

Nine in ten Europeans want the right to pay in cash guaranteed. Denaria

Europe launches in Brussels to defend freedom of choice in payments

The 1st European Barometer on the Need to Preserve Cash, conducted by GAD3 based on 5,185 interviews, reveals that 92% of Europeans believe consumers should always be guaranteed the option to pay in cash, the same level of support as for card payments (91%).

Denaria Europe, a coalition of national organisations from Sweden, Spain, France, Portugal and Denmark, calls on the European institutions to adopt broad, measurable and enforceable legal tender rules, without country-by-country exemptions that would weaken the right to use cash.

Brussels, 14 October 2026.

At a decisive moment for Europe, as EU institutions negotiate legislation on the legal tender of euro banknotes and coins, Denaria Europe was officially launched today in Brussels. The new platform brings together civil society movements from several countries to give a common European voice to citizens who want and need cash, many of them vulnerable, and to ensure that more than 450 million Europeans keep a real ability to choose how they pay.

The launch event, held at the Hotel Stanhope, opened with remarks by Diana Vieira, Financial Services Attaché at the Permanent Representation of Portugal to the EU, and Björn Eriksson, President of Denaria Europe. Narciso Michavila, President of GAD3, presented the *1st European Barometer on the Need to Preserve Cash*, followed by a social dialogue moderated by political analyst Tom Burns with the participation of Mireia Llambrich, Financial Services Policy Officer at BEUC. Philip Tod, Head of the Euro Protection and Euro Cash Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN), closed the event.

Cash, the payment method Europeans want guaranteed

The barometer shows that support for guaranteeing cash cuts across all generations: young people aged 18 to 29 back it as strongly (92%) as those over 65 (91%). By country, support ranges from 87% in France to 97% in Spain and Portugal.

Income also plays a role: cash is the main payment method for 33% of households with a monthly income below €1,200, compared with 16% of those earning more than €3,500.

While card is the payment method Europeans use most (52%), followed by cash (23%), cash gains ground when citizens are asked what they prefer: 28% choose it, and in every country more people prefer cash than use it as their main method. The gap is widest in Sweden, where 14% prefer cash but only 4% are able to use it as their main method of payment.

Europeans also consider cash the best option on every attribute tested: 82% believe it works best during internet outages or technical failures, 70% see it as the safest against fraud or cyberattacks, 69% as the easiest for older or vulnerable people and 68% as the most accessible for the whole population. Almost half (46%) believe cash payment should be guaranteed in all areas, with the strongest support for food and basic necessities (88%), pharmacies and health services (78%), small shops (77%) and public transport (75%).

A public responsibility

Three in four Europeans (74%) believe a public institution should be primarily responsible for ensuring that cash can always be used and accessed: the state or government (44%), the central bank (17%) or the European Union (13%). Only 6% assign this role to private banks, and 8% would leave it to the market. Large majorities support guaranteeing the use of cash for everyday purchases (82%), protecting the right to use it by law (79%), ensuring a sufficient network of access points (78%) and requiring public administrations to always accept it (75%). Even where limits exist for larger payments, 82% believe cash should be guaranteed for day-to-day payments.

Access and acceptance, an everyday problem

Two in three Europeans (68%) experienced at least one payment incident in the last 12 months. The most common were being unable to withdraw money because an ATM was out of service or empty (28%), having difficulty finding an ATM (23%), having to pay a fee to withdraw or use cash (19%) and being unable to pay in cash because the establishment did not accept it (18%). Cash refusal is highest in Sweden (37%), the United Kingdom (32%) and the Netherlands (30%).

More than eight in ten Europeans (84%) believe new measures are needed to improve access to cash, led by neutral ATMs independent of the user's bank (24%) and lower withdrawal fees (22%). Faced with the proposal to allow some cash payments to be made at self-service machines, 60% want a person to be involved and only 8% prefer machines, a view also shared by young people (58%).

The risk is also geographical and measurable. According to data presented by Denaria Europe, built from OpenStreetMap access points and the Eurostat population grid and validated against the 5 km

standard of the Dutch central bank (De Nederlandsche Bank), up to 24 million people in the euro area (around 7%) live more than 5 km from a cash access point, and up to 5 million more than 10 km away. “For these people, allowing a shop to refuse cash does not push them to pay by card, but to travel further or to give up the purchase,” warned Björn Eriksson.

Resilience, privacy and independence

Nine in ten Europeans (91%) consider cash important in emergencies, and 83% want authorities to treat it as an essential service during emergencies or technical failures. Eight in ten (80%) believe shops selling essential goods should be required to accept it, and 76% that it should be maintained as a national security resource. Yet only 27% currently have enough cash to cover their basic payments for the 72 hours recommended by the European Union. In Spain and Portugal, after the blackout of 28 April 2025, 77% and 70% respectively say they now consider cash more important than before.

Privacy and technological dependence are also major concerns. Three in four Europeans (74%) fear their personal data could be exposed when paying digitally, 67% consider cash the only payment method that does not depend on any technology company, 57% fear that a company or bank could block or limit their access to payments and half (50%) are concerned about depending on foreign companies to pay. Among those aware of the digital euro, 73% believe it should guarantee the same level of privacy as cash and 66% that it should work offline, while only 35% would use it for their regular payments.

A European voice for the right to cash

Denaria Europe brings national experiences together into a single European voice that reflects the needs of older people, people with disabilities, the unbanked, rural communities and consumers. Its president, Björn Eriksson, also chairs Kontantupproret (“the Cash Uprising”) in Sweden, the country that has moved fastest towards a cashless society. “What began as a national concern has become a European concern. Other countries are now living the same story,” he said.

“This is one of the oldest questions in democracy: who decides?” said Eriksson. “Citizens must be free to decide how they manage their money and how they pay. The conditions for accessing and using money must be set by elected policymakers and public authorities, not decided quietly by banks or private actors.”

Denaria Europe expressed concern about the exemptions to cash acceptance currently being debated in Brussels, which would restrict citizens' right to use legal tender, which is instant and free, and push them towards paying on credit, with delay and with fees. “Commercial interests, or other

public interest considerations, cannot prevail over the fundamental public interest of protecting the resilience, inclusion and freedom of choice of more than 450 million European citizens,” Eriksson stressed. The platform also rejects tailor-made country-by-country rules: cash must be treated the same way in every Member State and on an equal footing with other payment methods.

Denaria Europe therefore urges the European institutions and Member States to ensure that the legal tender framework is:

- **Broad:** covering retail and services across Europe, with very limited and justified exemptions.
- **Measurable:** based on a common set of acceptance, access and resilience indicators, using the same methodology in all Member States, rather than national indicators that would make it impossible to know what is really happening to cash in the euro area.
- **Enforceable:** with binding rules, real consequences for non-compliance and appropriate supervision.
- **Clear on responsibilities:** with Member States responsible for access and acceptance, and the European institutions in charge of supervision.

“Protecting cash does not mean opposing digitalisation or innovation. The future of payments in Europe is not about choosing between cash and digital, but about making sure European citizens keep the ability to choose. That is why Denaria Europe exists,” Eriksson concluded.

About the barometer

The *1st European Barometer on the Need to Preserve Cash* was conducted by GAD3 for Denaria Europe through 5,185 online interviews with residents aged 18 and over in the EU-27, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Norway, with around 500 interviews in each of the nine main markets. Fieldwork was carried out from 9 to 17 September 2026. Margin of error: $\pm 1.4\%$ for the European aggregate (95.5% confidence level).

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