



Standard Eurobarometer 98
Winter 2022 - 2023

Public opinion in the European Union

National report IRELAND

Fieldwork: January – February 2023



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INTRODUCTION



Standard Eurobarometer 98

Winter 2022 - 2023

The annual Eurobarometer report for Ireland is part of a long-standing series of reports probing Irish and European public opinion trends towards the European Union (EU) as well as political and social issues more generally. The data for this report is sourced in the Standard Eurobarometer (SEB), now in its 98th edition and is referred to throughout this paper as SEB98.

Fieldwork for the Irish survey was undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes who interviewed 1,008 respondents aged 15+ between the 12th January and 6th February 2023. The structure of the sample was a multi-stage random probability sample. Fieldwork was conducted using a face-to-face CAPI methodology¹.

The national report covers a period of time when Ireland faced high inflation with the consequent impact on the cost of living. A major contributor to the increase in consumer prices has been the Russian invasion of Ukraine, impacting the cost of energy and food. COVID – a major talking point in the previous report - has since been supplanted by the cost of living crisis, inflation, and the war in Ukraine, with housing and the health system also featuring more heavily as concerns. Year-on-year inflation January 2022-January 2023 in Ireland has increased to 7.8%. At the time of fieldwork, figures were showing a reduction (albeit still considerably high) in inflation rates, however inflation has now risen. Interest rates are also a concern, with Irish consumers bracing themselves for another 0.5% rise in the European Central Bank rate. Despite the fragility of consumer confidence, the economy appears very resilient, with strong tax revenues, and low unemployment (4.4%).

Against this background, the report covers three core themes:

- Trust in European Institutions and EU direction for the future
- Important contextual issues
 - ▶ Local and EU Concerns
 - ▶ Russian invasion of Ukraine
 - ▶ Political Leanings
 - ▶ Energy Supply
- The media

¹ For further details concerning the methodology, please see the technical specifications section in the SEB98 results report

I. KEY FINDINGS



1 Trust in European Institutions and EU Direction for the Future

Compared to the EU27, the Irish public hold the most positive view of the EU in general with 74% positive towards the EU (19% are 'very positive' with a further 55% who are 'fairly' positive). This is up 4 percentage points since Standard 97 - Summer 2022 and well above the EU27 average of 45%, with the Irish public showing the highest level of positivity among all EU27 countries. Portugal shows the second highest level of positivity at 61%. Positivity varies depending on self-perceived socioeconomic class (65% of lower middle class and 68% of working class, increasing to 79% of middle class cohorts).

Just over three in five of the Irish public trust both the European Union and the European Parliament. Just under three in five trust in the European Commission, European Central Bank, and European Council. Across the European Institutions, the level of trust has remained steady since June 2022.

A majority (63%) believe they are informed about European matters, up from 56% in 2022. The Irish public's perceived knowledge of European matters is significantly better than the EU27 average (35%). Only Luxembourg has a higher perceived knowledge (69%).

The Irish public are also the most optimistic about the future of the EU, topping the list of countries with 84% citing their optimism. In this respect only 13% of the Irish public feel in any way pessimistic. Those under 25 indicated slightly less optimism (76%).

2 Important Contextual Issues

a) Local and EU Concerns

When focusing on key issues facing Ireland, housing is a clear and defining issue in Irish society with half (52%) citing this as a key concern (the EU27 average stands in stark contrast at 8%). This is followed swiftly by cost of living / inflation with 51% citing this, which falls in line with the EU27 average of 53%.

In terms of issues facing the EU27, concerns among the Irish public are similar to the perceived issues facing Ireland, with cost of living / inflation of most concern. However, the EU-wide focus results in higher citation of immigration and energy supply, while concerns surrounding health as an issue facing the EU as a whole falls away significantly among the Irish public. When focusing on issues facing Ireland specifically, however, health is the third most frequently cited issue. When focusing on issues facing the EU in general, we can see that the EU27 responses on average mirror the Irish public across most metrics, though concerns around immigration are slightly more muted among the EU27 generally, while concerns around member states' finances are more amplified among the EU27 generally.

b) Russian invasion of Ukraine

The response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has been mixed with 78% of the Irish public being satisfied with the government's response to the invasion, whereas the EU27 average

stands at 55% satisfied with their government's response. When considering the EU's response to the invasion, once again we see the Irish public showing a much more positive reaction with 76% satisfied, compared to the EU27 average of 56%.

c) Political Leanings

Political leanings in the EU vary widely depending on country. In Ireland, 25% of the Irish public view themselves as left wing, 59% of the Irish public view themselves as Centrist, and 10% of the Irish public view themselves as right wing. Compared to 2022, we see that these numbers remain largely unchanged, with the Standard 97 - Summer 2022 wave indicating 23% claiming to be left wing, 59% Centrist, and 12% right wing. When comparing to the EU27, we see that Ireland is much more Centrist in political leaning, with only 39% of the EU27 viewing themselves as Centrist, while 29% claim to be left wing, and 21% right wing.

d) Energy Supply

With the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a focal point of this Eurobarometer was on views surrounding energy supply within the EU. The Irish and EU public alike agree strongly with the view that the EU should reduce dependency on Russian sources of energy as quickly as possible, while also showing clear appetite for renewable and efficient energy sources. For example, nine in ten of the Irish public (84% EU27 average) agree that the EU should reduce its dependency on Russian sources of energy as soon as possible; and nine in ten of the Irish public (86% EU27 average) agree that the EU should invest massively in renewable energies, such as wind and solar power. Furthermore just under nine in ten of the Irish public agree that reducing imports of oil and gas and investing in renewable energy is important for the country's overall security – 84% of the EU27 public agree. There is a clear understanding across the EU that renewable energy sources are a more appropriate form of energy moving forward.

3 Media

There is a clear understanding in Ireland and across the EU generally that misinformation and disinformation is a problem for democracy generally – 83% of the Irish public agree with this sentiment (81% EU27 average). The rate of awareness of exposure to disinformation appears to be higher in Ireland with four in five (80%) of the Irish public agreeing that they often come across news or information that they believe misrepresents reality or is false, compared to 69% of the EU27 public on average.

When focusing on Ireland's media specifically, we see that the Irish public are more likely to trust the Irish media to deliver trustworthy information, with 74% noting Irish media provides trustworthy information. The EU27 average is much lower here at 59% agreeing that their country's media provides trustworthy information.

Sources of media on EU political matters shows the clear role of television in communications, with 49% of the Irish public citing TV news, while 45% note TV generalist channels, as key sources. These sources are much more popular among older cohorts (59% and 57% of over 55s respectively). Social media plays a significant role particularly among under 25s (67%), being the number one source of information on EU political matters. When focusing on the EU27

average here, we see that Ireland mirrors the EU27 under 25s (58% - most cited media source).

Interestingly, when we focus on sourcing information on the EU, its policies, and institutions, we see that while TV and other traditional media maintains their dominance in sharing information with both the Irish and EU27 public, the role of social media decreases (20% of the Irish public; 18% of EU27).

II. TRUST IN EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS & EU DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE

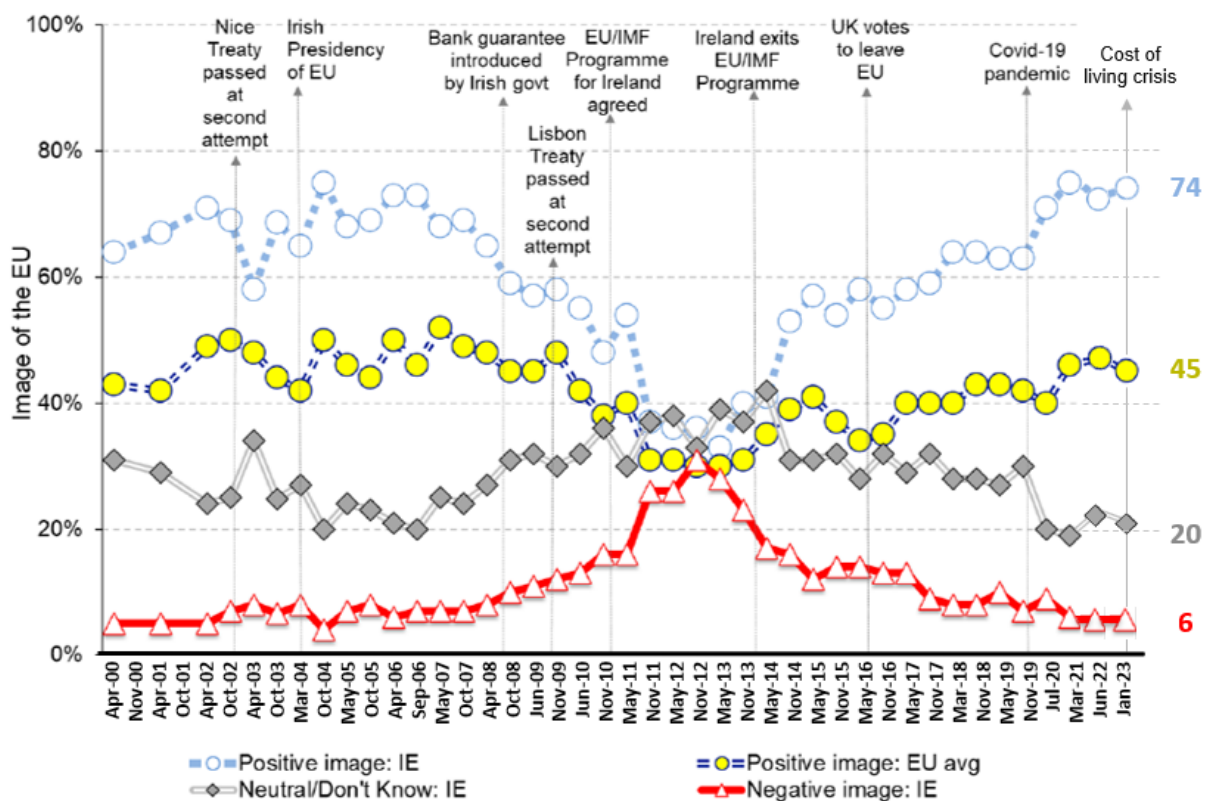


In this chapter we will first assess the perception of the EU. Overall, the Irish public hold a positive view of the EU in general with 74% positive (19% are 'very positive' with a further 55% who are 'fairly' positive). Among the EU27, Ireland ranks highest in terms of positivity levels, with Portugal in second place at 61%. Positivity is slightly lower amongst those who say they belong to the working class and lower middle class (65% of lower middle class and 68% of working class, increasing to 79% of middle class cohorts).

Figure 1 shows historical variances between Irish responses and the EU27 average. We should note that historically the Irish public has been among the most positive towards the EU on a whole range of indicators. During the global financial crisis and in the aftermath of the IMF programme for Ireland being agreed in late 2010, Ireland experienced a dip in positivity, though this was relatively short lived with positivity increasing once again following Ireland's exit from the EU/IMF programme in late 2013. In January 2023, over seven in ten hold a positive view of the EU, while only 6% hold a negative view. Positivity has increased slightly on 2022.

Figure 1

D78. In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? (%)



ST.98 Jan./Feb. 2023



Importantly this chart highlights the extent to which the Irish public have generally held a more positive image of the EU compared with the EU average across many years.

The EU27 countries with the lowest positive image of the EU are: Slovakia 32% and Czechia 33%.

We next look at Irish and EU27 public perceptions of what the future holds for the EU². Figure 1 compares all EU27 countries views on the future of the EU. This shows Ireland's optimistic view of the EU with the Irish public topping the list of those viewing the EU's future as being optimistic (84%). This stands in contrast with the EU27 average of 62%. In recent years, Ireland's level of optimism has remained broadly steady (85% in 2021, 88% in January 2022, 83% in June 2022), albeit declining slightly compared

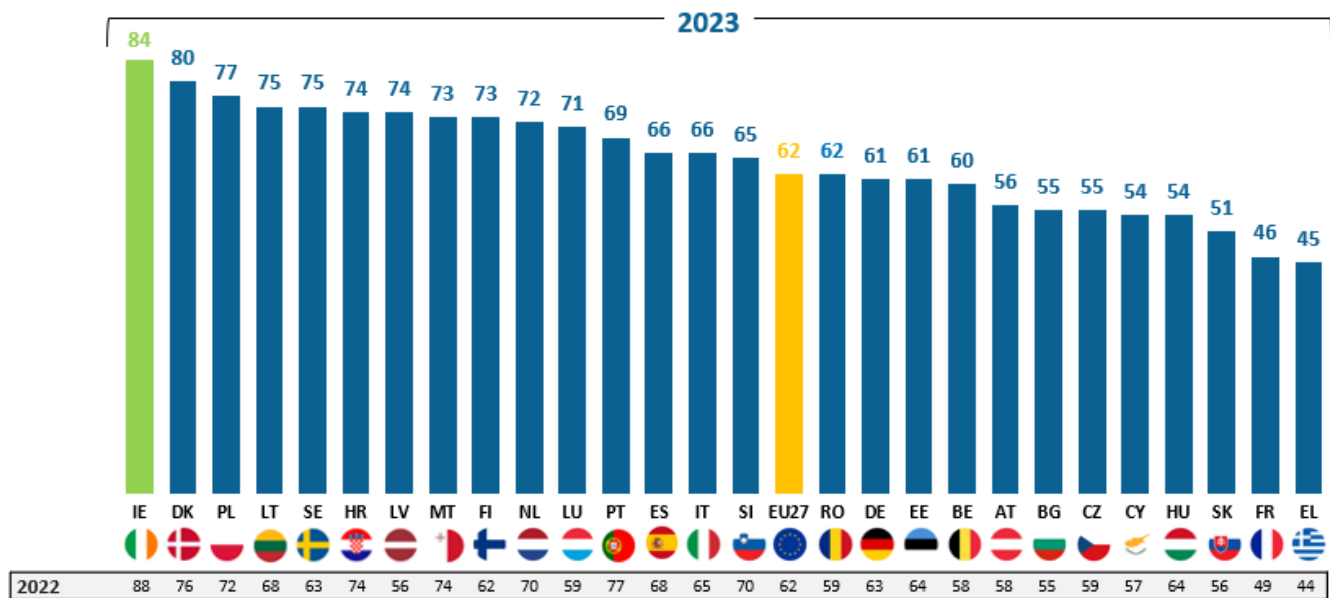
to January 2022. We can see some softening in optimism, particularly in Hungary (68% in 2021 to 54% in 2023), Slovakia (60% in 2021 to 51% in 2023), and to a lesser extent, France (53% in 2021 to 46% in 2023).

In January 2023, only 13% of the Irish public hold a pessimistic view of the future of the EU, compared to 35% of the EU27 public generally.

Figure 2

QA13. Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the EU? (%)

Base: All adults 26,468



Key: ■ Total Optimistic

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Importantly this chart highlights the extent to which the Irish public have generally held a more optimistic view of the future of the EU compared with the EU average in recent years.

The EU27 countries with the lowest optimistic views of the EU's future are: France 46%; Slovakia 51%; Hungary 54%; Republic of Cyprus 54%.

² "Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the EU?"

The survey also measured the trust levels among the Irish public in a number of European institutions³, including the European Union, European Parliament, European Commission, European Central Bank, and the European Council. Figure 3 demonstrates that, compared to the EU27 average, the Irish public show stronger levels of trust across all five institutions.

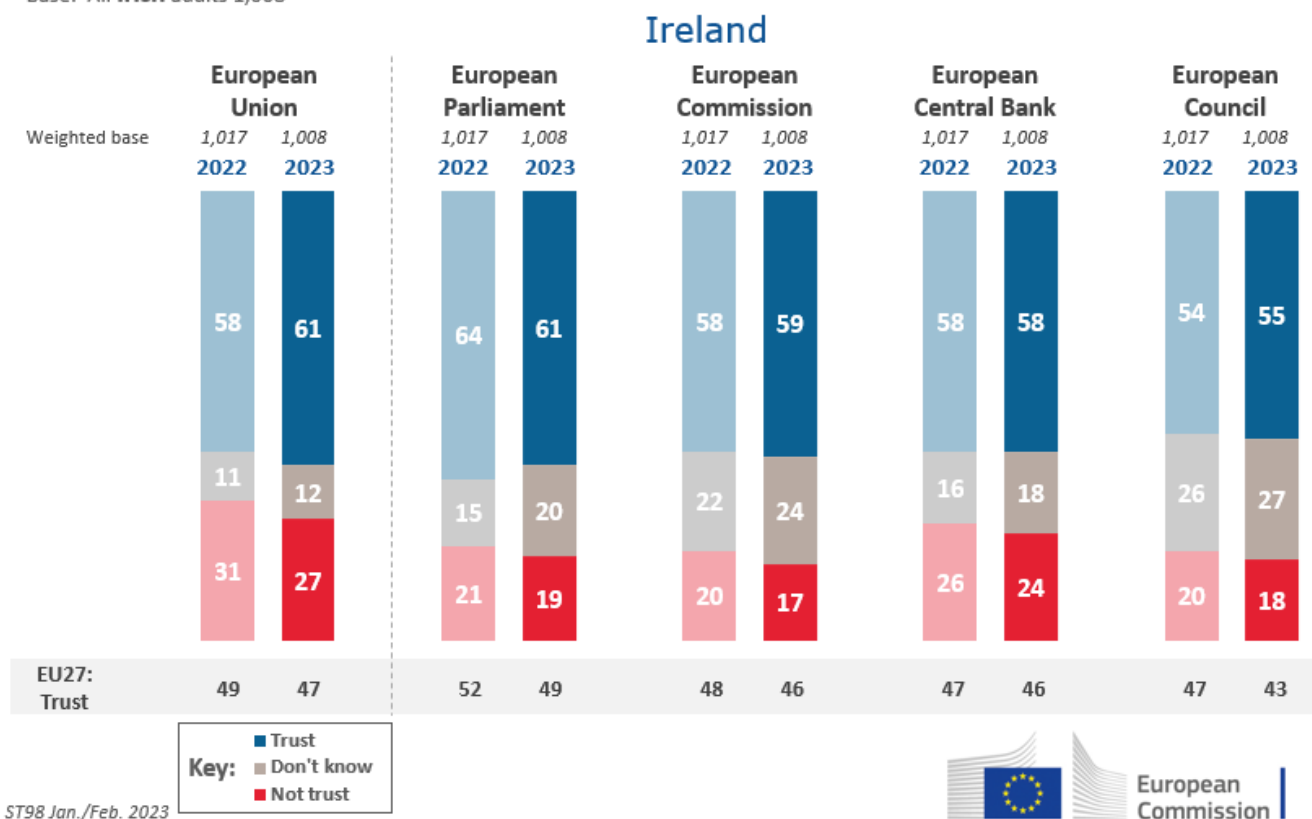
The highest level of trust is given to the European Union and European Parliament, while the lowest level of trust is given to the European Council. As alluded to previously however, Irish ratings of the European Institutions are significantly higher across all bodies listed, compared to the EU27 average.

Figure 3:

QA6.11; How much trust do you have in certain institutions? (%)

QA11.1, .2, .3, .4 Please tell if you tend to trust or tend not to trust these European institutions? (%)

Base: All Irish adults 1,008



³ QA6.11; QA11.1, .2, .3, .4 How much trust do you have in certain institutions? Please tell if you tend to trust or tend not to trust these European institutions?

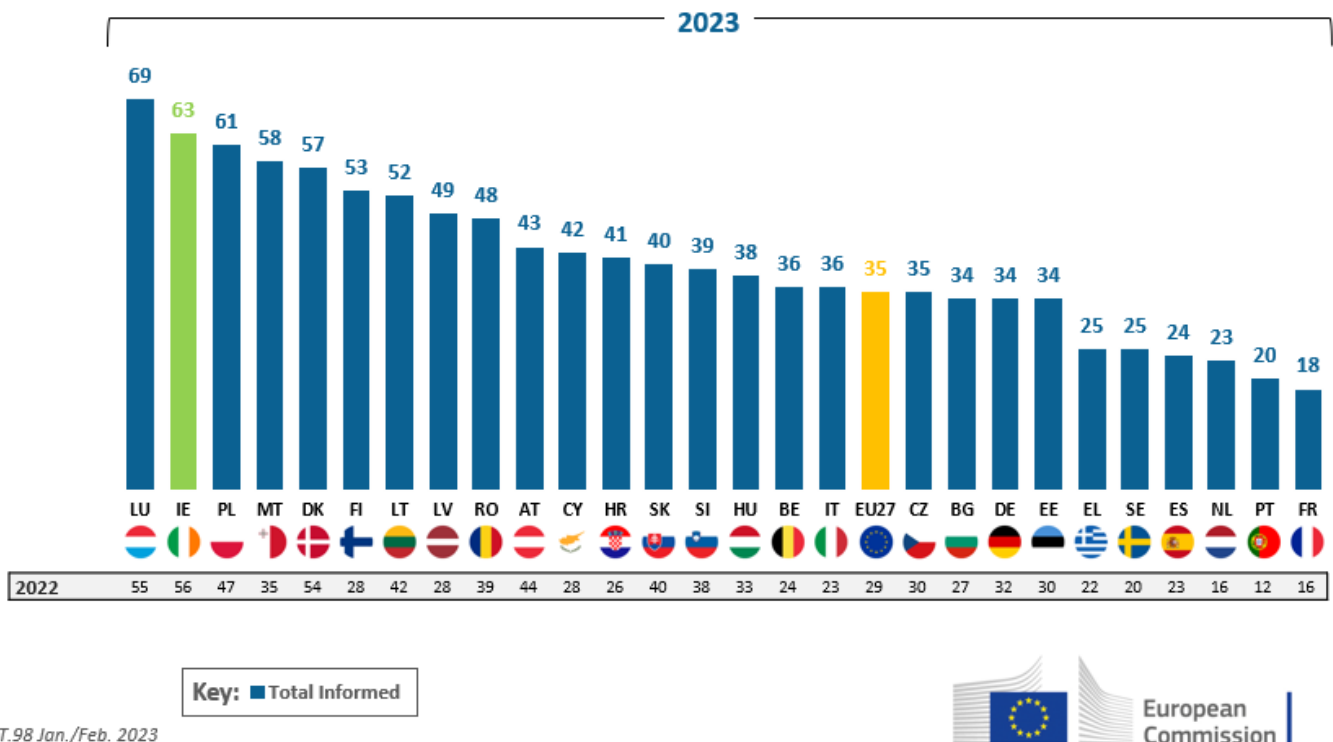
The final topic examined in this section was the Irish public's perceptions of how well informed they are in terms of European Matters⁴. In the below chart, we have positioned the Irish public's responses in comparison to other EU27 states. Ireland once again stands out as a leader in this regard (63% claiming to feel informed on European matters, compared to the EU average of

35%), with only Luxembourg public (69%) feeling that they are more informed on European matters.

Figure 4

QF1. How well informed do you think that people in (Country) are about European matters? (%)

Base: All adults 26,468



In Ireland, we once again see a greater disconnect among those of the working class and lower middle class, with 50% and 53% respectively feeling informed compared to 70% of the middle class, 78% of the upper middle class, and 84% of the upper class

In conclusion however, we can see that from a national standpoint, Ireland holds a positive opinion of Europe, European Institutions, and the future of the EU. In all these cases, the Irish public are more positive than the European public, on average.

⁴ "QF1. How well informed do you think that people in (IRELAND) are about European matters?"

III. IMPORTANT CONTEXTUAL ISSUES



There have been a number of events that have unfolded in recent years, particularly the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which have undoubtedly impacted the EU public, both economically and socially. As such, it is important that in this edition of the Eurobarometer, a focus is placed on some contextual issues. Firstly, in order to set the tone, figure 5 below conveys the Irish public's perceptions of the key issues facing, firstly, Ireland and, secondly, the EU⁵.

1 Local and EU Concerns

When focusing on the key issues facing Ireland, housing is a clear and defining issue in society with 52% citing this as a key concern. This is in stark contrast with the EU27 average of 8% when focusing on their own state. Irish concerns on housing are followed swiftly by cost of living / inflation with 51% citing this, which falls in line with the EU27 average of 53%.

When focusing on the Irish public's concerns in relation to issues facing the EU27, concerns are similar to the more specific country-level concerns with the cost of living / inflation being the main concern at both country- and EU-level. However, when we focus on EU-level concerns among the Irish public, we can see that immigration and energy supply are cited more frequently

compared to Ireland-focused concerns, while health in an EU-wide context is cited much less frequently than in an Irish context. When we focus on the issue of immigration, there has been an increase in the Irish public viewing this as a significant concern within the national context (3% in June 2022 to 10% in 2023). This is more stark within the context of the EU as a whole, with one in four (26%) of the Irish public citing immigration as an issue in the EU, compared to 11% in June 2022. Immigration is cited as a concern at a higher rate in Ireland than the EU27 average in the context of both national concerns and EU concerns (EU27 averages are 8% and 17% respectively).

It should be noted that concern around prices/inflation/cost of living has continued to grow from 44% of the Irish public being

concerned in January 2022 and 26% in 2021, to 51% in 2023; quickly becoming the main issue facing the public in Ireland and across the EU.

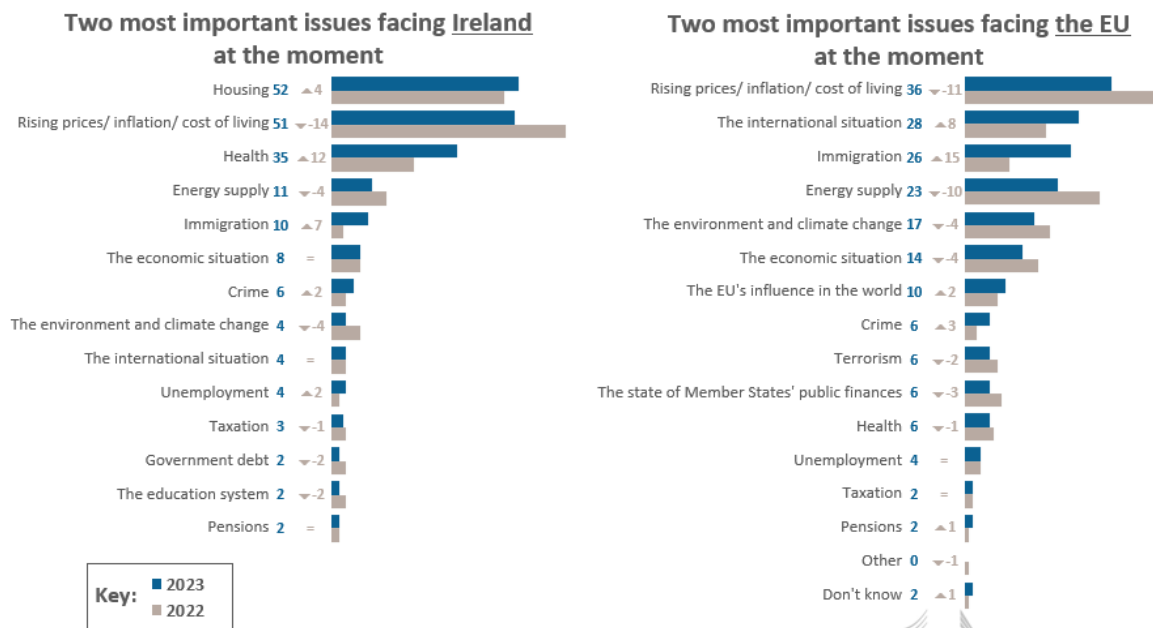
2 Russian invasion of Ukraine

When focusing on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we see that there is a much more positive reaction among the Irish public in terms of the response to the invasion from their own government and the European Union, when compared to the EU27 average.

Figure 5

QA3. What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment? (%)
QA5. What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment? (%)

Base: All Irish adults 1,008



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⁵ "QA3. What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment? QA5. What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?"

Almost four in five (78%) of the Irish public were satisfied with the Irish Government's response to the invasion, compared to 55% of the EU27 public generally. Three in four (76%) of the Irish public were also satisfied with the EU's response, however this drops to 56% of the EU27 public generally.

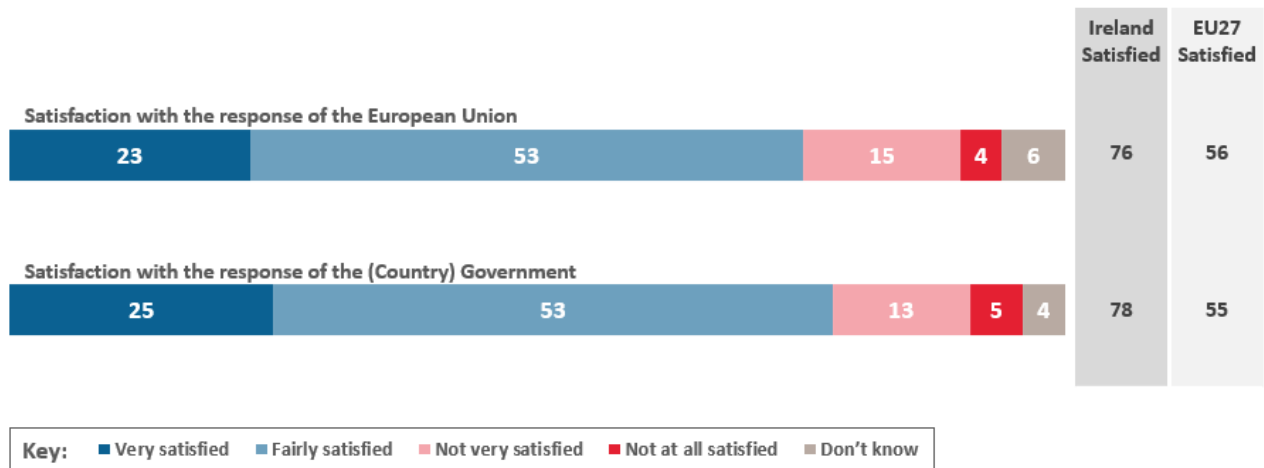
The Irish public over 55 years of age (83%) are most satisfied with the Irish government's response to the invasion, compared to 71% of those aged 15 to 24.

Once again, we see that perceived working class and lower middle class cohorts are showing less confidence and positivity toward the EU with 73% claiming to be satisfied, compared to 82% of the middle class and 90% of the upper class.

Figure 6

QE1.1. / QE1.2. In general, how satisfied are you with the response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine by ...? (%)

Base: All Irish adults 1,008



3 Political Leanings

When focusing on the political leanings in both Ireland and the EU27 member states, we see that this varies widely across the EU depending on country. In Ireland, we see a steady breakdown of left to right leaning, with 25% viewing themselves as left wing, 59% viewing themselves as Centrist, and 10% viewing themselves as right wing. Compared to 2022, we see that these numbers remain largely unchanged, with the Standard 97 - Summer 2022 wave indicating 23% claiming to be left wing, 59% Centrist, and 12% right wing. When comparing to the EU27, we see that Ireland is much more Centrist in political leaning, with only 39% of the EU27 viewing themselves as Centrist, while 29% claim to be left wing, and 21% right wing

Interestingly, we can see variance among the Irish public in relation to political leaning, particularly in relation to age (16% of those over 55 years old would consider themselves right-wing, compared to 2% of those aged 15 to 24, or 8% of those aged 25 to 39). The same variance is not as stark among the EU27 states, with 23% of those over 55 claiming a right wing ideology, while 16% of those 15 to 24 years old would consider themselves right wing. There is less variance here.

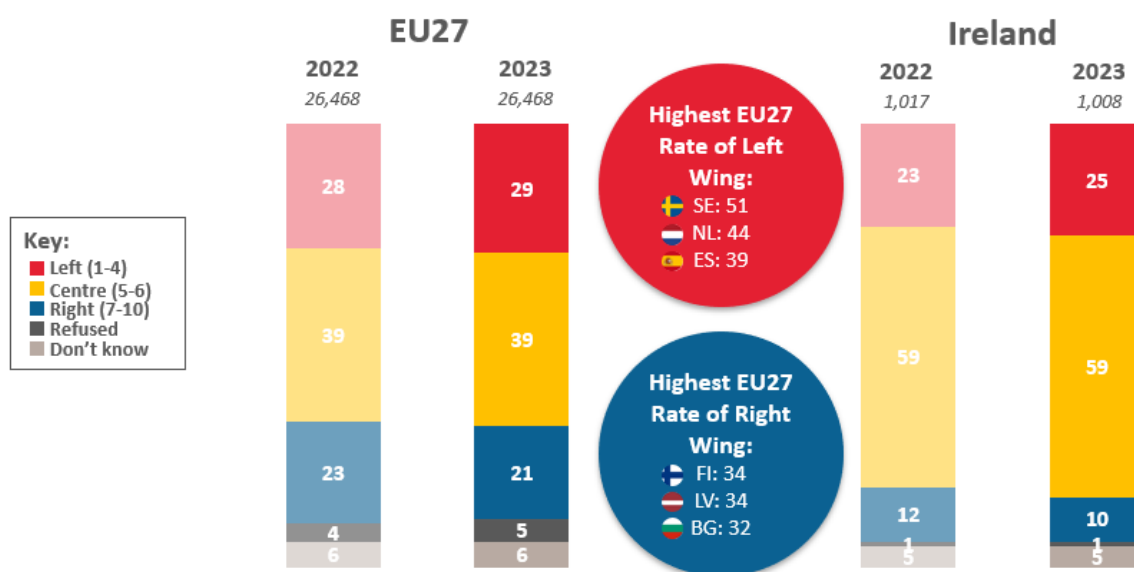
When compared to other EU27 member states, Ireland is considered more centrist in nature, while the most right wing states are Finland and Latvia with 34% claiming to be right wing. The most left-wing leaning among the EU27 member states are Sweden (51%) and the Netherlands (44%) and the Netherlands (44%).

Interesting to note, some states outside the EU27 show higher rates of a right-leaning public. For example, Türkiye (42%) and Montenegro (36%).

Figure 7

D1. In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". How would you place your views on this scale? (%)

Base: All EU / Irish adults 26,468 / 1,008



4 Energy Supply

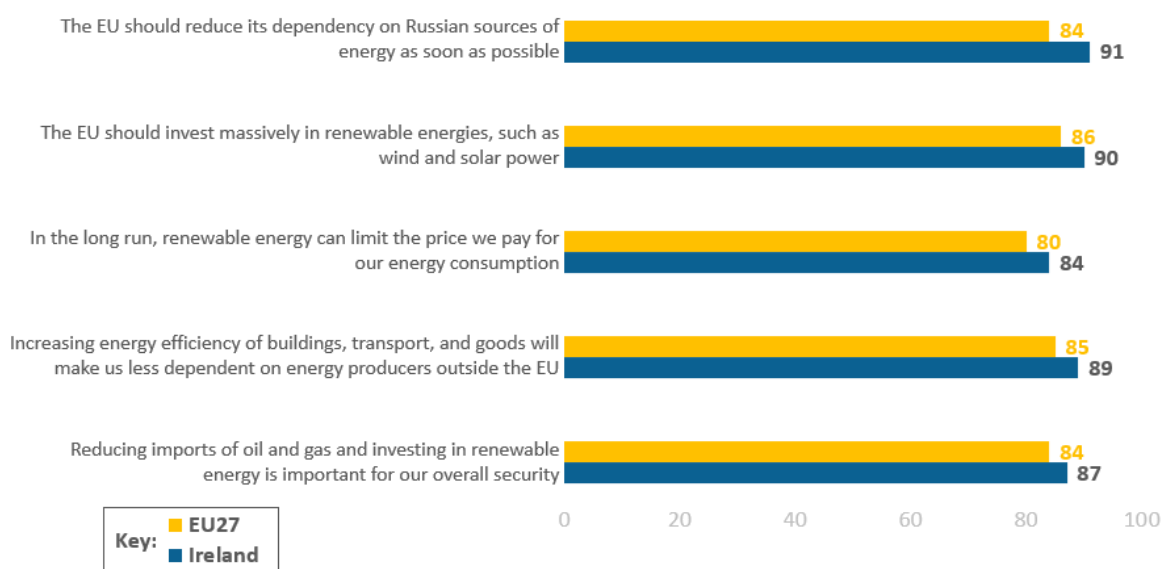
As alluded to earlier, the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine has resulted in clear questions surrounding sources and security of energy supply for the EU. The Irish and EU public alike agree strongly with the view that the EU should reduce dependency on Russian sources of energy as quickly as possible, while also showing clear appetite for renewable and efficient energy sources with clear links to increased renewable energy leading to lower energy costs. For example, nine in ten in the Irish public (84% EU27 average) agree that the EU should reduce its dependency on Russian sources of energy as soon as possible; nine in ten in the Irish public (86% EU27 average) agree that the EU should invest massively in renewable energies, such as wind and solar power.

Furthermore, just under nine in ten of the Irish public agree that reducing imports of oil and gas and investing in renewable energy is important for our overall security – 84% of the EU27 public agree. It is interesting to note that, when focusing on demographics both within Ireland and the EU27, there are no clear and significant variances in levels of agreement, with this remaining relatively steady throughout all demographics including age and socioeconomic class. There is a clear understanding across the EU that renewable energy sources are a more appropriate form of energy moving forward.

Figure 8

QE3.8. – QE3.12. Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (%)

Base: All EU / Irish adults 26,468 / 1,008



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IV. THE MEDIA



In recent years there has been considerable debate about how to evaluate objective reporting in the media versus disinformation, or what is now colloquially known as “fake news”. This is particularly relevant in the digital and social media age with many opportunities presenting to mislead and misinform. This section will focus on understanding the level of trust felt and the sources of media used to find information on European political matters and EU policies and institutions.

Firstly, we will focus on the Irish and EU public’s understanding of disinformation and its prevalence. Four in five (83%) of the Irish public agrees that the existence of disinformation is a problem for democracy generally (81% EU27 average). The rate of exposure to

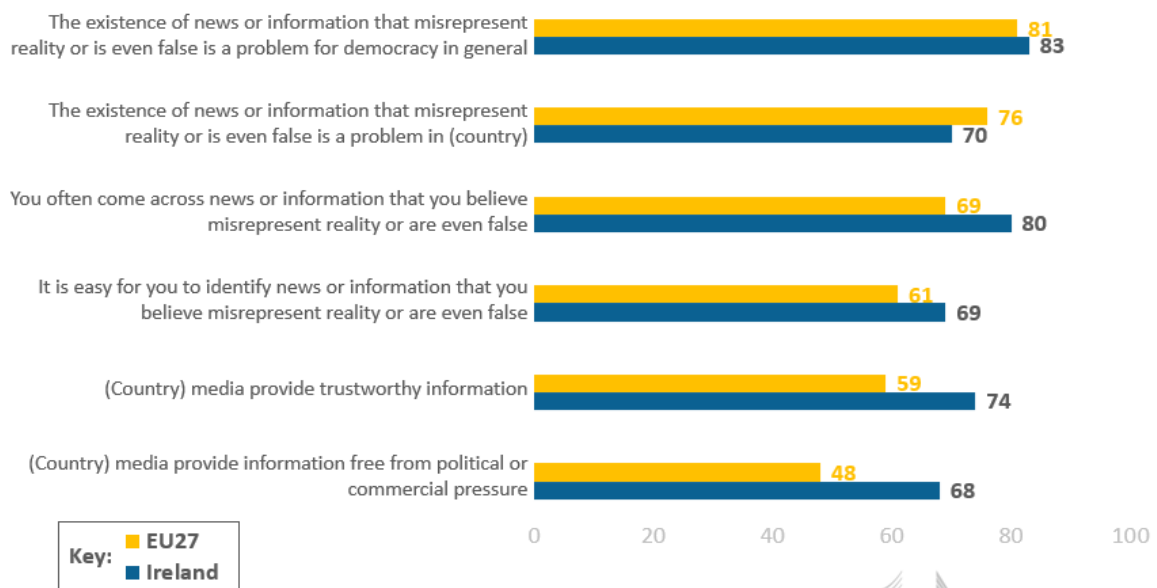
disinformation appears to be higher in Ireland with four in five (80%) of the Irish public agreeing that they often come across news or information that they believe misrepresents reality or is false, compared to 69% of the EU27 public on average. However, when we focus on the ability to identify disinformation both the Irish and EU public indicate lower agreement here (69% and 61% respectively).

When focusing on Ireland’s media specifically, we see that the Irish public are more likely to trust the national media to deliver trustworthy information, with three in four (74%) agreeing with this sentiment. The EU27 average is much lower here at 59% agreeing that their country’s media provides trustworthy information.

Figure 9

QF7.1. For each of the following statements, please tell to what extent it corresponds or not to the situation of the (NATIONALITY) media (%)
QF8.1. Do you totally agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or totally disagree with each of the following statements. (%)

Base: All EU / Irish adults 26,468 / 1,008



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When focusing on sources on information for European matters, and EU policies and institutions, we see that there are varying levels of usage depending on demographics.

Sources of media on EU political matters show the clear role of television in communications, with 49% of the Irish public citing TV news and 45% citing TV generalist channels as their principal sources of information. These sources are much more popular among older cohorts (59% and 57% of over 55s respectively), while media sources such as social media plays a significant role particularly among under 25s (67%, compared to 35% total Irish population), positioning it as the number one source of information on EU political matters. When we focus on the EU27 average, we see that Ireland follows a similar pattern to the EU generally.

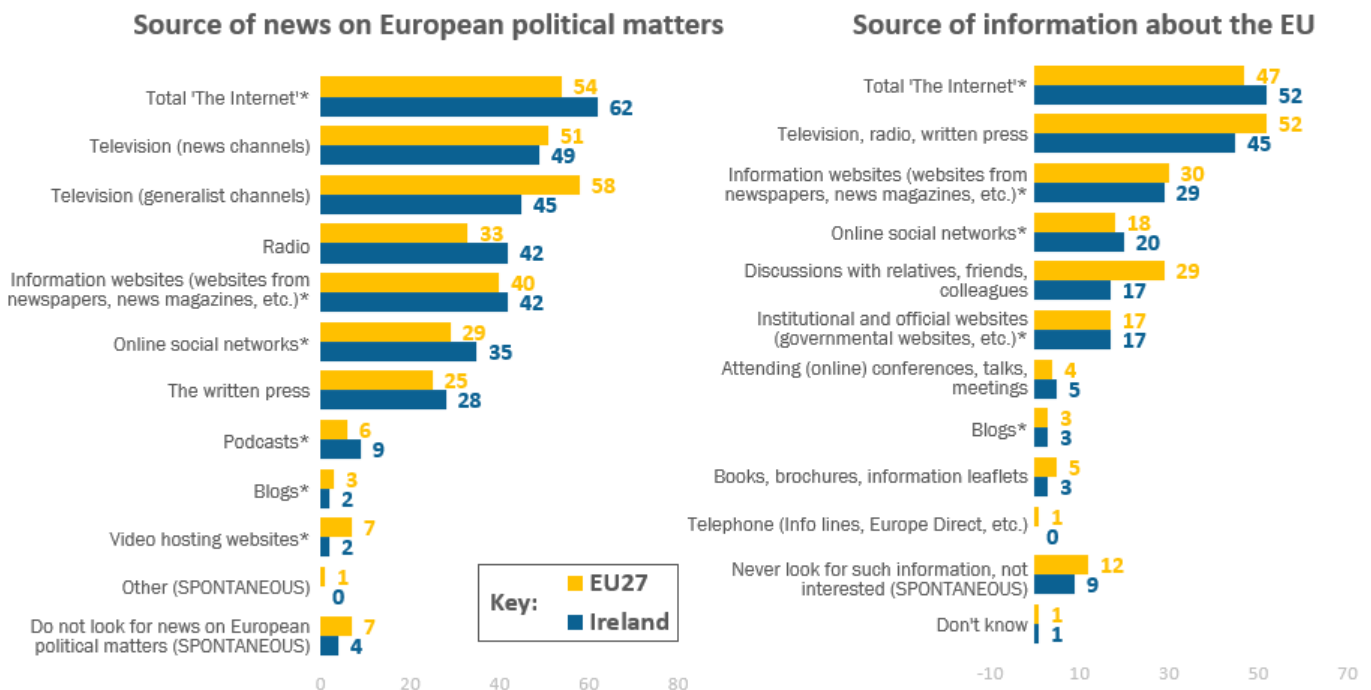
Interestingly, when we focus on sourcing information on the EU, its policies, and institutions, we see that while TV and other traditional media maintains its dominance in informing both the Irish and EU27 public, however the role of social media decreases (20% of Irish public; 18% of EU27 public) in this respect.

Figure 10

QF4T. Where do you get most of your news on European political matters? Firstly? And then? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) (%)

QF5. When you are looking for information about the EU, its policies, its institutions, which of the following sources do you use? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) (%)

Base: All EU / Irish adults 26,468 / 1,008



CONCLUSIONS



During this year's fieldwork, Ireland was wrestling with rising inflation and a cost-of-living crisis following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

It is clear from this survey that the Irish public continue to hold a positive opinion of Europe and its institutions. Overall, Ireland displayed considerably more positivity towards the EU and indicated a high level of perceived knowledge of the EU compared to the EU27 average.

The Irish public continues to have a very positive image overall of the EU and this is reflected throughout the findings of this survey;

- Most positive member state when considering the image of the EU
- Most optimistic about the EU's future
- Very strong perception among the Irish public that they are informed on European matters (2nd among EU27 states)
- Ireland is positioned in circa 9th place among EU27 nations when considering trust in EU Institutions.
- Key issues for Ireland are perceived to be housing and prices / inflation / cost of living. 52% of the public in Ireland cite housing as a concern. Only Luxembourg is on par here. Across the EU27, housing is not perceived as a significant concern with only 8% on average citing this as an important issue. When focusing on specific EU concerns, the key concern remains rising prices / inflation / cost of living, while housing falls away significantly. Those citing immigration as an EU concern has increased to 26% in Ireland, compared to the EU average of 17%.
- The Irish public view themselves as the most Centrist among the EU27 states.
- There is a strong understanding of disinformation and its prevalence, with four in five of the Irish public agreeing that they come across new or information that they believe misrepresents reality or is false, while 83% agree that the existence of this disinformation is a problem for democracy.
- Ireland's usage of media sources mirrors the EU27 average, with TV generalist channels and news channels topping the list for sourcing information on European political matters. Television, radio, and written print top the list for sourcing information on the EU, its policies, and its institutions. Online social media is the most significant media source among those aged 15 to 24 for sourcing information on European political matters.

In the past year the Russian invasion of Ukraine has resulted in an array of responses from nations across the world, including those within the EU. As such, this Eurobarometer focused on the level of satisfaction among the EU27 public in terms of their own government's response, and the EU's response, to the invasion:

- Much more positivity in Ireland compared to the EU27 average, with almost four in five (78%) of the Irish public satisfied with their government's response to the invasion, compared to 55% of the EU27 public generally.

- Three in four (76%) of the Irish public were also satisfied with the EU's response, however this drops to 56% of the EU27 public generally.

Overall, this report illustrates the continued strong pro-EU stance of the Irish public. Notwithstanding that, there are some developing areas of potential concern, notably, surrounding immigration and the clear concerns the Irish public hold in the area of housing. The report also illustrates the challenge of disinformation and the rising importance of social media, especially among younger people.

