



Standard Eurobarometer 94

National report

Public opinion in the European Union



Ireland

Winter 2020-21

This survey has been requested and co-ordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication.

This report was produced for the European Commission's Representation in Ireland.

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission.
The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

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<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer>

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INTRODUCTION

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 were gathered in winter 2020/2021, part of the Standard Eurobarometer (SEB), now in its 94th edition, and referred to throughout this paper as SEB94. The data for this report was gathered in Ireland by Kantar who interviewed 1,094 respondents aged 15+ online between 17 February 2021 and 3 March 2021.¹

This national report comes at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic is dominating the political agenda as Ireland (and the world) grapples with trying to manage and contain the spread of the disease. Restrictions on social contact and travel, the wearing of face masks in public, handwashing, and the monitoring and self-isolation of people exposed to, or symptomatic of, the virus are commonplace. Meanwhile, there are strong efforts to alleviate this crisis with vaccines, with several deployed since December 2020.

While the pandemic has undoubtedly been the primary focus of most commentary, this is the first national report since the European Union and the United Kingdom agreed a trade deal in December 2020 setting out the post-Brexit trading relationship between the EU and the UK. This deal has special significance for Ireland which shares a land border with the UK. It is also the first report since a new coalition government comprising Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, traditionally political opponents, and the Green Party, was formed in June 2020.

With this context in mind, SEB94 focuses on four themes:

1. Citizens' attitudes towards the EU: their general orientations, their trust in the EU and how responsive they feel the EU is, their views on what the EU's European Green Deal should prioritize, and what role is foreseen for citizens' voices related to the future of the EU.
2. Irish people's sentiments towards the economy in view of the pandemic.
3. Irish citizens' feelings towards the coronavirus related restrictions and evaluations of performance by the national government and the EU concerning the pandemic.
4. Irish people's attitudes towards coronavirus vaccinations.

¹ For further details concerning the methodology, please see the Technical specifications section in the SEB94 First Results Report.

KEY FINDINGS

SENTIMENTS TOWARD AND EVALUATIONS OF THE EU

- Seventy-five per cent of Irish people have a positive image of the EU, the highest proportion of Irish people saying this since autumn 2004. With this level of positivity, Ireland ranks second highest across EU Member States and significantly above the EU average of 46 per cent.
- Seventy-seven per cent of Irish people agree that the interests of Ireland are well taken account of in the EU, the highest proportion saying this in the EU, and above the EU average (57 per cent).
- Most Irish people say they tend to trust the EU (74 per cent). Trust in the EU among Irish people outpaces the EU average of 49 per cent, with Ireland ranking the second most trusting nation of the EU (behind Portugal, 78 per cent).

ECONOMIC SENTIMENTS

- Irish people are more optimistic about their personal economic situation than that of the country at large. Eighty-three per cent classify their household's financial position as "good" while 75 per cent say their personal job situation is "good", both above the EU average. But only 42 per cent classify the national economy as "good", while 58 per cent say it is "bad." And just 37 per cent classify the national employment situation as "good".
- Most Irish people think that their personal economic situation will stay the same in the next twelve months - 63 per cent say this regarding their personal job situation and 55 per cent for their financial situation. Few expect their situation to worsen.
- There is greater optimism concerning the future prospects of the national economy. Forty-four per cent think the national economy will get "better", the second-highest in the EU, while 45 per cent expect the employment situation to get "better". There is also evidence that pessimism regarding the future economic situation is subsiding. Compared to summer 2020, pessimism about the economy's prospects is down 29-points; and 24-points regarding the future employment situation.

CORONAVIRUS: ATTITUDES TO RESTRICTIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF PERFORMANCE

- Most Irish people (88 per cent) thought the restrictions implemented nationally to fight Covid-19 were justified, above the EU average of 73 per cent.
- Majorities say they are satisfied with how the Irish government (53 per cent) and the EU (56 per cent) handled the pandemic. Satisfaction in both the government's and EU's handling of the crisis is higher in Ireland than across the EU, where the average response in most Member States was dissatisfaction.
- Seventy per cent of Irish people express trust in the EU to make the right decisions in the future regarding the coronavirus, above the EU average (59 per cent).

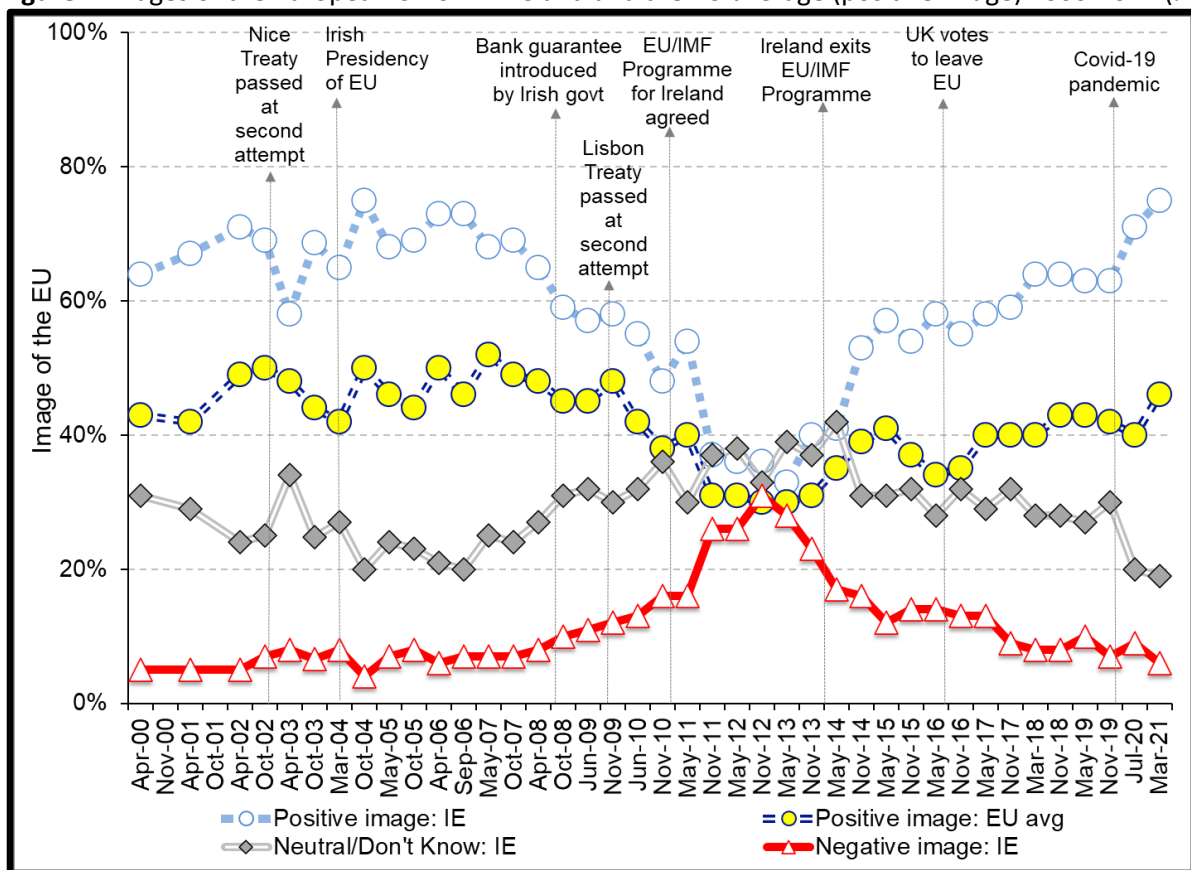
CORONAVIRUS: ATTITUDES TO VACCINATIONS

- There is strong enthusiasm in Ireland to receive an authorized Coronavirus vaccine. Most Irish people say they want to receive one – 74 per cent say they want to receive (or have already received) one as soon as possible, and a further 12 per cent say they wish to receive a vaccine by the end of 2021. Only 4 per cent of Irish people say they never intend to receive an authorized vaccine, among the lowest proportion saying this in the EU.
- While 54 per cent of Irish people agree with the statement that vaccines could have long term side-effects that we do not know yet, 69 per cent of people reject the notion that vaccines are being developed, tested and authorized too quickly to be safe. The proportion disagreeing with this marks the third highest in the EU and is substantially above the EU average of 42 per cent.

I. SENTIMENTS TOWARD AND EVALUATIONS OF THE EU

We start with the standard means of tapping orientations towards the EU – the image indicator. It examines whether respondents have a positive, a neutral, or a negative image of the EU.² **Figure 1** tracks Irish responses to this question dating back to 2000. Historically, Irish people have been among the most positive towards the EU on a whole range of indicators. During the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), there was a dampening of enthusiasm. Since the exit from the EU-IMF program, positivity about the EU has been gradually returning to pre-GFC levels. As of winter 2020/2021, we see that most Irish people have a positive image of the EU, with 75 per cent saying so, the highest proportion of Irish people saying this since autumn 2004.

Figure 1 Images of the European Union in Ireland and the EU average (positive image) 2000-2021 (%)



Source of data: SEB53-94.

Only 6 per cent of citizens say they have a negative image of the EU, the lowest proportion of Irish people saying this since autumn 2006, while the remaining 19 per cent have a neutral image of the EU. Comparatively speaking, Ireland ranks second in the extent of positivity – only in Portugal is there more positivity (76 per cent). At the other end of the spectrum, only 34 per cent of Greeks and 35 per cent

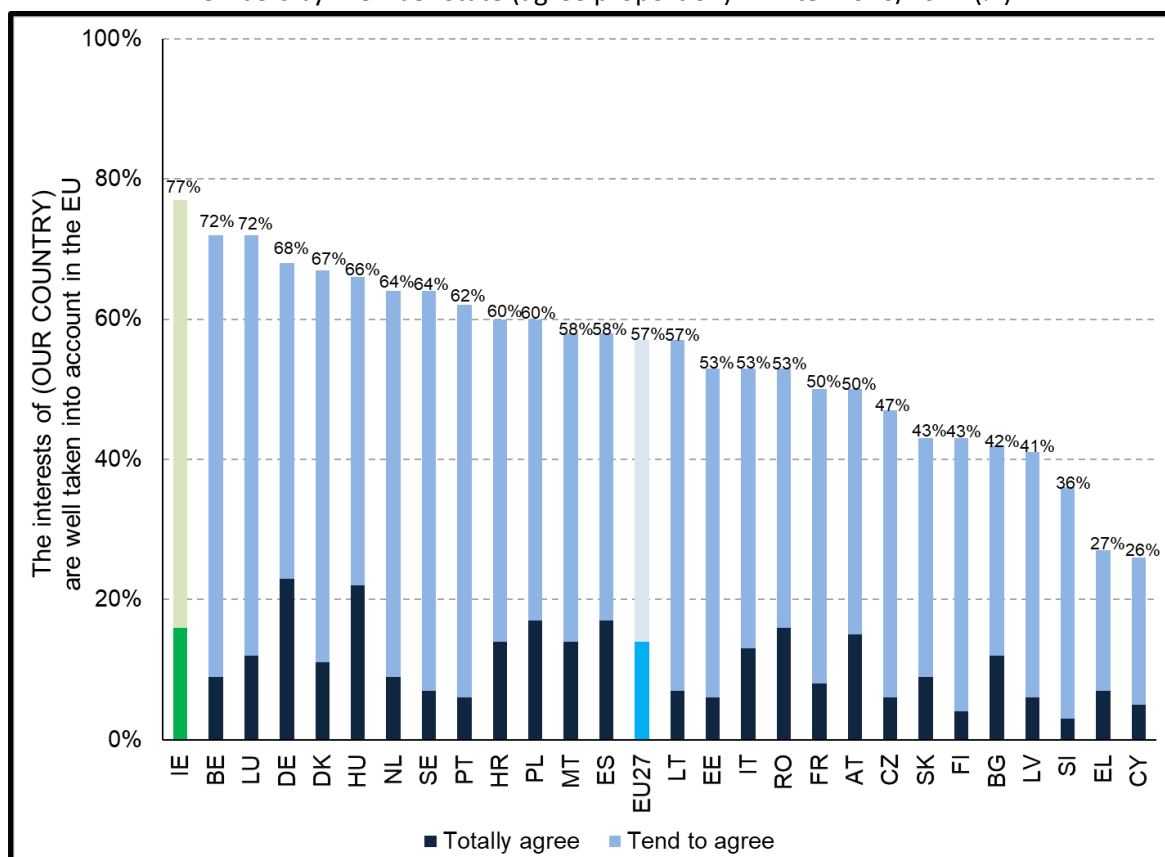
² Question: “In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?” (Source: SEB94, QD78).

of Austrians have a positive image of the EU. **Figure 1** also shows a continuing trend of Irish positivity towards the EU far outstripping the EU average. As of winter 2020/2021, this stands at 46 per cent, 29-points below the Irish levels of positivity, the most significant gap recorded on this metric since the image question became standard in 2000.

Moving to citizen evaluations of the EU generally, we explore this in two ways: the responsiveness indicator and the extent to which citizens profess trust in the EU. Taking the responsiveness indicator³ first, **Figure 2** shows that most Irish people agree (77 per cent) with the statement that the country's interests are well taken into account in the EU. Among citizens who agree, 1/5 totally agree with the idea, while the remaining 4/5 tend to agree. Only 23 per cent disagree with the proposition, and of this group, only one in six strongly disagree with the premise. As we see in **Figure 2**, Ireland tops the rankings on this metric, ahead of Belgium (72 per cent) and Luxembourg (72 per cent), and substantially above the EU average of 57 per cent. Since 2018 we have seen high agreement with this statement among Irish people - at least seven in ten citizens have consistently agreed with the proposition. Still, this score represents the highest proportion of agreement since the question was first asked in 2007.

³ Question: "Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: *"The interests of (OUR COUNTRY) are well taken into account in the EU: Totally agree; Tend to agree; Tend to disagree; Totally disagree"* (Source: SEB94, QB_1).

Figure 2 Feelings that European Union is responsive to the interests of its Members by Member State (agree proportion): Winter 2020/2021 (%)

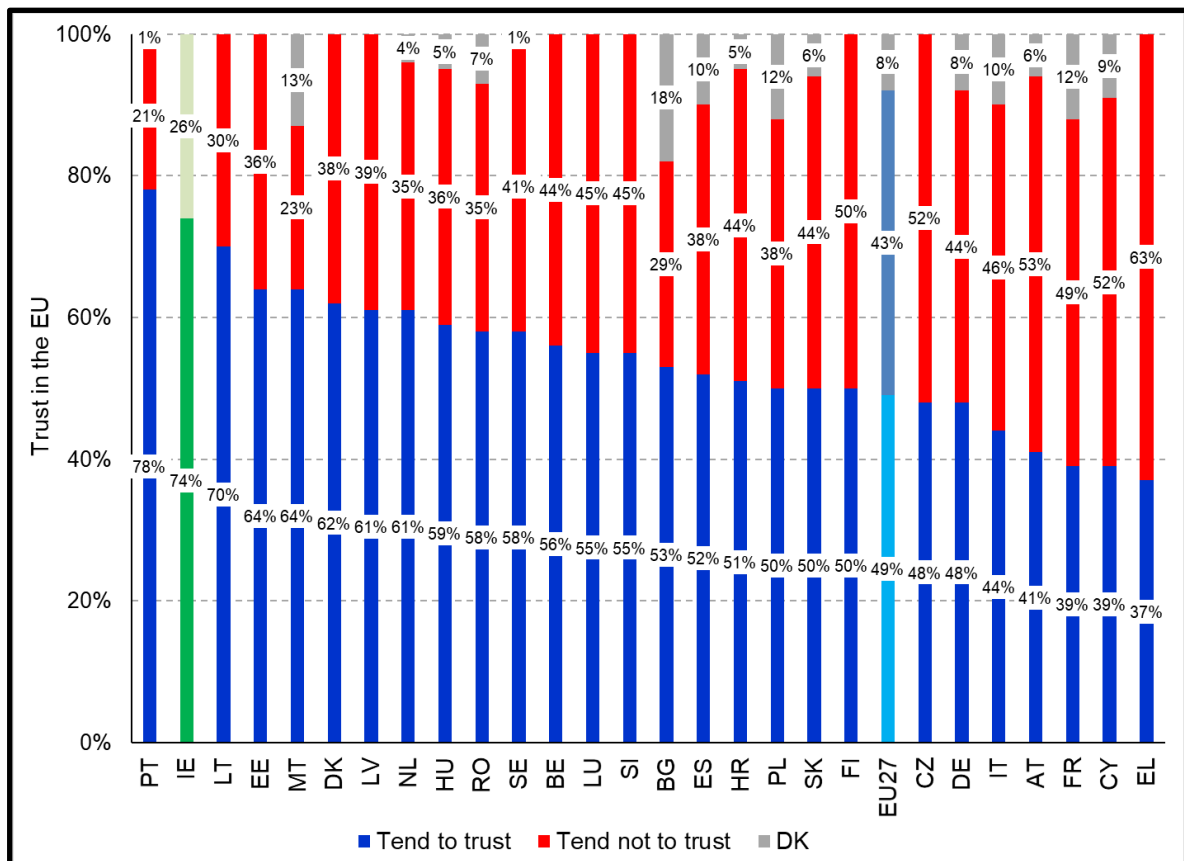


Source of data: SEB94. Note: Member States listed in descending order of total agreement with the proposition. Ireland (Green shading) and EU-27 (Light Blue shading) highlighted in different colours for illustrative purposes.⁴

⁴ In this report, EU Member States are denoted by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations and their corresponding state can be found in the Technical specifications section in the SEB94 First Results Report.

Another means of analyzing citizen evaluations of the EU is to look at the proportion of respondents expressing trust in the EU.⁵ In **Figure 3**, we see that most Irish people tend to trust the EU – 74 per cent say so, significantly above the EU average of 49 per cent, ranking Ireland the second-highest among Member States, second only to Portugal (78 per cent tend to trust).

Figure 3 Trust in the European Union by Member State: Winter 2020/2021 (%)



Source of data: SEB94. Note: Member States listed in descending order of “tend to trust” the EU. Ireland (Green shading) and EU-27 (Blue shading) highlighted in different colours for illustrative purposes

Next, we move to tap citizens’ feelings about one of the EU’s key policy initiatives - the European Green Deal. Described by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as the EU’s “man on the moon” moment, these are a set of policy initiatives by the European Commission which aim to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.⁶ SEB94 presents respondents with a list of objectives associated with the European Green Deal, with respondents asked to state which issues should be given top priority.⁷

⁵ Question: “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: “The European Union”; (Source: SEB94, QA6_10);

⁶ See: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-commission-unveils-european-green-deal-the-key-points/> (Date accessed: 17 April 2021).

⁷ Question: “In your opinion, which of the following objectives should be given top priority in a European Green Deal, a set of measures to protect the environment and fight climate change? (MAX. 4 ANSWERS)” (Source: SEB94, QB5).

Table 1 details Irish responses and contrasts them against the EU average response. Top of the list in Ireland was developing renewable energy – mentioned by 67 per cent of Irish respondents, 15-points above the EU average of 52 per cent. The next most popular item mentioned was fighting against plastic waste and being a leader on single-use plastic, cited by 59 percent of respondents, 11-points above the EU average of 48 percent. The least mentioned items by Irish people were reducing energy consumption (20 per cent) and introducing a tax on products imported from third countries with lower climate policy standards than the EU, cited by 22 per cent. Meanwhile, 40 per cent of Irish people mentioned measures to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050 by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, 10-points above the EU average of 30 per cent.

Table 1 European Green Deal – which objectives should be given top priority: Ireland and EU-27 Winter 2020/2021 (%).

	IE	EU-27
Developing renewable energy	67	52
Fighting against plastic waste and being a leader on the issue of single-use of plastic	59	48
Supporting EU farmers for them to receive fair remuneration to provide Europeans with affordable and safe food	43	39
Measures to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050 by reducing greenhouse gas emissions	40	30
Promote the "Circular Economy" – a system preserving natural resources and limiting waste Council	40	39
Protecting biodiversity	36	31
Moving towards a zero-pollution ambition	30	28
Introducing a tax on products imported from third countries that have lower climate policy standards than the EU	22	21
Reducing energy consumption	20	28

Source of data: SEB94. *Note:* Multiple responses possible – maximum 4 answers.

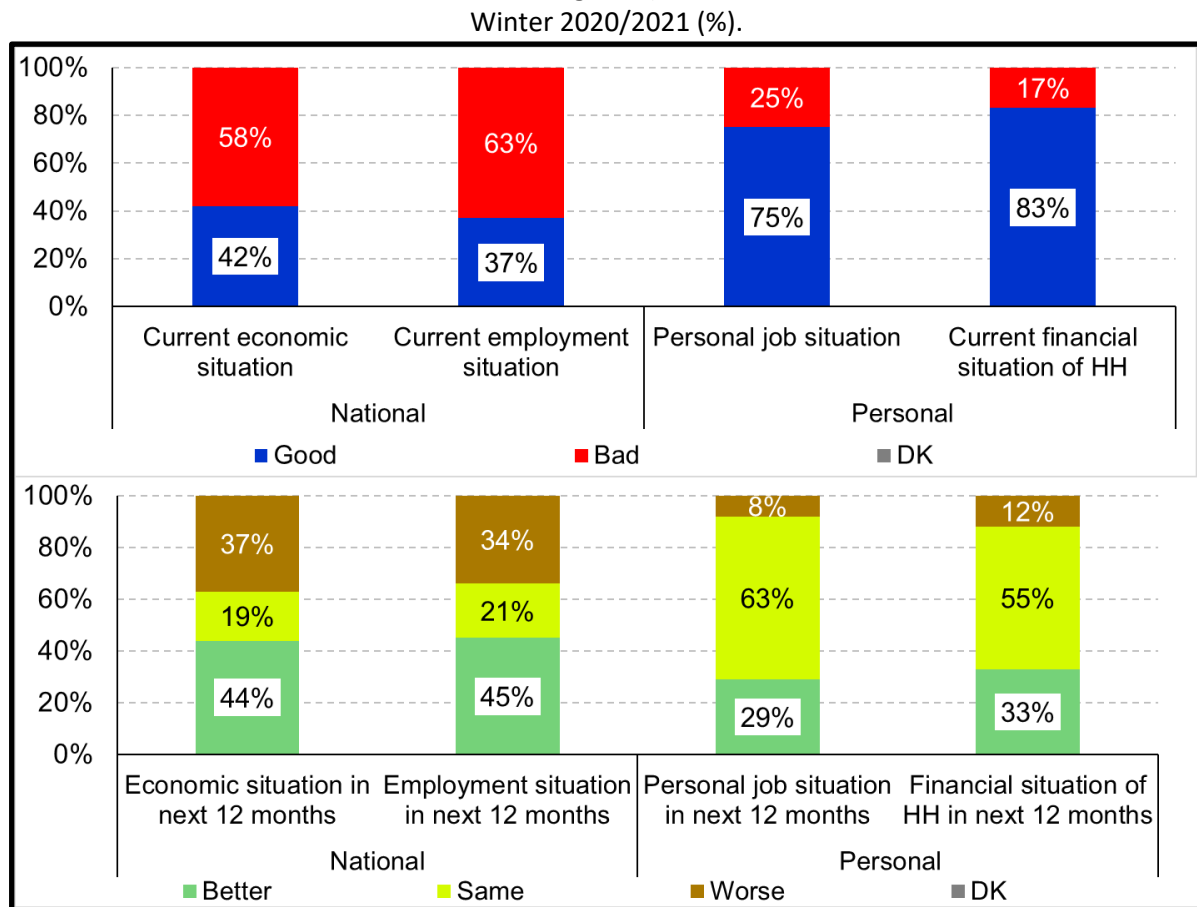
But what about the role of citizens in shaping Europe's future? SEB94 asks respondents about their views on whether EU citizens' voices should be taken into account more for decisions relating to the future of Europe.⁸ In every Member State, a majority agrees with this premise. There is an exceptionally high level of agreement in Ireland – 94 percent in total. Of those who agree, 2/5 strongly agree, with the remaining three-fifths saying they tend to agree. Comparatively speaking, Ireland ranks joint third highest (with Slovakia) in support of this premise. Only in Greece (97 per cent agreement) and Portugal (96 per cent) is it higher. Perhaps this is not surprising – after all, Ireland has had more EU-related referendums than any other Member State.

⁸ Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: EU citizens' voice should be more taken into account for decisions relating to the future of Europe" (Source: SEB94, QB1_2).

II. ECONOMIC SENTIMENTS

Figure 4 (top segment) conveys Irish citizens’ views on the current state of four economic indicators: the Irish economy, and the employment situation in Ireland; their household’s financial situation, and their personal job situation.⁹

Figure 4 Irish respondents’ views of the current national and personal economic climate (top segment) and future expectations about the national and personal economic climate (bottom segment):



Source of data: SEB94.

In light of the pandemic, the data suggest that people are significantly more optimistic about their personal economic situation than the country at large. Eighty-three per cent of Irish people classify their household's financial position as “good”, 15-points above the EU average of 68 percent, ranking Ireland seventh-highest among Member States. Seventeen per cent classify it as “bad”. When asked to assess their personal job situation, 75 per cent of Irish people say it is good, again substantially above the EU average of 58 per cent. Only 25 per cent say it is “bad”.

⁹ Question: “How would you judge the current situation in each of the following: the situation of the Irish economy; the employment situation in Ireland; your personal job situation; the financial situation of your household” (Source: SEB94, QA1_2/4/5/6).

Irish people are more skeptical however, about the country's economic and employment situation. Only 42 per cent classify the national economy as "good", while 58 per cent say it is "bad." For the first time since May 2015, more people brand the economic situation as "bad" compared to "good," and the proportion of Irish people classifying the national economic situation as "good" is at its lowest level since autumn 2014. It is a significant, if not unexpected, shift in Irish people's assessment of the national economy, which took root last year when the Covid-19 pandemic was in its infancy - at that point, there was a 21-point drop in economic optimism. Since the previous SEB survey last summer, this has fallen a further 6-points to its current 42 per cent level. On the national employment situation, only 37 per cent classify the national employment situation as "good", a 10-point drop since last summer. Still, more Irish people rate the national economy and employment situation as "good" than the EU average. For the national economy, the mean "good" rating across Member States is 29 per cent, and for the employment situation, the average "good" rating across the EU is 27 per cent.

The national and personal distinctions are also borne out when respondents are asked to assess the economic consequences of coronavirus accruing to the country and themselves personally.¹⁰ While 98 per cent of Irish people agree with the statement "the coronavirus pandemic has serious economic consequences for Ireland", ranking Ireland the fifth highest Member State in extent of agreement (behind Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, and Czechia), only 48 per cent of Irish people agree with the statement "the coronavirus pandemic has serious financial consequences for you personally". On this latter metric, Ireland ranks 14th in levels of agreement with this statement. Granted, this national versus personal distinction is visible across all Member States – the message is that Irish people are much more optimistic about their personal economic situation than the country's, and the sense is that the economic consequences of the pandemic are more detrimental for the country rather than most people's individual economic situation.

Looking at people's expectations regarding the next twelve months on these four economic indicators¹¹, Irish people are among the most optimistic in the EU concerning the national economic situation. **Figure 4** (bottom segment) shows 44 percent believe the economic situation in the next twelve months will get "better", the joint second highest in the EU, surpassed only by Denmark (45 per cent). A similar proportion (45 per cent) expect the employment situation to get "better". While sizeable proportions think both situations may worsen in the coming twelve months (37 per cent think the economy will "worsen" and 34 per cent think the employment situation will "worsen"), pessimism is subsiding. Compared to summer 2020, pessimism about the national economy's prospects is down 29-points, and down 24-points when it comes to the country's future employment situation.

¹⁰ Questions: "Thinking about the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? "The coronavirus pandemic has serious economic consequences for you personally" & "The coronavirus pandemic has serious economic consequences for (OUR COUNTRY)" (Source: SEB94, QA13_1 & QA13_2).

¹¹ Question: What are your expectations for the next twelve months: will the next twelve months be better, worse or the same, when it comes to... the situation of the Irish economy; the employment situation in Ireland; your personal job situation; the financial situation of your household" (Source: SEB94, QA2_3/4/5/6).

Regarding Irish people's personal economic situation, we see the most common answer is that things will remain the same – 63 per cent say this regarding their personal job situation and 55 per cent concerning their household's financial situation. Only 12 per cent of Irish people think their household's financial situation will worsen in the coming twelve months, and even fewer (8 per cent) expect their job situation to worsen. Again, we see much less pessimism when personal economic sentiments are measured compared with national economic prospects.

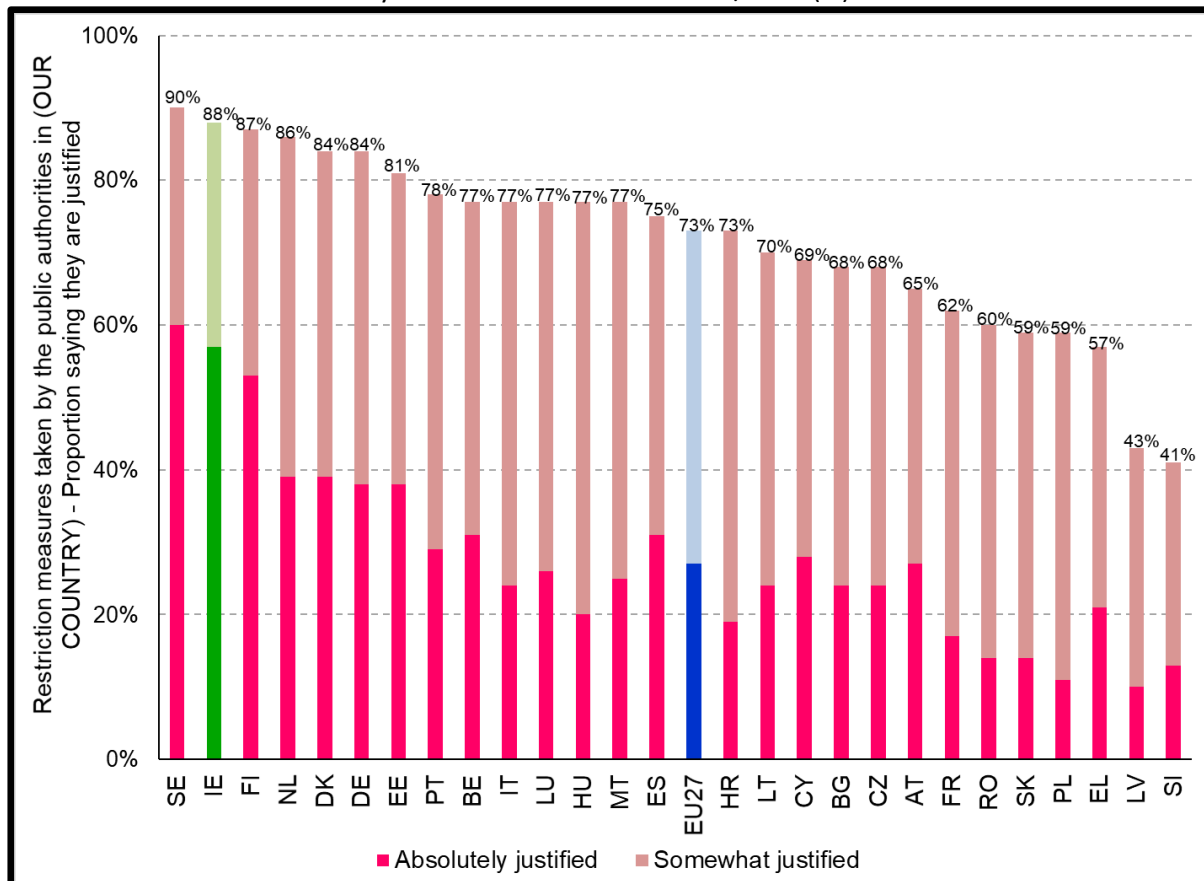
III. CORONAVIRUS: ATTITUDES TO RESTRICTIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF PERFORMANCE

Given the unprecedented restrictions introduced nationally by public authorities as a means of combatting the pandemic, SEB94 probes respondents' views on whether they considered them justified or not.¹² **Figure 5** shows that the vast majority of Irish people (88 per cent) thought the restrictions in Ireland were justified. Of those who did, about 2/3 respondents said they were "absolutely justified" while the remaining 1/3 said they were "somewhat justified". A notable aspect is that older Irish people are more likely to classify the restrictions as "justified" compared to younger people – for example, 95 per cent of respondents aged 55+ say the restrictions were justified, while only 79 per cent of respondents aged 15-24 say so.

As **Figure 5** shows, the sense of justification concerning the restrictions is substantially higher among Irish people than in other Member States. The sense of justification in the EU as a whole regarding nationally introduced restrictions was 73 per cent, with Ireland ranking second highest - only in Sweden are there more people who think the national restrictions were justified (90 per cent). **Figure 5** also uncovers a substantial degree of country variation. For example, in Slovenia, only 41 per cent of respondents think the rules were justified, while in Latvia, only 43 per cent felt likewise.

¹² Question: "Thinking about the restriction measures taken by the public authorities in (OUR COUNTRY) to fight the coronavirus and its effects, would you say that they were: absolutely justified; somewhat justified; not very justified; not at all justified" (Source: SEB94, QA16).

Figure 5 Restriction measures taken by the public authorities to fight coronavirus by Member State: Winter 2020/2021 (%).



Source of data: SEB94. Note: Member States listed in descending order of total justification for the restrictions in their country. Ireland (Green shading) and EU-27 (Blue shading) highlighted in different colours for illustrative purposes.

But how satisfied are citizens with the measures taken by the Irish government and the European Union to respond to the coronavirus crisis?¹³ **Table 2** details people's satisfaction levels and contrasts them with the average across the Member States. We see that a majority of Irish people in both instances are satisfied with the responses of both the national government (53 per cent satisfied) and the European Union (56 per cent satisfied). However, there are substantial minorities who are not satisfied with the performance of both. **Table 2** also shows a correlation between age and satisfaction with national government and the EU – younger people are less likely to be satisfied than older people. For example, only 39 per cent of Irish people aged 15-24 say they are satisfied with the Irish government, but the corresponding satisfaction level for respondents aged 55+ is 64 per cent. A similar

¹³ Question: "In general, how satisfied are you with the measures taken to fight the coronavirus pandemic by "The National Government": "The European Union"? (Source: SEB94, QA10_1 & 3).

pattern is observed for the EU – 46 per cent of respondents aged 15-24 say they are satisfied with the EU response compared to 62 per cent satisfaction among respondents aged 55+.

Table 2 Satisfaction with the measures taken to fight the coronavirus pandemic by the national government and the European Union: Ireland and EU-27 Winter 2020/2021 (%).

	Total		Age			
	IE	EU-27	15-24	25-39	40-54	55+
<i><u>National Government</u></i>						
Satisfied	53	43	39	46	55	64
Not satisfied	47	56	61	54	45	36
DK	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i><u>European Union</u></i>						
Satisfied	56	43	46	53	59	62
Not satisfied	44	49	54	47	41	38
DK	0	8	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

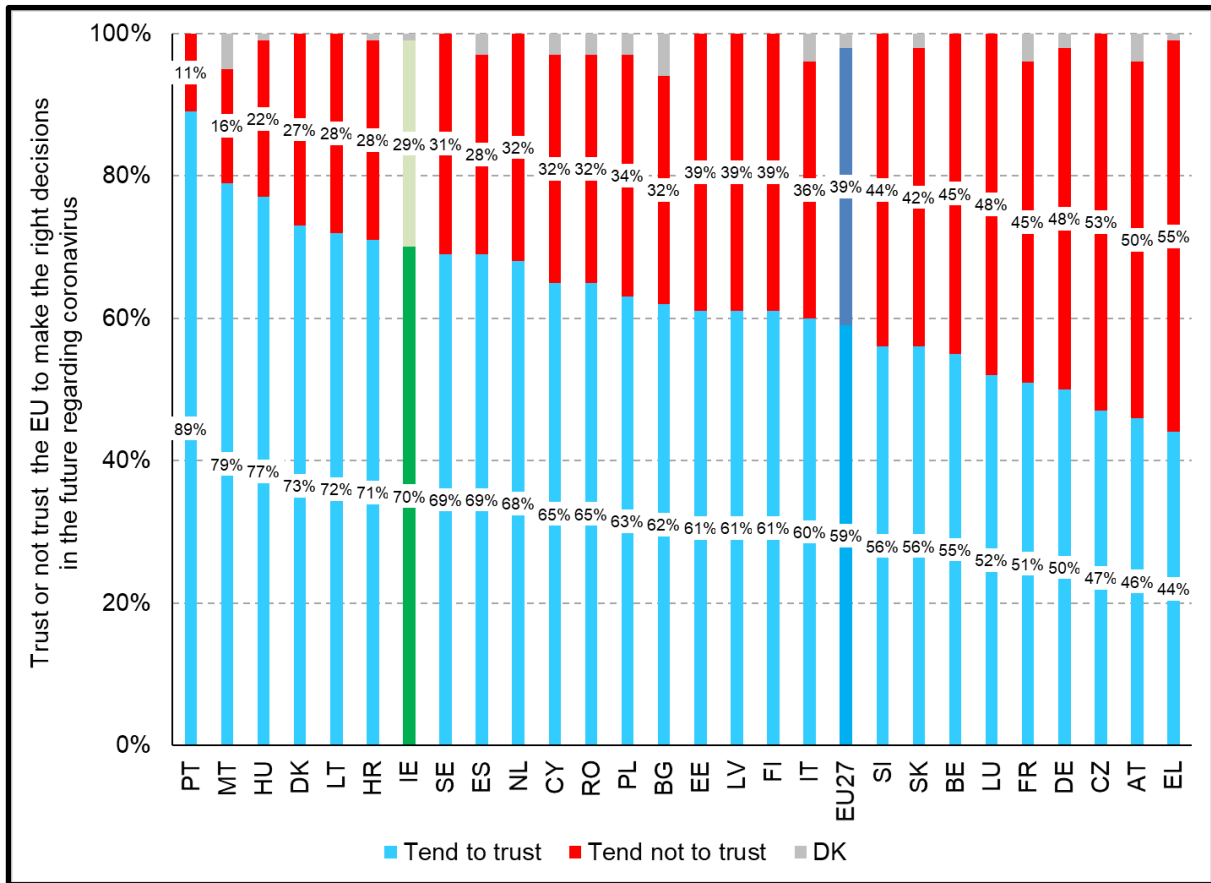
Source of data: SEB94.

Putting satisfaction levels in Ireland in a comparative perspective, satisfaction in both the government's and EU's handling of the crisis is higher in Ireland than across the EU, where the average response among Member States is dissatisfaction. Only in 12 of the 27 states do a majority express satisfaction with their national government or the EU – Ireland being one of them in both instances and ranking fifth overall on the EU metric (behind Denmark, Lithuania, Portugal, and Romania) and sixth overall on national government satisfaction (behind Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden).

Figure 6 explores respondents' views across Member States concerning the level of trust citizens have in the European Union to manage the coronavirus crisis moving forward.¹⁴ We see that most Irish people express trust in the EU to do so (70 per cent), although, of this group, most say they “tend to trust” rather than “totally trust”, while 29 per cent say they tend not to trust the EU on this. Comparatively speaking, **Figure 6** shows substantial country variation. For example, 89 per cent of Portuguese respondents say they trust the EU, whereas only 44 per cent of Greeks say likewise. Overall, most Europeans profess trust in the EU to manage the crisis, with the EU average 59 per cent, and majorities expressing this sentiment in 24 of the 27 Member States (only in Czechia, Austria, and Greece do a majority not trust the EU to handle the matter).

¹⁴ Question: “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?” (Source: SEB94, QA12).

Figure 6 Trust in the European Union to make the right decisions in the future regarding the coronavirus by Member State: Winter 2020/2021 (%).



Source of data: SEB94. Note: Member States listed in descending order of tend to trust. Ireland (Green shading) and EU-27 (Blue shading) highlighted in different colours for illustrative purposes.

Additionally, when asked to rate the effectiveness of the EU’s economic recovery plan, *NextGenerationEU*, 77 per cent of Irish people say they think it will be effective – the second highest in the EU (only in Malta is it higher at 83 per cent).¹⁵ While most people rate it as “fairly effective” rather than “very effective” the Irish score is substantially above the EU average of 55 per cent.

¹⁵ Question: “The European Union has designed a recovery plan of 750 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? Very effective; Fairly effective; Not very effective; Not at all effective”. (Source: SEB94, QA15).

IV. CORONAVIRUS : ATTITUDES TO VACCINATIONS

Vaccinations are heralded as one of the critical long-term means of mitigating and ultimately combatting the coronavirus. In response, SEB94 has probed respondents' views on vaccinations on two dimensions: citizens' willingness to receive a vaccine and their sentiments on vaccine development.

Figure 7 details respondents' inclination to receive a vaccine authorized by public authorities across Member States.¹⁶ What it shows is there is a strong inclination among the Irish public to receive a publicly approved vaccine. Seventy-four per cent of Irish people say they want to receive a vaccine (or have already received it) – the highest proportion across the EU saying this.¹⁷ Couple this with the 12 per cent of Irish respondents who report they'd like to take an authorized vaccine “by the end of 2021” – 86 per cent of Irish people show a willingness to be vaccinated. It is substantially above the EU average of 65 per cent on the same metric.¹⁸ Only 4 per cent of Irish people say they “never” intend to receive an authorized vaccine. It represents the joint second-lowest proportion in the EU and Sweden and Malta (and only bettered by Denmark - only 2 percent of Danes say “never”).

This enthusiasm for receiving the vaccine is substantiated when we look at another measure regarding vaccine take-up. SEB94 asks respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following proposition: “You do not understand why people are reluctant to get vaccinated”.¹⁹ Sixty-six per cent of Irish people say they “agree” with the statement, above the EU average on this metric of 56 per cent. Just over one-third disagree, the seventh-lowest proportion across Member States. In sum, the data imply a strong willingness by most of the Irish population to receive an authorized coronavirus vaccine when available.

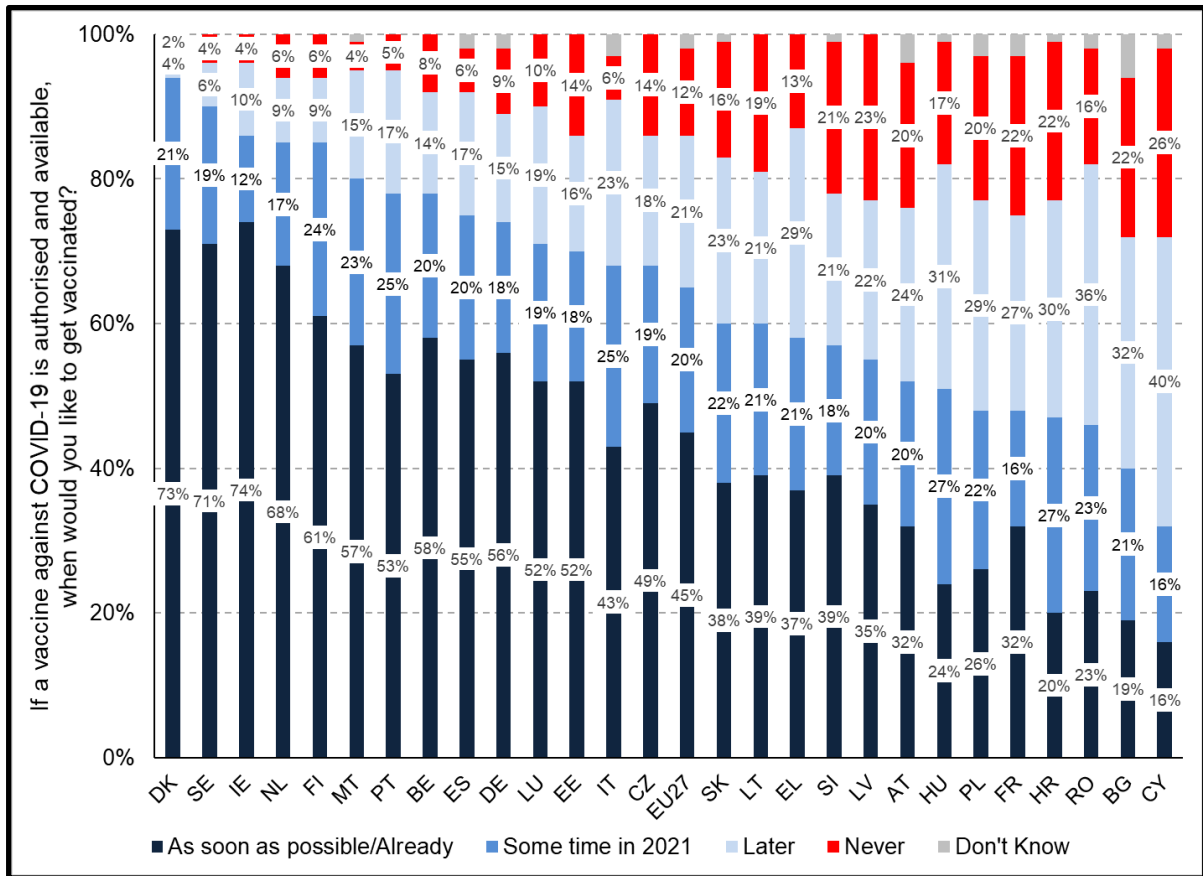
¹⁶ Question: “If a vaccine against COVID-19 (coronavirus) is authorised by public authorities and available for you, when would you like to get vaccinated?": As soon as possible; Some time in 2021; Later; Never; I have already been vaccinated; Don't Know" (Source: SEB94, QA19).

¹⁷ The breakdown between the two combined categories is 4 per cent of respondents' report having already been vaccinated and 70 per cent say “as soon as possible”.

¹⁸ The breakdown for the EU-27 is 45 per cent of respondents reporting “as soon as possible/already” and 20 per cent “some time in 2021”.

¹⁹ Question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? ‘You do not understand why people are reluctant to get vaccinated’” (Source: SEB94, QA18_5).

Figure 7 Willingness to receive a Covid-19 vaccine that is authorized and available by Member States: Winter 2020/2021 (%).



Source of data: SEB94. Note: Countries listed in descending order of those who say they wish to receive a vaccine “as soon as possible/already” and those who say “some time in 2021” combined.

But **Figure 7** illustrates there is substantial country-level variation, especially when it comes to the proportion of respondents saying they will never receive a vaccine. For example, while only 4 per cent of Irish respondents say this, 26 per cent of Cypriots and 22 per cent of French respondents say they never intend to receive a vaccine. And in six states, namely Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, France, and Poland, less than a majority of respondents’ report wishing to receive a vaccine “as soon as possible” or “by the end of 2021”.

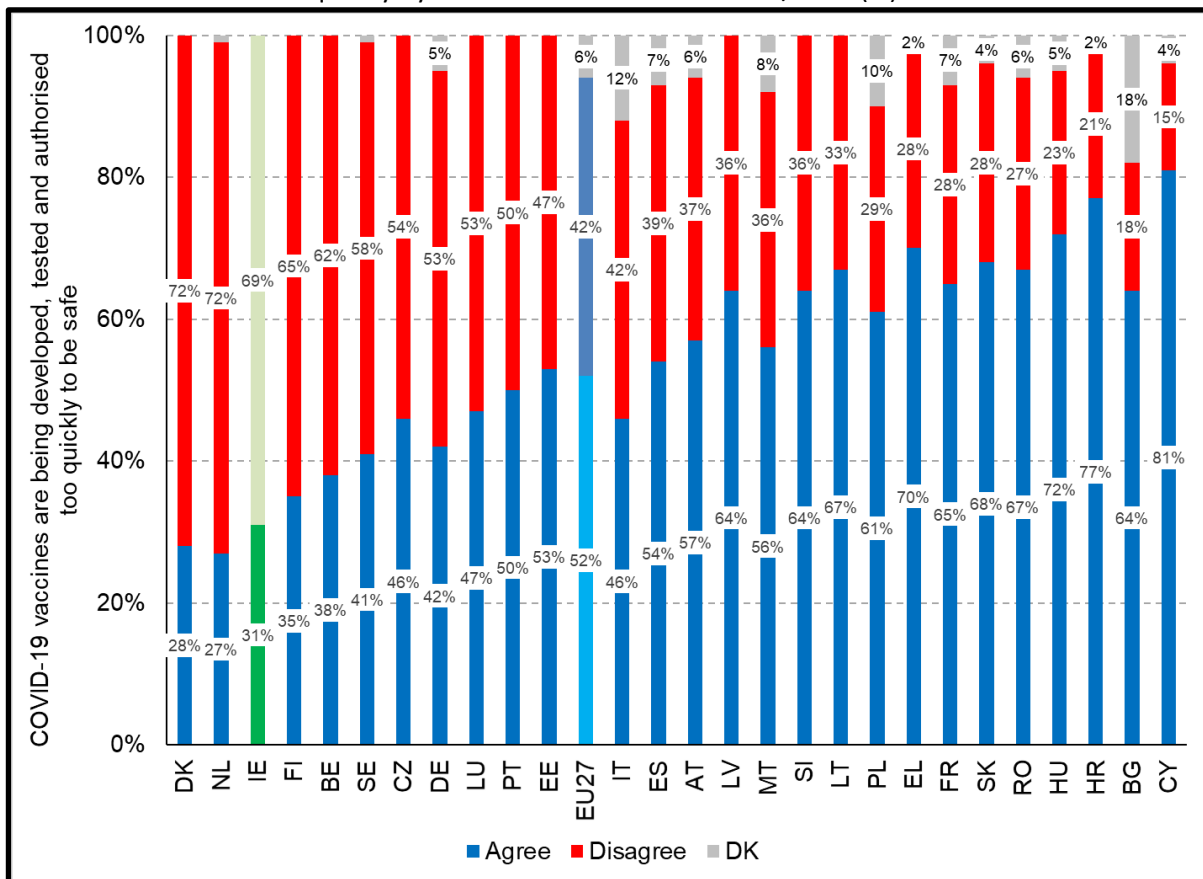
When asked about whether Covid-19 vaccines could have long-term side effects that we do not know yet, a majority of Irish people agreed with the statement (54 per cent).²⁰ Of note is that of those Irish people who agree with this statement, only over one in four “totally agree” while the remaining opt for “tend to agree”. There is also a correlation with age – younger respondents in Ireland are more likely to agree with this statement – 62 per cent of respondents aged 15-24 opted for agree. In contrast, only 46 per cent of respondents aged 55+ say likewise. Overall, the Irish level of agreement

²⁰ Question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? ‘COVID-19 vaccines could have long term side-effects that we do not know yet” (Source: SEB94, QA18_2).

is the joint second-lowest proportion of agreement in the EU (tied with Italy, only in Czechia do fewer agree – 52 per cent) and below the EU average on the metric of 67 per cent.

However, most Irish people reject the notion that “COVID-19 vaccines are being developed, tested and authorized too quickly to be safe”.²¹ **Figure 8** shows that only 31 per cent of Irish people agree with this proposition, while 69 per cent disagree, the latter the third highest in the EU, second only to Denmark and the Netherlands (72 per cent disagree in both states). Disagreement with this notion in Ireland is also substantially above the EU average of 42 per cent, where a majority (52 per cent) agree with the statement. In sum, there is much less skepticism among the Irish public about authorized coronavirus vaccines than in many other EU states.

Figure 8 Sentiments concerning Covid-19 vaccines are being developed, tested, and authorized too quickly by Member States: Winter 2020/2021 (%).



Source of data: SEB94. Note: Member States listed in descending order of “disagree” with proposition. Ireland (Green shading) and EU-27 (Blue shading) highlighted in different colours for illustrative purposes.

²¹ Question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? ‘COVID-19 vaccines are being developed, tested and authorized too quickly to be safe’ (Source: SEB94, QA18_1).

CONCLUSION

There are three takeaway points from SEB94. The first concerns Irish attitudes to the coronavirus. Most Irish people (88 per cent) feel the national restrictions imposed to control the pandemic were justified, and a majority (53 per cent) are satisfied with the way the Irish government and the EU (56 per cent) has handled the pandemic, although there are sizeable minorities who are not satisfied. Additionally, there is significant enthusiasm and willingness among the Irish population to receive a Covid-19 publicly approved vaccine, and this is ahead of the EU-average. Most (86 per cent) Irish people wish to receive a vaccine as soon as possible or by the end of 2021. Very few Irish people say they would never take an approved vaccination, and 2/3 say they don't understand someone who would refuse to accept a vaccine. While a majority of Irish people (54 per cent) acknowledge that the vaccinations may have side effects not yet known, fewer Irish people think this than the EU average. Moreover, most Irish people disagree with the premise that the Covid-19 vaccines have been developed too fast. All of this together implies a positive atmosphere for vaccination take-up in Ireland, among the most positive in the EU.

The second takeaway concerns the economy. The solid economic optimism which has been a feature of Irish public opinion in the past five to six years in these SEB reports has subsided – not a great surprise given the pandemic. However, while economic confidence and optimism are down on recent years, it has in no way fallen back to the lows of the Global Financial Crisis. Irish people make an important distinction in their judgments of the economy between the national situation and their personal situation, with much gloomier assessments of the former compared with the latter. While this national versus personal distinction is prominent across Member States and has been prevalent in Ireland before, it is especially acute during this period. Sentiments regarding the national economic situation have fallen to their lowest points since 2014-5 with most people judging the current economic and employment situations as “bad” (58 per cent for the economic situation and 63 per cent for the employment situation). That said, citizens' assessments regarding the Irish economic and employment situation remain above the EU average and have not reached the depth they fell to during the Global Financial Crisis. Moreover, Irish people are among the most optimistic in the EU about the national economic situation over the next twelve months, with 45 per cent expecting both conditions to get “better”, more than those who think it will worsen. Meanwhile, Irish people are substantially more confident about their personal economic situation – three out of four describe their personal job situation as “good” and 83 per cent say likewise concerning the financial situation of their household. Most people don't foresee any deterioration in either in the next twelve months.

The third takeaway concerns Irish attitudes to the EU. Previous Eurobarometer reports for Ireland have documented the correlation between economic optimism and attitudes towards the EU, implying that enthusiasm towards the EU could be subject to reconsideration depending on economic conditions. One might have expected that the slipping back in economic optimism could have been

accompanied by a drop in enthusiasm for the EU. Thus far, this has not been the case and as of winter 2020/2021, sentiments towards the EU are broadly positive – both comparatively and over time. Most Irish people have a positive image of the EU (76 per cent), the second-highest in the EU, well above the EU average, and the highest proportion of people saying this since 2004. Trust in the EU is also widespread, with about three in four Irish people saying they trust in the EU. Most Irish people (77 per cent) believe the EU takes account of Ireland’s interests, the highest in the EU. And there is a sense among most Irish people that the *NextGenerationEU* economic recovery package will be effective and that the EU can be trusted to handle the pandemic moving forward. An important qualification to this positive picture is that enthusiasm for the EU is somewhat soft, with varying levels of commitment on several indicators. Moreover, as the long-term economic consequences of the pandemic remain unclear, there is a need for careful monitoring of attitudes to the EU as this plays out. That said, the evidence from SEB94 is that Ireland is following its traditional form where Irish people are consistently supportive and broadly positive about the European Union.