behavior of respondents points to a consumer base that is open to ecological consumption, yet still situated in a transitional stage between curiosity and regular adoption.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of consumer preferences regarding the purchase of the most frequent categories of ecological products, and the results highlight a strong interest concentrated on basic products and those with an immediate impact on health. Among the most demanded products, food items rank first, being selected by 194 respondents. This predominance indicates that, for most consumers, the transition toward a healthier lifestyle is closely linked to daily food consumption. Ecological food products are perceived as having a direct connection to health, food safety, and quality of life, which justifies their high share.

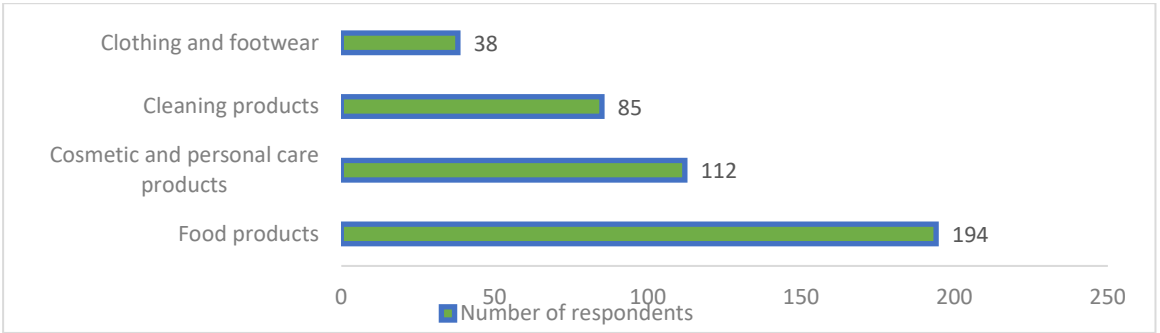

Figure 2. Respondents' answers to the question "Which category of organic products do you buy most often?"

Cosmetic and personal care products follow, with 112 respondents, suggesting a sustained concern for avoiding aggressive chemical substances in products applied to the skin. In this case, consumers become more attentive to the ingredients used in cosmetic products and to the long-term risks associated with conventional alternatives, which in turn stimulates demand for organic options. Cleaning products rank third, with 85 respondents. Although less popular than the previously mentioned categories, there is a noticeable openness toward reducing exposure to detergents and toxic substances in the household

environment. This segment is expanding, being influenced by campaigns related to respiratory health and environmental protection.

The least demanded category is ecological clothing and footwear, selected by only 38 respondents. The reasons for this situation may vary, but they mainly relate to the fact that the impact of these products is perceived as less immediate compared to food or cosmetic products, as well as to the notion that, for many consumers, sustainable fashion remains a secondary concern.

Thus, it can be observed that the adoption of ecological products is closely linked to their perceived importance and direct impact on health. Consumers prioritize ecological food products as a core element of a healthy lifestyle, cosmetic and personal care products for reasons of personal safety, and cleaning products out of a desire to avoid toxic substances within the household.

The data presented in Figure 3 highlight a strong dependence of consumers on supermarket chains as the primary purchasing channel for ecological products. With 195 respondents, this category clearly dominates consumer preferences, suggesting that accessibility, relatively competitive prices, and a wide product assortment play a decisive role in this orientation. Supermarkets are perceived as convenient spaces where consumers can find everything in one place, including ecological alternatives.

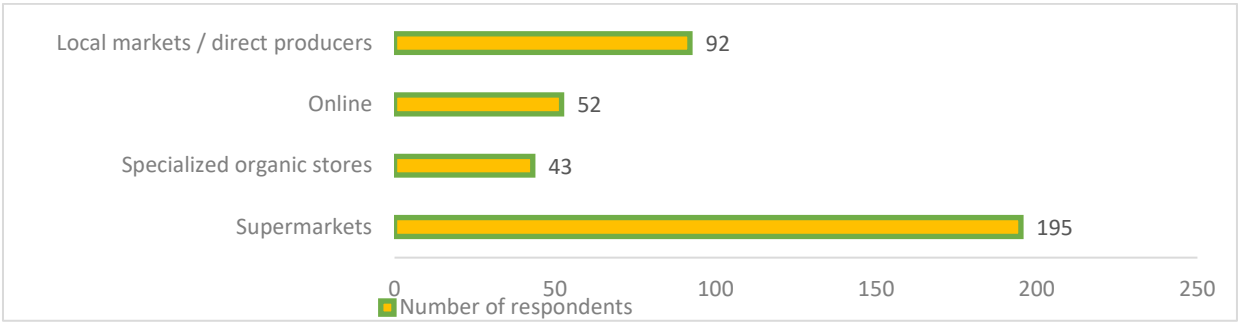

Figure 3. Respondents' answers to the question "From what type of stores do you most often buy organic products?"

Local markets and direct producers rank second, with 92 respondents. This significant share indicates that a substantial segment of the population prefers authentic and traditional sources, where trust in production methods, freshness, and quality is higher. Direct purchasing from producers aligns with traditional values and the desire for clear traceability, reflecting both an attachment to natural products and support for the local economy.

Online sales, chosen by 52 respondents, occupy the third position. Although not representing the dominant segment, their growing presence is evident. This trend reflects consumers' appetite for convenience, home delivery, and a broader product range, particularly for niche products. Nevertheless, the adoption rate remains moderate, possibly due to logistical constraints, varying levels of trust, or delivery costs.

At the bottom of the ranking are specialized organic stores, with 43 respondents. Despite offering carefully selected and certified products, their relatively low share may be explained by higher prices, limited accessibility, and a more restricted territorial presence. Consumers may perceive these stores as targeting a narrower and more sustainability-educated segment.

Overall, the information in Figure 3 shows that the purchase of ecological products is primarily influenced by accessibility and convenience, criteria that favor supermarkets.

However, nearly one third of respondents prefer local markets and direct producers, signaling a genuine interest in natural, local, and trustworthy products.

Online purchasing and specialized organic stores remain secondary options, yet they represent segments with growth potential, especially if factors such as price, product diversity, and trust in ecological certifications are improved.

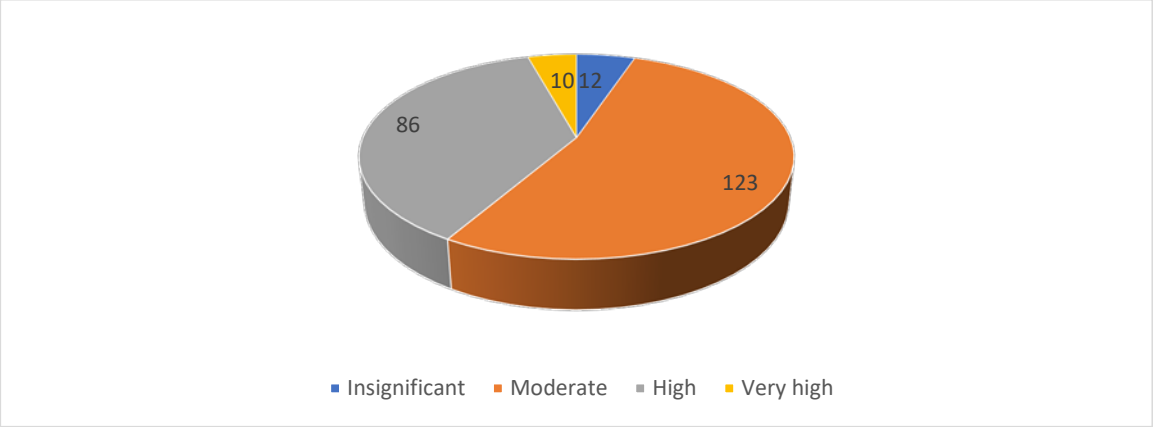

Figure 4. Respondents' answers to the question "How do you perceive the price difference between organic and conventional products?"

Figure 4 clearly illustrates how consumers perceive the price difference between ecological and conventional products, with the distribution of responses highlighting a predominantly moderate to high perception.

The largest share of respondents, 123 individuals, consider the price difference to be moderate, suggesting that although ecological products are perceived as more expensive, this level is not regarded as excessive or unaffordable. Such a perception may encourage consumers' openness toward occasional or regular purchases of ecological products, especially when the health and environmental benefits are clearly communicated.

A significant segment, comprising 86 respondents, perceives the price difference as high. This group signals heightened price sensitivity, which may represent a barrier to the consistent adoption of ecological products. The perception of a substantial cost increase can limit purchase frequency and redirect consumer behavior toward more affordable conventional alternatives.

The "insignificant" category, with 12 respondents, indicates that only a small number of consumers consider the price difference to be unimportant. These individuals represent the segment with the highest potential for loyalty, likely being less influenced by cost and more by factors such as health, quality, or ecological responsibility.

At the opposite end, 10 respondents perceive the price difference as very high, reflecting a critical view of the costs associated with ecological products. For this group, price constitutes a major barrier that almost completely inhibits the adoption of this type of product.

Overall, perceptions of the price difference are dominated by moderate and high evaluations, indicating a tangible sensitivity to costs among consumers. Although most respondents do not consider the difference to be exaggerated, price nevertheless remains a determining factor in the purchasing decision.

Therefore, in order to expand ecological consumption, clearer communication of the benefits of ecological products, more accessible or promotional pricing policies, and diversification of product ranges with a balanced price–quality ratio would be necessary.

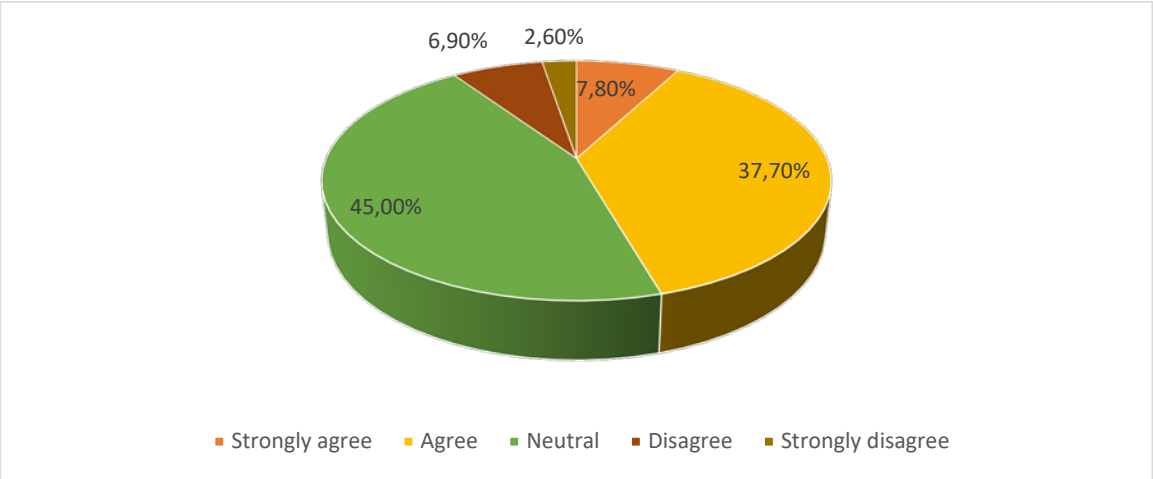

Figure 5. Respondents' answers to the question "Are organic products more expensive because they include environmental protection costs?"

Figure 5 indicates that consumers' perceptions regarding the reason why ecological products are more expensive are predominantly inclined toward acceptance, with a significant proportion of respondents considering the inclusion of environmental protection costs in the price to be justified.

The largest category is the neutral one, accounting for 45% of respondents. This high proportion indicates a considerable level of uncertainty or a lack of clear information regarding the cost components of ecological products. Many consumers neither reject nor fully accept the idea, which suggests an evident need for more effective communication from producers and retailers.

A total of 45.5% of respondents fall within the agreement range (37.7% agree and 7.8% strongly agree). This majority category suggests that nearly half of consumers understand the rationale behind higher prices and accept the fact that sustainable production processes involve additional investments—in certification, the quality of raw materials, green energy, responsible resource management, or emission reduction. These consumers are more likely to adopt ecological products even under conditions of higher prices.

On the other hand, a relatively small yet present proportion—9.5% (6.9% disagree and 2.6% strongly disagree)—rejects the idea that ecological prices reflect real environmental protection costs. This group may perceive prices as exaggerated or artificially imposed, or may lack trust in the differences between ecological and conventional products.

The distribution of responses indicates a clear tendency toward accepting the justification for higher prices of ecological products, although nearly half of respondents remain undecided. These results suggest that the market still lacks transparent information about the real costs of ecological production. At the same time, they point to a considerable potential for increasing consumer trust through educational campaigns and clear communication regarding ecological benefits and the investments required to produce goods with minimal environmental impact.

The analysis of responses shows that consumers' perceptions of the price difference between ecological and conventional products are, overall, slightly favorable toward justifying these costs. Although a significant share of respondents—104 individuals—adopt a neutral position, indicating uncertainty or insufficient information about cost structures, approximately 45.5% of participants (87 agreeing and 18 strongly agreeing) believe that the higher price genuinely reflects investments in environmental protection.

The group contesting this justification is relatively small—only 22 respondents—indicating that opposition to the rationale behind ecological pricing is marginal. The Likert scale calculation confirms this trend, with an aggregated score of +0.41, oriented toward agreement, though with moderate intensity.

Overall, public opinion is shaped in a cautiously favorable direction, in which consumers tend to accept the logic of higher prices but do not do so firmly. The results suggest that clearer communication regarding ecological benefits, certification processes, and the real costs of sustainable production could transform neutrality into trust and, consequently, into a greater willingness to pay ecological prices.

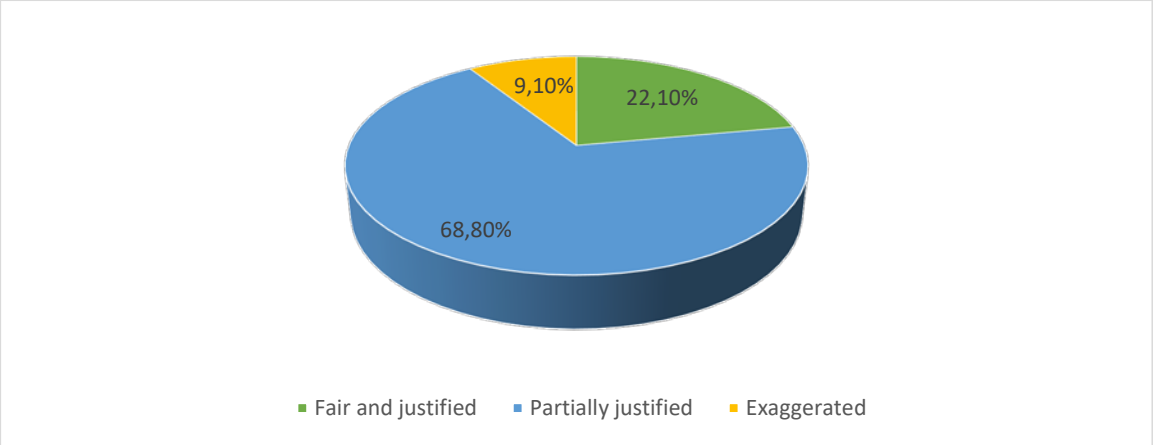

Figure 6. Respondents' answers to the question "Do you consider the prices of organic products to be:"

Figure 6 presents a clear structure of consumers' perceptions regarding the price level of ecological products, suggesting a predominantly moderate evaluation.

The largest share of respondents—68.8%, representing 159 individuals—consider the prices to be partially justified. This majority proportion indicates that the public recognizes, to a certain extent, the reasons behind the higher costs of ecological products, while also perceiving the existence of elements that could be optimized. At the same time, 22.1% of respondents (51 individuals) believe that prices are fair and justified. This group represents the segment of consumers who are fully aware of and accept the fact that ecological production involves additional costs. These consumers are the most likely to adopt ecological products on a consistent basis, as they perceive the price–value relationship as balanced and fair.

On the other hand, 9.1% of participants (21 individuals) consider the prices to be exaggerated, reflecting a critical perception and a low tolerance for increased costs. For these consumers, high prices constitute a direct barrier to the purchase of ecological products, and this segment indicates that a small but relevant share of the public is not convinced by the justification of current prices.

The results show that the majority of respondents (nearly 70%) place the prices of ecological products in an intermediate zone, viewing them as partially justified, while only about one fifth perceive them as fully justified. The relatively small proportion of those who consider prices exaggerated suggests that negative perceptions are limited, yet still present. Overall, consumers display a moderate openness toward the prices of ecological products, combined with a need for more transparent explanations regarding the real costs of production, traceability, and ecological benefits. Clearer communication of these aspects could reduce the neutral zone and contribute to strengthening the perception of a "fair price."

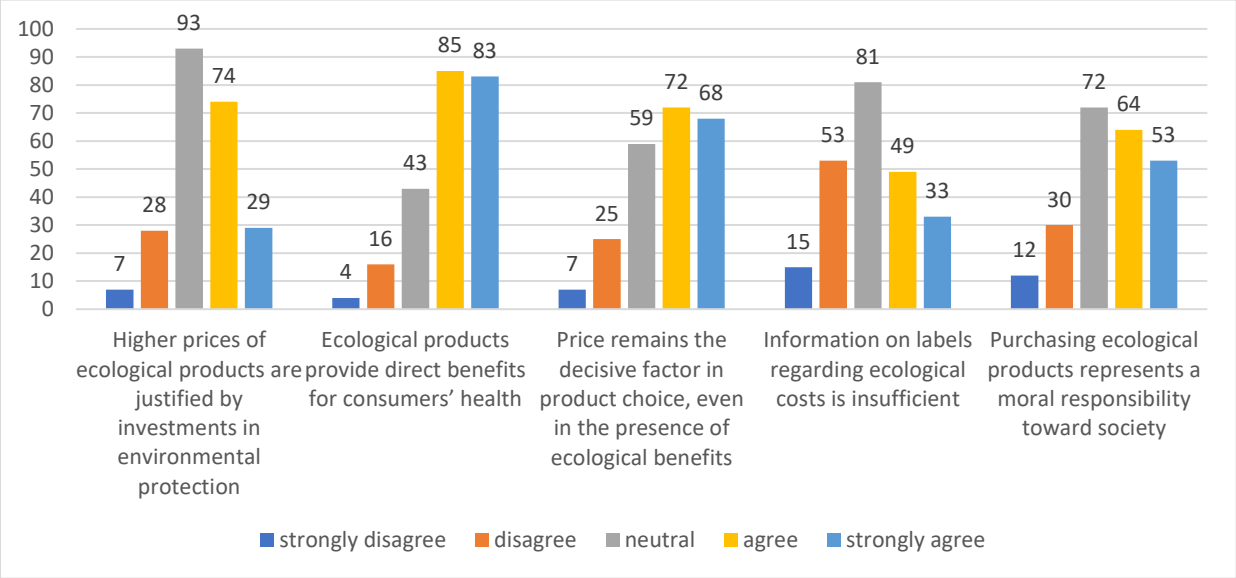

Figure 7. Respondents' answers to the question "Please rate how much you agree with the following statements about organic products."

Figure 7 presents a set of five key statements about ecological products, evaluated on a five-point scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The distribution of responses provides a comprehensive picture of consumer perceptions regarding price, benefits, transparency, and the moral responsibility associated with ecological consumption.

The statement *"Higher prices of ecological products are justified by investments in environmental protection"* generates a relative balance between agreement and neutrality, with a slight predominance of respondents who support price justification (the combined categories of strongly agree and agree total 103 respondents), followed by neutral responses (93 respondents), while disagreement and strong disagreement account for 35 respondents. However, the high number of neutral responses indicates a considerable level of uncertainty or mistrust regarding cost transparency. Only a minority rejects the argument of ecological investments. Overall, consumers partially accept the justification but likely expect clearer explanations.

The statement *"Ecological products provide direct benefits for consumers' health"* records the highest level of agreement (strongly agree and agree total 168 respondents), compared to 43 neutral responses and only 20 respondents expressing disagreement. Consumers are thus largely convinced that ecological products have a positive impact on health. This perception represents the main driver of ecological product purchases and confirms the strong association between ecological and healthy consumption.

For the statement *"Price remains the decisive factor in product choice, even in the presence of ecological benefits"*, the results are very clear: the combined agreement categories total 140 respondents, neutral responses account for 59 respondents, and disagreement totals 32 respondents. This indicates that most consumers consider price to be the primary purchasing criterion, even when they acknowledge ecological benefits. This perception helps explain why many individuals purchase ecological products only occasionally. While benefits are recognized, they are not always sufficient to offset price considerations. The size of the neutral segment suggests that purchasing behavior may vary depending on the type of product.

The statement *"Information on labels regarding ecological costs is insufficient"* is the most polarized, with the combined categories of strongly agree and agree totaling 82 respondents,

neutral responses accounting for 81 respondents, and the combined categories of disagree and strongly disagree amounting to 68 respondents. This distribution indicates that the market suffers from a lack of transparency and that information on ecological costs is not yet communicated clearly enough. At the same time, the relatively high level of disagreement shows that some consumers consider the information currently provided on labels to be sufficient or not strictly necessary.

For the statement *"Purchasing ecological products represents a moral responsibility toward society,"* the balance tilts toward agreement, with strongly agree and agree totaling 117 respondents, neutral responses accounting for 72 respondents, and disagree and strongly disagree totaling 42 respondents. Nearly half of the respondents perceive the purchase of ecological products as a moral and responsible act. However, the substantial neutral group suggests that the idea of social responsibility, while growing, is not yet dominant. A significant share of respondents does not perceive a direct moral link.

The final conclusion for Figure 7 highlights a complex and nuanced consumer perception of ecological products. Health benefits are the most strongly recognized (by over 70% of respondents), price remains the main obstacle to purchase (140 respondents), and the justification of higher prices through ecological costs is accepted, but with reservations. Transparency regarding labeling is perceived as insufficient, with opinions being highly divided, while nearly half of respondents consider ecological purchasing to be a moral gesture.

Overall, consumers are favorable toward ecological products and acknowledge their benefits, yet they remain price-sensitive and in need of clear information. This combination explains the predominance of occasional purchases and the continued preference for conventional products.

Figure 8 illustrates how respondents assess the importance of five key factors that may justify the price of an ecological product. The distribution of responses shows a clear orientation toward recognizing the decisive role of durability, sustainable raw materials, and ecological technologies, with more moderate variations in the case of taxes, regulations, and subsidies.

The category *"Sustainable raw materials used"* is perceived as one of the most relevant factors in justifying price. Nearly half of respondents (149 out of 231) consider sustainable raw materials to be important or very important, reflecting a strong concern for the quality of inputs and their origin. Only 16 respondents regard this factor as of little relevance. Sustainable raw materials thus represent a central anchor in the perceived value of ecological products.

The factor *"Ecological technologies in the production process"* records the highest number of "important" responses (79 respondents) and a consistently high number of "very important" responses (70 respondents), totaling 149 respondents who recognize the relevance of clean technologies in price justification. This result highlights that the public attaches considerable value to how products are manufactured, appreciating investments in technologies with reduced environmental impact.

For the factor *"Environmental taxes and regulations,"* a more balanced distribution can be observed, though it is less polarized than in the first two categories. Approximately 121 respondents consider this factor important or very important, while 73 place it in a moderate range. However, a higher number of respondents consider this category to be of little or no relevance, suggesting that taxes and regulations are perceived as a more technical element, less visible to the final consumer.

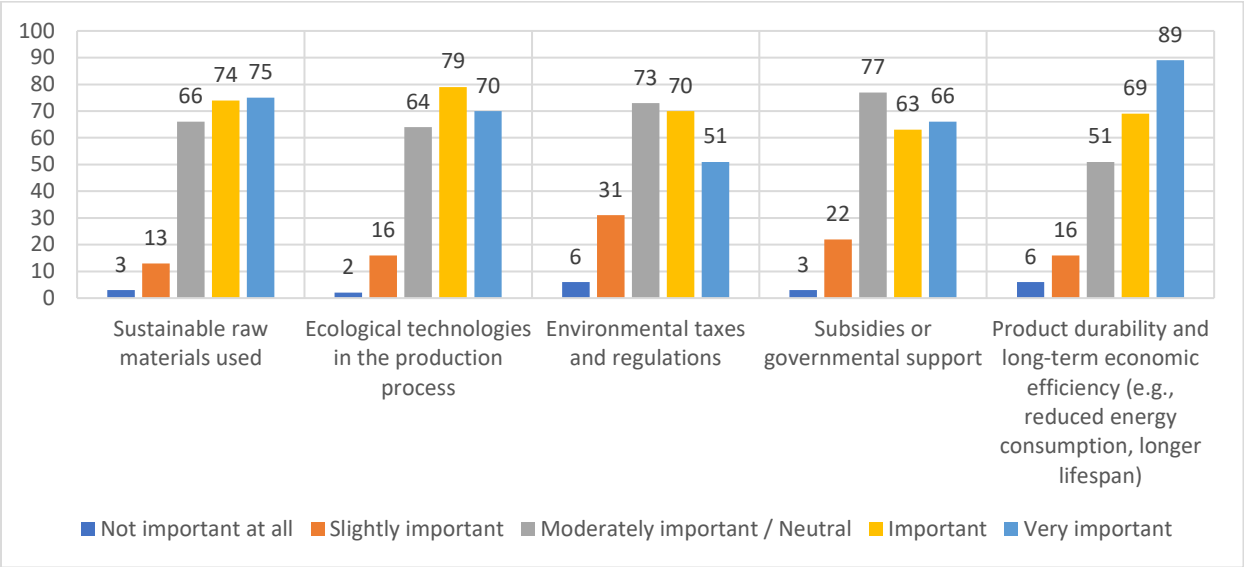

Figure 8. Respondents' answers to the question "How important do you consider the following factors in justifying the price of an organic product?"

The perceived importance of subsidies is significant, although weaker than in the first two categories. A total of 129 respondents consider this factor important or very important. The high number of neutral responses (77 respondents) indicates uncertainty regarding the actual role of the state in the final price of ecological products. Nevertheless, only 25 respondents consider this factor irrelevant, suggesting a general acknowledgment of the potential role of public policies.

"Product durability and long-term economic efficiency" is the category with the highest number of "very important" responses (89 respondents). Consumers strongly value durability and long-term economic benefits, elements that directly contribute to the perception of profitability of an ecological product. Approximately 140 respondents consider this factor important or very important, confirming that a long-term perspective is becoming an increasingly influential criterion in price justification.

Overall, the results presented in Figure 8 show that respondents assign high importance to factors reflecting quality, sustainability, and durability. Consumers therefore value investments in processes and tangible outcomes of sustainability, while being less influenced by administrative or fiscal aspects. The figure confirms the existence of a rational orientation whereby buyers accept higher prices when these are justified by quality, reduced environmental impact, and extended product lifespan.

Figure 9 provides insight into how consumers integrate five important factors into the decision-making process related to the purchase of ecological products.

The factor *"Price–quality ratio of the product"* has the strongest impact on purchasing decisions. A total of 175 respondents (over 75%) state that they frequently or always take the price–quality ratio into account. This result confirms that, despite the growing interest in ecological products, consumers remain highly attentive to the economic value of the product. Perceived quality and the balance between price and performance are decisive in the purchasing process.

Although the importance of transparency is acknowledged, the distribution shows that a significant number of respondents fall within the moderate category (78 respondents). Nevertheless, 120 individuals evaluate this criterion as frequently or always relevant. This

finding suggests that a considerable proportion of consumers seek clear information about ecological costs; however, the lack of standardization and consistent labeling may reduce the influence of this factor on final purchasing decisions.

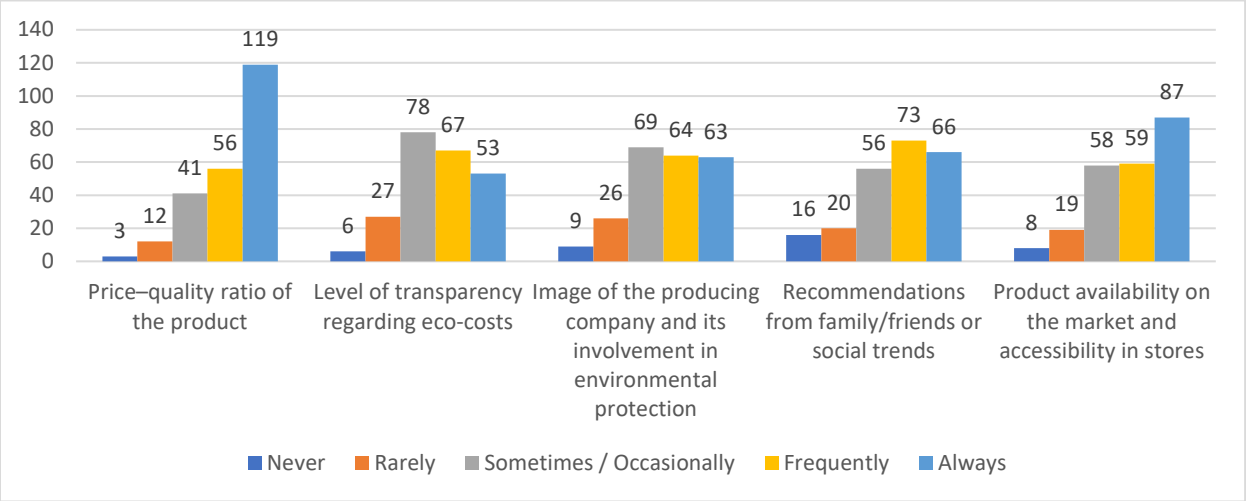

Figure 9. Respondents' answers to the question "When deciding whether to buy an eco-friendly product, to what extent do you consider the following aspects?"

Approximately 127 respondents frequently or always consider the reputation of the company and its involvement in ecological practices. This criterion is becoming increasingly important against the backdrop of concerns related to greenwashing. The majority of respondents pay attention to corporate responsibility, indicating the strengthening of an ethical consumption culture.

Social recommendations exert a significant influence, with 139 respondents taking them into account frequently or always. This aspect highlights the strong role of social influence and validation through reference groups. In decisions regarding the purchase of ecological products, the opinions of close social circles function as a source of trust and confirmation.

Product availability is an extremely important factor, with 146 respondents considering it frequently or always. Thus, even when purchase intention exists, it is conditioned by the actual presence of ecological products in stores. Limited or uneven supply remains one of the major barriers to the consistent adoption of ecological consumption.

In conclusion, the results presented in Figure 9 indicate that purchasing decisions are primarily guided by economic considerations and trust, complemented by social influence and product availability. Overall, consumers seek ecological products that are affordable, high-quality, and transparent, originating from credible companies and easily accessible on the market. Their decisions reflect a balance between personal values, budget constraints, and social environment influences.

Figure 10 illustrates how five key elements influence consumers' decisions to pay a higher price for an ecological product.

Ecological certification represents an essential element in justifying the price, as 117 respondents are influenced either strongly or very strongly by this factor. This finding confirms the importance of visible evidence of authenticity and standardization. However, the high number of moderate responses (74 respondents) suggests that the impact of certification also depends on consumers' familiarity with labeling systems.

Evidence of reduced environmental impact has a considerable influence, with 119 respondents stating that they are influenced strongly or very strongly, and 84 respondents indicating a moderate influence. This result points to a high level of sensitivity toward environmental arguments. Consumers value transparency regarding the positive ecological effects of a product, indicating that authentic green messaging can justify a higher price.

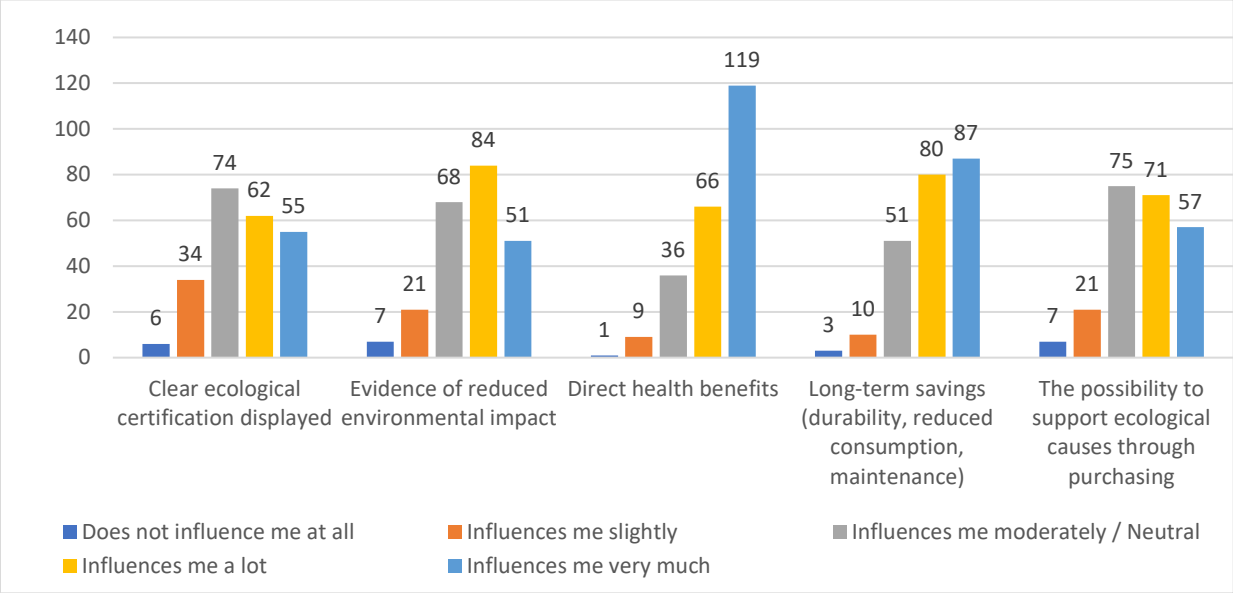

Figure 10. Respondents' answers to the question "If an organic product is more expensive than a conventional one, how would the following factors influence your purchasing decision?"

Direct health benefits represent the factor with the strongest emotional and decisional impact. An impressive total of 132 respondents report that health benefits influence them strongly or very strongly, while only 10 individuals state that the influence is low or nonexistent. This confirms that health remains the primary motivation for consumers to pay higher prices for ecological products.

The factor *"Long-term savings"* records the highest score in the category "influences me very much" (87 respondents). Overall, 167 respondents are influenced strongly or very strongly, highlighting that perceptions of efficiency and durability constitute an extremely convincing argument for accepting a higher price. Consumers pay attention to the total cost of use, not only to the initial purchase price.

With 128 respondents influenced strongly or very strongly, the element *"The possibility to support ecological causes through purchasing"* confirms the moral dimension of ecological consumption. However, its influence is slightly more modest compared to health benefits or long-term savings. The results show that ecological solidarity is important, but its persuasive power depends on consumers' personal connection to these causes.

Figure 11 illustrates the perceived level of preparedness of individuals, families, the community, the market, and state institutions to accept higher prices for ecological products. The majority of respondents position themselves in the categories *moderately prepared* and *prepared* (109 respondents), indicating a considerable personal openness to paying a higher price for ecological products. Nevertheless, the 46 respondents who consider themselves *slightly prepared* suggest that, for a significant share of consumers, price remains an obstacle. The segment of those who feel *very prepared* (27 respondents) is still relatively small, indicating that firm willingness to pay higher prices is limited.

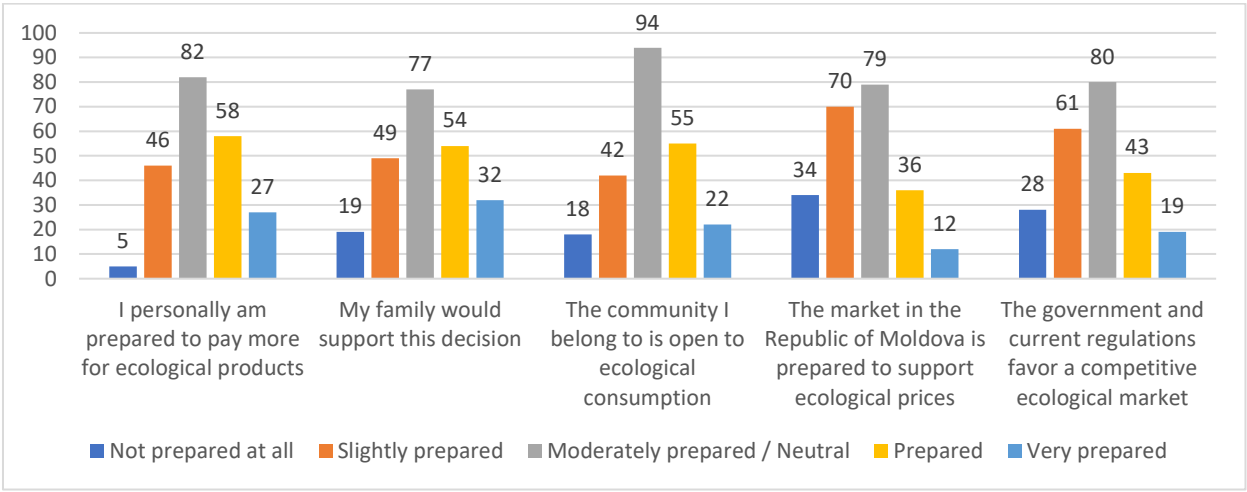

Figure 11. Respondents' answers to the question "On a scale of 1 to 5 (not at all prepared – very prepared), how prepared do you think society (including yourself) is to accept higher green prices?"

Respondents' perceptions indicate that their families are generally moderately supportive of higher ecological prices (77 respondents). However, a substantial number believe that their families would be *prepared* (54 respondents) or *very prepared* (19 respondents) to support such decisions. This distribution suggests a potential for positive influence within the family environment, alongside a certain degree of hesitation.

The community is perceived as the least prepared element for accepting ecological prices. With 94 responses in the moderate category and 60 respondents indicating that the community is *slightly* or *not at all prepared*, participants point to the absence of a strong collective culture of ecological consumption. Although 77 respondents (*prepared* and *very prepared*) represent a meaningful segment, it is insufficient to suggest broad acceptance at the community level.

The preparedness of the market in the Republic of Moldova reflects the highest level of reluctance. A total of 104 respondents (*slightly prepared* and *not at all prepared*) consider that the market is not ready t o support ecological prices. Only 48 respondents believe that the market is *prepared* or *very prepared*. This perception reflects the limited availability of ecological products, significant price differences, the lack of stable demand, and the slow development of the ecological sector in Moldova.

Regarding *the role of government and regulations*, perceptions are dominated by the *moderately prepared* category (80 respondents), indicating unclear expectations concerning public policies. Only 62 respondents consider the government to be prepared, while 40 express the opposite view. These results suggest a perception of insufficient state involvement in subsidizing ecological agriculture, promoting organic products, regulating labeling, and creating a competitive ecological market.

The data presented in Figure 12 highlight a substantial openness among consumers toward paying a price premium for ecological products, albeit within moderate limits. The largest share of respondents, 60.6%, state that they would be willing to pay up to 10% more, indicating a psychological threshold at which the additional cost is perceived as reasonable in relation to the benefits associated with ecological consumption. This segment represents the core group of consumers with high potential for the consistent purchase of ecological products, provided that the price difference remains within affordable limits.

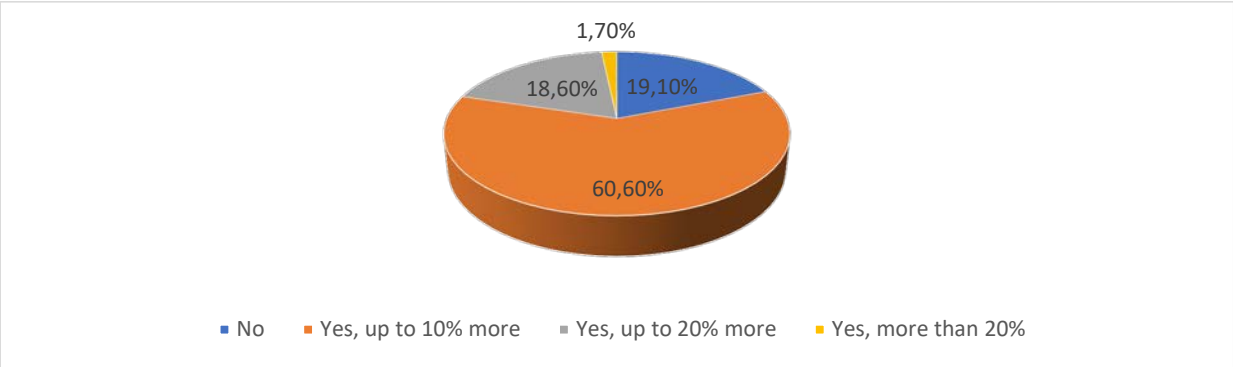

Figure 12. Respondents' answers to the question "Would you be willing to pay more for organic products?"

Another significant group, accounting for 18.6%, is willing to pay up to 20% more, reflecting a strong motivation, whether related to health considerations or environmental responsibility. These consumers appear to perceive the added value of ecological products as sufficiently important to justify a more substantial price increase. By contrast, only 1.7% of respondents are willing to pay more than 20% extra, highlighting a small but highly committed segment that strongly values ecological benefits and is prepared to bear significantly higher costs. In contrast, 19.1% of participants state that they would not be willing to pay more, underscoring the fact that a considerable proportion of the population remains price-sensitive and less convinced of the justification for the higher costs of ecological products.

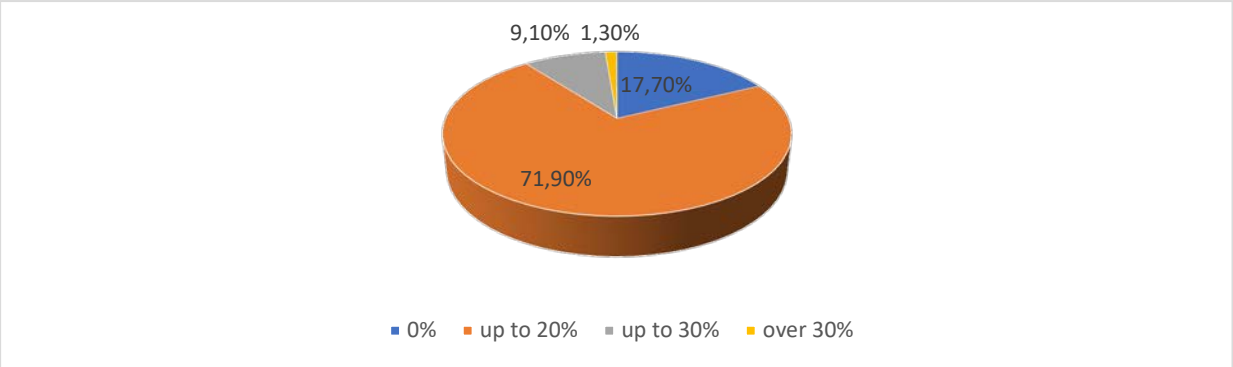

Figure 13. Respondents' answers to the question "What is the maximum price premium you would accept for organic products?"

Figure 13 highlights a clear and dominant trend regarding consumers' willingness to accept price premiums for ecological products. The largest segment, representing 71.9% of respondents, indicates a willingness to accept a price premium of up to 20%. This level appears to be the most comfortable psychological threshold for the majority of participants, reflecting the perception that a moderately higher ecological price is reasonable and justified in relation to the benefits offered.

Another notable segment consists of respondents who would not accept any price premium (17.7%). This group reflects a high level of price sensitivity and, likely, a lower willingness to pay more for ecological products, either due to economic constraints or a lack of conviction regarding the added value of such products. This finding represents an important indicator of a significant market barrier shaped by perceptions related to costs, trust, or income levels.

The segment of consumers willing to accept price premiums of up to 30% (9.1%) represents a group with stronger motivation and a higher level of commitment to ecological consumption. These respondents are more aware of the beneficial impact of ecological products on the environment and health and are therefore willing to invest more accordingly.

The smallest share, 1.3%, is represented by those who would accept a price premium above 30%. This very limited segment is characteristic of highly dedicated consumers who are strongly oriented toward ecological values, for whom perceived benefits outweigh higher costs.

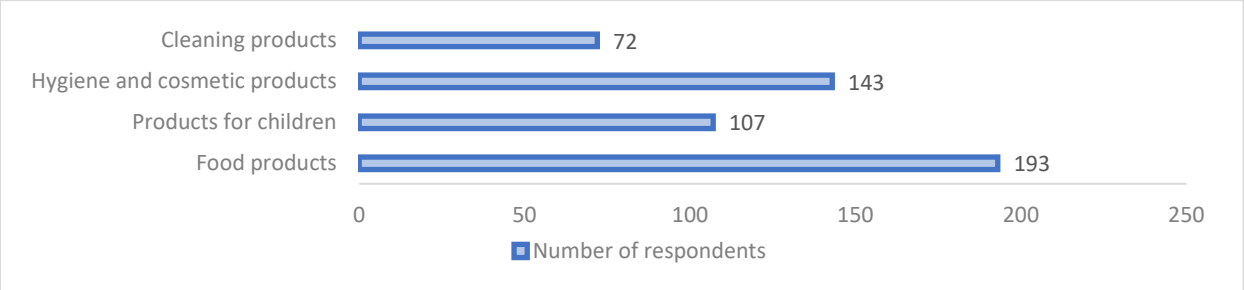

Figure 14. Respondents' answers to the question "For which product category would you be willing to pay the most for the ecological attribute?"

The distribution of responses indicates a clear consumer orientation toward specific product categories in which the ecological attribute is perceived as having high value. Accordingly, Figure 14 reflects consumer priorities based on the direct impact on health, personal safety, and environmental sensitivity. The results reveal a clear hierarchy of consumers' willingness to pay more for the ecological attribute, with the highest priority assigned to food products, which are perceived as having a direct and immediate impact on health.

A high level of interest is also observed for hygiene and cosmetic products, where product composition is considered important for personal well-being. Additionally, there is significant interest in products for children, driven by their vulnerability and the demand for safe and reliable products. At the lower end of the hierarchy are cleaning products, which attract a moderate level of interest, as their benefits are perceived more at the environmental level than at the personal level.

Overall, consumers are more willing to make additional investments in product categories where ecological attributes are closely associated with health, safety, and quality of life, confirming the trends observed in the previous figures.

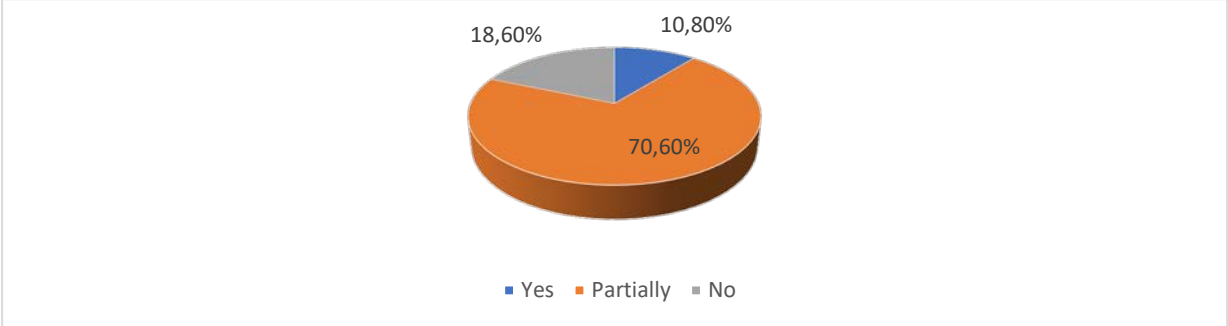

Figure 15. Respondents' answers to the question "Do you think manufacturers provide sufficient explanations about eco-prices?"

Figure 15 highlights that the majority of consumers believe producers do not provide sufficient explanations regarding the formation of ecological prices, and that this communication deficit influences how the public perceives price differences between ecological and conventional products. In this regard, a major lack of communication concerning ecological pricing can be observed: approximately 7 out of 10 consumers consider the explanations to be only partial and therefore insufficient to generate full trust; nearly 2 out of 10 believe that no clear justification exists at all, which may foster suspicion and reluctance to purchase; and only 1 out of 10 consumers is fully satisfied, thus indicating a structural transparency problem at the producer level.

Consequently, the lack of clear information regarding the formation of ecological prices remains one of the main barriers to accepting price differences, affecting both consumers' willingness to pay and their trust in ecological products.

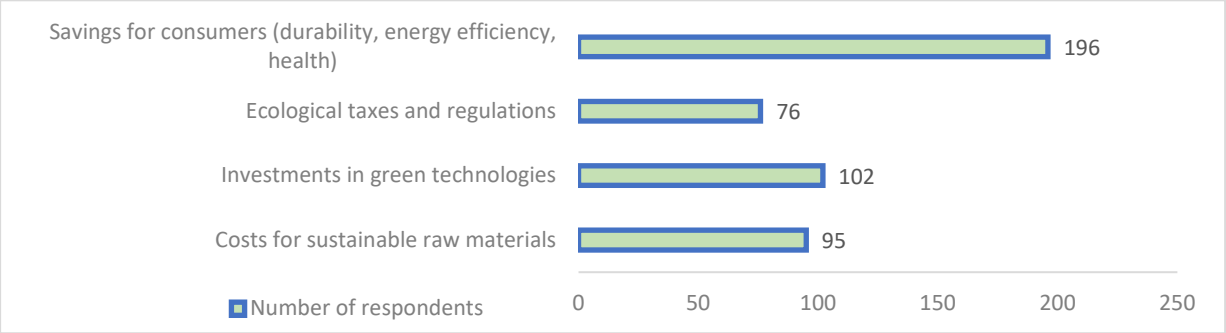

Figure 16. Respondents' answers to the question "What information would you like to see on the label of organic products in order to understand the price?"

Figure 16 clearly highlights that transparency is an essential element in the acceptance of the price of ecological products. Respondents express a strong desire to better understand the reasons that justify the higher costs of these products, and the types of information requested reveal consumers' main concerns. Accordingly, it can be observed that respondents are primarily interested in the clarity of the economic justification of ecological prices. They seek information that explains not only production costs, but also the concrete long-term benefits, both financial and health-related.

In this context, the most frequently requested information concerns direct savings for the consumer, followed by technical information—such as green technologies and sustainable raw materials—which is considered relevant but secondary. The least requested information relates to taxes and regulations. These results reflect the need for more transparent, consumer-oriented labeling that clearly explains the reasons for price differences and strengthens trust in ecological products.

Figure 17 highlights an essential aspect for understanding consumer behavior, namely the role of information in justifying ecological prices. The results show that the majority of respondents fall between neutrality and agreement (based on Likert scale analysis, an aggregated score of +0.45 was obtained), suggesting that better information can positively influence willingness to pay, although a considerable segment remains unconvinced of this relationship.

Thus, it can be clearly observed that the level of information regarding eco-costs has a potentially positive impact on consumers' willingness to pay a higher price. Nearly half of respondents (48.5%) indicate that they would be more open to higher prices if they

understood eco-costs, while a very large proportion (40.2%) remains undecided, suggesting that greater transparency could transform this neutral segment into a favorable one. Only one out of ten respondents reports not being influenced by additional information. This finding once again confirms that a lack of information represents a major barrier to the acceptance of ecological prices, and that clear and detailed communication regarding the real costs of ecological products can significantly improve consumers' willingness to pay.

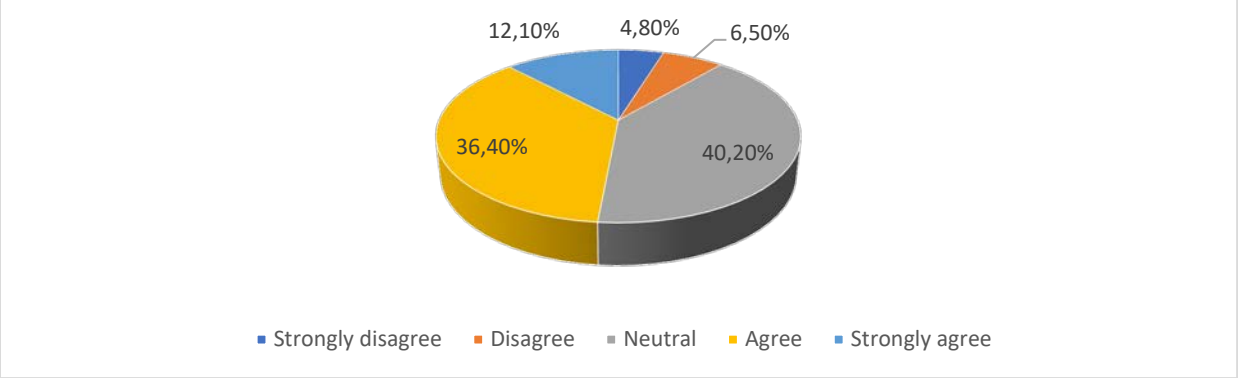

Figure 17. Respondents' answers to the question "If I were better informed about eco-costs, would I be more willing to pay a higher price?"

Figure 18 reveals an essential aspect of consumer behavior, namely that in the absence of price differences, the ecological product becomes the overwhelmingly dominant choice. The results indicate a clear and stable preference for ecological products once the price barrier is removed, highlighting a fundamental reality: under equal price conditions, consumers overwhelmingly choose ecological products.

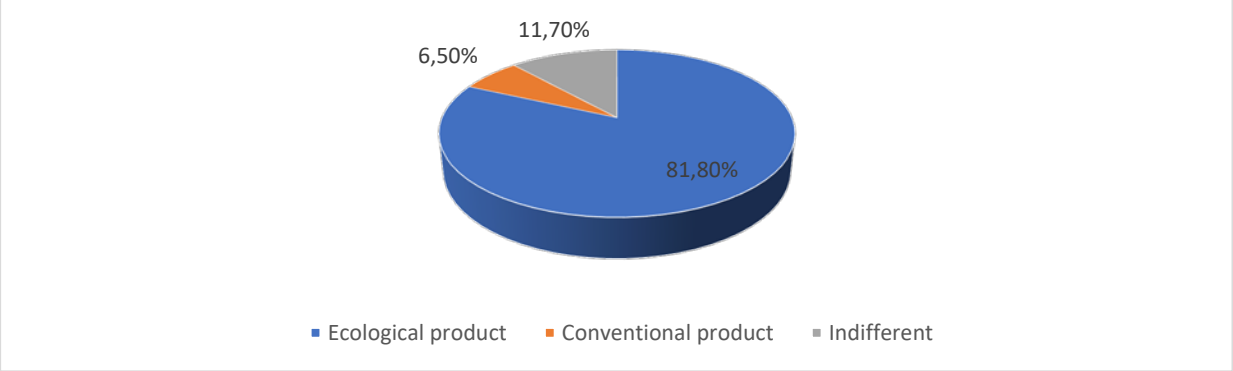

Figure 18. Respondents' answers to the question "If an organic product had the same price as a conventional one, which would you choose?"

This finding demonstrates that interest in ecological products is very high and that the primary barrier to adoption is price rather than perception or lack of trust. Eliminating cost differences would likely lead to a rapid increase in ecological consumption, a result that retailers and producers could capitalize on primarily through pricing and communication strategies. Overall, the data presented in this figure confirm that the potential of the ecological market is very high and that price accessibility is the key factor for expanding ecological consumption.

Figure 19 reflects how consumers evaluate the importance of the "ecological" attribute in relation to product price. The results suggest that, although price remains a strong decision criterion, the ecological attribute has acquired a comparable level of importance for the majority of respondents.

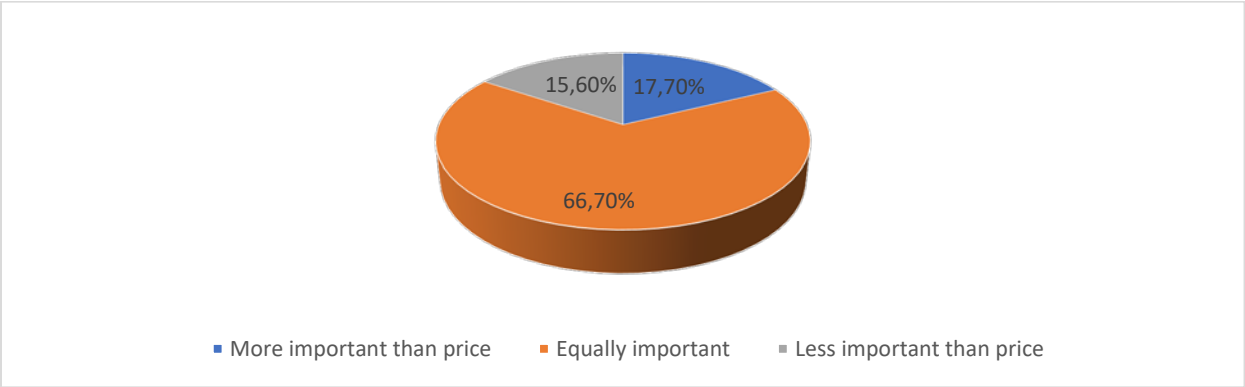

Figure 19. Respondents' answers to the question "How important is the 'eco-friendly' attribute in choosing a product compared to price?

Thus, an overall balanced perception structure can be observed, with an overwhelming majority for whom the ecological attribute is at least as important as price. Specifically, 84.4% of respondents consider the ecological attribute to be equally important or more important than price, while only 15.6% prioritize price over the ecological characteristic.

These findings confirm that ecological products have strong market potential and that effective communication of their value can transform the ecological attribute into a decisive purchasing criterion for an even broader segment of consumers.

4. Results and Discussion

Ecological interests and needs of individuals manifest both at the personal level and within the groups and social structures to which they belong, and they can be delineated across several levels of analysis. At the national level, ecological interests express society's aspiration to ensure a healthy environment capable of supporting the normal course of life and the continuity of future generations. At the regional level, ecological interests are determined by the degree of pollution specific to each area, with populations in heavily affected regions exhibiting a more pronounced concern for environmental protection compared to less exposed areas.

Local ecological interests are particularly evident in communities located in proximity to major sources of pollution, such as metallurgical enterprises, mining operations, power plants, or chemical complexes, where the impact of anthropogenic activities is high and directly experienced by the population. At the individual level, personal ecological interests are characteristic of those who directly perceive the effects of environmental quality on health and quality of life, this direct experience constituting a determining factor of behavior and attitudes toward environmental protection [2]. Although consumption of ecological products is not very high in the Republic of Moldova, the new generation of consumers is showing a growing interest in such products [3]. Aligning production with these specific needs allows economic agents to transform the population's ecological concerns into development opportunities, ensuring an effective correlation between the supply of organic products and the real expectations of the market [4].

Considering the role of price as a fundamental element of the marketing mix, it not only indicates the value of a transaction but also reflects the conditions of commercialization through mechanisms such as quantity discounts, bonuses, or other granted facilities. From this perspective, price acquires particular importance in shaping consumers' ecological behavior. Through price, the seller formulates an offer addressed to the buyer, which may be accepted or rejected depending on the perceived value created.

The results presented in Figures 1–4 clearly confirm this decisive role of price. The low frequency of regular purchases of ecological products, highlighted in Figure 1, suggests that price level constitutes a limiting factor in their consistent integration into daily consumption. Although interest in ecological products exists, it is manifested predominantly at an occasional level, indicating acceptance that is conditional upon favorable circumstances such as promotions or financial availability.

The preferences illustrated in Figure 2 show that ecological products are primarily chosen in categories where health benefits are perceived as immediate, particularly food products and cosmetics. This orientation suggests that when perceived value is high, consumers are more willing to accept a higher price. Similarly, the data in Figure 3 indicate that accessibility and the possibility of price comparison favor the purchase of ecological products from supermarkets, to the detriment of specialized stores, where prices are perceived as higher.

The perception of price differences, illustrated in Figure 4, highlights consumers' heightened sensitivity to the costs of ecological products. Even though the majority of respondents assess the price difference as moderate, the existence of a significant segment that perceives it as high or very high confirms that price remains an essential criterion in purchasing decisions. "When the price is too high, the manufacturer is placed in a rather unstable position, as customers will usually look for other manufacturers" [5]. Thus, price acts not only as an economic indicator but also as an instrument influencing ecological behavior, determining the degree of acceptance, purchase frequency, and orientation toward specific distribution channels.

Globally, there is a trend that on average, one in three consumers worldwide is willing to increase their spending if they are confident in the environmental safety of products [6]. Consumers' willingness to bear additional costs is directly proportional to their degree of certainty about the environmental attributes of the product. This link demonstrates that price sensitivity, discussed earlier, can be reduced if the perceived value of environmental safety is substantiated by credible evidence, thus transforming price from a barrier into an indicator of sustainable quality.

Since price generally represents a decisive factor in the purchasing decision-making process, it directly influences the degree of acceptance or rejection of ecological products. For proponents of market mechanisms as instruments of sustainable development, the integration of ecological costs into the structure of production costs—and implicitly into price levels—is essential. In the absence of reflecting environmental protection costs in prices, the expansion of consumption will inevitably lead to the intensification of ecosystem degradation [7].

The extent to which an enterprise integrates ecological considerations into its policy is directly reflected in the structure of the costs it assumes. In most cases, ecological products involve additional costs generated by expenditures required to preserve and improve environmental conditions. These expenditures are incorporated into the total cost of the product, and the final price must reflect both the value of the core benefits demanded by consumers and the full range of costs specific to traditional marketing, to which are added the costs associated with conferring ecological attributes. These include cost increases resulting from the use of ecosystem-compatible raw materials, investments required for the greening of production processes and technologies, as well as additional expenses imposed by compliance with new environmental regulations. In the Republic of Moldova, the increase in the prices of ecological products is driven by the integration of additional costs specific to

the national context, such as expenses related to compliance with environmental legislation, ecological certification costs, the use of organic agricultural inputs, imported ecological packaging, investments in less polluting technologies, and payments associated with environmental taxes. These elements increase production costs and are inevitably reflected in the final price of ecological products. "Bioproducts for the domestic market are sold at 15-20% higher prices than similar products without ecological labelling" [8].

At the same time, the implementation of ecological attributes may also generate certain cost savings, as a result of reduced consumption of raw materials, materials, and energy required for product realization, the "dematerialization" of packaging processes, as well as the use of more efficient and less polluting energy sources or fuels in the enterprise's internal transport activities, such as the use of unleaded gasoline.

In the process of substantiating decisions regarding the setting of "green" prices, it is necessary to take into account three essential dimensions: the structure of unit costs, consumer perceptions, and the price levels practiced by competitors.

Unit costs play a central role in price formation, as they allow for the estimation of unit cost corresponding to the production volume, define the lower bound of price, and constitute one of the two determining factors of profit. Given that profit represents a fundamental criterion for economic activity, erroneous or incomplete cost evaluation—particularly through the failure to identify and integrate eco-costs—leads to distorted signals regarding the profitability of products and economic activities.

In most situations, the higher price level of ecological products results from the inclusion of environmental protection expenditures. In this regard, Ken Peattie formulates a relevant observation that offers an alternative perspective on this issue, arguing that the perception that ecological products are unusually expensive is largely illusory. In reality, "grey" (conventional) products are artificially cheaper, as the costs generated by environmental degradation are not reflected in their prices, with the environment effectively functioning as a form of implicit subsidy [9].

Consequently, the main issues to be addressed concern the identification of the multiple sources of eco-costs and the development of appropriate mechanisms for allocating them to the products responsible for generating them. The results presented in Figures 5 and 6 confirm that, from the consumers' perspective, the prices of eco-friendly products are largely perceived as being associated with additional costs generated by environmental protection, but the level of understanding and acceptance of these costs remains moderate. Although almost half of the respondents consider the inclusion of environmental costs in the price of organic products to be justified, a significant proportion adopt a neutral position, which indicates a lack of clear information on the sources and structure of eco-costs.

This situation supports the need for the rigorous identification of the multiple sources of eco-costs and for the development of appropriate mechanisms to allocate them to the products responsible for generating them. Consumer perceptions indicate that, in the absence of transparent explanations of these costs, price differences are only partially accepted, and the level of trust remains limited.

At the same time, the results emphasize the importance of a distinct reflection of eco-costs in enterprises' accounting records, through their separate registration from other operational expenses. Such an approach enables the proper integration of environmental costs into the decision-making process regarding product portfolio structure, the selection of technologies employed, and the choice of materials compatible with sustainability

requirements. Moreover, clear accounting records facilitate the credible communication of ecological value to consumers, contributing to the transformation of neutral perceptions into firm acceptance of ecological prices.

The results of other studies show that there is a need for greater clarification and education of the population regarding the concepts of "ecological food," "bio," "natural," and "organic [3].

Even if some producers claim that they do not use pesticides, additives, or other synthetic chemicals in the cultivation/processing of their products, they may indicate in the product description that it is "naturally grown," but without eco-certification, it is illegal to use the terms "eco," "bio," or "organic" [10]. The communication gap is not just a marketing issue, but also one of compliance, where the misuse of "green" terminology without a legal basis undermines the credibility of the entire market. This state of affairs requires rigorous consumer information so that buyers can distinguish between vague commercial claims and certified organic quality, thereby reducing the risk of "greenwashing."

Furthermore, pressures exerted by the regulatory framework, public opinion, and organizations' commitments to the community necessitate the adoption of transparent reporting of efforts aimed at ecosystem protection. In this context, clarity regarding eco-costs represents not only a managerial and accounting requirement, but also a strategic instrument for strengthening consumer trust and supporting pricing policies oriented toward sustainable development.

Philip Kotler argues that, ultimately, the consumer is the one who decides whether a product's price is fair, which implies that perceived value plays a determining role in the pricing process. From this perspective, the central element is not the costs borne by the seller, but the value perceived by the consumer. Establishing a consumer-oriented price therefore requires an in-depth understanding of the value that consumers attribute to the benefits obtained through the consumption or use of a product. Perceived value results from the relationship between perceived primary and secondary benefits and the monetary sacrifice associated with the purchase [11].

The results presented in Figure 7 confirm Philip Kotler's assertion that, ultimately, the consumer is the one who decides whether a product's price is fair, this decision being grounded in the perception of the value offered. The data obtained highlight that the evaluation of the price of ecological products is not carried out exclusively by reference to the costs incurred by producers, but rather through a comparison between perceived benefits and the monetary sacrifice associated with the purchase.

Thus, the high level of agreement recorded for the statement referring to the direct health benefits of ecological products demonstrates that this type of primary benefit makes a major contribution to the formation of perceived value. For most consumers, the association of ecological products with a positive impact on health represents the main argument in favor of purchase, confirming that clear and immediate benefits increase price acceptance.

At the same time, the results related to the statement that price remains the decisive factor in product choice, even in the presence of ecological benefits, indicate that monetary sacrifice continues to play a determining role in purchasing decisions. Although ecological and health benefits are recognized, they are not always sufficient to offset the perception of a higher price, which explains the low frequency of consistent purchases of ecological products.

The partial acceptance of the justification for higher prices through investments in environmental protection, accompanied by a significant level of neutrality, suggests that secondary benefits-such as ecological or moral benefits-are not always clearly understood or sufficiently valued. This situation directly affects perceived value and points to the need for more effective communication regarding the content and impact of these benefits.

Moreover, divergent opinions regarding the sufficiency of label information reflect a non-uniform perception of transparency, an essential element in strengthening perceived value. The lack of clear and credible information about ecological costs reduces consumers' ability to accurately assess the balance between benefits and price.

The transparency promotion strategy requires companies to communicate detailed and explicit information about the raw materials used, the manufacturing process, and any sustainable practices implemented in order to gain consumer trust [12].

Consequently, the purchasing decision is directly influenced by the advantages perceived by consumers. In the case of ecological products, environment-related benefits are generally manifested in the form of intangible promises regarding future improvements in quality of life and are therefore perceived mainly as secondary benefits. Although these are positively valued when present, they are not regarded as essential in the decision-making process. Moreover, a segment of consumers either lacks sufficient information about ecological attributes or does not show interest in them; in such situations, a clear correlation between perceived value and the ecological characteristics of the product cannot be established, and the willingness to pay a higher price remains limited. Nevertheless, the specialized literature highlights that, as the level of education and awareness of environmental issues increases, ecological attributes gain relevance in purchasing decisions, especially when price and quality are perceived as similar across multiple alternatives.

The results presented in Figures 8 and 9 support the idea that purchasing decisions are directly influenced by perceived advantages, and that the value attributed to ecological products is constructed through a combination of tangible and intangible benefits. The analysis shows that the factors justifying the price of an ecological product are particularly appreciated when they can be linked to clear and easily understandable benefits, such as the use of sustainable raw materials, the application of ecological technologies, and long-term product durability.

In this regard, the data in Figure 8 indicate that respondents assign high importance to elements reflecting product quality and performance, namely durability and long-term economic efficiency, which are perceived as concrete advantages. These results confirm that ecological benefits are more readily accepted when they are associated with practical outcomes and with perceived economic value, rather than solely with abstract promises related to environmental protection. By contrast, administrative or fiscal factors—such as environmental taxes and regulations or subsidies—are assessed as less relevant, as their impact is not directly visible to the final consumer.

At the same time, Figure 9 highlights that, within the decision-making process, the price–quality ratio remains the dominant criterion, confirming that monetary sacrifice plays a central role in the acceptance of ecological products. Although information transparency and corporate reputation are taken into account by a significant number of respondents, they remain secondary to the evaluation of immediate economic value. This behavior suggests that ecological benefits are often perceived as secondary benefits: they are positively valued when

present, but they do not constitute decisive elements in the absence of a favorable price–quality ratio.

Simultaneously, the influence of social recommendations and the importance of product availability indicate that the adoption of ecological consumption is conditioned both by social validation and by the actual accessibility of products. The lack of clear information or limited interest in ecological attributes—reflected in the moderate response levels regarding transparency—weakens the correlation between perceived value and the ecological characteristics of products, thereby reducing consumers' willingness to pay a higher price.

Nevertheless, the structure of responses suggests the existence of potential for the evolution of consumption behavior. As education levels and awareness of environmental issues increase, ecological attributes tend to gain greater importance in purchasing decisions, particularly in situations where competing products are perceived as having similar price and quality levels. Under such conditions, ecological benefits may become a differentiating criterion and an additional factor justifying the price of ecological products.

Building on the previously presented results, Figure 10 further demonstrates that the acceptance of higher prices for ecological products is determined primarily by directly perceived benefits at both the individual and environmental levels, as well as by the prospect of long-term economic efficiency. These findings confirm that purchasing decisions are not exclusively emotional or moral in nature, but rather reflect a balance between economic rationality, trust in the product, social responsibility, and personal benefits. Consumers are willing to accept a higher price insofar as it is justified by concrete and credible advantages integrated into a coherent perception of value.

Figure 11 brings into focus a significant gap between the individual and systemic levels of preparedness regarding the acceptance of ecological prices. At the personal level, the majority of respondents declare themselves to be moderately prepared or prepared to pay higher prices for ecological products, and this willingness is largely maintained at the family level, albeit with a slight decline. By contrast, at the community level, a lower degree of collective openness toward ecological consumption is observed, while the market is perceived as the least prepared to support ecological prices. Moreover, perceptions regarding state involvement are moderate and marked by a certain degree of distrust in current institutional support. Overall, these results suggest that, although consumers are willing to financially support the ecological transition, market infrastructure, social culture, and public policies are not yet perceived as sufficiently consolidated to facilitate the widespread adoption of ecological prices.

At the same time, Figure 12 indicates a clear tendency toward accepting a slightly higher price for ecological products, but within strictly defined limits. The majority of respondents state that they would accept a moderate price premium of up to 10%, while approximately one fifth are willing to tolerate an increase of up to 20%. However, only a very small proportion would accept significantly higher price increases, and nearly one fifth of respondents are unwilling to pay any additional cost. These results highlight a high degree of price sensitivity, which constrains the acceptance of ecological products beyond a certain threshold.

The data synthesized in Table 13 reinforce this conclusion, indicating a clear orientation toward the acceptance of a moderate price premium, situated within the 0–20% range. This interval may be considered the economically optimal zone for positioning ecological products on the local market. While most consumers accept a moderate additional

cost, nearly one fifth reject the idea of any price premium altogether, and only a small segment—approximately 10%—is willing to exceed the 20% threshold. Price increases above 30% are acceptable only to a negligible proportion of consumers, which significantly limits the potential expansion of this segment.

Continuing the analysis of consumer behavior toward the prices of ecological products, Figure 14 highlights that the willingness to pay a higher price for the ecological attribute varies significantly depending on the product category. Consumers clearly prioritize ecological food products, which are perceived as having a direct and immediate impact on health, ranking first in the hierarchy of willingness to pay. A high level of interest is also observed for hygiene and cosmetic products, where composition and direct contact with the body increase the importance of the ecological attribute. Products intended for children likewise receive heightened attention, due to the vulnerability of this segment and concerns related to safety. By contrast, cleaning products register a moderate level of interest, as their benefits are perceived primarily at the environmental level rather than at the personal level. These results confirm that willingness to pay a price premium is closely correlated with perceived impacts on health, safety, and quality of life.

Figure 15 brings to light one of the most significant barriers to the acceptance of ecological prices, namely the communication deficit on the part of producers. The majority of consumers consider the explanations regarding the formation of ecological prices to be insufficient or only partial, which directly affects trust levels and the justification of price differences. The small proportion of fully satisfied respondents indicates a structural transparency issue that may fuel skepticism and reluctance toward ecological products, even when their benefits are perceived positively.

This conclusion is further supported by the results presented in Figure 16, which clearly highlight consumers' need for more detailed and relevant information on ecological product labels. Respondents primarily request explanations regarding the economic justification of prices and concrete long-term benefits, both for health and for personal budgets. Information about green technologies and sustainable raw materials is appreciated but occupies a secondary position, while details concerning taxes and regulations are considered the least relevant. These findings indicate the necessity of consumer-oriented labeling that clearly explains the added value of ecological products and strengthens trust in price fairness.

"We can say that eco-labeling acts as a bridge between the producer and the consumer, providing information about the quality and safety of products for the environment" [13]. This statement highlights the strategic function of eco-labeling. If price is the main economic barrier, the label acts as a social and informational facilitator, restoring the balance between cost and value. Completing the purchase process in favor of the green product depends on the strength of this "bridge", which must be built on accounting transparency, official certification, and communication of the direct benefits to health and the environment.

Figure 17 confirms the decisive role of information in increasing willingness to pay for ecological products. Nearly half of respondents state that they would be more willing to accept a higher price if they better understood eco-costs, while a very large segment remains undecided, suggesting significant potential for influence through adequate communication. Only a minority completely rejects the idea that information could alter payment behavior. These results demonstrate that a lack of information represents one of the main barriers to

the acceptance of ecological prices and that transparency can transform neutrality into genuine willingness to pay.

At the same time, Figure 18 (the question regarding choice under equal price conditions) convincingly shows that when the price difference is eliminated, preference for ecological products becomes overwhelming. This finding demonstrates that interest in and trust toward ecological products are already high, and that price constitutes the primary barrier to their widespread adoption. Consequently, the potential of the ecological market is considerable, and pricing and communication strategies can play a decisive role in harnessing this potential.

Finally, Figure 19 shows that, for the majority of respondents, the "ecological" attribute is at least as important as, or even more important than, product price. The fact that over four fifths of consumers assign comparable or greater importance to the ecological characteristic confirms the consolidation of this attribute as a relevant decision-making factor. Although price remains an important criterion, the results suggest that ecological value can become a decisive differentiating element, particularly under conditions of effective communication and a clear perception of benefits. "The continuously growing market for organic products [...] also poses certain challenges. To ensure the presence of organic qualities [...] reliable control tools are needed" [14].

The success of pricing and communication strategies ultimately depends on the market's ability to provide indisputable proof of authenticity. Control tools and certifications are not just administrative barriers, but pillars of trust that allow consumers to validate the rationality of their decision to accept a premium price, thus ensuring the sustainability of the entire organic economic ecosystem.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the results obtained through the empirical research highlights that the price of ecological products represents the main constraint in the consistent adoption of ecological consumption, not due to a rejection of their value, but as a result of high price sensitivity and an information deficit. Consumers recognize the benefits of ecological products—especially those related to health, safety, and quality of life—and are willing to accept a moderate price premium within the 0–20% range, which is considered the optimal zone of acceptance.

The results indicate that willingness to pay more is conditioned by a clear perception of value, transparency regarding eco-costs, and trust in producers. The lack of detailed explanations concerning the formation of ecological prices and labeling that is insufficiently consumer-oriented constitute significant barriers to the expansion of the ecological market. At the same time, the data confirm that, in the absence of price differences, preference for ecological products becomes dominant, highlighting a high growth potential for this segment. The development of ecological product consumption depends on maintaining prices within a reasonable affordability range, strengthening communication about real benefits and eco-costs, and increasing transparency and trust throughout the production and distribution chain. The ecological attribute has the capacity to become a decisive purchasing criterion, provided that its value is clearly understood and credibly supported in consumers' perceptions.

Based on the results obtained, there emerges a clear need for producers and retailers of ecological products to keep price levels within a reasonable zone of economic acceptability. Given that most consumers accept only a moderate price premium, pricing strategies should

avoid excessive positioning in premium segments. The use of flexible pricing mechanisms—such as temporary promotions, promotional bundles, or assortment differentiation—can help reduce the initial cost barrier and stimulate product trial, thereby encouraging the formation of repeated consumption behavior.

The marketing of green products must navigate between the imperative of profitability and satisfying consumer desires, which involves increasing the degree of satisfaction of consumer desires and expectations on the one hand, and setting prices that ensure the profitability of the business involved in production, distribution, and marketing on the other [15].

At the same time, producers and retailers should focus their efforts on product categories for which consumers demonstrate a higher willingness to pay for the ecological attribute. Food products, hygiene and cosmetic products, as well as products intended for children are perceived as having a direct impact on health and personal safety, which justifies heightened interest and greater price tolerance. Prioritizing these categories in offer development strategies allows for the efficient valorization of ecological investments and the strengthening of positioning in segments with the highest growth potential.

Another essential aspect concerns increasing transparency regarding the formation of ecological prices. The communication deficit identified among consumers suggests the need for clear explanations of the cost components associated with ecological production, such as the use of sustainable raw materials, the implementation of clean technologies, or certification costs. Simple and accessible communication—delivered through explanatory labels, informational materials, or digital tools—can contribute to building trust and facilitating acceptance of price differences.

At the same time, the labeling of ecological products should place greater emphasis on highlighting concrete benefits for consumers. The research results show that the public is primarily interested in direct advantages, such as positive health impacts, safety in use, and long-term savings. Shifting the focus from general messages about environmental protection toward clear explanations of the product's practical value can enhance perceived value and transform the ecological attribute into a decisive purchasing argument.

Building trust also represents a major strategic objective for producers and retailers. In the context of concerns related to greenwashing, it is essential that ecological messages be supported by clear and verifiable evidence, such as recognized certifications and consistent information across all communication channels. Retailers can contribute to this process through the careful selection of ecological products and the creation of dedicated spaces that convey credibility and consistency in the offer.

The role of retailers goes beyond commercial intermediation, as they have the potential to become educators of consumers. Through staff training, the display of explanatory information at the point of sale, and the organization of thematic campaigns, retailers can reduce uncertainty and facilitate understanding of the differences between ecological and conventional products. This approach contributes to increasing awareness and fostering favorable attitudes toward ecological consumption.

Furthermore, it is important for ecological products to benefit from constant availability and adequate visibility within retail spaces. Integrating them into the regular shopping flow—rather than isolating them as niche products—can contribute to the normalization of ecological consumption. A stable and easily accessible offer reduces purchasing barriers and encourages long-term adoption.

Finally, collaboration with public authorities and the effective use of existing support mechanisms can help maintain ecological prices within an accessible range. Subsidies, support programs, or fiscal incentives can alleviate pressure on final costs, while communicating these measures to consumers can enhance trust in ecological products and in the broader efforts undertaken to promote sustainable development.

Contribution of Authors

Sergiu Mîrza: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft.
Lilia Chiriac: Data curation, Investigation, Administration, Writing – original draft, review and editing. Feodosie Pituşcan: Investigation, Writing, Supervision.

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