



Reflecting Ireland

Looking forward to 2024

An insight into consumer behavioural change in Ireland

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Executive summary

A year on and many of the same concerns, hopes and priorities remain for people in Ireland. The public mood appears more positive than last year, when we faced a winter of rising energy prices and global uncertainty. The perceived risk of a recession has also reduced and a majority expect to get by financially, even if it is a squeeze. Concerns about our healthcare system are top of mind, perhaps contributing to a growing sense for some that Ireland is becoming a worse place to grow old in.

Many of our hopes and priorities remain consistent. A healthy lifestyle is a priority for most this year but fewer people are focused on losing weight – are we shifting how we think about our health?

Life in Ireland

- 72% of us agree that Ireland is a good place to grow up in – down by 2% versus last year. Over half (56%) feel Ireland is a good country to grow old in – down from 61% in 2022.
- Our natural environment, welcoming nature and cultural strengths are cited as the best things about living in Ireland.
- Our healthcare system, crime situation and political system are seen as the worst things about living in Ireland.
- There are increased concerns about the standard of policing versus last year, particularly among older age groups.

Managing our finances in 2024

- Just under half (46%) of people expect there will be a recession this year. Though sizeable, it is significantly less than those who said the same last year (67%).
- The majority expect to get by in managing their day-to-day finances and are prepared to reduce their spending to combat the cost-of-living crisis.
- Most plan to reduce discretionary spending across all categories this year – particularly those in the ‘squeezed middle’.
- The majority plan on saving this year, with preparing for a ‘rainy day’ cited as the main motivation, followed by holidays and home improvements.

What will motivate us in 2024?

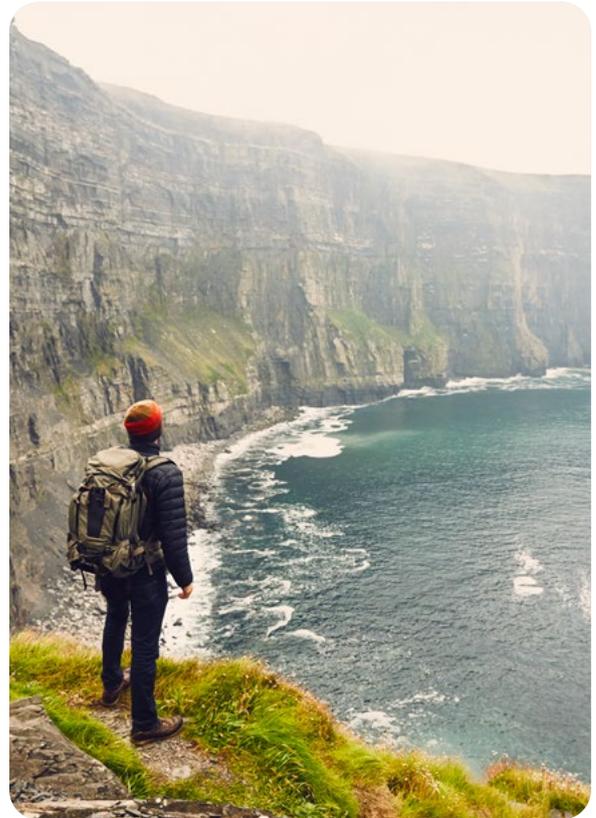
- The top personal goals for Irish people remain consistent with last year’s findings, with most aiming to sort their finances out and get fitter and healthier.
- Fewer people plan on losing weight and getting fitter versus last year, while more plan on being more environmentally friendly.
- Deepening relationships with friends and family is a main motivator for Irish people into 2024, though slightly less so than last year.

The public mood in 2024

- Nearly half of us (47%) expect the national economic situation to deteriorate over the next 12 months. Only 16% believe it will improve.
- From a personal perspective, over half (54%) say they are worse off compared to this time last year. Looking a year ahead, 37% expect to be worse off while 23% hold a positive view.
- The cost-of-living crisis remains the dominant concern for Irish people with anxiety the most reported emotion when considering life in Ireland in 2024.

For most, Ireland is a good place to grow up and grow old

Overall, 7 in 10 (72%) agree Ireland is a good country to grow up in. Fewer, though a majority (56%) believe it is a good place to grow old in, a decline of 5% since this time last year. Those aged 35-54 are the most downbeat about growing older in Ireland.



Older adults (55+) are most likely to say Ireland is a good country to grow up in (79%) and grow old in (63%). Those aged 18 to 24 are least likely to agree Ireland is a good country to grow up in (57%).

| Age group | Ireland is a good country to grow up in | Ireland is a good country to grow old in |
|----------------|---|--|
| 18-24 | 57% | 60% |
| 25-34 | 75% | 60% |
| 35-44 | 63% | 46% |
| 45-54 | 71% | 55% |
| 55+ | 79% | 63% |
| Average | 72% | 56% |

Our personal mood as we move into 2024

Thinking ahead, more of us are feeling positive about living in Ireland as we think about the year ahead (44%) compared to this time last year (39%). While most of us feel downbeat (56%) this represents a decline versus last year (61%). The two dominant emotions reported are anxiety and optimism. Optimism remains unchanged vs. last year at 18%, while anxiety has declined from 28% last year to 22% this year.

How do we feel about life in Ireland in 2024?





Fewer people expect a recession compared to last year

This time last year two thirds of us (67%) anticipated a recession in 2023. In late October/early November we are less downbeat with 46% expecting a recession in 2024, a decline of over 20% vs. a year ago.

Expect a recession in coming year

67%



2022 → 2023

46%



2023 → 2024

Note: this was before recent announcements by the European Commission and the OECD predicting Ireland would fall into recession this year.

There has been a significant decline in those that expect the economy to worsen over the coming year from 63% last year to 47% this year. There has been a corresponding increase in those that expect the economy to perform the same or improve over the coming year from 32% last year to 48% this year.

This trend is reflected in how we view our personal financial circumstances

There has been a decline in those that feel financially worse off compared to a year ago. This time last year 63% felt worse off; this has declined to 54%. There has been a corresponding increase in those that feel better off than a year ago, from 11% last year to 17% this year.



**At the end of 2022, 63% felt worse off compared to the previous year.
At the end of 2023, that has declined to 54%.**

Gap between those that expect to feel worse off versus better off has halved in a year

Looking ahead to 2024, almost 1 in 4 (23%) expect to be financially better off a year from now, up from 18% this time last year, while 37% expect to be worse off, down from 47% last year.

Squeezed middle buck trend with more negative outlook



Those aged 45-54 are the most likely to feel personally worse off vs. last year and to expect to feel worse off this year. They are also the most downbeat about the performance of the economy in the year ahead. This impacts their assessment of their situation and their plans for the coming year.

| % agree | Average | 45-54 |
|---|---------|-------|
| Feel financially worse off vs. last year | 54% | 63% |
| Expect to feel financially worse off over next year | 37% | 48% |
| Expect economic situation to get worse over next year | 47% | 52% |

This group are the least likely to feel confident about managing their day-to-day finances (45% vs 57% average) or to expect to have money left over at the end of the month (35% vs 42% average). They are also the most likely to say they expect to just get by financially (64% vs 61% average).

Cutting back to manage the cost of living impact

Those aged 45-54 are the most likely to say they will cut back on both essentials and discretionary spend in 2024. They are also the least likely to plan an investment in retrofitting (**12% vs. 18% average**) or buying a new hybrid or electric vehicle (**11% vs. 17% average**).

This group are the least likely to say they plan to look after their health and wellbeing by socialising with friends in 2024 (23% vs 35% average). Those that save are most likely to be saving for a 'rainy day' (60% vs 50% average) and the least likely to be saving for a holiday (31% vs 39% average).

60%

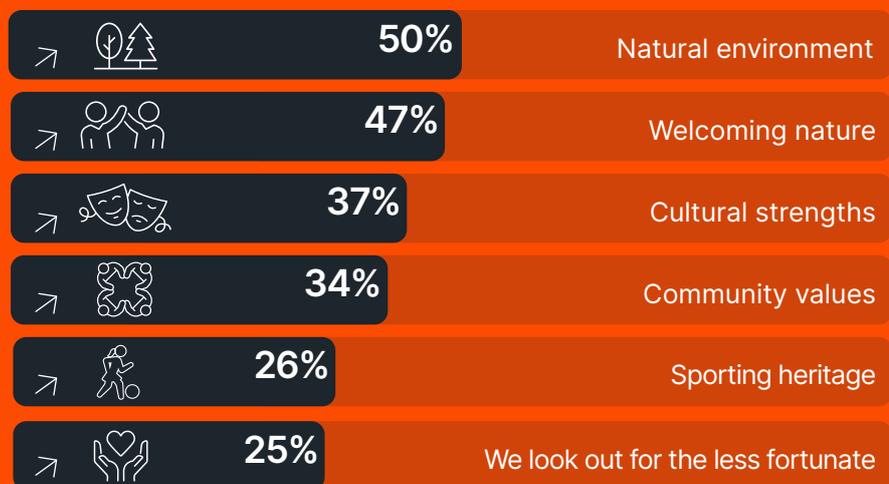
6 in 10 of those in the **Squeezed Middle** are saving for a "rainy day" versus half of the general population.

Appreciation for our natural beauty translating into climate action



Our natural environment is seen as the best thing about living in Ireland, followed by our welcoming nature, cultural strengths, community values, sporting heritage and our tendency to look out for the less fortunate. The top 6 are the same as last year, however our natural environment ranks first this year, up from second place last year.

Top 6 best things about living in Ireland



There is greater ambition to act to protect our environment

There is evidence of more intention to act to protect our environment this year than was the case a year ago. Almost 3 in 4 (73%) see climate change as an issue that will be personally important to them in 2024, particularly women and those over 45.

More people also resolve to be more environmentally friendly this year. It ranks 8th among planned New Year Resolutions for 2024, compared to 13th a year ago. Almost 6 in 10 (57%) say they intend to do more to reduce their carbon footprint in 2024.

Increase in those who intend to recycle more in coming year

6 in 10



2022 → 2023

7 in 10



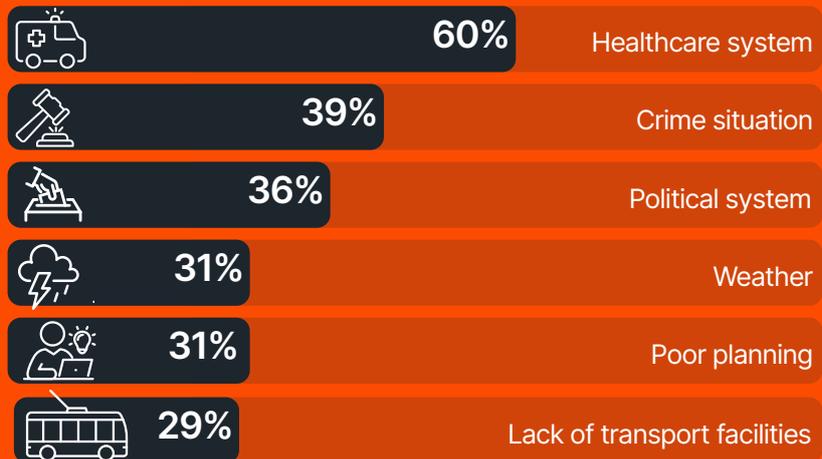
2023 → 2024

Healthcare system remains worst thing about living in Ireland

The healthcare system is regarded as one of the worst things about living in Ireland by 60% of us. This is followed by crime, the political system, weather, poor planning and transport facilities. The top six are the same as last year, with a slight increase in concern about weather and transport facilities and a reduced focus on poor planning.



Top 6 worst things about living in Ireland



Healthcare also the issue of most importance to us

As it was last year, the standard of healthcare is the most important issue to us personally moving into 2024. It is followed by policing and the level of pensions, all of which become more important with age.

| Age group | Standard of healthcare | Standard of policing | Level of pensions |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 18-24 | 63% | 27% | 30% |
| 25-34 | 74% | 40% | 34% |
| 35-44 | 76% | 39% | 35% |
| 45-54 | 72% | 42% | 44% |
| 55+ | 80% | 54% | 56% |
| Average | 75% | 44% | 43% |

Other important issues include the standard of education (43%), transport infrastructure (39%), climate change (38%), availability of housing (38%) and level of available social welfare benefits (36%).

The standard of healthcare is particularly concerning for women

Four in ten women (40%) regard the standard of healthcare as the single most important issue for them personally compared to 3 in 10 men (29%).

Taking a measure of our financial health going into 2024



Almost 6 in 10 (57%) feel confident about managing day-to-day finances over the coming year, with those aged 55+ the most confident (66%). Those aged between 35 and 54 are the least confident.

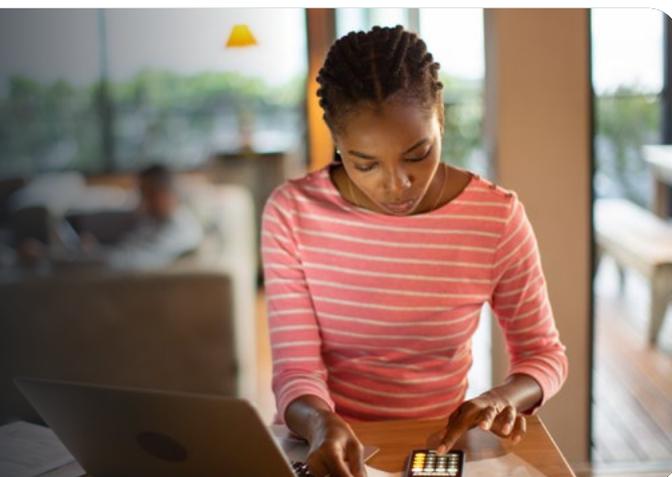
| Age group | Confident | Not confident |
|----------------|------------|---------------|
| 18-24 | 46% | 22% |
| 25-34 | 62% | 20% |
| 35-44 | 53% | 28% |
| 45-54 | 45% | 25% |
| 55+ | 66% | 16% |
| Average | 57% | 21% |

More feel like they will 'just get by' than be comfortable

Approximately 4 in 10 expect to have money left over at the end of the month (42%) or will be able to handle a major unexpected expense (41%). However almost as many disagree, 39% in each case. Most (61%) expect to just get by financially and 56% expect finances to control their lives.

| 4 in 10 expect to feel financially comfortable | | 6 in 10 expect to just get by financially | |
|--|-----|---|-----|
| I expect to have money left over at the end of the month | 42% | I expect to just get by financially | 61% |
| I expect I will be able to handle a major unexpected expense | 41% | I expect my finances will control my life | 56% |

Most expect to be able to save in 2024



Seven in ten (71%) expect to be able to save either regularly or when there is money to spare in 2024. Those under 35 are most likely to save. Almost 1 in 4 (24%) feel they will not save in 2024. Intention to save over the coming year is higher among the under 35s and gradually declines with age. Those aged 55+ are twice as likely as those under 35 to say they won't save in 2024.

Will save

| | |
|---------|-----|
| 18-24 | 78% |
| 25-34 | 84% |
| 35-44 | 70% |
| 45-54 | 67% |
| 55+ | 62% |
| Average | 71% |

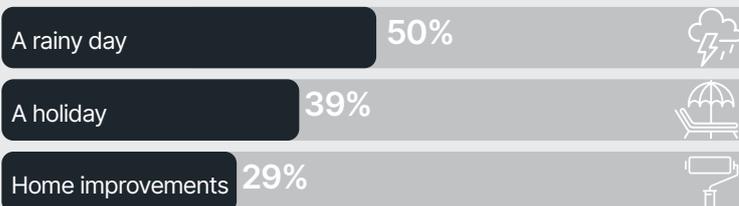
Won't save

| | |
|---------|-----|
| 18-24 | 12% |
| 25-34 | 14% |
| 35-44 | 24% |
| 45-54 | 28% |
| 55+ | 31% |
| Average | 24% |

Saving for a 'Rainy Day'

Our main motivation to save, as last year, is for a 'rainy day'. One in two of us do so, ahead of saving for a holiday (39%), home improvements (29%), a new car (21%) or a new home (16%). Those most likely to save for a 'rainy day' are aged 45-54 (60%) while younger age groups are least likely to (40% of those aged 25-34). Compared to last year fewer people are saving for a new car (21% vs. 27%) and more are saving for home improvements (29% vs. 22%).

Top reasons to save



We're cutting back in response to the cost of living



We have become accustomed to dealing with the cost of living challenge, with the issue very much still top of mind. Seven in ten (71%) are committed to cutting back on essential items in 2024 if the cost of living continues to increase, up from 66% this time last year. Those aged 45 to 54 are most likely to cut back, both on essentials and discretionary spend.

Cutting back on the essentials

Energy **60%**

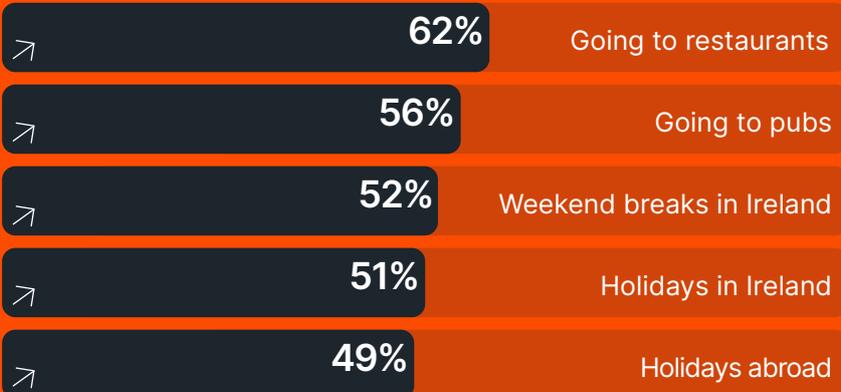
Weekly groceries **53%**

Reducing our discretionary spend

Most are prepared to curb discretionary spend, particularly on clothing. We are also prepared to cut back on eating and drinking out, entertainment and holidays, which doesn't bode well for the domestic hospitality industry.

The number one area of discretionary spend we are prepared to cut back on is clothing. Almost 7 in 10 (68%) plan to cut back, up from 62% this time last year. Most are also prepared to cut back on going out and going on holidays.

Hospitality most at risk of reduced consumer spending



Over 4 in 10 (42%) intend to cut spend on entertaining at home, however 1 in 5 (19%) intend to increase spend here, perhaps to compensate for not going out as much.



Older adults see benefit of Budget 2024 more than younger peers

Now that the dust has settled after Budget 2024, overall a third (34%) believe they will benefit financially from it. Over a quarter (28%) believe they will lose out either a lot or at least to some degree, and 4 in 10 (39%) believe their financial situation will not change as a result.

Older adults are more likely to feel they will benefit from measures announced in Budget 2024. Almost 1 in 2 of those aged 55+ feel they will benefit to some degree from changes announced, more than twice those aged under 35 that feel this way. Younger adults are more likely to feel they will lose out to some degree at 43% for under-35s compared to 16% of those 55+.





The views of the nation – referendum, sanctions, Israel-Gaza, AI

More than half of us believe it is important to address the role of women in the home

More than half (55%) believe it is important to remove the reference to women's duties in the home from the constitution, particularly those aged 25-34 (62%). This was before the Government's recent announcement that a referendum will be held on March 8th next on the role of women in the home and the concept of family.

Most support Ireland's official response to the current conflict in Israel / Gaza

More believe Ireland's official response to the Israel / Gaza conflict has been fair and balanced to date (42%) than disagree (17%).

There is support for European sanctions against Russia and European support for Ukrainian refugees

Half of us (49%) feel European sanctions against Russia are still worth it even if it means higher energy prices in 2024, but 1 in 5 disagree (23%). This is virtually unchanged since a year ago.

Half support sanctions against Russia even if it means higher energy prices



Four in ten (42%) feel we should continue to support EU policy on supporting refugees from Ukraine in 2024, more than those that disagree (33%). This represents a reduction of 7% in those that support this policy vs. a year ago.

We have mixed views on what AI means for us

There is a split opinion on the nature of Artificial Intelligence and what it holds for the future with 1 in 4 believing that AI poses both an opportunity and a threat – similarly 1 in 4 believe that AI is neither an opportunity nor a threat. Almost 1 in 5 (18%) see it as an opportunity, but almost twice as many (34%) see it as a threat.

People are nearly twice as likely to see AI as a threat than opportunity



Our motivations and resolutions as we move into the New Year

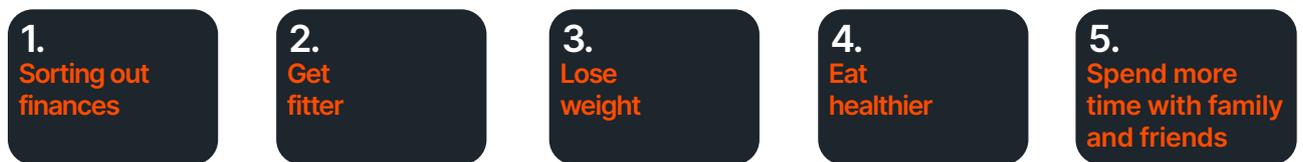


Celebrating with friends and family is what will motivate us most in 2024, particularly for those aged 35 and older. The top three new year motivations remain unchanged from last year, although the opportunity to travel features more strongly this year (+5%). Celebrating with friends and family is the top motivator for all apart from those aged 18 to 24, for whom it ranks 3rd after career progression and the opportunity to travel.



Our top resolutions in 2024

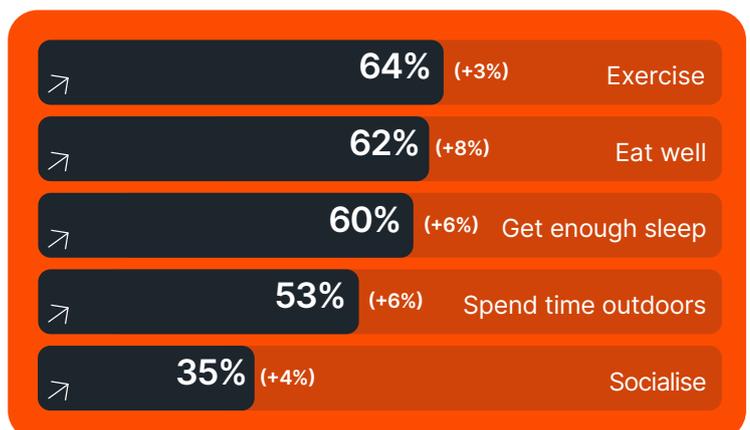
Perhaps related to the rising cost of living, sorting out our finances leads the way in the top five resolutions going into 2024. The remaining four are health-related.



Taking action on health

Our commitment to health and wellbeing has increased since last year, with more of us planning to take steps to look after our everyday health and wellbeing in the New Year than a year ago.

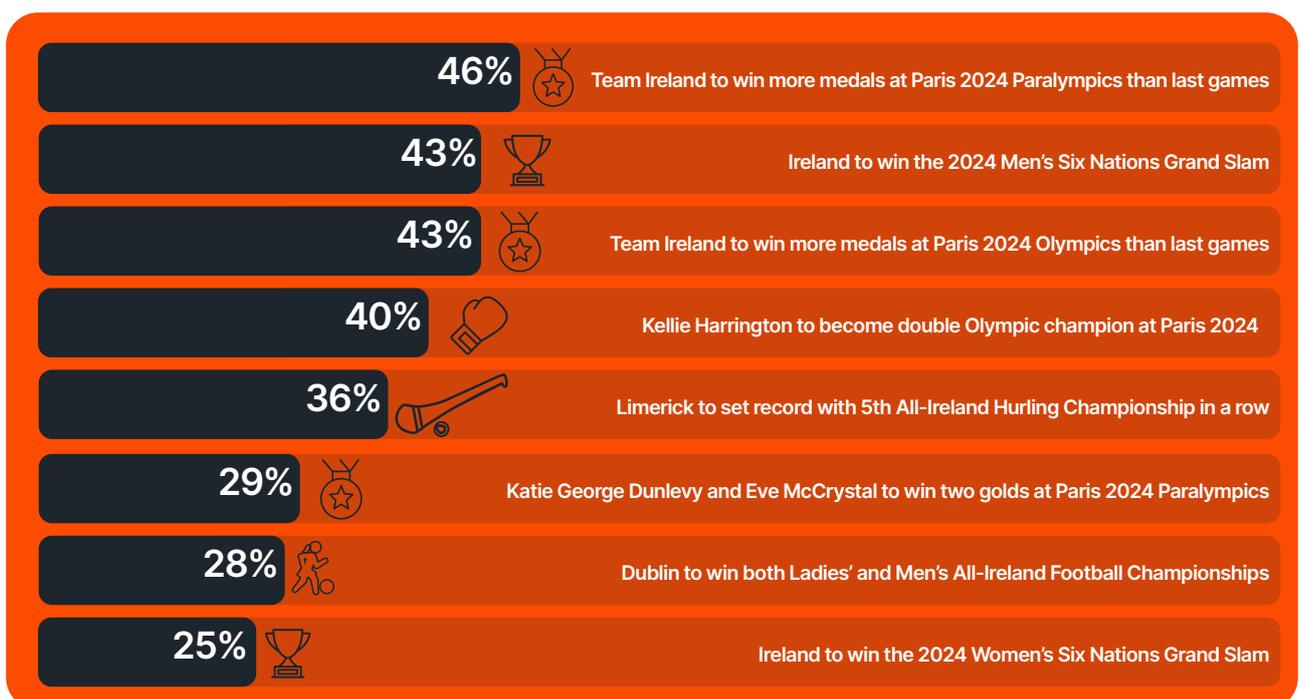
More of us also plan to cut our spending on less healthy food and drink than was the case a year ago. In total, 67% say they will cut back on sweets and soft drinks (up 3%), 64% of those that smoke will cut back on cigarettes (up 8%) and 53% on alcohol (up 5%).





How we see Irish teams and athletes performing in 2024

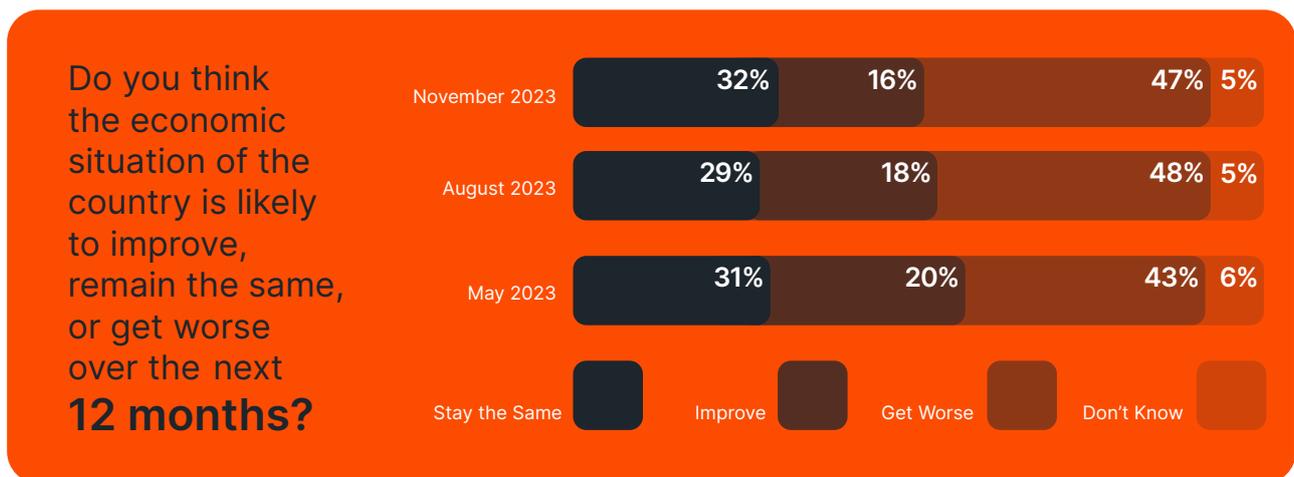
Dominated by the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the sporting horizon is in no short supply of major competition. Ireland has a chance to put their Rugby World Cup disappointment to bed as they take on the Six Nations, while at home there are records to be set as Limerick seeks to retain the Liam McCarthy Cup for a record fifth consecutive occasion.



Our view on the Irish economy

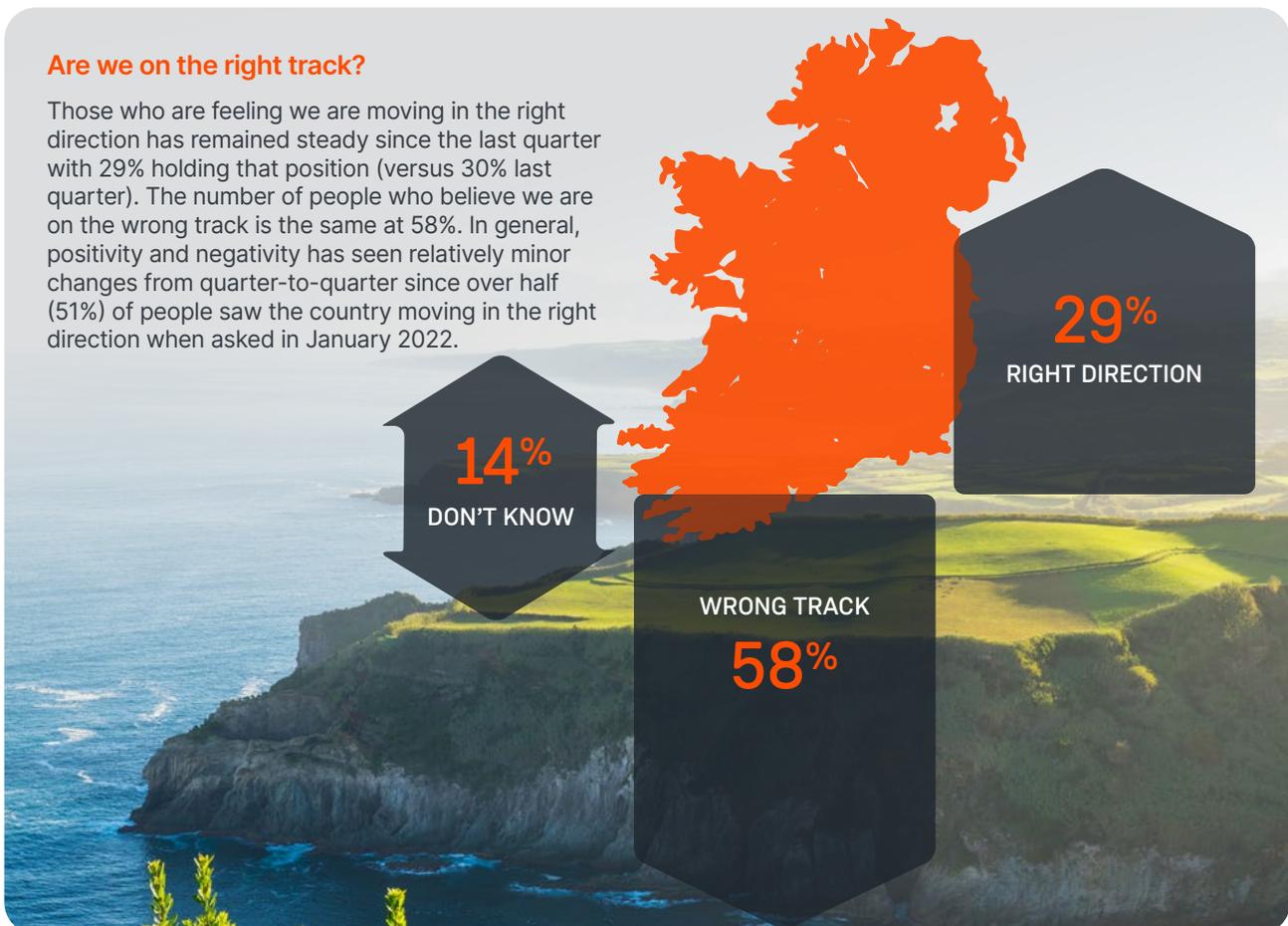
Nearly half of us expect the economy will get worse over coming year

People in Ireland remain concerned about how the economy will develop in 2024. As with the last report, nearly half (47%) of people believe it will get worse. A third (32%) believe it will stay the same, while those taking an optimistic view are very much in the minority; fewer than a fifth (16%) expect the economy will improve.



Are we on the right track?

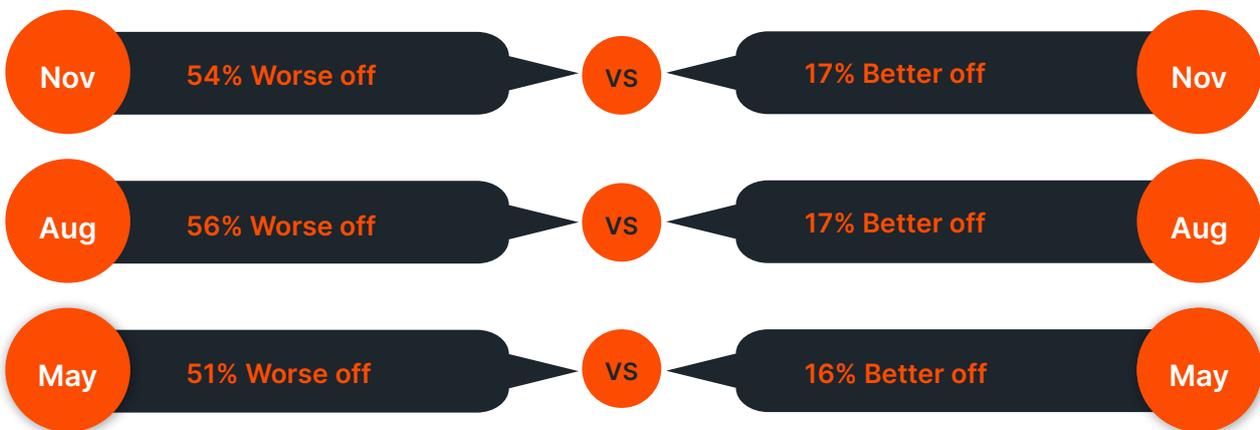
Those who are feeling we are moving in the right direction has remained steady since the last quarter with 29% holding that position (versus 30% last quarter). The number of people who believe we are on the wrong track is the same at 58%. In general, positivity and negativity has seen relatively minor changes from quarter-to-quarter since over half (51%) of people saw the country moving in the right direction when asked in January 2022.



How we describe our personal finances

Are we doing better than a year ago?

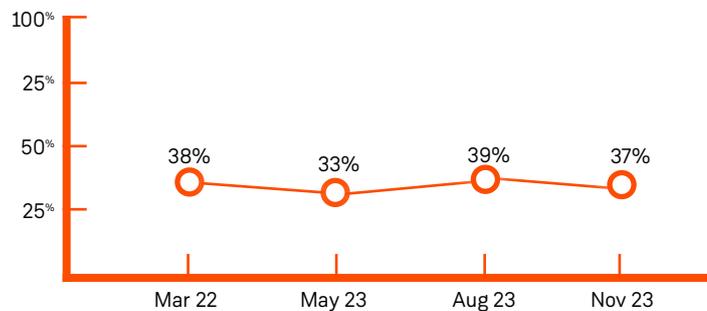
The number of people who say they are worse off compared to 12 months ago has decreased. Now, 54% of people say their personal finances have suffered since last year, a reduction on the 56% we saw in the last quarter. Those who say they are in a better situation remains below one in five (17%), a figure that has remained broadly unchanged since May.



Where do we see ourselves in 12 months?

Perhaps encouragingly, there has been a reduction in how many people expect to be worse off at this time next year. In total, 37% of people expect to be personally worse off next year vs. 39% in our last report. Just under a quarter (23%) expect to be better off over the coming year.

Expect to be worse off in 12 months

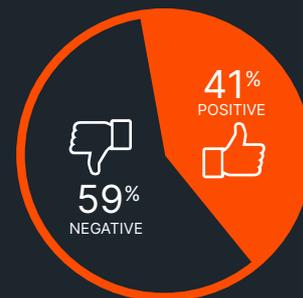


What do we feel about living in Ireland today?

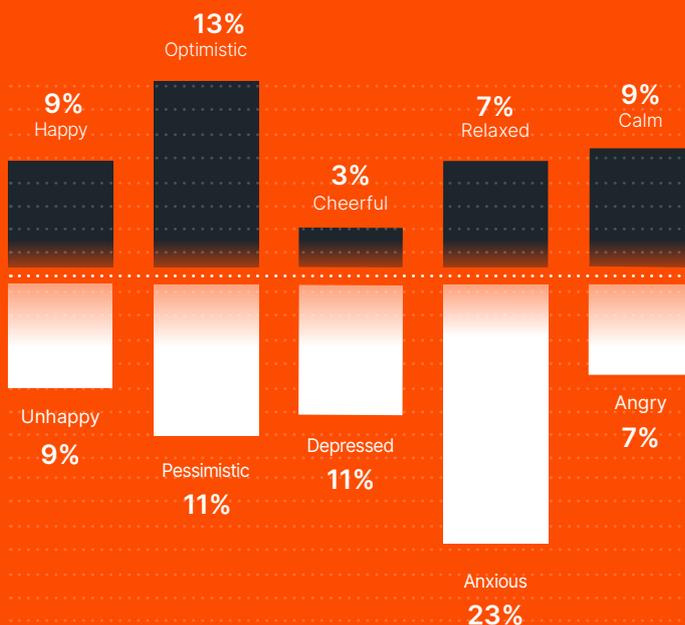
Across the board, there has been very little change since the last quarter in how people report their primary mood about living in Ireland nowadays. In keeping with the prevailing trend, anxiety (23%) is still the dominant emotion felt by people in Ireland today. Optimism (13%) is second – the only positive emotion in double figures – while pessimism appears in third place.

Overall, women (28%) are more likely to report anxiety than men (17%). In general, men feel more positive (46%) than women (37%).

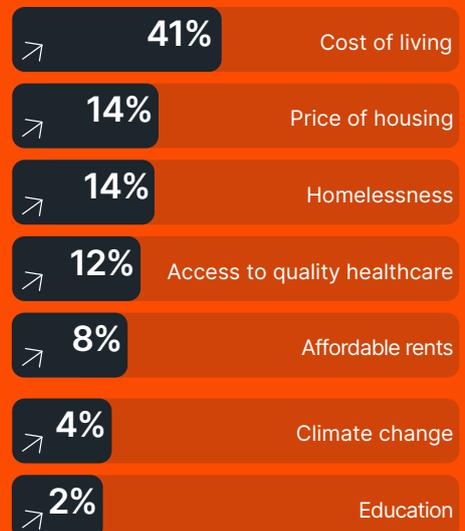
How do we feel?



Nation's Emotions



Top 7 most important issues to be addressed



Reflecting the Nation

A regional view of the “women in the home” referendum and financial plans for 2024

Looking ahead to our financial plans this year, we can see that those living in Dublin are more likely to be saving for a mortgage deposit (21% versus national average of 14%). People in Munster are more likely to expect to cut back on cigarettes (71% among those that smoke versus national average of 64%). Residents of Connacht and Ulster are also less likely to consider the “women in the home” referendum to be personally important (47% versus national average of 57%).



Methodology

In the eleventh edition of Reflecting Ireland, we take a look at what people in Ireland are expecting from 2024.

Survey information

- An online survey was conducted of 1,000 people in the Republic of Ireland
- Sample was nationally representative of the population based on gender, age, social class and region
- Fieldwork was carried out between October 26th and November 3rd, 2023
- Data weighted to reflect the adult population aged 18+
- The margin of error for this research is +/- 3%

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