Standard Eurobarometer 86

National Report

Public opinion in the European Union

Ireland
Autumn 2016

Survey requested and co-ordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication

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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PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

IRELAND

http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion

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This report was produced for the European Commission’s (EC) Representation in Ireland. Dr. Stephen Quinlan of the GESIS Leibniz Institute, Germany compiled this report for the EC Representation in Ireland.
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INTRODUCTION

When Harold Macmillan became British Prime Minister in 1957, in response to a question about what would decide the course of his government, he reportedly answered “Events, dear boy, events”. The key point is that events sit in the saddle that rides mankind. 2016 marked a year of seminal happenings globally and in Ireland. Donald Trump, a property mogul and someone who had never held political office before, was elected the 45th President of the United States. The rise of anti-status quo parties, campaigning on populist platforms challenging economic and cultural globalisation continued, with increases in electoral support in France, Germany, and Austria, coming hot on the heels of gains for anti-status quo parties in other European Union (EU) member states in recent years. Away from the electoral arena, the threat of terrorism in Europe worsened as attacks in Belgium, France, and Germany put member states on high-security alert. Meanwhile, the European migrant crisis, which has seen a huge number of migrants seek refuge in the EU, remained a vexing public policy issue.

But perhaps the most ground-breaking event of 2016 occurred in June when the United Kingdom, Ireland’s nearest neighbour, voted by plebiscite to leave the EU. An unprecedented happening, ‘Brexit’ (as Britain’s withdrawal is commonly referred to) raises many new challenges for the EU, and especially for Ireland, considering the country’s close links with the United Kingdom politically, geographically, and economically. Meanwhile, the European Commission’s ruling in August 2016 that the tax treatment given by Ireland to multinational company Apple amounted to inappropriate state aid, a ruling that is being appealed by the Irish government, brought Ireland’s economic policy and its relationship with the EU into sharp focus. Historically, the hallmark of Ireland’s connection with the EU has been strong levels of public enthusiasm for the EU. However, this has dampened in recent years because of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Moreover, although enthusiasm has been rebounding to an extent since the end of the EU/IMF bailout, the events of 2016 have resulted in Ireland’s relationship with the EU taking on greater saliency and perhaps being viewed through a new prism.

Closer to home, Ireland has not been immune from the populist wave seen in other member states. A general election in February 2016 resulted in the outgoing Fine Gael/Labour coalition receiving an electoral shellacking, despite an improving economy. Further, the vote of the traditional three parties in Ireland (Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, and Labour) fell to its lowest combined share ever. Instead, anti-austerity parties, including the nationalist party, Sinn Féin increased their support. Meanwhile, independent candidates scored their best results ever, returning 23 members to the Irish parliament, with some joining the new minority coalition government led by Fine Gael. Election 2016 was characterised by a dimension of anti-establishment feeling driving a segment of Irish voters.

Given the momentous events of 2016, Eurobarometer 86 (EB86), part of a long series of reports probing trends in Irish and European public opinion towards the EU and political and social issues, focuses on two themes. The first is Irish attitudes to the EU and some of its hallmark policies. The second is Irish people’s sentiments towards the seminal global developments of 2016. The data for this report was gathered in November 2016 by Behaviour and Attitudes, who carried out the fieldwork for Eurobarometer 86 between 5 November and 14 November 2016, interviewing 1,006 respondents aged 15+.1

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5 Full technical details are contained in the EB86 Technical Report and appendices.
KEY FINDINGS

ATTITUDES TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND EU POLICIES

- Eighty-five per cent of Irish people are “for” the single currency, above the Eurozone average of 70 per cent and 90 per cent are “for” Freedom of Movement, above the EU average of 81 per cent. Meanwhile, 3 out of 4 Irish people are ‘for’ a free trade agreement between the EU and the United States, above the EU average of 53 per cent.

- Fifty-five per cent of Irish people have a positive image of the EU, the highest among member states and 20 points above the EU average. Only 13 per cent have a negative image of the EU. However, certain groups are more likely to have a positive image of the EU than others. More educated people have a greater likelihood of having a positive image of the EU as are people who think the Irish economy is performing well, and those who say they trust the EU.

- More Irish people trust the EU than distrust it (49 per cent to 42 per cent), reversing a trend that had developed during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). However, a larger proportion of Irish people still distrust the EU today compared with before the Crisis.

- While positivity towards the EU among Irish people has increased in recent years, it still lags behind the enthusiasm seen before the GFC. However, there is little sign of mushrooming Euroscepticism as 67 per cent of Irish people disagree with the idea that Ireland could best face the future outside of the EU.

FEELINGS TOWARDS IMMIGRATION

- Eighty-one per cent of Irish people have a positive view about immigration from within the EU, 20 points above the EU average. Meanwhile, 57 per cent of Irish people have a positive view of immigration from outside the EU, 20 points above the EU average, although significantly lower than the proportion feeling positive about immigration from within the EU.

- Seventy-seven per cent of Irish people agree with the proposition that immigrants contribute a lot to Ireland, substantially above the EU average of 44 per cent. These data reflect a consistent trend of Irish people having a positive view of immigration, certainly more enthusiastic than most other EU member states.

SENTIMENTS ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF THE UNITED STATES

- As Donald Trump assumes the Presidency of the United States, three fifths of Irish people believe the US is going in the ‘wrong direction’, above the EU average of 55 per cent. Only 16 per cent of Irish people think America is going in the ‘right direction’.

- This scepticism is a marked change from six years ago when the question was last asked. Then, over two fifths of Irish people thought the America was going in the ‘right direction’.

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

- Sixty-four per cent classify the Irish economy as ‘good’, significantly above the EU average assessment of 41 per cent.

- In spite of the ‘Brexit’ vote, 38 per cent think the Irish economy will get ‘better’ in the next twelve months, while 45 per cent think it will ‘stay the same’. Only 13 per cent believe it will ‘worsen’.
I. ATTITUDES TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND EU POLICIES

The consistent message of recent Eurobarometer reports for Ireland has been that the widespread enthusiasm for the EU, which was commonplace before the Global Financial Crisis, has lessened. Despite this, the end of EU and IMF financial relief for Ireland has seen support for the EU rebound to a certain extent. 2016 resulted in EU related issues being at the top of the political agenda both in Ireland and internationally, dominated by the United Kingdom’s decision to withdraw from the Union. How has this affected sentiment towards the EU?

There are multiple ways of teasing this out. First, we look at the levels of trust Irish people declare to have in the European Union.6 Trust is a barometer of citizens’ confidence in an institution. It is something institutions crave because high levels of trust nourish the connection with citizens and more trust is considered to confer greater legitimacy. Figure 1 tracks Irish levels of trust in the EU dating back to 2003. As of November 2016, more Irish people profess to have trust in the EU compared with those that do not (49 per cent versus 42 per cent). Levels of distrust in the EU have fallen back from their height during the Global Financial Crisis when nearly 3 in 5 Irish people consistently expressed distrust in the EU between 2011 and 2013. Concurrently, we have seen a gradual return of trust in the EU, especially since the end of the EU and IMF bailout in December 2013. Trust in the EU has risen from a low of 24 per cent in November 2011 to 49 per cent currently. This is higher than the EU average of 36 per cent and the largest proportion of Irish people professing trust in the Union since October 2008.

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6 Source of question EBB6 QAB_14: “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”
Yet, a sombre note is the extent to which distrust, while declining and lower than the EU average, remains substantial in an Irish context, with distrust having not fallen back to the levels we saw pre the GFC. Lack of trust in political institutions can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, a citizenry taking a critical stance towards institutions might be considered a boon as it provides checks and balances needed for a functioning democracy. Thus, distrust might simply reflect a judicious approach by citizens. Conversely, it might be viewed more negatively, symptomatic of a wider malaise and lack of confidence in the body politic generally. Delving deeper into the reasons for distrust is beyond the scope of this report. However, we can say that while trust in the EU is beginning to recover, there is some way to go before a return to the halcyon days before the Global Financial Crisis, when trust in the EU was robust and plentiful and levels of distrust were minute.

A second way of tapping into citizens’ feelings about the EU is to examine how citizens feel about certain policies and priorities that the EU has implemented or is trying to pursue. Table 1 details the levels of support among Irish people and the EU as a whole for four different policies. These are: freedom of movement for EU citizens, the euro-currency, a free trade agreement between the EU and America, and further EU enlargement. Respondents are asked whether they are “for” or “against” each policy. First, we see Irish people are more supportive of these four EU policies than the EU average. Second, the extent of support differs substantially for each policy. The strongest support comes for the principle of freedom of movement for EU citizens, a particular bête noir of opponents of Britain’s membership of the European Union. Unlike their neighbours, Irish people are strongly “for” freedom of movement, with near universal support (90 per cent), and above the EU average of 81 per cent “for”. Irish people are strongly “for” a free trade deal between the EU and America, with 3 in 4 Irish people supportive, substantially above the EU average support of 53 per cent for this policy. Ireland ranks second in its support across member states, behind Lithuania, where support reaches 78 per cent. This divergence might be a reflection of Ireland being an export-led economy and its capacity to attract foreign direct investment from the United States. Further, we need to bear in mind that while Irish people are intimately familiar with the consequences of policies like the single currency, enlargement, and freedom of movement, in light of the GFC and indeed many EU referendums taking up these issues. However, the extent to which they are knowledgeable about a free-trade deal and its implications is unclear, and needs to be borne in mind when interpreting support for this policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU policy/priority</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>EU28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A European economic and monetary union with one single currency, the euro</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>970%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A free trade and investment agreement between the EU and the USA</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: EB86.

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7 Source of question EB86 QA17: “What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it: 1) A European economic and monetary union with one single currency, the euro; 2) Further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years; 3) A free trade and investment agreement between the EU and the USA; 4) The free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU“


9 Please note that this is not the EU average but the average support for the single currency among Eurozone members.
Meanwhile, Irish support for the single currency remains robust. Eighty-five per cent of Irish people are “for” the Euro, above the Eurozone average of 70 per cent. Only in Slovenia is support for the single currency matched (85 per cent “for”). These levels of support are substantially up from the depths of the GFC, when support for the single currency in Ireland fell to a low of 67 per cent in November 2012. Finally, Irish people are rather split on the idea of future enlargement of the EU. Forty-four per cent say they are “for” this but 45 per cent say they are “against”, continuing a relative ambivalence among Irish people stretching back some time to the idea of further EU enlargement.

Perhaps the best means of getting a sense of people’s attitudes to the EU is to explore the image people have of it. Figure 2 tracks Irish images of the EU dating back to 2000. As of November 2016, most Irish people (55 per cent) have a positive image of the EU. This score means Irish people have the most positive image of the EU across member states and is 20 points above the EU average of 35 per cent. Figure 2 also shows that there has been a clear trend of increasing positivity in Ireland in recent years, especially since the end of the EU and IMF bailout. As of November 2016, the gains of the past two and a half years have been consolidated. At the same time, the proportion of Irish people having a negative image of the Union has fallen from a high point of 31 per cent in autumn 2012 to 13 per cent currently. Yet, there have also been an increasing number of Irish people taking a neutral stance towards the EU, with 31 per cent of Irish people feeling this way presently. Pre the GFC, this averaged 19 per cent. The message is that while positivity is on the rise, we are still some way off the pre-Crisis positivity for the EU (the mean positive image between 2000 and 2008 was 68 per cent). It raises the vexing question about what determines Irish people's view of the EU and where does scope exist for improving its image?

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Figure 2 Images of the European Union in Ireland 2000-2016 (%).
Source of data: EBS5-EB86.

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10 Source of question EB86 Q9: “In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative, or very negative image?”
To discover this, we turn to multivariate regression analysis, which allows us to examine the impact of various attitudes and socio-demographics of respondents simultaneously in determining images of the EU. A logit regression model forms the basis of the analysis (see appendix).\(^{11}\) To understand what influences attitudes to the EU, we focus in particular on three sets of variables. The first are socio-demographic with the idea that certain socio-economic groups are better-placed to take advantage of the benefits of the EU model of market liberalisation and freedom of movement. For example, young highly educated middle-class professionals are more likely to be in a better position to take advantage of market liberalisation and the opportunities to travel, or study abroad compared with a middle-aged, low skilled labourer, who faces employment competition and has fewer resources at their disposal to travel, move, or upskill. Thus we might expect more educated, younger, and middle and upper class citizens to be more supportive of the EU and more likely to have a positive image of it.

**Figure 3** shows that education does have a strong impact on the likelihood of Irish people having a positive image of the EU. The likelihood of having a positive image of the EU is 18 points higher among Irish people who completed their education aged 20+ compared with those had done so aged 15 or less. A similar pattern exists for those aged 16-19, who are 13 points more likely to have a positive image of the EU. We also found that lower middle-class Irish people were less likely to have a positive image of the EU compared with middle-class and upper middle-class people by 9 points. However, we find no evidence that age has any impact on determining image of the EU.

![Figure 3 Average predicted effect of having a positive image of the EU in Ireland depending on the age you finished education. Source of data: EBB6.](image)

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\(^{11}\) The logit model is chosen because we look at positive versus non-positive images EU (a combination of respondents who said they had a ‘neutral’ or ‘negative’ image of the EU). Don’t know responses are excluded from the analysis.

\(^{12}\) The predicted effect is based on the logit model detailed in the appendix and in which other variables controlled for are held constant at their mean values.
The second set of variables said to determine attitudes to the EU are economic expectations. The line of thinking is simple: those who feel the economy is performing well are more likely to have a positive view about the EU. **Figure 4** shows there is a strong and robust link between Irish people’s opinions of the Irish economy and positivity towards the EU. Positive perceptions of the Irish economy are strongly linked to the likelihood of possessing positive perceptions of the EU rising by 30 points from those who rate the Irish economy as ‘very bad’ to ‘very good’.

*Figure 4: Average predicted effect of having a positive image of the EU in Ireland depending on attitude regarding performance of Irish economy.*

*Source of data: EBB6.*
The third set of variables said to influence attitudes towards the EU are feelings about the EU itself, the so-called “Europe matters” school of thought. The argument is simple: the more favourable people are towards the EU, the more likely they will have a positive image of it. Figure 5 shows this is the case. It illustrates that having trust in the EU has a significant impact on Irish people’s likelihood of having a positive image of the EU. Among those who trust the EU, their likelihood of having a positive image of the EU is 76 per cent compared with a likelihood of 34 per cent among those who distrust the EU, a whopping 41-point difference. In sum, many reasons determine Irish people’s image of the EU. Economic perceptions clearly matter with positive economic vibes translating into more positivity. However, there is more to it. Education and trust in the EU are also critical, and are key to understanding why positivity, while rising, has yet to reach the heights we saw before the Financial Crisis.

Figure 5 Average predicted effect of having a positive image of the EU in Ireland depending on trust in the European Union. Source of data: EBB6.

‘Brexit’ has raised great questions about Ireland’s relationship with Britain and the EU. Eurobarometer 86 does not contain any specific questions probing respondent’s views about Britain’s forthcoming departure from the EU. But we can examine whether Britain’s decision to leave the EU resulted in Irish people feeling their country’s place is outside of the Union. While some prominent voices have recommended that Ireland should consider its position, the evidence presented thus far would not support the idea of mushrooming Euroscepticism in Ireland. To fully explore this, we probe people’s responses to the question ‘(OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future outside of the EU’.

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Source of question EBB6 Q419 5: “Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following: ‘(OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future outside of the EU’.”
Figure 6 displays an index calculated by taking the proportion who disagreed with the statement from those who agreed, yielding a positive-negative index by country. A positive score means more people thought their country could better face the future outside the EU while a negative score means more people disagreed with this proposition. In most member states, more people disagreed that their country’s future is best served outside of the EU. A strong majority in Ireland rejected the proposition, 67 per cent disagreeing, and 25 per cent agreeing, yielding a score of -42 on the index depicted in Figure 6. This was above the EU average of -26, meaning Ireland ranks seventh cross-nationally in their disagreement with the premise that leaving the EU would better serve the country. Only in four countries, Britain, Slovenia, Italy, and Cyprus did more people agree with the idea than disagree with it. Thus, while ‘Brexit’ has thrown up serious questions and challenges about Ireland’s relationship with the EU, we do not see, at least for now, any signs of significant Euroscepticism developing in Ireland. Currently, positivity about the EU in Ireland is plentiful. And while it continues to lag behind where it was pre the Financial Crisis, there are few signs that Irish people are turning away from the EU in significant numbers since ‘Brexit’, with a strong majority in favour of continuing Irish membership of the EU.

**Figure 6** Index of support for the statement "(OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future outside of the EU" by member state – autumn 2016 (%)\(^{15}\). Source of data: EB86.

Please note: A positive score indicates more people agreed with the statement than disagreed with it and a negative score means more people disagreed with the statement than agreed with it. Countries listed in descending order of more people agreeing with the statement.

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\(^{15}\) Don’t know responses excluded from the index. They averaged 10 per cent across the EU and were 8 per cent in Ireland.
II. ATTITUDES TO GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

Eurobarometer 86 comes at a seminal time globally. Thus, this report takes the opportunity to explore Irish people’s attitudes to three global developments. The first is attitudes to immigration in light of the ongoing European migrant crisis. The second is feelings about the direction of the United States as Donald Trump assumes the American Presidency. The third is Ireland’s economic expectations over the next twelve months considering Britain’s forthcoming departure from the EU.

First we examine feelings about immigration. 2016 did see some advances in controlling the flow of migrants into the EU with the European Border and Coastguard Agency’s establishment and the signing of the European Union-Turkey Refugee Agreement. But migration remains a hot topic. Ireland’s geographic location means it’s not at the forefront of the migration crisis. Yet immigration has been central to the rise of many anti-status quo parties cross-nationally. Further, Ireland has absorbed some migrants as part of the European relocation effort and with the Irish Census showing that over 15 per cent of the population were born outside the country\textsuperscript{16}, exploring attitudes to immigration is worthwhile.

Irish people continue to show strong support for immigration comparatively speaking. Eighty-one per cent of Irish people have a positive view about immigrants from other EU member states, 20 points above the EU average\textsuperscript{17}. This places Ireland third (slightly behind Sweden and Luxembourg) in positivity cross-nationally. Like EU citizens as a whole, Irish people are less enthusiastic about immigrants from outside the EU. Yet, 57 per cent of Irish people have a positive view of immigration from outside the EU, 20 points above the EU average. Comparatively speaking, Ireland ranks among the most positive about this form of immigration by member state\textsuperscript{18}. Of note is that comparing positivity about immigration from within and outside the EU today to a year ago shows an increase in support on both metrics (+10 points for immigration from within the EU and +8 points for immigration for outside it).

\textsuperscript{17} Source of question EBB6 QB4 1: “Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you: ‘Immigration of people from other EU member states’.”
\textsuperscript{18} Source of question EBB6 QB4 2: “Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you: ‘Immigration of people from outside of the EU’.”
Figure 7 probes attitudes to migration more deeply by displaying the proportion of respondents across the EU by country who say they agree with the statement "immigrants contribute a lot to (OUR COUNTRY)." What is immediately obvious is that views vary significantly by country. Ireland ranks second highest in support of the proposition, with 77 per cent agreeing, 35 per cent of which totally agreeing with the statement. Irish support for this idea is substantially above the EU average of 44 per cent. In sum, most Irish people view immigration and immigrants in a positive light. Interpreting the reasons for this are beyond the scope of this report. We might speculate that it is a reflection of the Irish emigrant tradition. Conversely, it could be that as Ireland has not been at the frontline of the migration crisis, it has had little negative experience of immigration.

![Figure 7](image.png)

**Figure 7** Agreement with the proposition that "immigrants contribute a lot to (OUR COUNTRY)" by member state – autumn 2016 (%). Source of data: EB86.

Second, we examine attitudes to the United States’ direction. Donald Trump’s ascendancy to the US Presidency constituted one of the great political upsets of our time. His election signals the United States might embark on a new course globally, given that President Trump has favoured an “America First” policy. The President has stressed the issue of jobs and threatened to punish American multinationals that transfer to countries where the economic conditions are more favourable to them. Ireland could be adversely affected by such developments were they to occur. So, how do Irish people feel about America’s direction given the President’s likely agenda?

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19 Source of question EB86 Q9 2: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: ‘immigrants contribute a lot to (OUR COUNTRY).’

EB86 asks Irish people whether they believe the United States is going in the ‘right direction’ or the ‘wrong direction’. Eurobarometer has asked the question on three previous occasions and Figure 8 displays Irish responses to it dating back to 2009. As of November 2016, three fifths of Irish people believe the US is going in the ‘wrong direction’, above the EU average of 55 per cent. Only 16 per cent think America is going in the ‘right direction’. It represents a large sea change in Irish feeling on this metric. When the question was last asked six years ago, 43 per cent of Irish people believed America was going in the ‘right direction’. If we look at the high point of Irish confidence in the direction of the US (November 2009 – 48 per cent going in the ‘right direction’), there has been a 32-point drop in the proportion of Irish people feeling the US is on the right track. Yet, despite strong concern in Ireland, it is higher in other member states: for example, 75 per cent of Belgians and 71 per cent of Danes consider the US to be going in the ‘wrong direction’. In sum, there is clear evidence that Europe-wide there is concern over the direction of the United States under a Donald Trump presidency.

Figure 8 Irish attitudes to the direction of the United States 2009-2016 (%).
Source of data: EB71-EB86.

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21 Source of question EB86 QD73_3: “At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going the right direction, or in the wrong direction, in the United States?”
EB86 does not contain specific questions about ‘Brexit’. While the effects of Britain’s withdrawal for Ireland are likely to be deep and long-lasting, the economic consequences are especially likely to be far-reaching. Debate continues to rage about whether it will be to Ireland’s economic benefit or harm.22 Thus, it is timely to assess Irish people’s feelings about the economy, specifically Ireland’s economic future, considering the United Kingdom’s vote. Recent Eurobarometer reports have shown that Irish economic confidence is strong.23 This trend continues in EB86 as 64 per cent of Irish people describe Ireland’s economy as ‘good’. But if ‘Brexit’ is to have had impact, we might expect to see it in the form of future prospects. Eurobarometer probes people’s economic expectations by asking people whether they feel the economy will get ‘better’, ‘stay the same’, or get ‘worse’ in the coming twelve months.24 While not an ideal measure of economic concerns specifically linked to ‘Brexit’, it provides an insight into how people feel about the economy’s trajectory given the new global circumstances, and which also might reflect concerns about Donald Trump’s economic policies as he assumes the American Presidency.


24 Source of question EB86 QA2.1.
Figure 9 details Irish responses to this question dating back to 2012, when the Global Financial Crisis was continuing to bite. We see that since then Irish people have been broadly confident about the country’s economic future. This economic confidence was still in existence in November 2016. Thirty-eight per cent think it will get ‘better’ in the next twelve months, above the EU average of 22 per cent. However, this does mark a drop of four points on the numbers saying so in May 2016 and 13 points on the proportion saying this in November 2015. That being said, it is accompanied by an increase in the proportion saying they expect the economy to ‘stay the same’, which currently stands at 45 per cent. Only 13 per cent believe the economy will ‘worsen’ in the next twelve months, an increase of five points over the past year. In trying to assess the impact of ‘Brexit’ on economic expectations, we should treat this data with caution. On the one hand, the drop back in positive expectations and slight increase in negativity about Ireland’s future economic prospects might reflect some early nervousness over ‘Brexit’. On the other hand, economic expectations have been especially positive in Ireland since the end of the bailout, and the decline in positivity may simply be an evening out of positivity, as the economy has improved significantly in recent years, and thus there may be a sense it has gone as far as it can go. Whatever the underlying reasons, what we can say is that confidence still reigns supreme: a strong proportion believe the economy will improve in the next twelve months, among the highest in the EU. And while this metric only measures people’s confidence for the next year whereas the implications of ‘Brexit’ and Donald Trump’s presidency will take longer to emerge and recognise, there are few signs that it has resulted in Irish people forming a pessimistic view about the country’s economic prospects.

![Figure 9 Economic expectations for the next twelve months in Ireland & the EU: 2012-2016 (%). Source of data: EB77-EB86.](image)
CONCLUSION

In time, 2016 may be classified as an epoch: a year of pivotal events with marked consequences for the future. Eurobarometer 86 allows us to delve into how Irish people feel about some of these developments and their impact on attitudes towards the EU. There are four take away points from this report.

First, 3 in 5 Irish people believe the United States is on the wrong track as Donald Trump takes office as the 45th President of the United States. It marks a significant shift in Irish views about America’s direction but fits in with a widespread concern felt Europe wide about the direction of the US under President Trump.

Second – regarding immigration, Irish opinions diverge significantly from the EU average position. Most Irish people believe immigrants make a strong contribution to the country and majorities support immigration from within and outside the EU, although fewer support the latter. These high levels of positivity are noteworthy given the European migrant crisis and the rise of anti-status quo parties in other member states, some of whom have been buoyed by anti-immigrant feeling among citizens, and considering that freedom of movement and immigration was one of the reasons that some British citizens voted to leave the EU.

Third, support for the EU is steady and the gains in positivity of recent years have been consolidated. Fifty-five per cent of Irish people have a positive image of the Union, the highest across the Union, and few Irish people have a negative image of the EU. There is also strong support for cornerstone EU policies such as Freedom of Movement and the single currency. Further, more people today trust the EU than distrust it, reversing a prevalent trend that developed during the Global Financial Crisis. Yet, we need to balance this positivity by accepting sizeable numbers of Irish people still declare distrust in the EU. Further, while an improving Irish economy has undoubtedly contributed to the gains and consolidation of positivity, enthusiasm for the EU remains below what it was before the Crisis. This report suggests that policymakers hoping to increase enthusiasm for the EU in Ireland should concentrate their attention on the less educated and lower middle-class citizens, where scope for growth in positivity evidently exists. Further, increasing levels of trust in the EU will undoubtedly help improve the image of the EU, especially considering that the relationship between trust and image is likely to be reciprocal, and thus it provides a solid each-way bet.

Finally, perhaps the biggest development of 2016, at least for Ireland and its relationship with the EU, was ‘Brexit’. While EB86 does not probe respondents’ views on this issue specifically, six months after Britain’s momentous decision, we can say two things. The first is that ‘Brexit’, thus far, has not damaged Irish people’s immediate economic confidence. Most Irish people think the Irish economy will remain the same or will improve in the coming twelve months and most classify it as ‘good’ currently. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the Euroscepticism of Ireland’s near neighbour Britain, has not taken hold in Ireland. Two thirds of Irish people say they do not believe Ireland would do better outside the EU, meaning there is solid support for Ireland’s continuing membership of the Union. Putting this together, the effects of ‘Brexit’ on public opinion seem to be muted thus far. However, we need to recognise that Britian’s withdrawal will not take place for at least two more years, and the effects of ‘Brexit’ will take even longer to become obvious. Given the challenges that this poses for Ireland, there is a need for careful monitoring of Irish attitudes to the EU as this plays out.
## APPENDIX

**Table A1** Logit model exploring the determinants images of the European Union in Ireland

**Dependent variable:** Positive versus non-positive image of EU among Irish respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tend to distrust the European Union</td>
<td>-1.9640***</td>
<td>(0.1702)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations of the Irish economy (bad to good)</td>
<td>0.5429***</td>
<td>(0.1332)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished education at age (ref: age 15 or less)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 16-19</td>
<td>0.7610**</td>
<td>(0.2576)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 20 +</td>
<td>1.0158***</td>
<td>(0.2850)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still studying</td>
<td>0.7776</td>
<td>(0.4840)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class (ref: Upper/middle class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>-0.0345</td>
<td>(0.1919)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td>-0.5275*</td>
<td>(0.2578)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (ref: age 60+)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-29</td>
<td>-0.2186</td>
<td>(0.3424)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>0.0868</td>
<td>(0.2354)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-59</td>
<td>-0.2037</td>
<td>(0.2265)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political knowledge</td>
<td>0.2807**</td>
<td>(0.0920)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.2321</td>
<td>(0.1678)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.4810**</td>
<td>(0.5183)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Log-likelihood = 451.45993  
N = 846

Pseudo $R^2 = 0.223$

*Source of data: EB86*