



Riáaltas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Public attitudes and awareness of the European Structural and Investment Funds in Ireland

National Survey 2020

NOVEMBER 2020



RESEARCH
& INSIGHT

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Research background and objectives

The European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds support economic development across all of the European Union. These Funds make up over half of the European Union's budget. Here in Ireland these funds are used, together with Government funding, to invest over €6.1 billion in the 2014-2020 period.

The ESI Funds were created to help those regions, within the European Union, whose development was some way behind. The aim is to reduce the differences between regions and create a better economic and social balance within and between Member States.

The investment includes initiatives in education, research and job creation to help create a sustainable and healthy economy across the whole of the country. The funds are also spent on protecting our environment, and on supporting rural and coastal communities.

The main ESI Funds for which Ireland is eligible are:

- the European Social Fund (ESF);
- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD);
- European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The Minister for Finance and new President of the Eurogroup, Paschal Donohoe was quoted in 2017:

"If we reflect on the lessons learned from major political events in Europe in the past year, a key learning point for all of us here today is that we need to rise to the challenge of communicating more effectively about the very positive impact which EU membership has on all our lives, in every corner of Ireland."

The ESI Funds in Ireland commissioned a National Public Attitudes and Awareness Research to establish current awareness and perceptions of the funding. In addition to the ESI Funds, this research also covered other EU Funds including the Fund for European Aid for the most Deprived (FEAD), Erasmus+ and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF).

The specific objectives for the research included:

- issues of national concern and the importance of investment in these areas
- the level of awareness of Ireland's ESI Funds and their contribution to economic and social development
- the level of awareness of ESI Fund operational programmes and their funded projects/initiatives
- the level of awareness of other EU Funds, e.g. FEAD, EGF, Erasmus+
- the level of awareness of the EU Emblem
- attitudes towards the EU Funds and the European Union
- the perception of the impact of EU funded projects
- public attitudes towards Brexit
- the level of awareness and attitude to the EU's response to COVID-19.



On this basis a nationally and regionally representative survey among the Irish adult population was conducted:

- Distribution across the NUTS II and NUTS III regions as per levels of incidence from the Central Statistics Office
- Quota controlled by gender, age and social grades
- At analysis stage the results will be weighted to be proportionately representative at each of the NUTS II and NUTS III regions and at a national level.

To maximise the robustness of the results from the quantitative research a sample size of 1,200 adults, aged 16 years+ was delivered. Final data was weighted to the most recent CSO statistics. The survey was conducted by way of an online survey sourced from B&A’s own online consumer panel, Acumen which provides one of the largest ‘research only’ (not for general marketing) samples in Ireland.

Fieldwork was conducted throughout November 2020.

National Survey 2020 Sample Profile

Base: Adults aged 16+ n – 1,260



		2020 %
Gender	Male	49
	Female	51
Age	16-24	11
	25-34	17
	35-44	21
	45-54	18
	55+	33
Social Class	ABC1F	50
	C2DE	50
	ABC1F	50

		2020 %
Region (NUTS)	Border	8
	West	10
	Mid-west	10
	South East	9
	South-West	15
	Dublin	29
	Mid-East	14
	Midlands	6
Area	Urban	66
	Rural	34

Under GDPR guidelines, respondents were clearly informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary, that they were free to refuse to answer any particular question, to stop the interview at any point and to request that all data they provided to B&A be destroyed. Respondents were also reassured as to how their data would be used in an anonymised dataset.

The breadth and detail of the information coverage of the survey questionnaire naturally needed to achieve a balance between the key research deliverables for the Department and maintaining an accessible and time limited interview for a broad, nationally representative sample which contained adults from all backgrounds.



The survey questionnaire consisted of a series of key sections and this report follows a similar structure:

1. Awareness of Government Plans and Strategies
2. European Funds Awareness
3. Individual Funds: Awareness and Understanding
4. Which national issues/sectors to support
5. Attitudes towards EU Funding
6. Overall attitudes towards the EU.



Key Learnings



There is overwhelming public support for the EU:

87% say that EU Funding support has had a positive impact on Ireland.
88% think that Ireland's membership of the EU is a good thing.



Over 3 in 4 (77%) Irish adults are aware of at least one of the European Funds which provide support to Ireland.

The top funds for awareness include Erasmus+, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

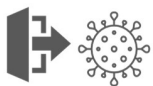


There is considerable consistency among Irish adults on the most important areas for EU investment:

Public Health; Environment/Climate Change; Education and Learning; and Sustainable Quality Employment.



80% of Irish adults agree that 'a regional approach to EU funding is a good idea'.



83% believe our national interests are best supported by acting jointly with the EU in relation to either Brexit or COVID-19.



Awareness of Government Plans and Strategies

To begin the survey, it was noted to participants that the Government has a range of local and national economic and social development plans and strategies and were asked which, if any, of these they were currently aware of on both a spontaneous and prompted basis.

On a prompted basis, awareness of 14 plans in total were measured, from the National Broadband Plan to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

While spontaneous references were modest, on a promoted basis 85% of Irish adults were aware of at least one Government plan/strategy.

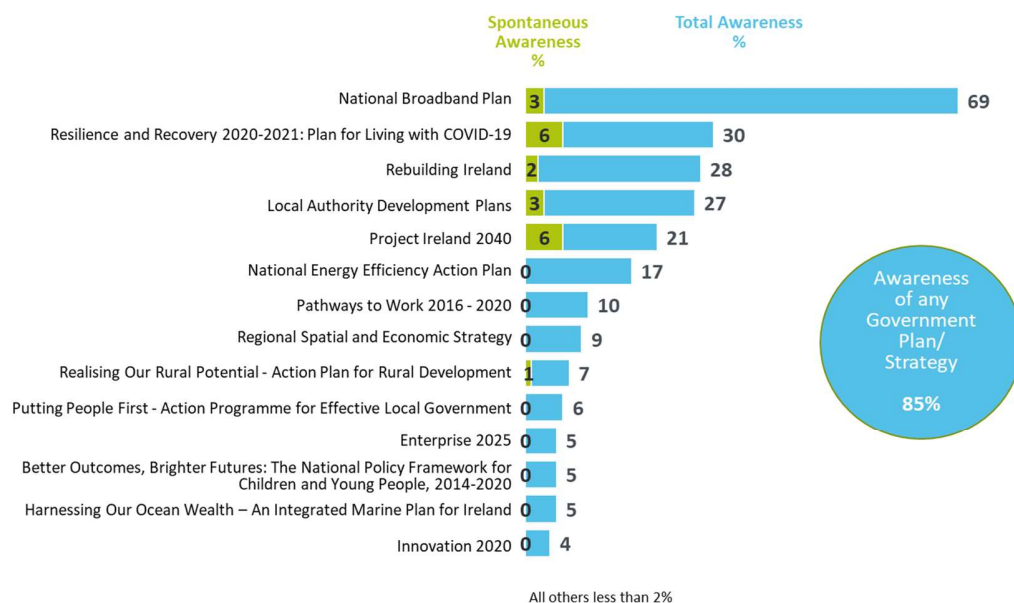
High level national awareness of Government plans focused on the National Broadband Plan; in addition, four other plans have awareness beyond 1 in 5 adults. These plans include: Resilience and Recovery 2020–2021 - plan for living with COVID-19; Rebuilding Ireland; local authority development plans; and Project Ireland 2040. One other government plan measured awareness beyond 10% – the National Energy Efficiency Action plan. Thereafter, the remaining plans had awareness levels of between four and 10%.

In demographic terms, national awareness of Government plans and strategies typically increases with age, peaking among those aged 55 years+. Awareness of no plan/strategy was significantly more prominent among those under 35 years.

Q.2 The Government has a range of local and national economic and social development plans and strategies. What, if any, are you currently aware of?
Q.3 Which, if any, of the following Government Plans or Strategies have you heard of?

Awareness of Government Plans & Strategies

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000



High level national awareness of Government plans is focussed on the National Broadband Plan; in addition, four other plans have awareness beyond 1 in 5 adults, peaking for 'Living with Covid-19'.



In relation to awareness by region, the pattern largely conforms to the national average; however, there are some notable exceptions with, for example, awareness for both local authority development plans and the National Broadband Plan peaking in the Border region; interestingly, awareness for the National Broadband Plan is lowest in Dublin. Any awareness for the listed Government plans peaks overall in the Midlands.

Q.3 Which, if any, of the following Government Plans or Strategies have you heard of?

Awareness of Government Plans & Strategies x Region

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	1260	126	107	128	112	207	333	163	84
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
National Broadband Plan	69	83	76	67	67	76	59	69	75
Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19	30	29	36	27	24	25	35	27	28
Rebuilding Ireland	28	26	41	21	26	31	27	23	32
Local Authority Development Plans	27	40	27	29	32	23	24	23	24
Project Ireland 2040	21	14	25	18	20	18	26	22	16
National Energy Efficiency Action Plan	17	13	10	20	17	17	17	22	11
Pathways to Work 2016 - 2020	10	15	11	11	8	9	8	8	9
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy	9	12	11	6	8	7	9	8	11
Realising Our Rural Potential - Action Plan for Rural Development	7	5	7	13	10	7	7	5	9
Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government	6	7	5	5	11	8	5	4	7
Enterprise 2025	5	5	9	7	3	5	5	5	6
Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020	5	4	5	5	6	4	6	3	9
Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth – An Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland	5	4	3	6	5	9	3	4	6
Innovation 2020	4	1	10	3	2	3	4	5	6
Any	85	92	91	84	86	86	80	84	93



European Funds Awareness

The initial review of the European Structural and Investment Funds consisted of measuring the national public's awareness of the funds on a spontaneous and prompted basis.

On a prompted basis, it was noted to respondents that 'Ireland receives funding from a number of European Funds, have you heard of any of the following?', with 10 funds then presented including the European Regional Development Fund (otherwise known as ERDF), the European Social Fund (otherwise known as the ESF), the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (otherwise known as EGF) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

Despite spontaneous awareness being minor, over 3 in 4 Irish adults are aware of at least one European Fund.

The national pattern of awareness separated into three reasonably defined tiers:

- The top tier of European funds as per national awareness includes Erasmus+, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and the European Social Fund (ESF).
 - Each of these funds delivered an awareness level of 40% or more among the public.
- The second tier comprised the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the Youth Employment Initiative with awareness levels of 34%, 27% and 19% respectively.
- The lower tier comprised four funds each of which with less than 10% national awareness, including the Fund for European Aid to the most deprived; Horizon 2020; the EGF, and Life 2020.
 - (Interestingly, when later asked *which EU funds would you be most interested in hearing about*, Life 2020 was nominated as the fund of third most interest).

When responses were reviewed in summary form, analysis established that 10% of Irish adults were aware of 6 or more of the 10 funds presented; 32% were aware of 3-5 funds; and 58% were aware of less than 3 of the funds.

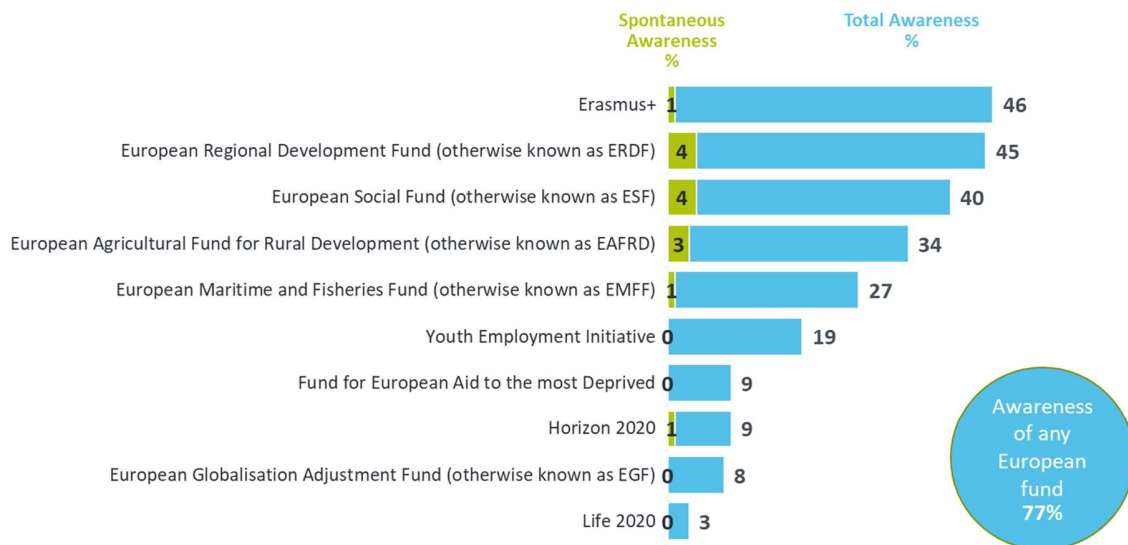


Q.4 Can you name any of the European Funds which provide support to Ireland?

Q.5 Ireland receives funding from a number of European Funds, have you heard of any of the following?

Awareness of European Funds

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000



Over 3 in 4 Irish adults are aware of at least one European Fund. The top tier of European funds as per national awareness include Erasmus, ERDF & ESF.

As with government plans and strategies, awareness of the European funds increases with age, with awareness of several funds being significantly higher amongst those aged above 55 years. These included the ERDF, the ESF, the EAFRD, the EMFF and the Fund for European Aid to the most deprived.

There was one exception to this general rule: Erasmus+. Perhaps not surprisingly, the awareness for Erasmus+ showed a youthful bias and was also higher among the ABC1 social grade. There is perhaps an opportunity here to leverage the youth orientated recognition of Erasmus+ to build awareness of other European funds.

The research also offered some level of comparison with previous surveys in relation to fund awareness, albeit this was confined to a handful of funds. Where comparisons were possible it showed increasing levels of awareness over time for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and the European Social Fund (ESF); conversely declines in awareness were evident for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)



Awareness of the European funds on a regional basis shows a striking level of consistency with awareness not being significantly higher or lower in any region for any of the funds.

Q.5 Ireland receives funding from a number of European Funds, have you heard of any of the following?

Awareness of European Funds x Region

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	1260	126	107	128	112	207	333	163	84
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Erasmus+	46	39	51	44	48	42	50	48	39
European Regional Development Fund (otherwise known as ERDF)	45	44	55	43	36	40	48	45	46
European Social Fund (otherwise known as ESF)	40	44	51	38	35	40	42	37	33
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (otherwise known as EAFRD)	34	41	40	31	27	34	34	31	38
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (otherwise known as EMFF)	27	26	32	30	27	28	24	25	30
Youth Employment Initiative	19	16	20	20	18	23	20	14	24
Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived	9	8	15	8	12	8	9	7	11
Horizon 2020	9	5	15	10	11	6	8	8	8
European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (otherwise known as EGF)	8	4	8	11	9	6	7	7	9
Life 2020	3	1	5	2	3	2	4	5	6

When awareness for both government plans and European funds were reviewed in aggregate form, a national awareness profile did emerge: awareness for either Plans or Funds increased with age, peaking among those above 55 years; awareness was lowest among the youth demographic, aged 16 to 34 years, and also among women.

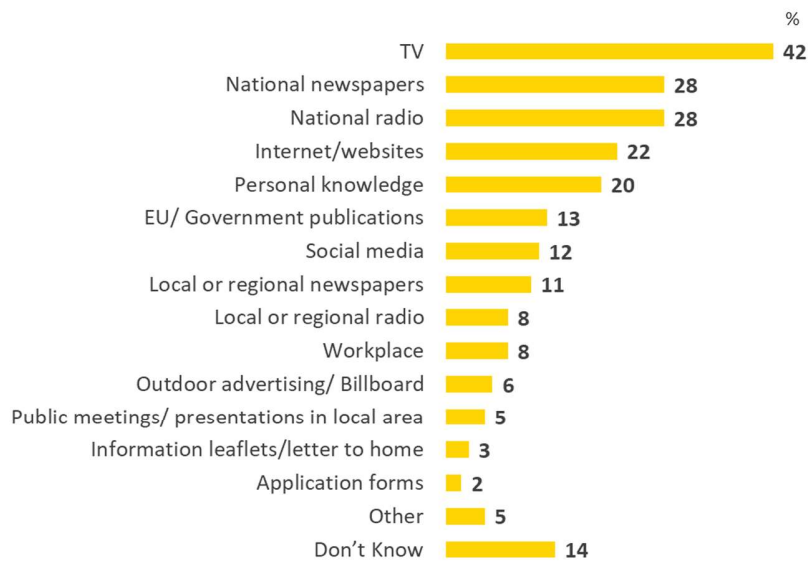


Given this age bias to awareness, it was perhaps not surprisingly that traditional media were the main sources of awareness for the European funds: TV, national newspapers and national radio were the three top rated sources of awareness for the European funds among those aware of any.

Q.10 Thinking now of the European funds you are aware of, where have you heard about them?

Source of European Funds Awareness

Base: Aware Any European Funds (77%) 967/2,834,000



Traditional media is the main driver of awareness among the Top Tier segment.



Sources of awareness show only mild variation by region: national radio as a source is distinctly lower in the Mid-West; while the importance of public meetings and presentations is significantly stronger in the Border region.

Q.10 Thinking now of the European funds you are aware of, where have you heard about them?

Source of European Funds Awareness x Region

Base: Aware Any European Funds (77%) 967/2,834,000

	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	967	98	92	95	81	156	262	119	64
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
TV	42	41	42	47	43	41	44	34	42
National newspapers	28	23	26	22	28	26	33	28	22
National radio	28	38	30	17	24	30	30	25	29
Internet/websites	22	19	27	28	15	22	26	15	18
Personal knowledge	20	17	24	13	25	17	19	29	14
EU/ Government publications	13	10	15	15	4	7	19	15	6
Social media	12	18	11	12	11	12	13	9	12
Local or regional newspapers	11	17	15	11	13	13	9	5	15
Local or regional radio	8	16	15	6	14	7	5	6	2
Workplace	8	6	12	3	8	10	7	6	13
Outdoor advertising/Billboard	6	3	8	7	5	7	7	5	7
Public meetings/ presentations in local area	5	14	8	6	4	2	5	2	3
Information leaflets/letter to home	3	4	6	4	1	3	3	3	3
Application forms	2	3	1	2	2	1	4	1	1
Other (specify)	5	1	8	3	8	1	7	3	9
Don't Know	14	12	11	17	18	19	11	17	10



To establish levels of understanding of the European funds, participants were asked to describe what each fund they were aware of was used for.

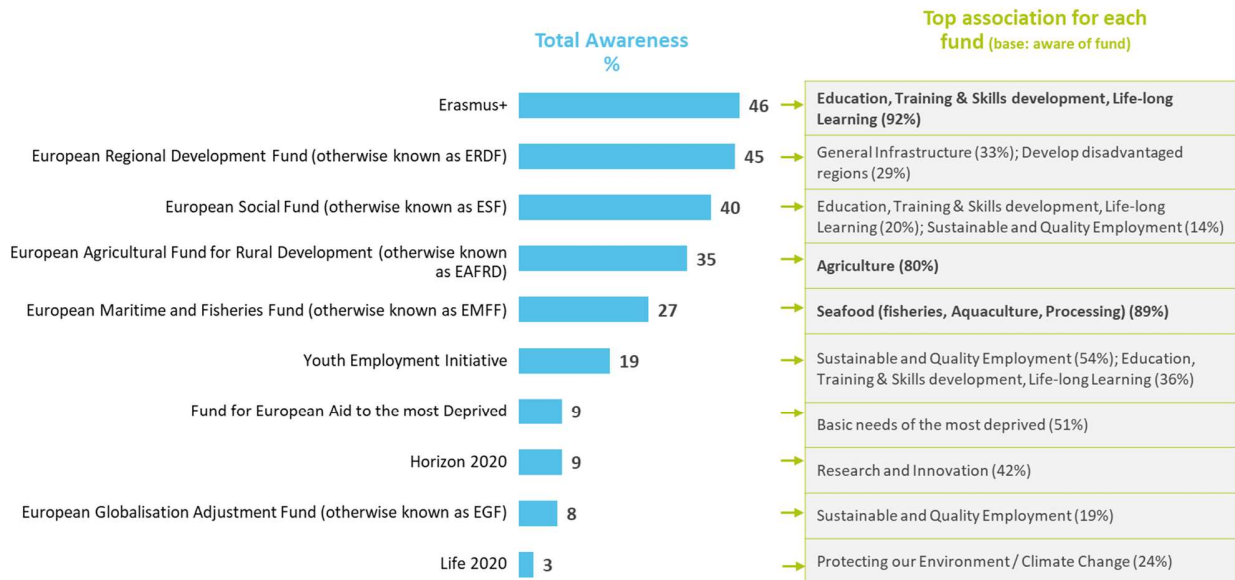
Among those aware, Erasmus+, EAFRD and the EMFF appear to have the clearest public associations:

- Erasmus+ with Education, Training and Life-long Learning;
- the EAFRD with Agriculture;
- and the EMFF with Seafood (fisheries, Aquaculture, Processing).

**Q.5 Ireland receives funding from a number of European Funds, have you heard of any of the following?
Q.6 What do you believe this European fund is used for/supports?**

European Funds Awareness: Top Associations

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000



Among those aware, Erasmus, EAFRD and the EMFF appear to have the clearest public associations.

Beyond this the associations with each fund could be reasonably shallow; for example, associations with the ESF peaked at 20% in relation to education and lifelong learning; associations with the ERDF peaked with general infrastructure at 33%.

Understanding of both the ERDF and ESF were also probed in further detail during the survey. In relation to the ERDF 14% of those aware of the fund claimed awareness of which ERDF program served their region. Of those aware of the ESF, awareness of the operational programme is yet to develop.



Which national issues/sectors should the funds support?

As a precursor to the series of questions on which national issues and sectors the public feel the European funds should support, the following descriptive paragraph was resented to survey participants:

The European Funds support economic development across all of the European Union.

These Funds make up over half of the European Union's budget.

Here in Ireland these funds are used together with Government of Ireland funding, to invest in education, research and job creation to help create a sustainable and healthy economy across the whole of the country.

They are also spent on protecting our environment, and on supporting rural and coastal communities.

Between 2014 and 2020, together the ERDF, ESF, EMFF and EAFRD will invest €3.45 billion in Ireland.

This was then followed with a question soliciting spontaneous feedback from the public on which issues or sectors they thought the EU funds in Ireland should support.

The responses exhibited a reasonably clearly defined pattern with just under one third of adults highlighting the area of education, training and skills development, lifelong learning as the key national issue requiring support.

There then followed a somewhat broad second tier which included sustainable and quality appointment, public health, and agriculture.

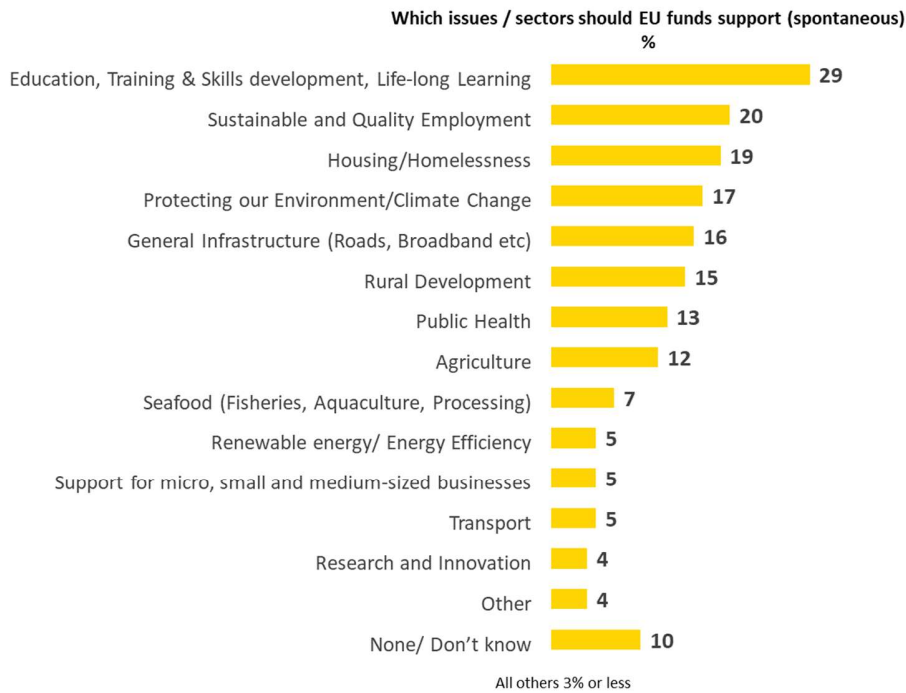
Interestingly when these spontaneous responses were reviewed by demographic groups, little variation across gender, age, or region was evident.



Q.12 Based on the above, what general issues or sectors do you think the EU Funds in Ireland should support?

Which national issues/sectors should EU funds support? (Spontaneous)

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000



On a spontaneous basis, Education & Learning is the top ranked general issue nominated for EU funding in Ireland.



The ranking of the issues raised on a spontaneous bases is also very consistent across the regions; The only variations of note include *education and skills development* receiving significantly fewer spontaneous references in the Mid-West; and *general infrastructure* being less referenced in the South-East.

Q.12 Based on the above, what general issues or sectors do you think the EU Funds in Ireland should support?

Which national issues/sectors should EU funds support? (Spontaneous) x Region

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	1260	126	107	128	112	207	333	163	84
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Education, Training & Skills development, Life-long Learning	29	30	31	14	31	30	30	32	28
Sustainable and Quality Employment	20	22	25	15	20	23	20	13	24
Housing/Homelessness	19	16	13	18	19	21	22	20	8
Protecting our Environment/Climate Change	17	14	11	18	18	17	20	17	12
General Infrastructure (Roads, Broadband etc)	16	14	13	18	9	16	20	14	17
Rural Development	15	21	14	14	16	13	13	13	24
Public Health	13	18	11	12	12	14	14	14	9
Agriculture	12	11	12	8	9	12	14	13	12
Seafood (Fisheries, Aquaculture, Processing)	7	6	7	4	2	11	8	5	6
Renewable energy/ Energy Efficiency	5	-	3	6	3	3	6	8	5
Support for micro, small and medium-sized businesses	5	5	5	7	5	5	6	6	3
Transport	5	6	4	2	6	5	7	5	4
Research and Innovation	4	6	1	-	1	3	6	5	3
Other	4	4	5	4	5	5	3	5	7
None/DK	10	10	10	15	14	10	7	9	13



The next part of the assessment involved presenting 16 specific areas to participants and asking them to nominate how important or unimportant investment in each of these areas was to them.

The 16 prompted areas are listed in the table below:

Low Carbon Transport
Renewable energy/Energy Efficiency
Community-led Local Development
Education, Training and Skills development, Life-long Learning
Seafood (Fisheries, Aquaculture, Processing)
Sustainable and Quality Employment
Support for micro, small and medium-sized businesses
Research and Innovation
Childcare
Sustainable Urban Development
Social inclusion and Equality
Protecting our Environment/Climate Change
Public Health
Rural Development
Agriculture
Basic needs of the most deprived

Again, the public provided a clear ranking system in their responses. Not surprisingly, given the current COVID-19 related environment, public health is perceived as the key investment area. Following that education and lifelong learning (the top ranked spontaneous area) was in second place on a prompted basis.

Thereafter three other areas were considered very important by over 50% of Irish adults: the basic needs of the most deprived; protecting our environment/climate change; and renewable energy/energy efficiency.

The second tier comprised five areas which were nominated as very important by 40% or more of Irish adults: sustainable and quality employment; rural development; support for SMEs; research and innovation; and social inclusion and equality.

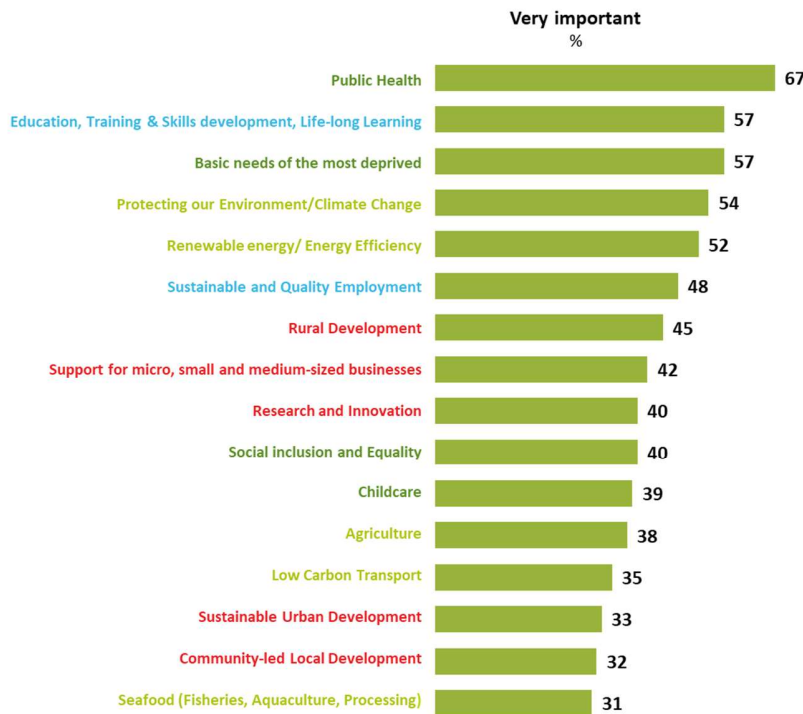


This ranking system showed considerable consistency when reviewed demographically. In addition, we were able to analyse the responses by national segments defined by their awareness of government plans and the European funds. Here Irish adults separated into three tiers of low, medium and high awareness. Irrespective of these groupings however, the top ranking of the most important areas for EU investment were largely consistent: public health; climate change; education; and employment.

Q.13 How important or unimportant to you is investment in each of the following areas/aspects by the EU Funds in Ireland

Importance of EU Fund investment in specific areas

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000





The national pattern is consistent in evidence across the regions. A slight exception here relates to *Rural Development* which is given significantly higher importance in both the Border and West regions.

Q.13 How important or unimportant to you is investment in each of the following areas/aspects by the EU Funds in Ireland

Importance of EU Fund investment in specific areas x Region

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

VERY IMPORTANT	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	1260	126	107	128	112	207	333	163	84
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Public Health	67	71	68	68	58	63	67	70	65
Education, Training & Skills development, Life-long Learning	57	53	57	48	57	52	62	64	57
Basic needs of the most deprived	57	56	57	48	52	59	58	62	59
Protecting our Environment/Climate Change	54	52	55	45	47	52	54	63	65
Renewable energy/ Energy Efficiency	52	51	54	48	47	49	51	57	60
Sustainable and Quality Employment	48	54	58	42	42	49	44	54	49
Rural Development	45	63	59	40	39	44	39	42	50
Support for micro, small and medium-sized businesses	42	49	51	42	41	41	40	40	45
Research and Innovation	40	37	42	38	38	37	43	42	35
Social inclusion and Equality	40	39	46	39	31	37	40	46	43
Childcare	39	42	39	40	29	36	40	40	41
Agriculture	38	43	48	33	33	32	37	35	55
Low Carbon Transport	35	36	30	33	26	32	38	43	39
Sustainable Urban Development	33	31	38	32	30	28	36	35	25
Community-led Local Development	32	35	39	33	37	31	26	34	33
Seafood (Fisheries, Aquaculture, Processing)	31	31	31	33	29	34	27	35	40



Attitudes towards EU Funding

The overall attitude of Irish adults towards the EU funds was clearly very positive.

When asked to take all the information they had heard about the funds into consideration, 87% of respondents indicated that the funds have had a positive impact on Ireland.

Q.11 Taking into consideration all the info you heard about EU Funding, would you say that support has had positive/negative impact on Ireland?

EU Funding impact on Ireland

Base: Aware Any European Funds (77%) 967/2,834,000



The overwhelming majority assess the impact of EU funding on Ireland as positive.



The clear perception that EU funding has had a positive impact on Ireland is equally apparent across the regions.

Q.11 Taking into consideration all the info you heard about EU Funding, would you say that support has had positive/negative impact on Ireland?

EU Funding impact on Ireland x Region

Base: Aware Any European Funds (77%) 967/2,834,000

	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	967	98	92	95	81	156	262	119	64
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Positive impact	87	83	88	86	83	89	89	86	84
Negative impact	3	3	3	2	5	1	2	2	4
No impact	10	14	9	12	12	10	8	12	12

The research also probed attitudes towards EU funding on a more detailed level, presenting five separate attitudinal statements relating to the funds and asking participants to nominate the extent to which they agreed to each one.

The five attitudinal statements included: *The EU funds are likely to benefit all people living in Ireland; I think the EU funds will benefit me as an individual; I think the EU will benefit my region/local area; I think a regional approach to EU funding is a good idea; I am interested in finding out more about the EU Funds and its effect on me.*

The statement with the strongest level of agreement relates to support for EU funding having a regional approach with in total 80% of Irish adults agreeing with this, with 43% agreeing strongly; in fact, only 2% of the sample disagree with this position in any way.

There is a very even level of support for two related statements: that EU funds are likely to benefit all the people; and that the EU will benefit ‘my region/local area’.

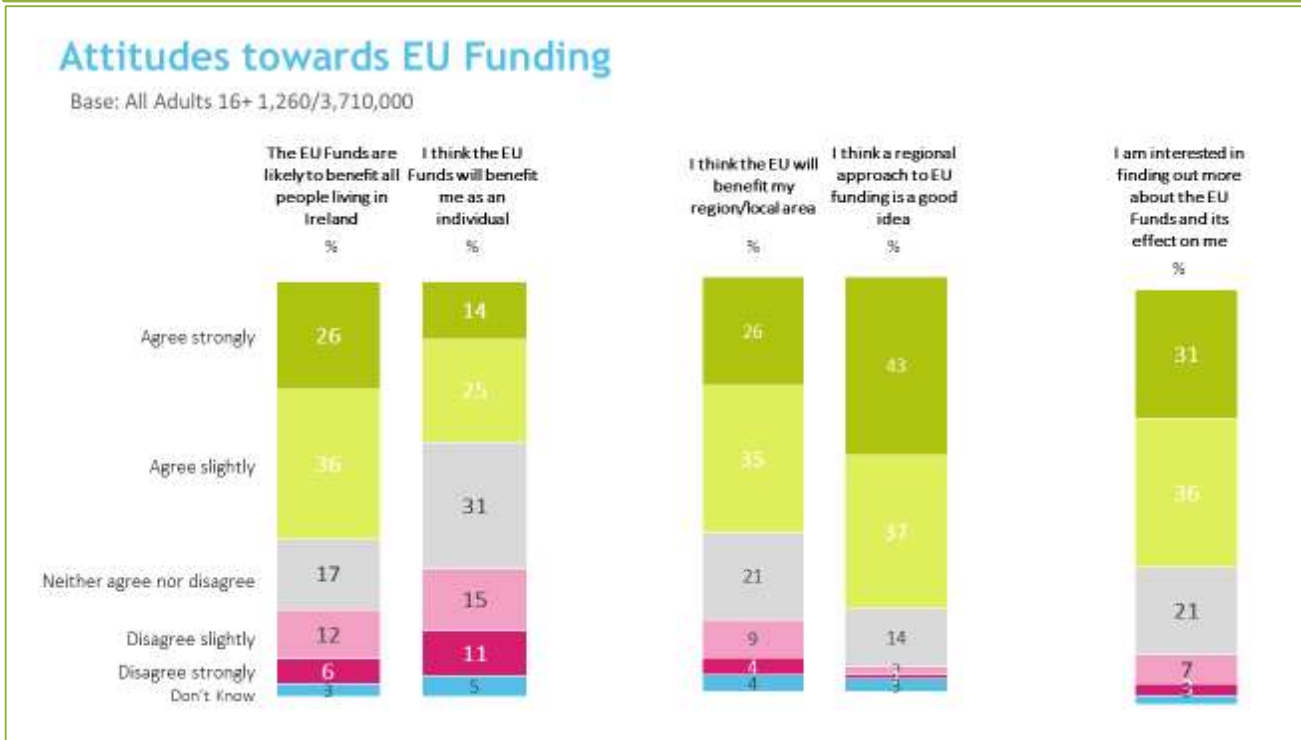
The statements received 60 to 61% support, respectively. As this suggests however overall support was more equivocal with for example 18% of Irish adults disagreeing in some form that the funds are likely to benefit *all people living in Ireland*.

Where support is most divided is in relation to the statement – *I think the EU funds will benefit me as an individual*. Here, 39% of Irish adults agree while 26% disagree, a further 31% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, with the balance expressing a *don’t know* opinion. This divided sentiment highlights the importance for communications around the EU funds to stress the tangible benefits to all people.



Finally, there is a positive indication of the public’s appetite to receive more information and to understand better the role of EU funding: 67% of Irish adults indicate *I am interested in finding out more about the funds and its effect on me.*

Q.14 Here are some statements about the EU Funds, can you tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following?



In analysing the agreement levels, support was reviewed by the awareness segments referenced earlier – those segments of the Irish population with low, medium or relatively high levels of awareness of the EU structural funds.

This analysis makes it clear that support for the funds increases with awareness and understanding, further highlighting the important role of communications in promoting the role of the funds and consequently confirming the positive impact of EU membership.



Q.14 Here are some statements about the EU Funds, can you tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following?

Attitudes towards EU Funding: Any agree

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

Any Agree	Total	Area		National Awareness Profile		
		Urban	Rural	Low	Medium	High
	1260	909	351	667	433	160
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I think a regional approach to EU funding is a good idea	80	80	80	72	88	90
I am interested in finding out more about the EU Funds and its effect on me	68	67	68	59	74	86
The EU Funds are likely to benefit all people living in Ireland	62	63	60	54	69	78
I think the EU will benefit my region/local area	62	63	59	53	70	77
I think the EU Funds will benefit me as an individual	39	40	38	30	46	59

Support for the EU Funds increases with awareness and understanding; there is no significant difference in attitudes across urban & rural areas.



Given the variation in attitudes across the statements, it is especially interesting to note there is no significant deviation in attitudes across the regions for any of the five attitudinal statements; rather there is a consistent national pattern in attitudes to the EU funds.

Q.14 Here are some statements about the EU Funds, can you tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following?

Attitudes towards EU Funding: Any Agree x Region

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

ANY AGREE	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	1260	126	107	128	112	207	333	163	84
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I think a regional approach to EU funding is a good idea	80	83	84	76	79	77	82	78	76
I am interested in finding out more about the EU Funds and its effect on me	68	66	69	75	65	73	66	62	70
The EU Funds are likely to benefit all people living in Ireland	62	58	66	61	63	58	63	64	61
I think the EU will benefit my region/local area	62	64	65	67	61	61	61	58	60
I think the EU Funds will benefit me as an individual	39	35	46	33	37	38	42	40	31

Each of the attitudinal statements were previously surveyed in the 2016 research. While comparisons are therefore available, there is the caveat that the length and sequencing of the questionnaires are significantly different, and this should be borne in mind when reviewing this timeseries analysis.

Two attitudes appear to have strengthened over time: the support for a regional approach to EU funding; and that *EU funds are likely to benefit all people living in Ireland*. The other sentiment that has clearly grown stronger over time is that which relates to *interest in finding out more about the funds and its effect on me*.

In relation to this interest, participants were asked to specify which fund they would be interested in hearing about. Here there is a clear ranking delivered by the survey with the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund being the two funds which generate the strongest public interest.



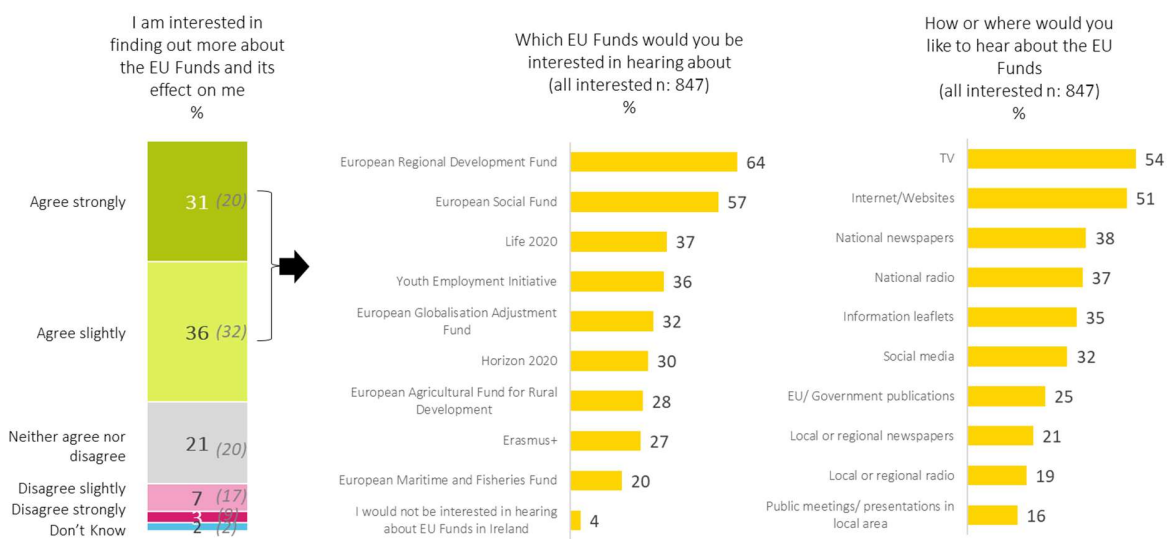
Q.14 Here are some statements about the EU Funds, can you tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following

Q.15 Which of the following EU Funds would you be interested in hearing about?

Q.16 How or where would you like to hear about the EU Funds?

Interest in finding out more about Funds and their effect

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000



*() 2016

Interest in finding out more about the EU funds has increased in 2020: the main funds of interest are the ERDF and ESF.



Overall attitudes towards the EU

In addition to the detailed review of the ESI funds, the survey also established overall attitudes towards the EU.

This section of questioning began with establishing awareness of the EU emblem, which was practically universal among Irish adults at 97%.

Participants were then asked to take everything into account and indicate whether they thought Ireland had on balance benefited or not from the EU funds. The response was very positive with 82% of Irish adults indicating that Ireland had benefited and only 6% indicating Ireland had not.

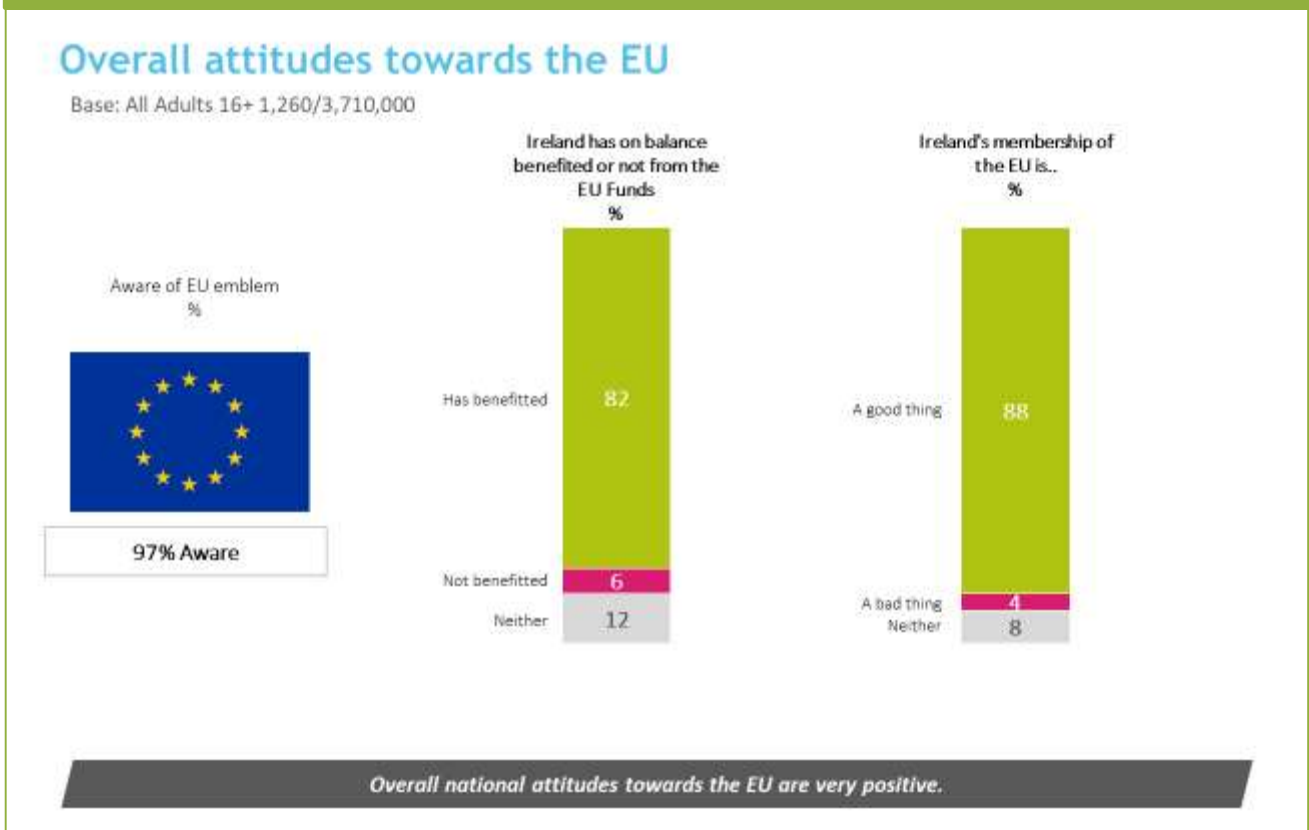
In addition, respondents were asked for their own assessment as to whether Ireland’s membership of the EU is *a good or bad thing*. Again, the response was extremely positive with 88% of Irish adults indicating it is a *good thing*, with only 4% stating it was a *bad thing*.

In relation to both measures, the comprehensive levels of support show no deviation across any of the key demographic groups.

Q.17 Taking everything into account, would you say that Ireland has on balance benefited or not from the EU Funds?

Q.18 Are you familiar with the following identities?

Q.21 Finally, do you think that Ireland's membership of the EU is...?





The overwhelming support for Ireland’s relationship with the EU, in respect of benefiting from the EU funds, and in relation to membership being ‘a good idea’ is again equally evident across the regions.

Q.17 Taking everything into account, would you say that Ireland has on balance benefited or not from the EU Funds?

Q.21 Finally, do you think that Ireland's membership of the EU is...?

Overall attitudes towards EU X Region

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	1260	126	107	128	112	207	333	163	84
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Has benefitted (from EU funds)	82	80	86	80	75	83	82	85	81
“A good thing” (EU membership)	88	84	92	87	84	89	89	88	90



The survey concluded with topical measures relating to Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here the same questions were posed in relation to both issues: whether the interests of Ireland would be better supported by acting jointly with other EU states or as an individual country; the second measure then established awareness of any EU support in relation to either issue.

In relation to either issue, Irish adults were clearly of the view that our interests were best served by acting jointly with the EU rather than as an individual country: in either case the preference for *joint activity* was supported by 83% of Irish adults.

Q.19 Please tell us whether the interests of Ireland would be better taken by acting jointly with other EU States or as an individual country.

Q.20 Are you aware of any supports provided by the European Union in relation to the following?



In terms of the awareness across the issues, there was a distinction, however. A high percentage of Irish adults, 59% in total, were aware of any support provided by the EU in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, there was only 42% awareness of such support in relation to Brexit. Given the longstanding media coverage of the Brexit negotiations this comparatively low awareness was a somewhat surprising result from the research.



The support for a joint approach with other EU states to either Brexit or COVID-19 is strongly and consistently apparent across the regions.

Q.19 Please tell us whether the interests of Ireland would be better taken by acting jointly with other EU States or as an individual country.

Brexit & Covid 19 Better acting jointly with EU or as individual country x Region

Base: All Adults 16+ 1,260/3,710,000

	Total	Region (NUTS)							
		Border	West	Mid-west	South East	South-West	Dublin	Mid-East	Midlands
Base:	1260	126	107	128	112	207	333	163	84
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Brexit: By acting jointly with the other EU Member States	83	84	87	85	80	81	84	80	89
Covid 19: By acting jointly with the other EU Member States	83	80	85	83	72	84	85	82	86



Summary and Conclusions: Public attitudes and awareness of the European Structural and Investment Funds in Ireland

- High level national awareness of Government plans is focused on the National Broadband Plan; in addition, four other plans have awareness beyond 1 in 5 adults, peaking for 'Living with COVID-19'.
- Over 3 in 4 Irish adults are aware of at least one European fund. The top tier of European funds as per national awareness include Erasmus+, ERDF and ESF.
- Among those aware, Erasmus+, EAFRD and the EMFF appear to have the clearest public associations.
- National awareness of both Government plans and European funds increases with age, peaking among those above 55 years.
- Traditional media is the main driver of awareness of EU funds.
- 45% of adults are aware of the ERDF; 14% of these claim awareness of which ERDF programme serves their region.
- 40% of adults are aware of the ESF; the top association for the fund is with education and learning; awareness of the funds delivery programme is yet to develop.
- On a spontaneous basis, Education and Learning is the top ranked general issue nominated for EU funding in Ireland.
- When prompted, public health is naturally perceived as the key investment area, followed by 'Education + Learning', 'basic needs' and climate change.
- Interest in finding out more about the EU funds has increased in 2020: the main funds of interest are the ERDF and ESF.
- Overall national attitudes towards the EU are very positive and the overwhelming majority assess the impact of EU funding on Ireland as positive.
- There is stronger national agreement in 2020 that EU funds benefit all Irish people and stronger support for a regional funding approach; there is also stronger interest in finding out more about the funds.
- We strongly view our national interests as best supported in relation to both Brexit and COVID-19 by acting jointly with the EU; awareness of existing EU supports is stronger for COVID-19.
- Support for the EU funds increases with awareness and understanding, highlighting the importance of strengthening public recognition of the identity and role of the ESI Funds.



The national research findings confirm the strongly positive perception the Irish public has towards the European Union. There is overwhelming agreement that Ireland has benefited from EU funds and support for our membership of the EU in general. Furthermore, we strongly believe a joint approach with other EU member states is required to address the exacting challenges of both Brexit and COVID-19.

Notwithstanding this strong overall support, awareness among the general public of key EU funding initiatives can appear at times as modest and does consistently peak among the older age groups. On one level, this is not surprising as an interest in national and international current affairs often increases with age. However, this demographic pattern highlights a challenge for the EU in Ireland in growing awareness overall and most particularly among the youth demographic. In addition, awareness of more regionally specific initiatives and funds indicate a further challenge of building awareness 'locally'.

The research makes it clear that traditional media sources are the key drivers of national levels of awareness of EU funds activity to date. This however may be a function of the aforementioned older age profile of the higher awareness groups.

Building awareness among the younger age groups and locally may require separate initiatives. The greater prominence of Erasmus+ fund among the youth market suggests this initiative may be used as a building block for a broader and more detailed awareness of EU activity among this demographic cohort. In addition, for this group more sustained use of online and social media as a source of information may well be beneficial.

Building stronger levels of recognition on a regional basis may likely require the greater use of local media, perhaps in particular local radio, to emphasise the tangible benefits EU funding has brought to individual regions and local communities.

Ultimately, it is heartening that in this period of global political upheaval and public health crisis, support for the EU remains at such prominently high levels.