



Standard Eurobarometer 96
Winter 2021 - 2022

Public opinion in the European Union

National report IRELAND

Fieldwork: January – February 2022



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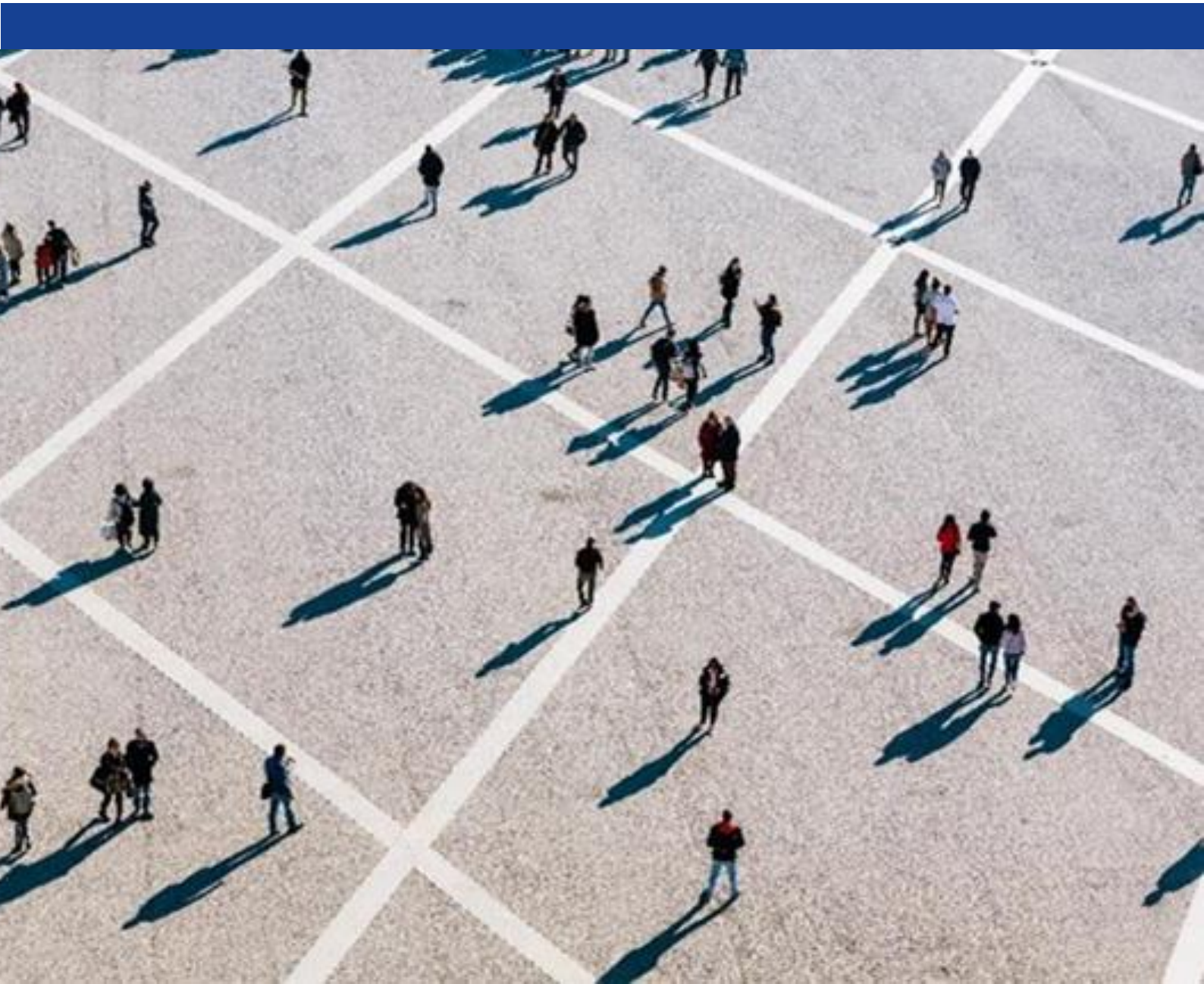
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
KEY FINDINGS	6
1. Trust in European Institutions and EU Direction for the Future	7
2. Irish Economic and Lifestyle Update	7
3. Democracy Under the Microscope	7
4. Trust in the Media	7
5. Satisfaction with Coronavirus Measures	7
I. TRUST IN EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS & EU DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE	8
II. IRISH ECONOMIC & LIFESTYLE UPDATE	13
III. DEMOCRACY UNDER THE MICROSCOPE	16
IV. TRUST IN THE MEDIA	18
V. SATISFACTION WITH CORONAVIRUS MEASURES	20
CONCLUSIONS	24

INTRODUCTION



Standard Eurobarometer 96 Winter 2021 - 2022

The annual Eurobarometer report for Ireland is part of a long series of reports probing Irish and European public opinion trends towards the European Union (EU) and political and social issues more generally. The data for this report forms part of the Standard Eurobarometer (SEB), now in its 96th edition and is referred to throughout this paper as SEB96.

Fieldwork for the Irish survey was undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes who interviewed 1,006 respondents aged 15+ between the 18th January and 14th February 2022. 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 started to re-open after almost two years of Covid-19 restrictions which were considered to be amongst the strictest in Europe. From 22nd January, a curfew on opening hours for hospitality and limits on attendance at indoor and outdoor events were scrapped. A phased return to the office was introduced from 24th January. Mask wearing remained mandatory in all public places. The requirement for those who tested positive for Covid-19 to self-isolate remained, together with the requirement for close contacts to restrict their movements. The fieldwork took place prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February. Concern about inflation in Ireland was dominating the media discourse during this period. Shortly after the fieldwork ended, figures from Ireland's Central Statistics Office showed that the annual rate of inflation had reached a 21 year high at 5.6% and was continuing to increase at pace.

Against this background, the report covers five themes: -

1. Trust in European Institutions and EU direction for the future
2. Irish Economic and lifestyle update
3. Democracy under the microscope
4. Trust in the media
5. Satisfaction with Coronavirus measures

¹ For further details concerning the methodology, please see the technical specifications section in the SEB96 results report

KEY FINDINGS



1. Trust in European Institutions and EU Direction for the Future

Irish citizens hold a positive view of the EU in general with 71% positive (21% are 'very positive' with a further 50% who are 'fairly' positive). Positivity is slightly lower amongst the younger population (64% for 15–24-year-olds but rises to 75% amongst those over the age of 55).

Almost two thirds of Irish citizens trust the European Parliament, and the European Commission. 60% trust the European Central Bank and the European Council. Trust among the EU 27 is highest for the European Parliament at 50%.

A majority (71%) believe that things are going in the right direction for Ireland in general, up from 64% in SEB95 in 2021. 62% hold a similar view about the direction of the European Union. Interestingly this is in stark contrast to the average for the EU 27 countries where only 36% and 37% (respectively) believe their country and the European Union are going in the right direction.

Irish citizens are also optimistic about the future of the EU. In this respect only one in ten respondents feel in any way pessimistic. On this front, attitudes are very consistent across Irish population demographics.

2. Irish Economic and Lifestyle Update

Broadly speaking the majority (63%) of Irish citizens believe the Irish economy is in a good place. Notwithstanding this, about a third have reservations about the state of the national economy with 34% judging the employment situation in Ireland as rather bad or very bad.

On a personal level, over eight in ten respondents believe they are in a rather good or very good financial household position (only 11% consider their position to be very/rather bad). Only 9% are dissatisfied with their personal job situation. Ireland is significantly more positive compared to the average EU 27 citizen especially on the economic and job situation. It should be borne in mind that these results reflect the views of an adult population in the early stage of an inflationary cycle. In this study, 44% cited rising prices/inflation/cost of living as a 'top two' issue facing Ireland (It was cited by only 26% in 2021). Inflation has soared since the fieldwork was conducted, driven by energy prices, with the economy now starting to feel the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Note for context: significant savings were accumulated during the Covid-19 pandemic and household debt has been in decline in Ireland.

3. Democracy Under the Microscope

83% of Irish people are satisfied with how democracy works in Ireland and 81% are satisfied with how democracy works in the EU. In general, slightly fewer younger adults are satisfied with how democracy works in Ireland when compared with older adults.

This compares with 56% (own country) and 55% (EU) respectively for the EU 27 average.

There is no doubt that Irish citizens believe in democracy, seeing and feeling its impact both in Ireland and in Europe. Irish citizens are clearly the most pro-European of all European citizens.

4. Trust in the Media

Trust in radio content for Irish citizens is strong (65%) across the board followed closely by TV at 59%. Trust in the written press stands at 52% while trust in the internet and online social networks is considerably lower (26% and 17% respectively).

Other EU citizens are a little less trusting of most traditional media but they are slightly more trusting of the internet. Trust in social media networks is generally low across the EU.

5. Satisfaction with Coronavirus Measures

Over three quarters of the Irish population are satisfied (78%) with measures taken by both Irish Government and Local/Regional Authorities to fight the pandemic. The results show a significant improvement on the 2021 evaluation. In 2021, satisfaction with Irish Government measures was 67%, while satisfaction with Local/Regional Authorities was 66%. The results are markedly higher than the EU 27 average in 2022 (EU 27 average: Own Government 50%; Local/Regional 58%).

Three in four Irish people (75%) are also satisfied with the measures taken by the European Union, compared to just 49% when it comes to the EU 27 average. Most Irish citizens (83%) also trust the EU to make the right decisions in the future (an increase from 79% in 2021) compared to 60% for the EU 27 average (a decrease from 65% in 2021).

As many as 85% believe the NextGenerationEU recovery package will be effective in responding to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic compared to only 54% on average across the EU 27 who believe this to be the case.

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

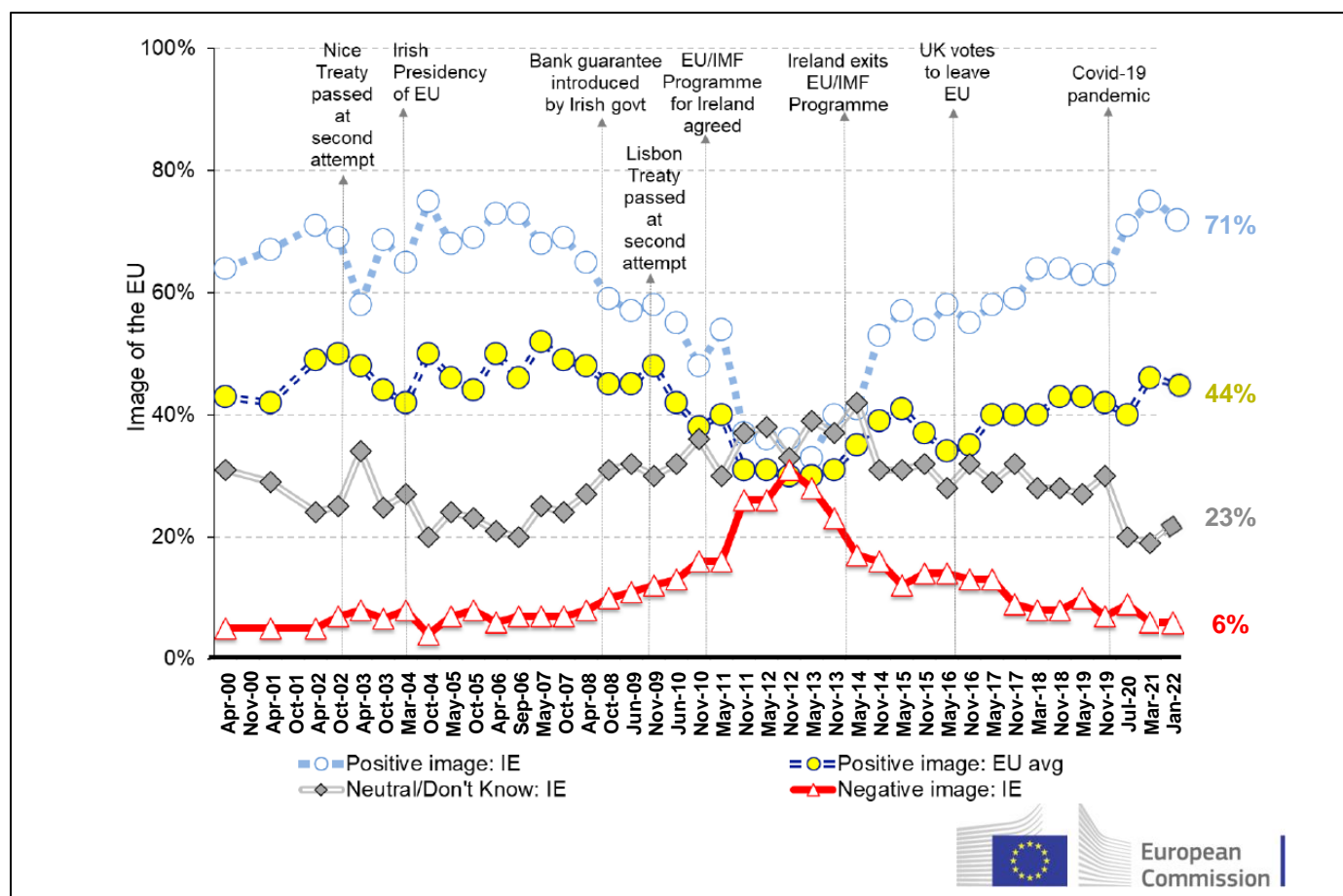


We begin this report by assessing the view of the EU. Overall, Irish citizens hold a positive view of the EU in general with 71% positive (21% are 'very positive' with a further 50% who are 'fairly' positive). Positivity is slightly lower amongst the younger population (64% for 15–24-year-olds but rises to 75% amongst those over the age of 55).

We next look at the image of the EU². Figure 1 compares historical Irish responses to this question to the EU 27 average. We should note that historically Irish people have been among the most positive towards the EU on a whole range of indicators. It was

only during the global financial crisis (circa 2012) that enthusiasm dampened. Since Ireland exited from the EU-IMF programme which was implemented as a result of the Global Financial Crisis, positivity towards the EU has been gradually improving. Irish positivity rose quickly post EU-IMF programme exit, plateaued over 2016-2017, and increased slightly in 2018-2019 with Brexit looming. Irish positivity towards the EU took another significant jump at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. In January of 2022, as many as seven in ten hold a positive view of the EU, while only 6% hold a negative view.

Figure 1:



Importantly this chart highlights the extent to which Irish citizens have generally held a more positive view of the EU compared with the EU average over the past 22 years.

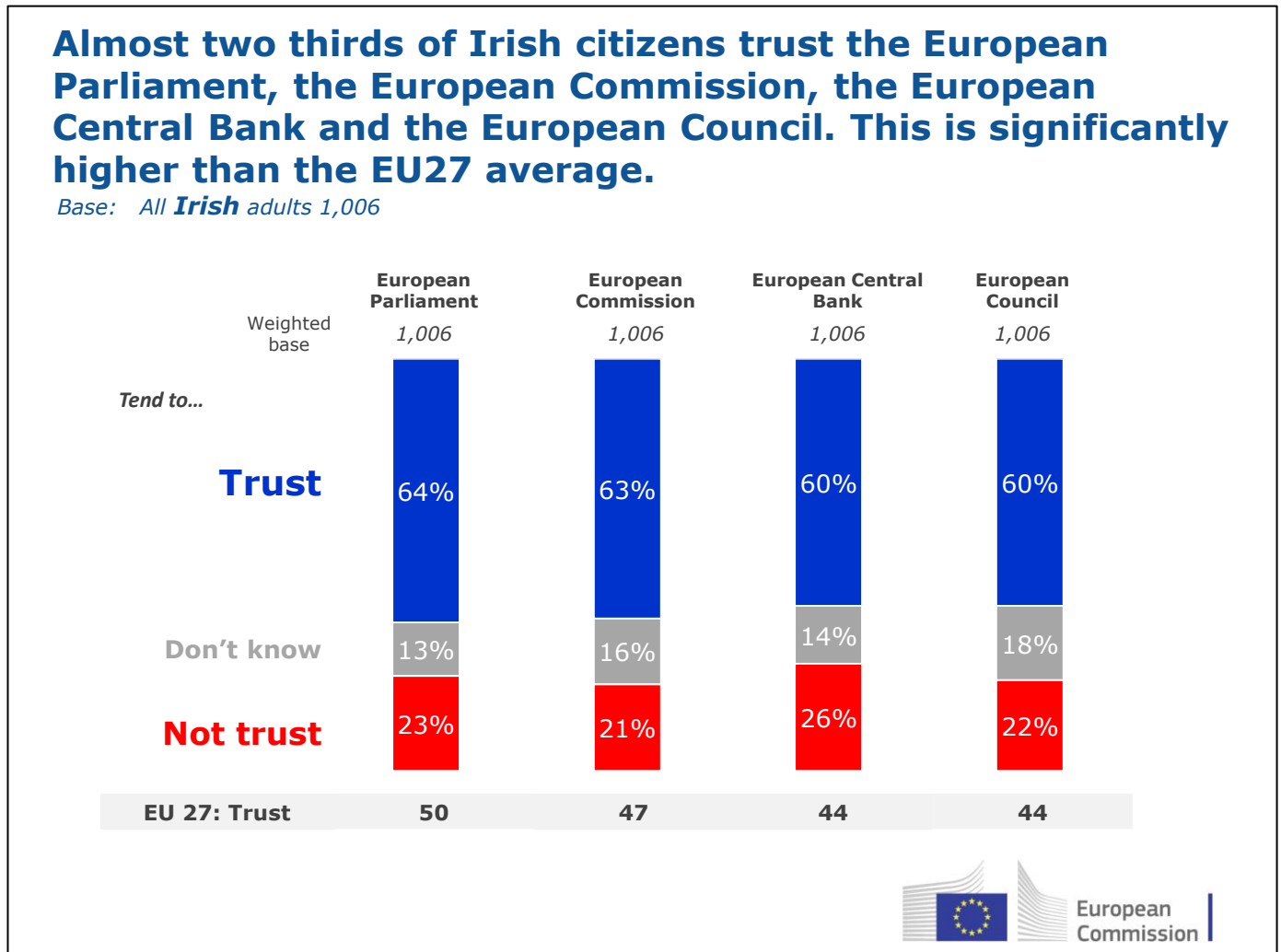
The EU 27 countries with the lowest positive views of the EU are: Greece 32%; Austria 34%; Slovakia 35%; France 36%; and Belgium

² "In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative, or very negative image?"

The study also gauged the level of trust that Irish citizens have in four European institutions³ - The European Parliament, The European Commission, The European Central Bank and The European Council. Figure 2 demonstrates that a majority of Irish citizens trust all four of these institutions – with slightly more trusting the European Parliament and the European Commission

than the Central Bank or the European Council. Almost two thirds (64%) of Irish citizens trust the European Parliament, 63% trust the European Commission, 60% trust the European Central Bank, and 60% trust the European Council. Irish ratings of the European bodies are significantly higher compared to the EU 27 average.

Figure 2:

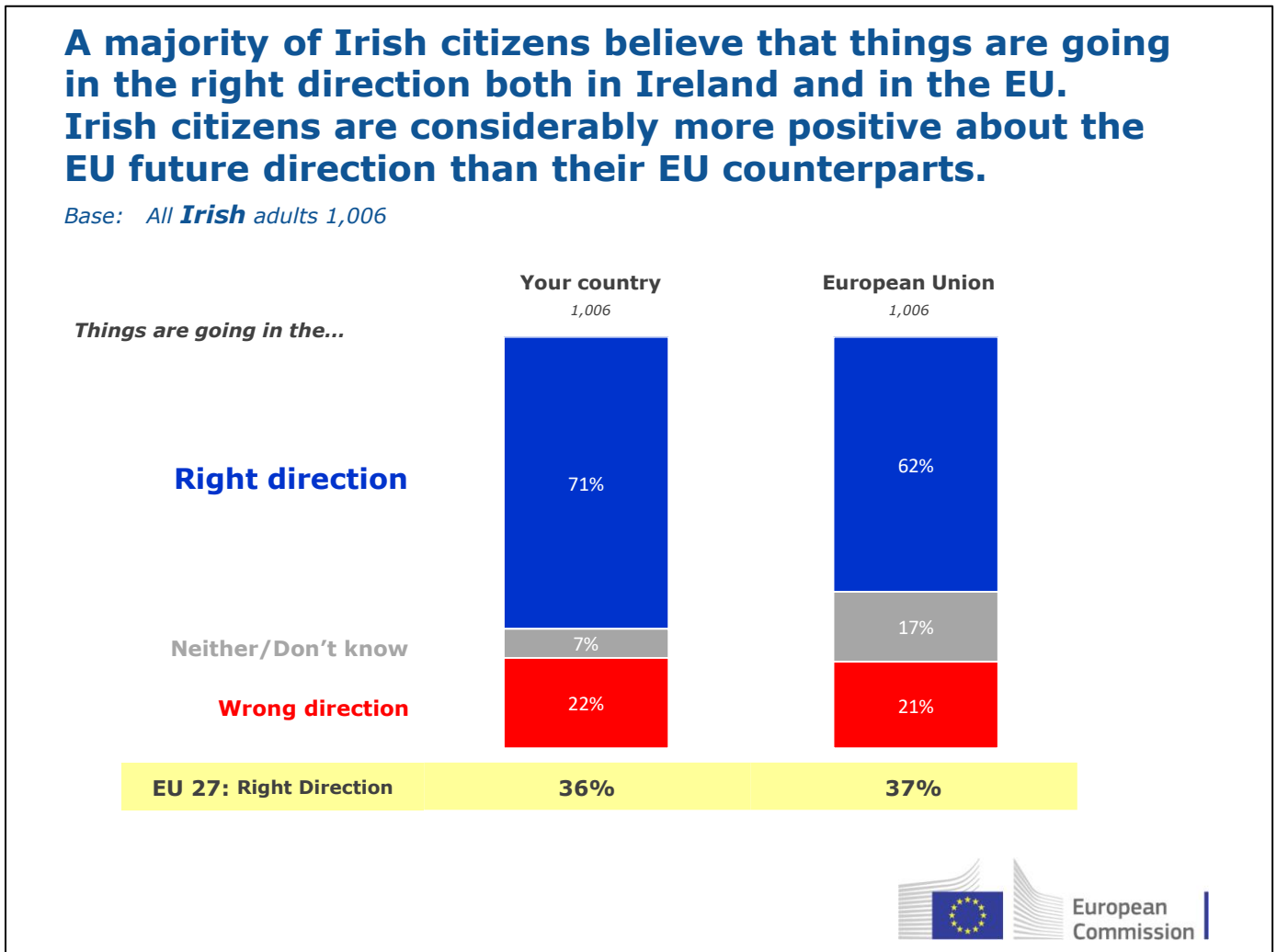


³ "For each of the following institutions do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it"

We now examine Irish citizens' opinions on whether they believe that, in general, things are going in the right or wrong direction⁴. Two questions were posed in this regard. The first examines the situation from an Irish perspective and the second question examines perceptions of the direction the European Union is taking.

The results indicate a stark contrast between perceptions of Irish citizens and those of other European citizens.

Figure 3:



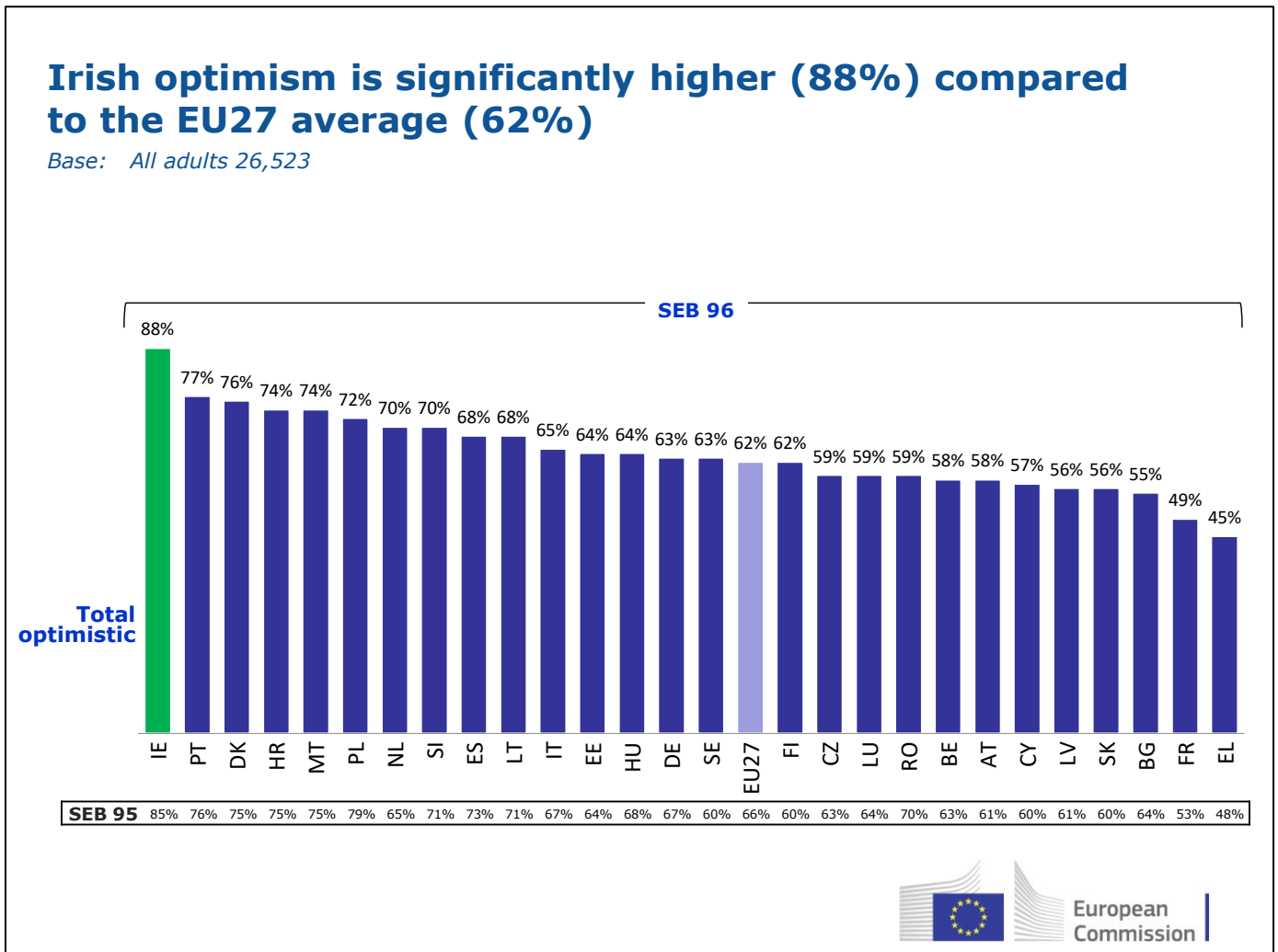
As many as seven in ten Irish citizens believe that the direction the country is following is the right one. This compares with only 36% for the EU 27 average who believe their country is going in the right direction.

Six in ten of Irish citizens believe the European Union is going in the right direction, compared with 37% of the average of the EU 27 who view the European Union as going in the right direction.

⁴ "At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in...?"

Looking forward, Irish citizens are also broadly optimistic about the future of the EU⁵. The following chart highlights this optimism relative to the other EU countries.

Figure 4:



Here we see almost nine in ten (88%) of Irish adults being optimistic about the future of the EU. This is significantly higher compared to the EU 27 average, and outstrips all other EU countries.

In conclusion we can see that from a national standpoint, Ireland holds a positive opinion of Europe and the European Institutions. Irish people believe that both Ireland and the European Union are going in the right direction and are optimistic about the future of the EU. In all these cases, the Irish are more positive than European citizens, on average.

⁵ "Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic, or very pessimistic about the future of the EU?"

II. IRISH ECONOMIC & LIFESTYLE UPDATE

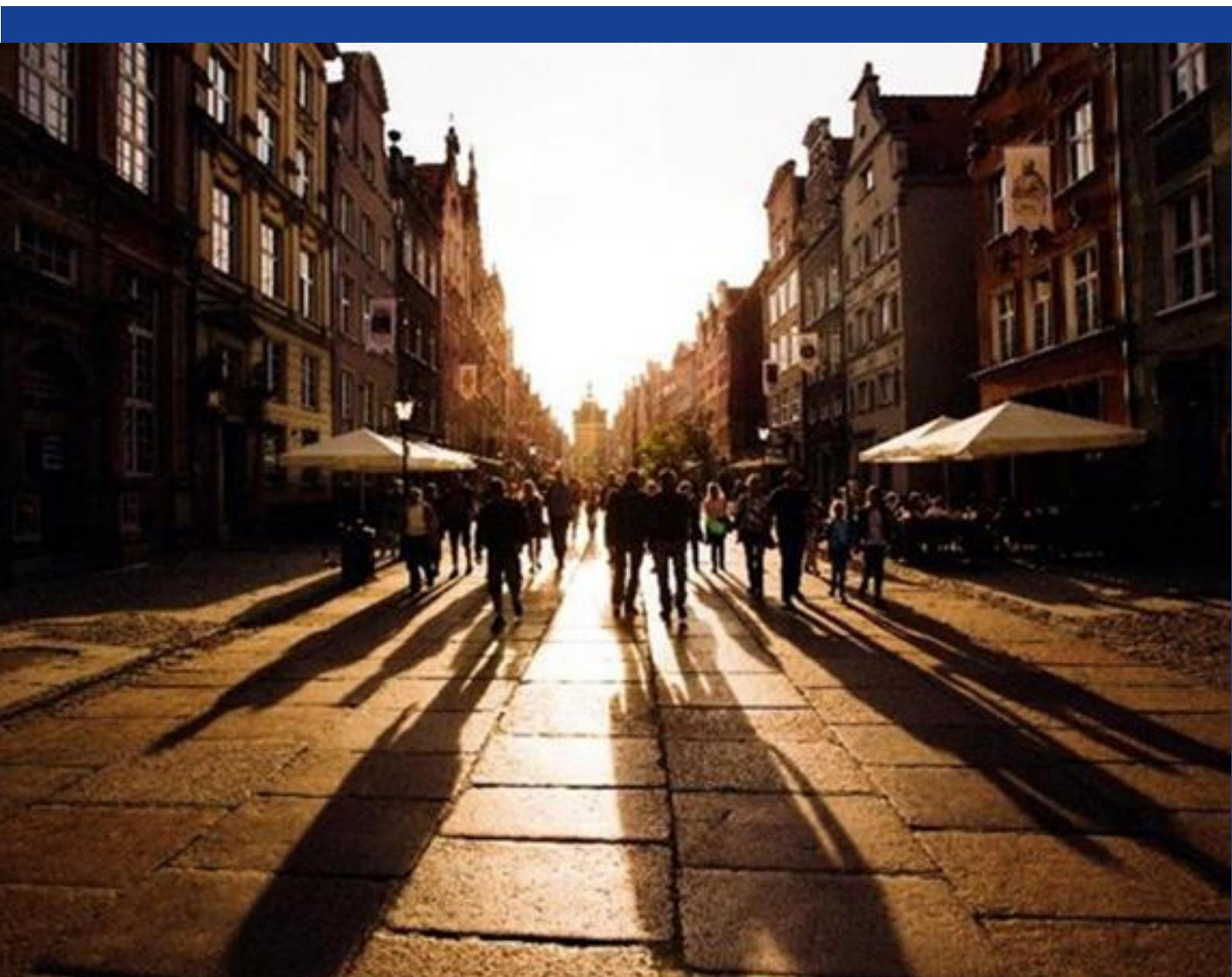
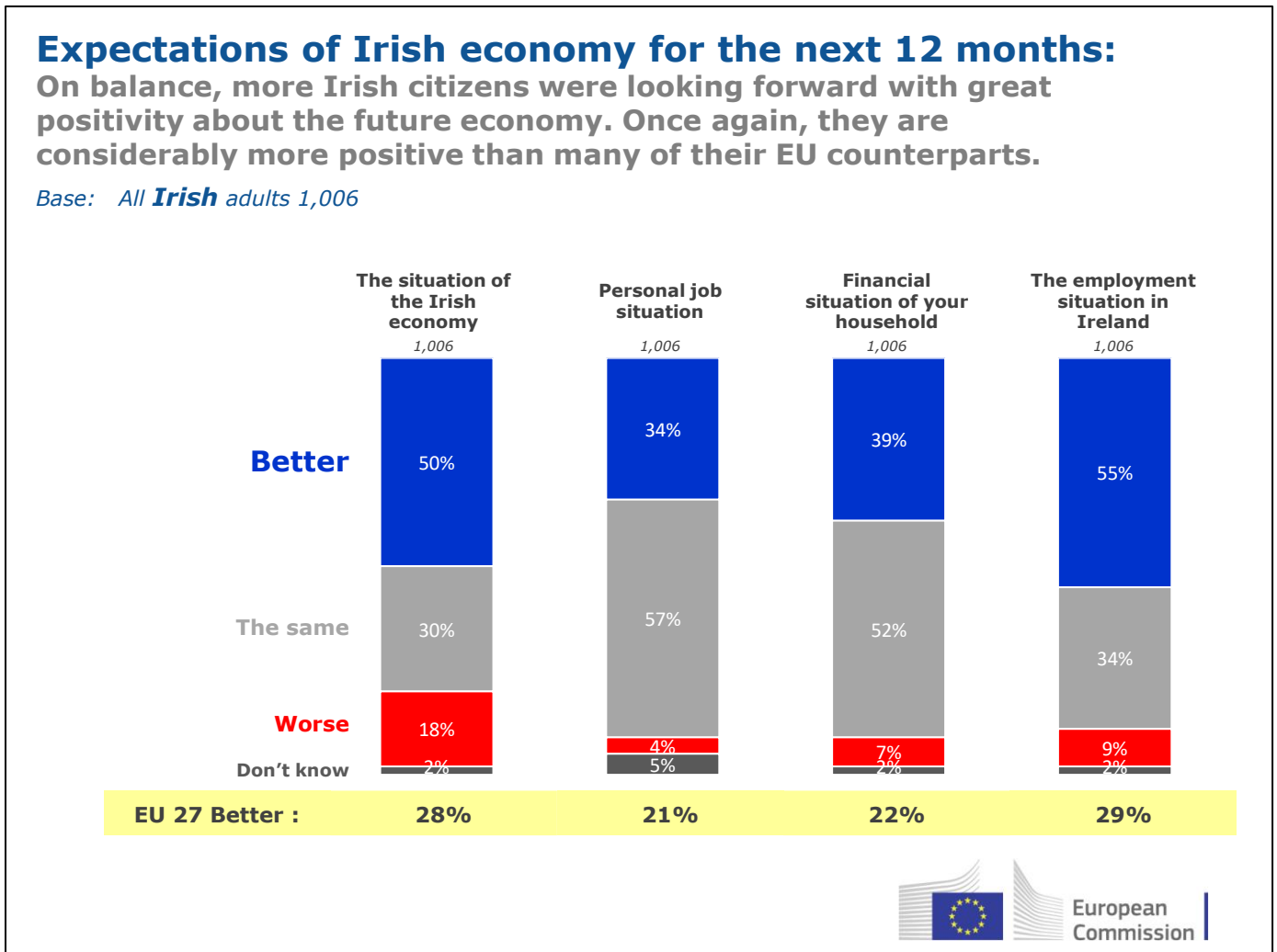


Figure 5 conveys Irish citizens' views on four economic indicators – the Irish economy, the employment situation in Ireland: their household's financial situation and their personal job situation⁶.

For the most part attitudes to these four economic indicators are positive. Interestingly the national position in respect of the Irish economy and in terms of the employment situation in Ireland is less positive than people's personal judgement of their own situation.

Figure 5:



The extent of negativity towards the Irish economy as a whole (34%) is likely due to perceptions of how the pandemic has impacted the overall Irish economy. However, when individuals assess their own situation, Irish people are in a positive place. Note that significant savings were accumulated during the pandemic and household debt has been in decline in Ireland, since its peak during the Celtic Tiger years.

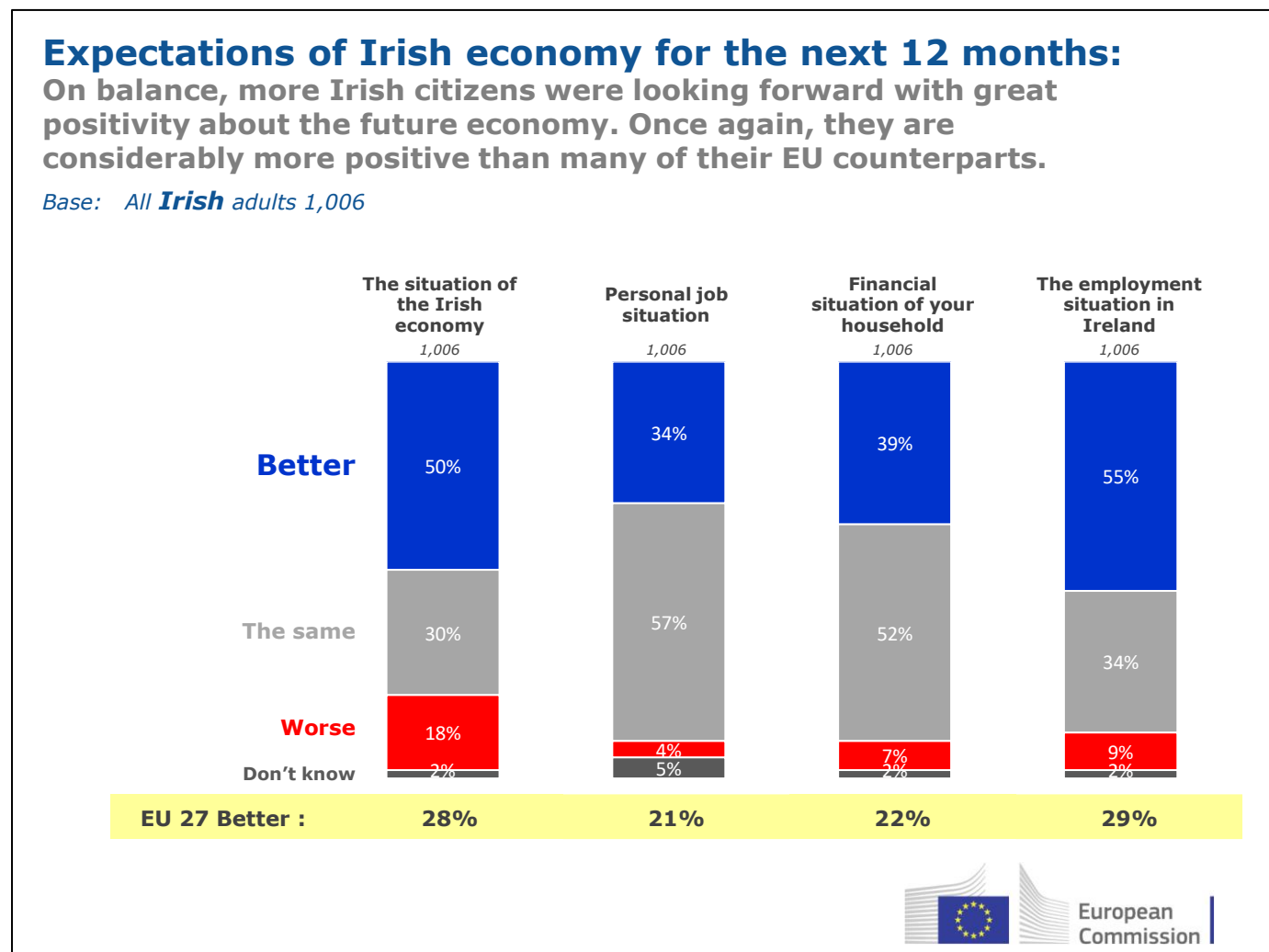
When compared to the average economic outlook of the EU 27, Ireland tends to be in a stronger and more positive position. As illustrated in figure [5] above, the starkest differences emerge when we compare the responses to questions about how citizens judge the current situation of their national economy and the current national employment situation; Ireland stands at + 24% and + 32% percentage points higher than the EU average on both questions, respectively.

⁶ "How would you judge the current situation in each of the following?"

In projecting ahead for the next 12 months there continues to be a positive outlook from an Irish citizen's perspective⁷. For example, while 57% believe their personal job situation will remain the

same, as many as one-third (34%) believe it will be better in the next 12 months.

Figure 6:



A majority (52%) of Irish citizens believe their household financial situation will remain static over the next 12 months but still the momentum is on a positive trajectory, with 39% believing it will be better versus only 7% who believe their household financial situation will be in a worse position.

A positive view of the situation of the Irish economy over the next twelve months is also evident with half (50%) expecting that it will be better. Just 18% expect that it will be worse.

Once again, Irish citizens are considerably more positive than their EU counterparts.

It should be noted that 44% of Irish citizens cited rising prices/inflation/cost of living as a 'top two' issue facing the country at the moment. In 2021, this figure was only 26%.

⁷ "Are your expectations for the next 12 months – will the next 12 months be better, worse or the same, when it comes to ...?"

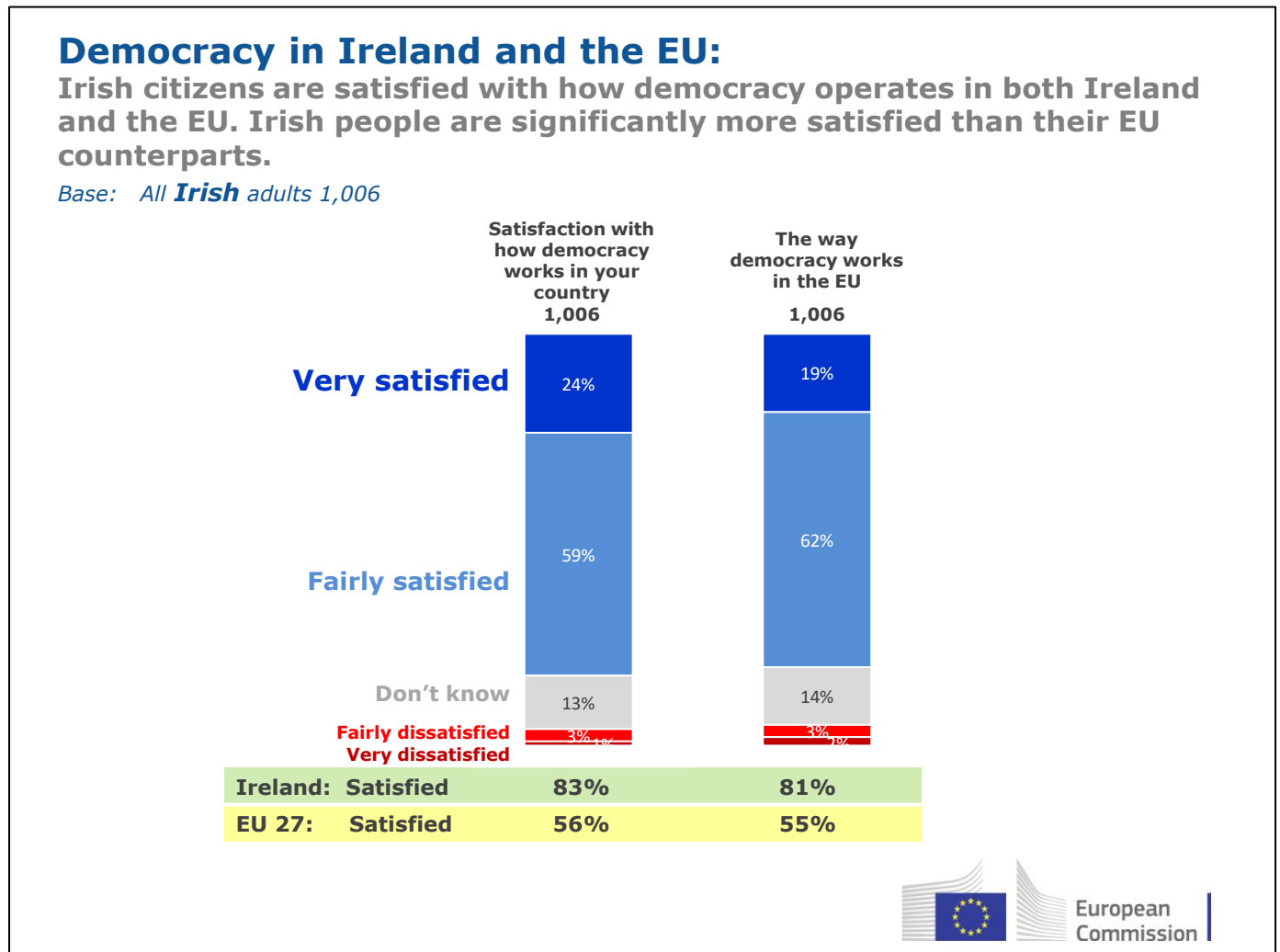
III. DEMOCRACY UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



The next section examines perceptions of democracy in Ireland and the EU. The question explores satisfaction with the way democracy works⁸.

There is no doubt that Irish citizens are satisfied with democracy and how it operates both in Ireland and within the EU.

Figure 7:



83% are satisfied with Irish democracy and 81% are satisfied with how democracy works in the EU.

Once again Irish people are considerably more positive than their European counterparts, on average, with only 56% of the EU 27 feeling satisfied with democracy in their country, and 55% feeling satisfied with how democracy works within the EU.

⁸ "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (our country)? ... And how about the way democracy works in the EU?"

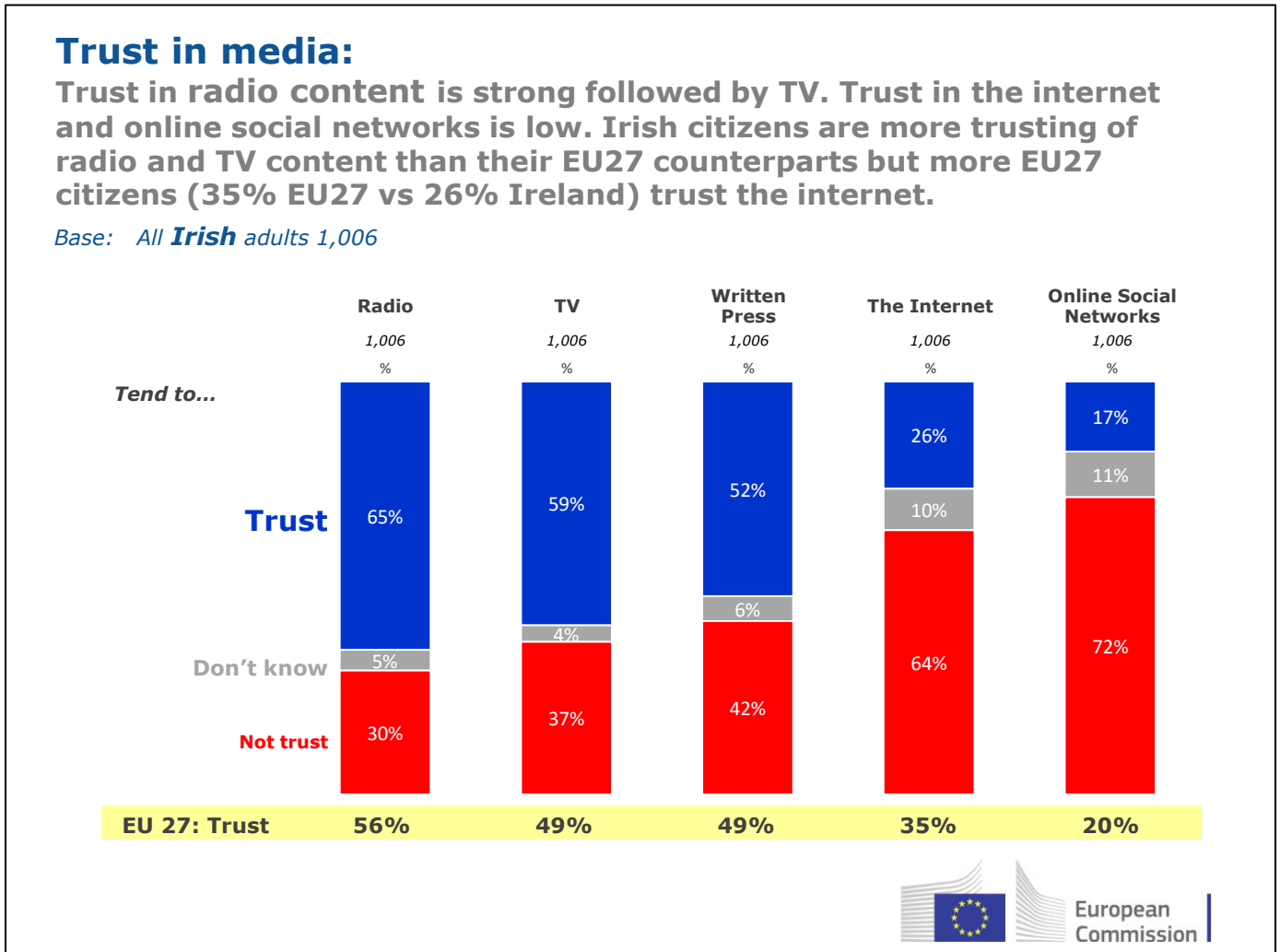
IV. TRUST IN THE MEDIA



Over the last number of years there has been considerable debate about how to evaluate objective reporting in the media versus what is now colloquially known as “fake news”. This section examines trust in the various types of media⁹.

From an Irish perspective radio is seen as the most trustworthy (65% trust), followed closely by TV (59% trust).

Figure 8:



About half of all Irish adults (52%) trust the written press and as we move through the different types of media; Radio, TV, written press, the internet and online social networks, trust really begins to disintegrate. Just 26% of Irish adults trust the internet, and an even lower figure of 17% trust online social networks.

Looking at the EU 27 average, trust in radio and TV is slightly lower than in Ireland. Trust among the EU 27 in relation to the written press is similar to Ireland. However, EU 27 trust in the internet is slightly higher than in Ireland. Trust in online social networks is low EU-wide.

These figures demonstrate considerable scepticism in online sources.

⁹ “How much trust do you have in certain media? For each of the following media, do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?”

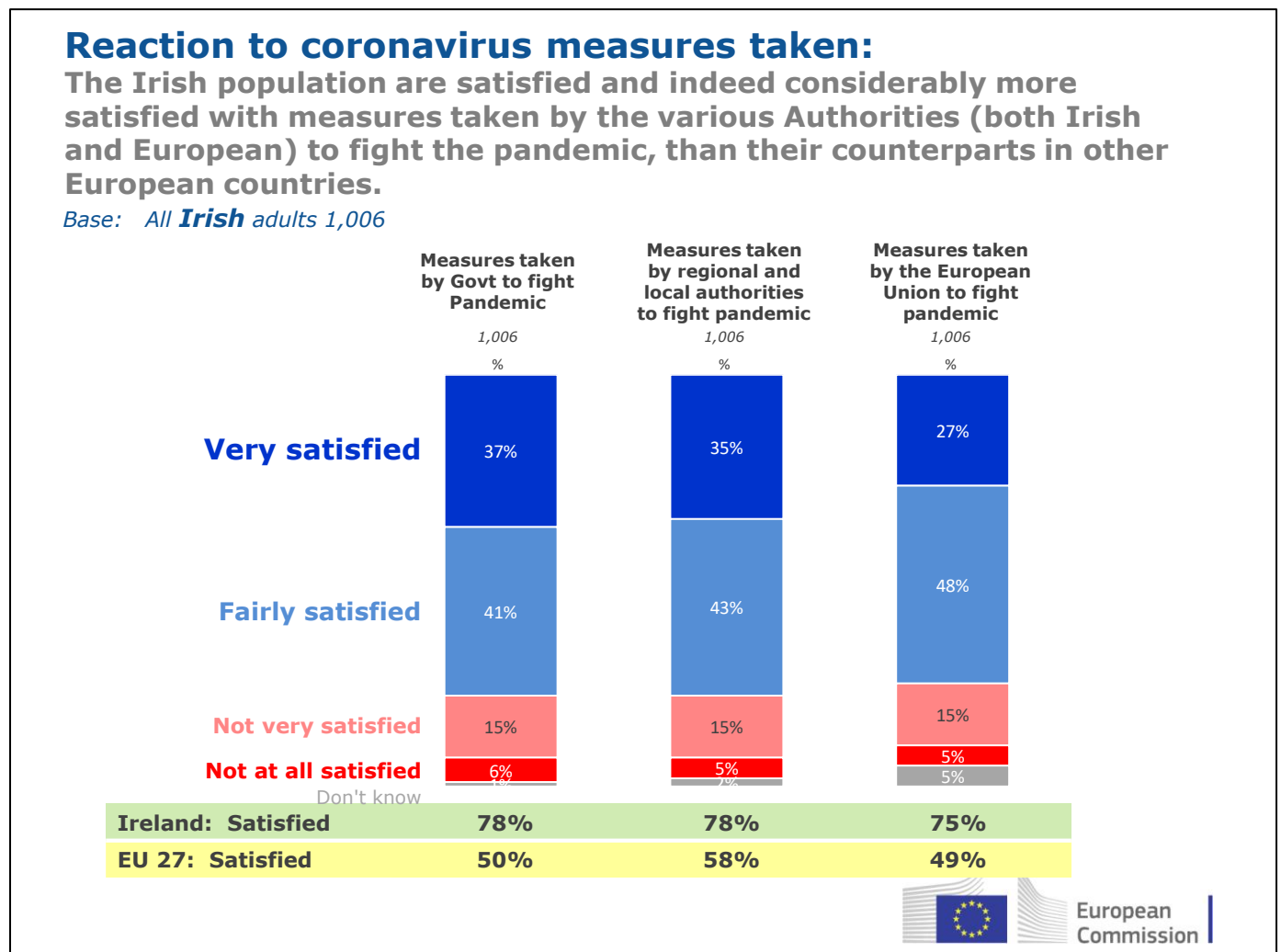
V. SATISFACTION WITH CORONAVIRUS MEASURES



This final section reviews public reaction to measures taken to fight the Coronavirus pandemic. There are three areas under the spotlight here. These include measures taken by government; measures taken by regional and local authorities, and measures taken by the European Union to fight the pandemic¹⁰.

The results for Ireland across the three areas under investigation are very similar. Over three quarters (78%) of Irish citizens are satisfied with measures taken by the Irish government and by regional or local authorities. A similar proportion, 75% of Irish citizens, are satisfied with the measures taken by the EU. When compared to the EU 27 average, Ireland far surpasses the level of satisfaction felt across the other Member States. Ireland ranks second only to Denmark in terms of satisfaction with measures taken by the national Government to tackle the pandemic.

Figure 9:



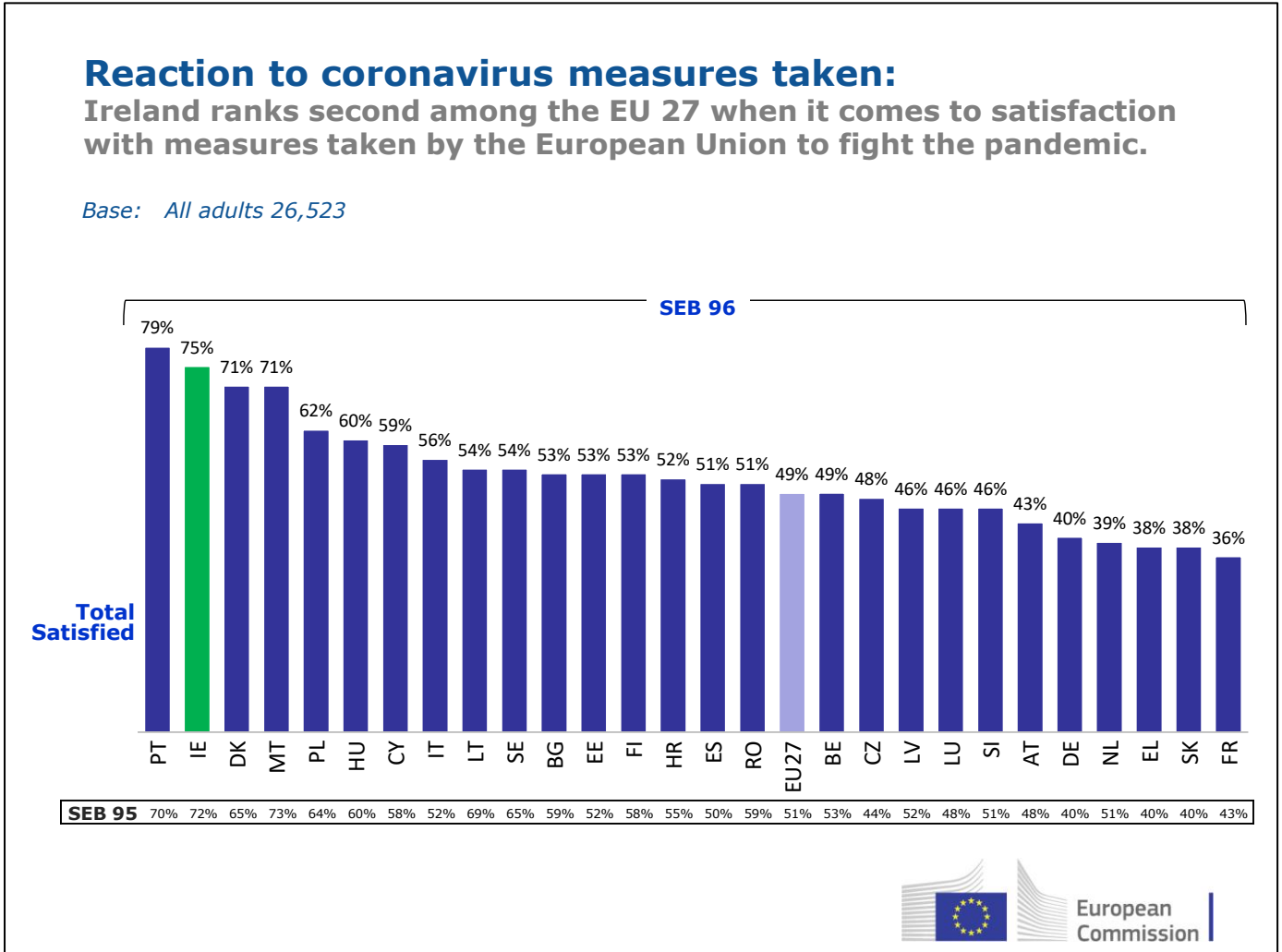
¹⁰ "In general, how satisfied are you with the measures taken to fight the Coronavirus pandemic by ...?"

Standard Eurobarometer 96
Winter 2021 - 2022

In Figure 10 below, which assesses satisfaction with measures undertaken by the European Union to fight the pandemic, we see that Portuguese citizens are most satisfied (79%) followed

closely by Irish citizens (75%). These satisfaction scores are significantly higher compared to countries such as France (36%) at the other end of the scale.

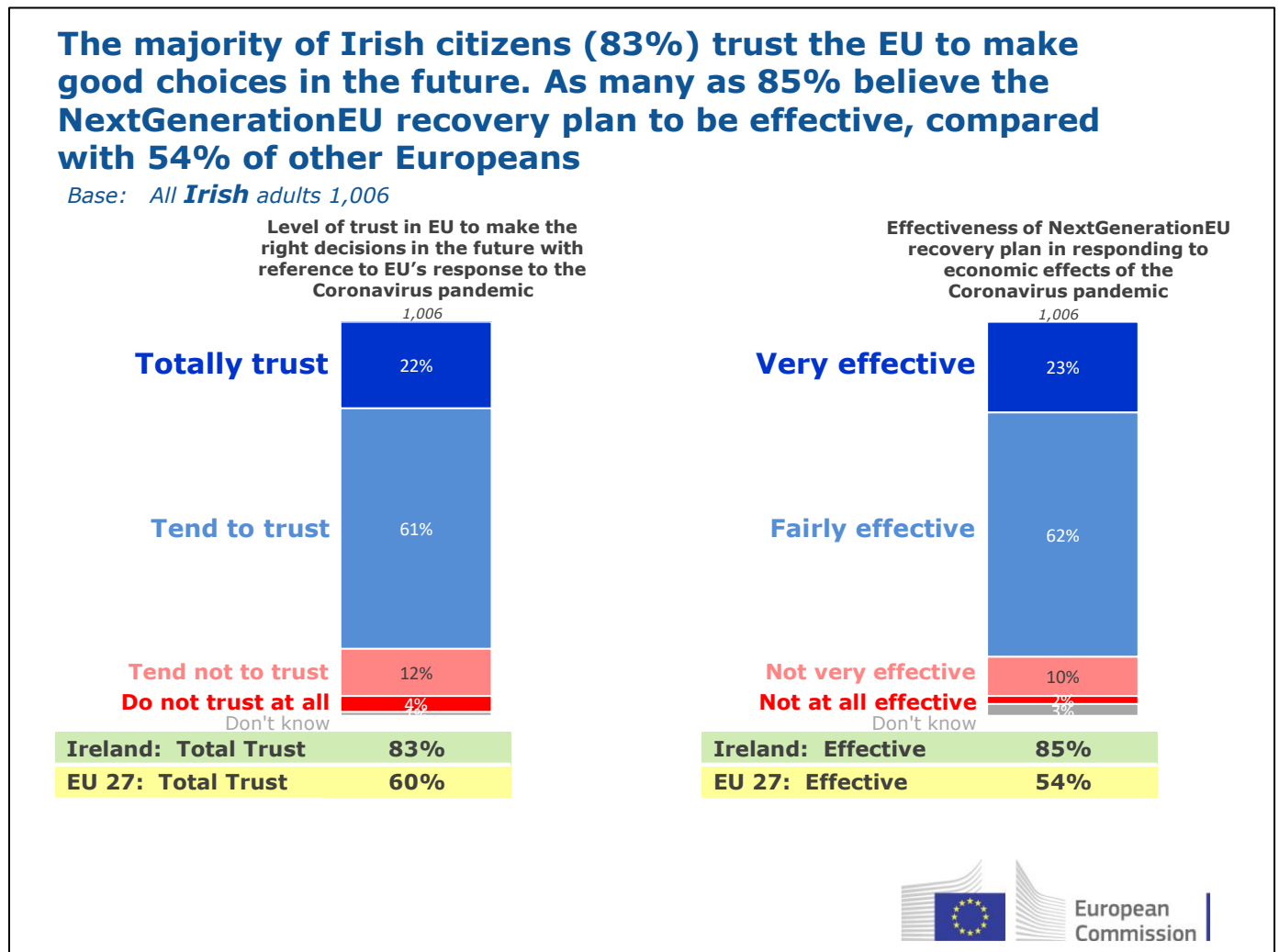
Figure 10:



Looking forward, 83% of Irish people trust the EU to make the right decisions in relation to any future response to the

Coronavirus pandemic¹¹. This compares to the EU 27 average of 60%.

Figure 11:



The final question in this section was as follows: "The European Union has designed a recovery plan of more than €800 billion, NextGenerationEU, to support the economy through grants and loans. How effective, or not, do you think that this measure is to respond to the economic effects of the Coronavirus pandemic?"

In response to this question¹², 85% of Irish citizens surveyed said that they believe the plan is effective, with only 12% disagreeing. Here, once again, we see that Irish citizens are considerably more positive than citizens of other EU Member States. On average, just 54% of citizens across the EU believe the NextGenerationEU plan to be effective.

¹¹ "Thinking about EU's response to the coronavirus pandemic, to what extent do you trust or not the EU to make the right decisions in the future?"

¹² "The European Union has designed a recovery plan of more than 800 billion euros, NextGenerationEU, to support the economy through grants and loans. How

effective or not do you think that this measure is to respond to the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic?"

CONCLUSIONS



Standard Eurobarometer 96 Winter 2021 - 2022

During the fieldwork, Ireland was starting to emerge from Covid-19 restrictions. However, rising inflation due to energy prices was beginning to dominate the headlines. While the Russian invasion of Ukraine had not yet begun, Russian forces were massing on the Ukrainian border.

At the time of this survey, Irish citizens hold a positive opinion of Europe and its Institutions. Overall, Ireland displayed considerably more positivity towards the EU than the EU 27 average.

Irish people have an overall positive image of the EU and this is reflected throughout the findings of this survey;

- Most trusting in the EU Institutions.
- High satisfaction with how democracy operates in Europe and a strong belief that Europe is moving in the right direction
- Strong optimism about the EU's future
- A strong belief that the EU has guided countries through the pandemic very well and an anticipation that the EU would make good decisions should they be required to do so in the future
- Most satisfied with the NextGenerationEU package

Irish people also have a positive view of their own leaders and their personal and financial well-being. At the time of interviewing:

- There was satisfaction with the way democracy was operating
- There was a strong belief that Ireland was going in the right direction
- Only one in ten were dissatisfied with their own job or household financial situation
- Strong satisfaction existed with how Government and Local Authorities had dealt with the Coronavirus pandemic.

In terms of media, the Irish have greatest trust in radio (65%) followed by TV (59%) closely followed by the written press (52%). However, the internet and social media platforms are viewed with considerably less trust (26% and 17% respectively).

As this report is being published in April 2022, it is likely that the Irish public are more concerned at this point with the impact of inflation on energy and the broader cost of living, as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the wider economic and humanitarian impact. In this study, 44% had already cited rising prices/inflation/cost of living as a 'top two' issue facing Ireland (It was cited by only 26% in 2021).

In addition, the Covid pandemic and its longer-term economic and social impacts have yet to be fully understood. However, it is clear that the Irish public has a high level of satisfaction with the EU response, and its future measures.

Overall, this report illustrates the continued strong pro-EU stance of Irish citizens.

