

# EUROBAROMETER 64

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

## AUTUMN 2005

### NATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### IRELAND

The survey was requested and coordinated by the Directorate General Press and Communication.

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

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The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

## **Introduction**

- This report is based on *Eurobarometer 64.2*, fielded in autumn 2005.

## **Ireland's Membership of the European Union**

- Seventy-three percent of Irish people believe Ireland's membership is 'a good thing', six percent feel it is 'a bad thing' and 16 percent regard it as 'neither good nor bad'. Over the last 12 months, there has been a four percentage point drop in the percentage of Irish people who regard membership as a good thing.
- Eighty-six percent of Irish people believe Ireland has benefited from membership of the EU, seven percent believe Ireland has not benefited and seven percent do not offer an opinion.

### *Irish Opinion of EU Membership by Socio-Demographic Groupings*

- Those with the highest levels of education are more likely than are those with the lowest levels of education to regard Ireland's membership of the EU as 'a good thing' (83 percent as compared to 55 percent).
- Those with the highest levels of education, as well as those who are currently studying, are substantially more likely than those with the lowest levels of education to feel that Ireland has benefited from EU membership (90 percent as compared to 75 percent).
- People aged 35-44 years of age (77 percent), managers (81 percent), students (78 percent), those living in small or middle-sized towns (79 percent) and those living in Munster (79 percent) are most likely to regard membership as 'a good thing'.
- This is in contrast with other groups who are less likely to regard membership as a 'good thing': people aged 55-64 years of age (69 percent), the self-employed (69 percent), manual workers (69 percent), and those living in the rest of Leinster, i.e. outside the Dublin area (69 percent).
- People's perceptions of Ireland benefiting from EU membership are strongest amongst managers (89 percent), the retired (92 percent) and students (90 percent) and weakest amongst self-employed (82 percent) and house persons (82 percent).

### *Irish Opinion of EU Membership in Comparative Perspective*

- The percentage of Irish people who feel membership is 'a good thing' is second only to Luxembourg (82 percent).
- Irish respondents are more likely than respondents in any other Member State to feel their country benefits from EU membership.
- Eighty-seven percent of Irish people regard the EU as having a good effect on 'our standard of living' and 84 percent believe the EU has a good effect on 'our exports' (54 percent of respondents in the 25 Member States regard the EU as having a good effect on the standard of living' and 63 percent believe the EU has a good effect on exports).
- Sixty-two percent of Irish people feel the EU has had a good effect on agriculture while 20 percent feel it has had a bad effect. (40 percent of respondents in the 25 Member States regard the EU as having a good effect on the agriculture while 48 percent believe the EU has a bad effect on it).

## **Irish People's Images of the European Union**

- Sixty-nine percent of Irish people have a positive image of the EU, eight percent have a negative image and 19 percent a neutral image.

#### *Irish People's Images of the EU by Socio-Demographic Groupings*

- Eighty-one percent of those with the highest levels of education have positive images of the EU while 58 percent of those with the lowest levels of education have a positive image.
- There are strong positive images of the EU evident amongst managers (83 percent), respondents aged 35-44 years of age (74 percent) and those aged 45-54 years of age (72 percent).

#### *Irish People's Images of the EU in Comparative Perspective*

- The Irish are the most likely of all EU25 citizens to have a positive image of the EU.

#### **Irish Public Opinion of Political Union**

- Fifty-three percent of Irish respondents are for 'the development towards a European political union' and 18 percent are against.
- Almost a third of respondents do not articulate an opinion (29 percent).

#### *Irish Public Opinion of Political Union by Socio-Demographic Groupings*

- Sixty-three percent of Irish people with high levels of education are in favour of political union, while 41 percent of those with low levels of education are in favour of political union.
- Irish people aged 25-54 years are most likely to be in favour of political union.
- Managers (67 percent) are most likely to be in favour of developments towards political union while the self-employed (28 percent) and the retired (27 percent) are most likely to be against political union.

#### *Irish Public Opinion of Political Union in Comparative Perspective*

- The percentage of Irish people who are for political union is less than the percentage of people in the 25 Member States who are for political union (55 percent). It is the eight lowest figure recorded for the 25 Member States.
- The percentage of people who are unsure about political union is greatest amongst the Irish (29 percent).

#### **Irish Public Opinion of the Constitution of the European Union**

- In Ireland, 56 percent of respondents are in favour of the Constitution, 13 percent are opposed to it and 33 percent are undecided.

#### *Irish Public Opinion of the EU Constitution by Socio-Demographic Groupings*

- Sixty-seven percent of Irish people with high levels of education are in favour of the Constitution, while 45 percent of those with low levels of education are opposed to it.
- Those aged 35-44 years are most likely to be in favour of the Constitution (62 percent).
- Sixty-six percent of managers are in favour of the European Constitution.
- Those living in rural areas (63 percent) or small towns (64 percent) are more likely than are those living in large towns (45 percent) to be in favour of the Constitution.

### *Irish Public Opinion of the EU Constitution in Comparative Perspective*

- In Ireland, 32 percent feel the European Constitution should be renegotiated, while 28 percent feel the ratification process should continue. Eight percent believe the Constitution should be dropped.
- A large percentage of Irish people are unsure about whether or not the Constitution is necessary for the EU institutions to work well (31 percent).

### **Irish People's Familiarity with, Knowledge of and Trust in the European Union**

#### *Irish People's Familiarity with EU Institutions*

- The institutions that nearly all Irish people have 'heard of' are the European Parliament (97 percent) and the European Commission (92 percent). Only 69 percent of Irish people report they have heard of the Council of the European Union.
- Twenty-three percent of Irish people report that they have heard of the nine EU institutions.
- Those who are 'very familiar' with EU institutions tend to have high levels of education, be aged between 35 and 54 years of age and to be either self-employed or managers.
- Irish people who are 'unfamiliar' with EU institutions tend to be in either the youngest or oldest members of society, those with the lowest levels of education, students and those who work in the home.

#### *Irish People's Knowledge of the EU*

- Three percent of Irish respondents provide the correct answers to the four questions. A fifth of Irish people do not answer any question correctly.
- Those who are 'informed' about the EU tend to have a high level of education, to be young, students, managers and living in Munster.
- Irish people who tend to be 'uninformed' are 55 years or age or older (as well as people aged 25-34 years), have low levels of education, be manual workers and live in rural areas and small towns, as well as in the rest of Leinster and in Connaught/Ulster.

#### *Irish People's Trust in EU Institutions*

- Sixty percent of Irish people trust the European Parliament and 60 percent trust the European Commission. Less than half of Irish people trust the Council of the EU (47 percent).
- Nineteen percent of Irish people say that they trust all nine institutions while 28 percent do not trust any of the EU institutions.
- People who tend to 'trust most' EU institutions are aged 35-64 years of age, have high levels of education, are either self-employed or managers and live in Dublin.
- The people who are most likely to 'trust few' EU institutions are the very young, those with low levels of education, students and those engaged in manual work.
- There is a strong association between familiarity with EU institutions and trust in institutions.

## **Irish Opinion of European Integration Amongst those with Differing Levels of Familiarity, Knowledge and Trust**

### *EU Membership*

- People who are 'very familiar' with EU institutions, who trust some of them and who are informed about the EU are most likely to regard Ireland's membership of the EU as 'a good thing' and that Ireland has benefited from membership.

### *Images of the EU*

- People who are 'very familiar' with EU institutions, who trust some of them and who are informed about the EU are most likely to have a positive image of the EU.

### *Political Union*

- People who are 'very familiar' with and who 'trust most' EU institutions are likely to be in favour of political union.
- Fifty-nine percent of people who are unfamiliar with EU institutions do not express an opinion on political union.
- Forty-four percent of those who 'trust few' institutions do not articulate an opinion.
- There is no real difference in the percentages of those who are informed and uninformed who support political union.

### *The European Constitution*

- Sixty-nine percent of people who are unfamiliar with EU institutions do not provide an opinion about the Constitution.
- Those who are 'informed' about the EU are more likely than those who are 'uninformed' to be in favour of the Constitution, and to oppose it.
- People who are 'uninformed' about the Constitution are more likely not to offer an opinion.

## **Conclusions**

- Irish public opinion is supportive of Ireland's membership of the European Union.
- While opinion with regard to political union and the European Constitution is more likely to be positive than negative, large percentages of Irish people are unsure about these issues.
- The most positive attitudes towards the EU tend to be amongst those groups in Irish society best placed to benefit economically from European integration.
- Those least able to benefit from integration tend to be least positive towards the EU and least informed about it.
- The overall lesson of the Nice Treaty referenda in Ireland is the need for elites to inform and engage their citizens. Positive attitudes towards the EU are most likely to be found amongst those who are knowledgeable about the EU and who trust its institutions.
- Failure to communicate with the electorate and in particular with those who are less well informed may alter what is currently a favourable attitudinal climate.