

Climate Change in the Irish Mind (Wave 2)

Insight Report No. 1: Life stages



Introduction

The ‘Climate Change in the Irish Mind’ study (CCIM) is a nationally representative study of the Irish people’s beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences and behaviours regarding climate change.

This work was undertaken by the EPA and the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in support of the National Dialogue on Climate Action.

The approach to the project is based on the established methodology of the “Climate Change in the American Mind” survey conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, which was tailored to meet Ireland’s particular socio-economic context. This is the first nationally-representative survey of its kind in Ireland.

These Insights Reports are based on the findings of the second wave of CCIM, which was carried out in 2023 (Wave 1 baseline survey of CCIM was undertaken in 2021, [CCIM Wave 2 Main Report link](#))

Methodology

CCIM Wave 2 fieldwork was conducted between the 30th of August and the 6th of October 2023 by the survey company Behaviour & Attitudes following a recognised industry standard. The survey was conducted with a representative sample of the Irish people, aged 18 years and over.

Survey respondents were recruited using a random digit dial sample of live Irish telephone numbers. A total of 22,862 numbers were contacted by telephone, about 80% of survey respondents were reached through mobile phone numbers and 20% through landline phone numbers.

A total of 1,355 interviews were completed (including 25 pilot interviews to test survey wording and timing), for a response rate of 5.9%*. All questionnaires were administered by call agents using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) software. The survey took, on average, 25 minutes to complete.

Gender, age, work status, and region quotas were used to ensure sample representativeness. Key demographic variables were also weighted, post-survey, to match Central Statistics Office norms.

*Wave 1 of CCIM (2021) used a sample size of (N = 4,000) to build the statistical model underlying the CCIM Climate Opinion Maps. Wave 2 of CCIM (2023) uses a sample size of (N = 1,330) for the Main Report but builds on the statistical model from Wave 1 for the mapping output which uses an effective sample of (N = 5,330). Please see the Methodology and FAQ pages of the Climate Opinion Maps for more details.

Topic Focus

The national survey questionnaire contained a series of topics and themes: Worry about climate change impacts or extreme weather; Beliefs; Risk Perceptions; Policy Support; Behaviours (consumer and political); Norms; Personal Experience of Climate Change; Media Sources; and Climate Literacy in the Irish public.

This report 'Climate Change in the Irish Mind – Life stage' concentrates on how life stage relates to the national responses on climate change beliefs and risk perceptions.

Key information areas covered in the climate change beliefs and risk perceptions topics include:

How much do you know about climate change; Do you think climate change is happening; Do you think it is... caused mostly by human activities; How worried are you about climate change; How important is the issue of climate change to you personally; How much do you think climate change will harm.... you/ your family/ community/ Ireland/ developing countries/ future generations; When do you think climate change will start to harm people in Ireland.

Summary of National Findings

In summary, key overall findings from CCIM Wave 2 (2023) for climate change beliefs and risk perceptions included:

- **Most people in Ireland say they know at least a moderate amount about climate change.**
- **Nearly all people in Ireland think climate change is happening.**
- **A majority of people in Ireland think climate change is mostly human caused.**
- **About eight in ten people in Ireland understand that most scientists think climate change is happening.**
- **A large majority of people in Ireland are worried about climate change.**
- **More than half of people in Ireland think people in Ireland are being harmed “right now” by climate change.**
- **Many people in Ireland think they will be harmed by climate change but think others will be harmed more.**

The following analysis focusses on the life stage differences exhibited in the responses to the topics of **Climate Change Beliefs** and **Risk Perceptions**.

Review of National Findings

To facilitate the analysis by life stage, the **responses from Wave 1 (2021) and Wave 2 (2023) for the life stage groups have been combined.**

The life stage groups for analysis are defined as follows:

- **Single -45:** Marital status – Single; Children – no dependent children; Age under 45 years
- **Single 45+:** Marital status – Single; Children – no dependent children; Age 45 years and over
- **Partnered, No Children:** Marital status – Married, Co-habiting; Children – no dependent children
- **Family Pre-School:** dependent children oldest aged 0-4 years
- **Family Pre-Teen:** dependent children oldest aged 5-12 years
- **Family Teen:** dependent children oldest aged 13-17 years.
- **Empty Nesters:** Marital status – Married, Co-habiting; Children – yes, not dependent under 18 years

Climate change beliefs and risk perceptions by life stage

The majority of people in Ireland think climate change is mostly human caused, and the strength of this perspective is typically consistent across the life stage groups. However, a worryingly large minority across all age groups (about 43%) do not understand the human caused nature of climate change.

This same pattern of uniformity by life stage is evident in the understanding that most scientists think climate change is happening.

In either case the exception is Singles age 45 years+ who are least likely to accept both anthropogenic climate change and a majority view among scientists.

	Total	Life stage						
		Single -45	Single 45+	Partnered No Children	Family Pre School	Family Pre Teen	Family Teen	Empty Nester
	5330	1032	701	484	479	645	396	1330
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<i>Climate change is...</i>								
Caused mostly by human activities	57	62	52	59	58	58	56	57
<i>Climate change beliefs</i>								
Most scientists think climate change is happening	81	82	75	84	85	82	82	81

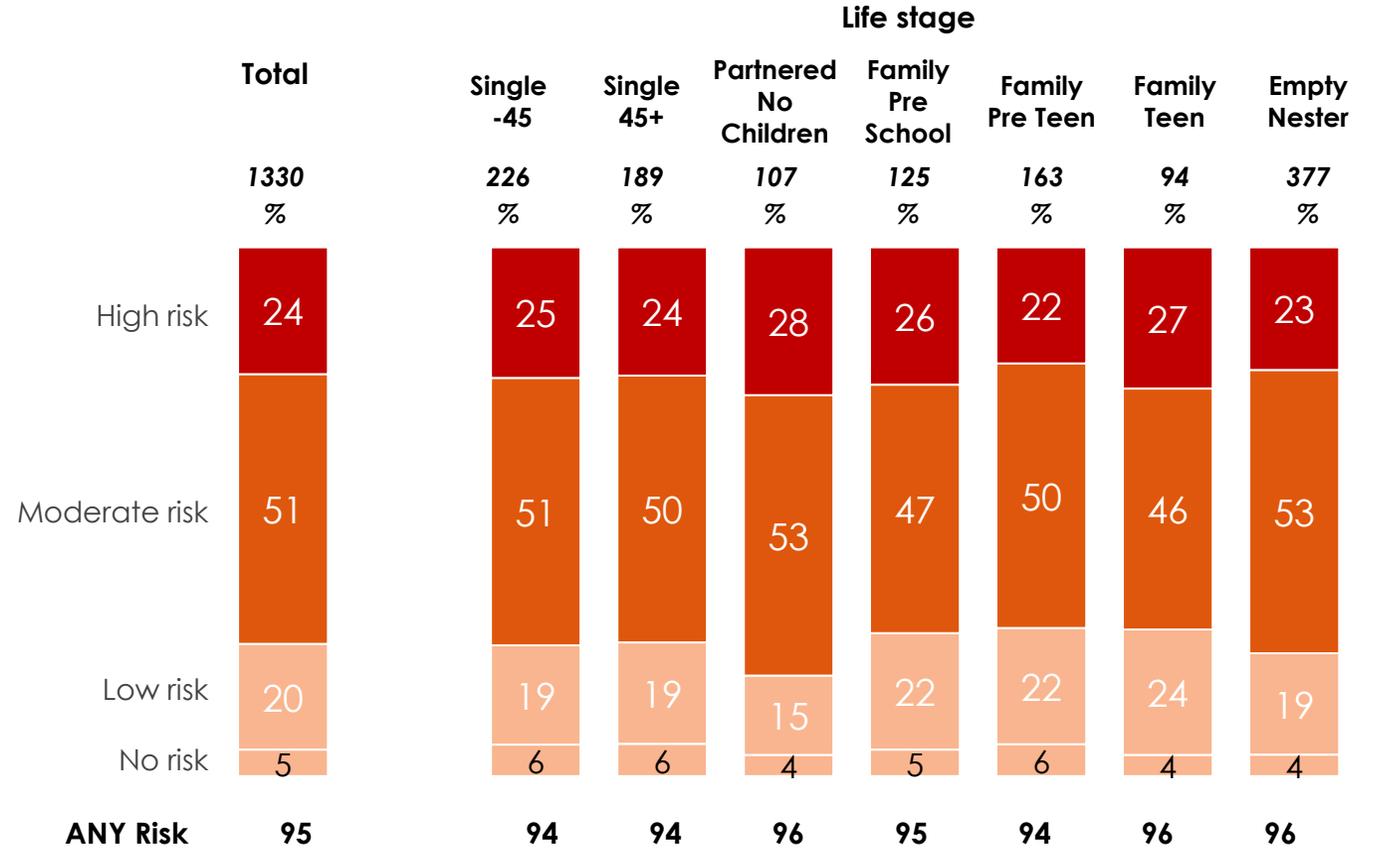
Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.8 & Q.9)
Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 5,330 (Wave 1 and Wave 2 combined)

Climate change beliefs and risk perceptions by life stage

The assessment of the risk posed by extreme weather to our communities also exhibits a high degree of consistency across the seven discrete life stage groups.

This consistency relates not only to the more general assessment of risk ('Any Risk' - aggregating the responses of *high* or *moderate* risk) but also to the respective incidences who believe there is a 'high risk'.

It is practically a universal view that extreme weather poses either a high or moderate risk over the next 10 years.



Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.2)
 Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 5,330 (Wave 1 and Wave 2 combined)

Climate change beliefs and risk perceptions by life stage

Across each life stage, a large majority are 'worried' about climate change. The consistency being particularly evident when we aggregate incidences of 'very' and 'somewhat' worried responses ('Any Worried').

The acuteness of concern does peak significantly among the two life stages associated with the youngest age profile: Single -45 years and the Partnered, No Children group. In contrast, Singles age 45 years+ again differentiate themselves through lower engagement.

When we review the personal importance attached to climate change, the respective incidences of 'extremely important' are particularly similar by life stage.

	Total	Life stage						
		Single -45	Single 45+	Partnered No Children	Family Pre School	Family Pre Teen	Family Teen	Empty Nester
	5330	1032	701	484	479	645	396	1330
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<i>How worried are you about climate change?</i>								
Very worried	36	40	30	41	39	32	34	35
ANY Worried	83	84	76	87	88	83	84	84
<i>How important is the issue of climate change to you personally?</i>								
Extremely Important	22	21	21	24	23	21	22	21
ANY Important	61	63	58	69	61	58	56	64

Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.11 & Q.12)
 Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 5,330 (Wave 1 and Wave 2 combined)

Climate change beliefs and risk perceptions by life stage

The total response shows that Irish people are much more likely to think that 'others' are at a much greater threat from climate change (e.g. 'people in developing countries' or 'future generations').

However, perceptions around 'at risk' groups do reveal variations by life stage in two respects.

Firstly, those in the Partnered, No Children group are distinctly more likely to think climate change will harm them personally (25% versus national total of 16%). Also, it is parents of preschool and preteen children who are significantly more likely to believe their families will be harmed 'a great deal'; although note that Empty Nesters are the most likely to think this will be the case.

'Climate change will harm ...a great deal'	Total	Life stage						
		Single -45	Single 45+	Partnered No Children	Family Pre School	Family Pre Teen	Family Teen	Empty Nester
	5330	1032	701	484	479	645	396	1330
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<i>How much do you think climate change will harm...?</i>								
You personally	16	18	11	25	19	16	13	12
Your Family	33	22	32	36	38	38	32	39
People in your community	26	24	26	29	24	29	25	28
People in Ireland	33	31	32	36	33	37	33	34
People in developing countries	81	81	81	84	77	80	81	84
Future generations	84	88	80	86	83	83	82	84
Plant and animal species	76	83	67	82	75	78	77	74
The Irish way of life	33	31	31	39	30	35	29	33
Irish historic sites	25	27	22	26	25	25	24	22
None	9	7	12	6	12	11	10	8
Average	45	45	42	49	45	47	44	45

Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.13)
Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 5,330 (Wave 1 and Wave 2 combined)

Climate change beliefs and risk perceptions by life stage

That people in Ireland are being harmed 'right now' by climate change is a further sentiment which shows only partial variation across life stage.

Albeit we note that those in the Partnered, No Children group are significantly more likely to feel 'they are being harmed now' (57%) – entirely consistent with this group's stronger belief that climate change will harm them personally.

Interestingly, the attitude of the Partnered, No Children group is most separate from Singles age -45 years; noteworthy as these two groups have a similar age profile.

These results prompt further research questions on how relationship status is related to climate risk status.

They are being harmed now

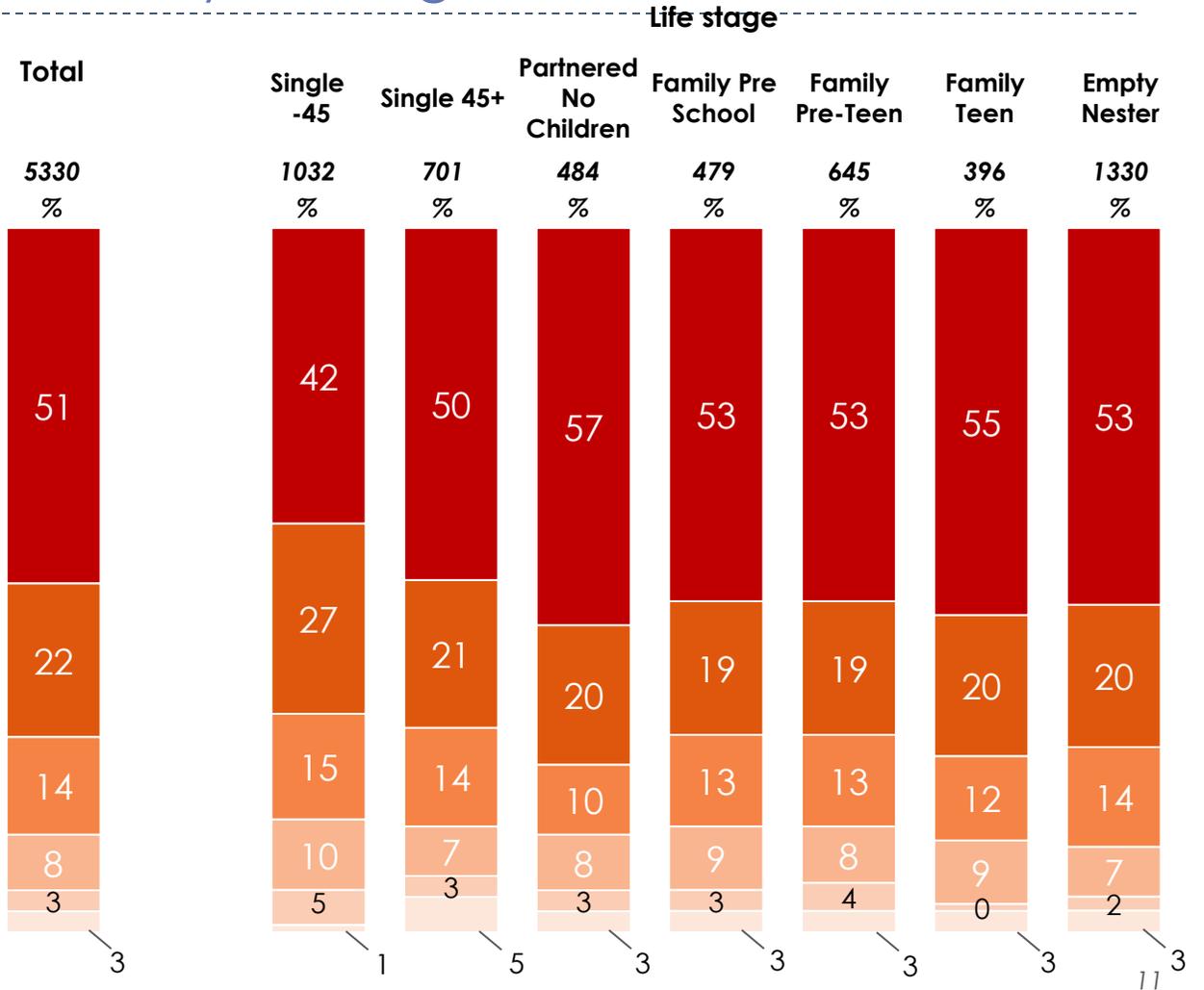
In 10 years

In 25 years

In 50 years

In 100 years

Never



Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.14)
Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 5,330 (Wave 1 and Wave 2 combined)

Key Learnings

This report examined how climate change beliefs and risk perceptions varied by life stage. Individuals at different stages of life typically have distinct priorities, experiences, responsibilities, and social contexts that shape their perceptions and concerns.

Across multiple measures of climate change beliefs and risk perceptions, the responses across life stage are typically consistent. For example, belief in anthropogenic climate change and the assessment of the risk of extreme weather are uniform by life stage.

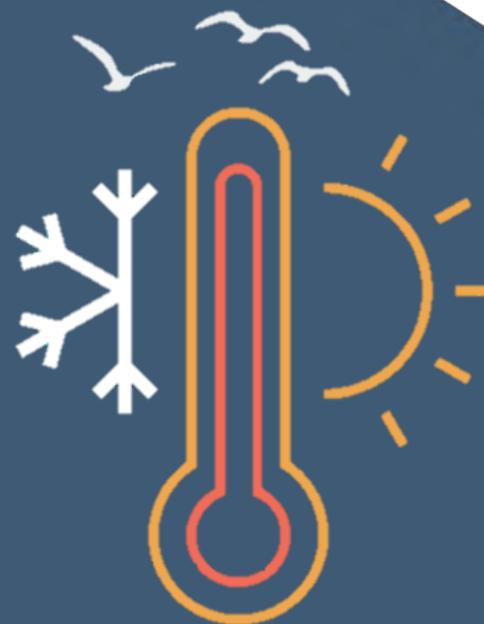
The two life stages most likely to differ from national norms are the 'Partnered, No Children' group and Singles age 45 years+. While 'Partnered, No Children' are more likely to think climate change will harm them personally, and to feel they are being harmed 'now', Singles age 45 years+ exhibit a pattern of lower engagement around climate change.

This report indicates that the universal and pressing nature of climate change, likely coupled with widespread education and media coverage, creates a shared understanding of its risks across life stage.

That there are few differences in climate change attitudes, beliefs, or risk perceptions across life stages is encouraging as it likely reflects a growing, collective recognition of the importance of climate change. This reduces generational divides and creates opportunities for unified, long-term solutions.

Climate Change in the Irish Mind

(Wave 2) Insight Report No. 1: Life stages



CCIM Insights Reports are based on the findings of the main CCIM study Wave 2, which was carried out in 2023. [The study homepage can be accessed Here](#)