

Climate Change in the Irish Mind

Wave 1: Insight Report No.2 Climate Risk Perceptions



Introduction

The ‘Climate Change in the Irish Mind’ project is a baseline 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.

Methodology

The fieldwork was conducted during 24th May to 29th July 2021 by the survey company Behaviours & 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 84,961 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 4,030 interviews were completed (including 30 pilot interviews to test survey wording and timing), for a response rate of 5%. 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.

Topic Focus

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

This report ‘Climate Change in the Irish Mind – Climate Risk Perceptions’ concentrates exclusively on the national responses in relation to the topic of **Risk Perceptions**.

Key information areas covered in the Risk Perceptions topic included: *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.*

In summary, key overall findings for the Risk Perceptions topic included:

- ***More than four in ten 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***

More than four in ten people in Ireland think people in Ireland are being harmed “right now” by climate change *

A large majority of people (85%) in Ireland are worried about climate change, including 37% who describe themselves as “very worried”.

47% of people in Ireland think that people in Ireland are being harmed “right now” by climate change, and 22% think that it will start to harm people in Ireland in the next 10 years.

- In contrast, few people (2%) think climate change will never harm people in Ireland or will harm them only in the distant future (“in 100 years”, 4%; “in 50 years”, 9%).

More Irish people think climate change will harm others more than it will harm them personally.

- Nearly all Irish people think that either future generations of people (95%), people in developing countries (94%), and plant and animal species (94%) will be harmed “a great deal” or “a moderate amount” by climate change.
- While 63% of people in Ireland think they themselves will be harmed by climate change, only 16% think climate change will harm them “a great deal”.
- About eight in ten (82%) think people in Ireland will be harmed, and seven in ten (76%) or more think their family, people in their community (75%), and the Irish way of life (72%) will be harmed. Two in three think Irish historic sites (66%) will be harmed.

The following analysis focusses on the demographic differences exhibited in the responses to the topic of **Risk Perceptions**.

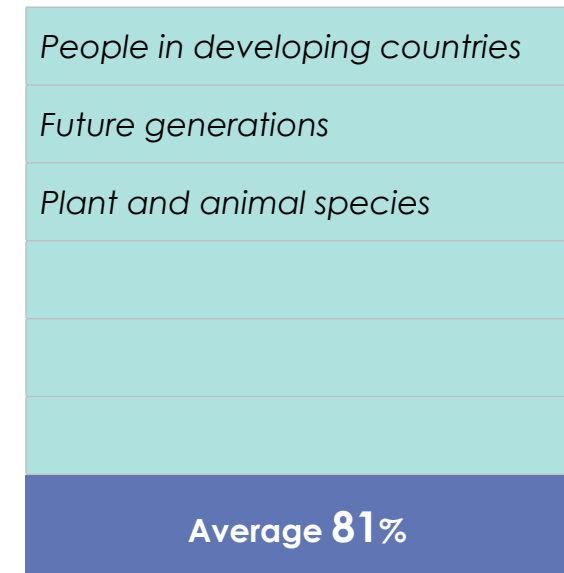
We think ‘other’s’ will be harmed more by Climate Change

‘Climate Change will harm.... a great deal’

‘Us’



‘Others’



53% (GAP)

57% 18-24 yrs	51% 50-64 yrs
53% 25-34 yrs	53% 65 yrs+
54% 35-49 yrs	

The extent to which we feel ‘others’ are at a much greater threat from climate change is clearly evident in the national responses.

This **gap** between the projected harmful effect on ‘us’ versus ‘others’ is also highly consistent by age.

Risk perceptions vary by age

The key demographic pattern in the responses to risk perceptions relates to age.

The youngest adults (18-24 years) consistently exhibit significantly higher levels of concern and risks perceptions.

This attitudinal difference is even significantly evident between the two youngest age groups (much higher 18-24 years vs 25-34 years).

	Total	Age				
		18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+
	4,000	459	701	1,193	1,037	610
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very worried about climate change	37	47	39	36	34	35
<i>Climate change will harm a great deal:</i>						
You personally	16	23	22	15	14	12
Your family	33	25	28	32	37	38
People in your community	27	27	25	25	28	29
People in Ireland	33	38	31	30	34	34
People in developing countries	81	86	78	80	80	84
Future generations	85	89	84	83	84	85
Plant and animal species	77	86	79	76	74	72
The Irish way of life	31	35	31	29	32	31
Irish historic sites	25	35	26	23	23	22

Young women drive youthful concern

When we review the responses specifically by these youngest adults, a further demographic pattern emerges.

The higher level of concern is not consistent across this age group – rather it varies significantly by gender.

It is young women who are disproportionately concerned about climate change.

In contrast young men typically conform to the national average.

	Total	Gender X Age	
		18-24 Male	18-24 Female
	4,000	237	222
	%	%	%
Very worried about climate change	37	36	59
Climate change will harm a great deal :			
You personally	16	19	26
Your family	33	21	29
People in your community	27	22	31
People in Ireland	33	35	41
People in developing countries	81	85	88
Future generations	85	85	93
Plant and animal species	77	80	92
The Irish way of life	31	33	37
Irish historic sites	25	32	37

Is the threat immediate?

It is noteworthy where young adult concern is less evident.

An example is in relation to ‘**your family**’:

- Here high concern is significantly lower among the younger age groups; and peaks amongst those 50 years plus
- While on one level this may be no surprise, it may also be suggestive that the youngest age group are hesitant to see the threat as short-term/immediate.

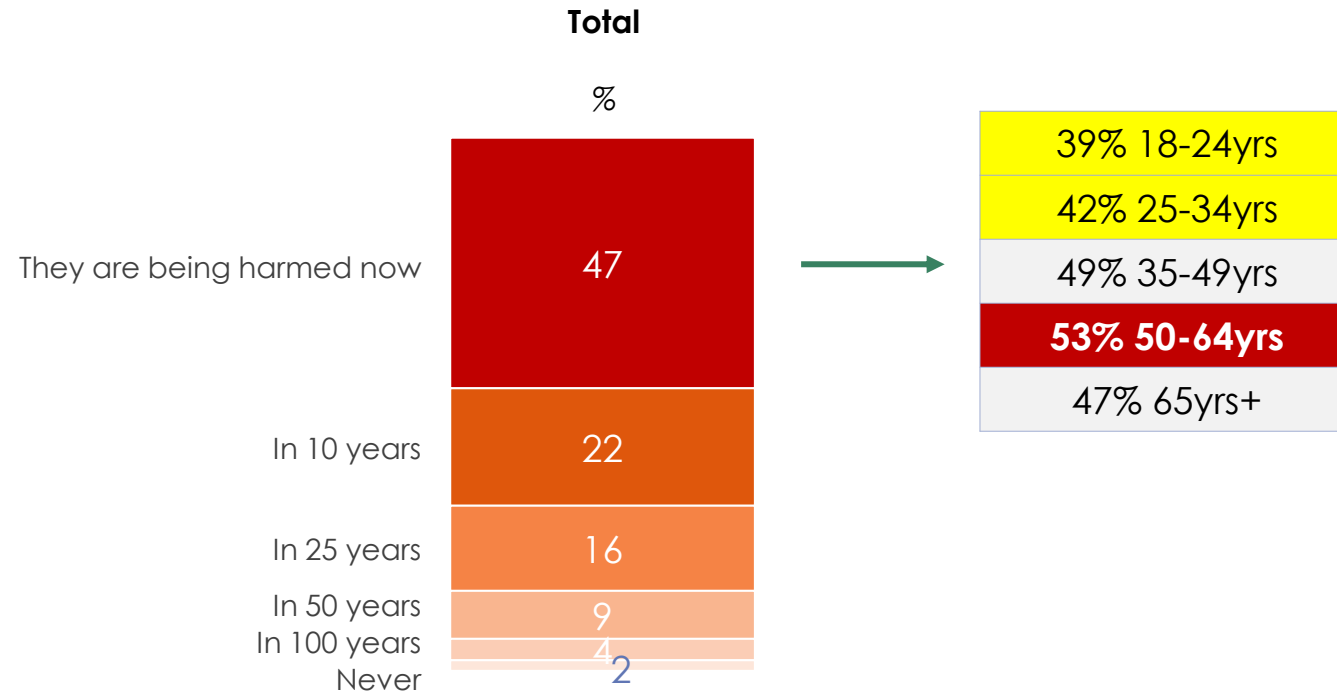
	Total	Age					Gender X Age	
		18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	18-24 Male	18-24 Female
	4,000	459	701	1,193	1,037	610	237	222
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very worried about climate change	37	47	39	36	34	35	36	59
Climate change will harm a great deal :								
You personally	16	23	22	15	14	12	19	26
Your family	33	25	28	32	37	38	21	29
People in your community	27	27	25	25	28	29	22	31
People in Ireland	33	38	31	30	34	34	35	41
People in developing countries	81	86	78	80	80	84	85	88
Future generations	85	89	84	83	84	85	85	93
Plant and animal species	77	86	79	76	74	72	80	92
The Irish way of life	31	35	31	29	32	31	33	37
Irish historic sites	25	35	26	23	23	22	32	37

Is the threat immediate?

In relation to 'when will climate change start to harm people in Ireland?', a striking 47% respond 'they are being harmed now'.

Interestingly this incidence is significantly lower among young adults. Rather they are more likely to say 'in 10 years'.

Therefore, the age group who are most concerned about climate change are also the least likely to perceive an immediate threat.

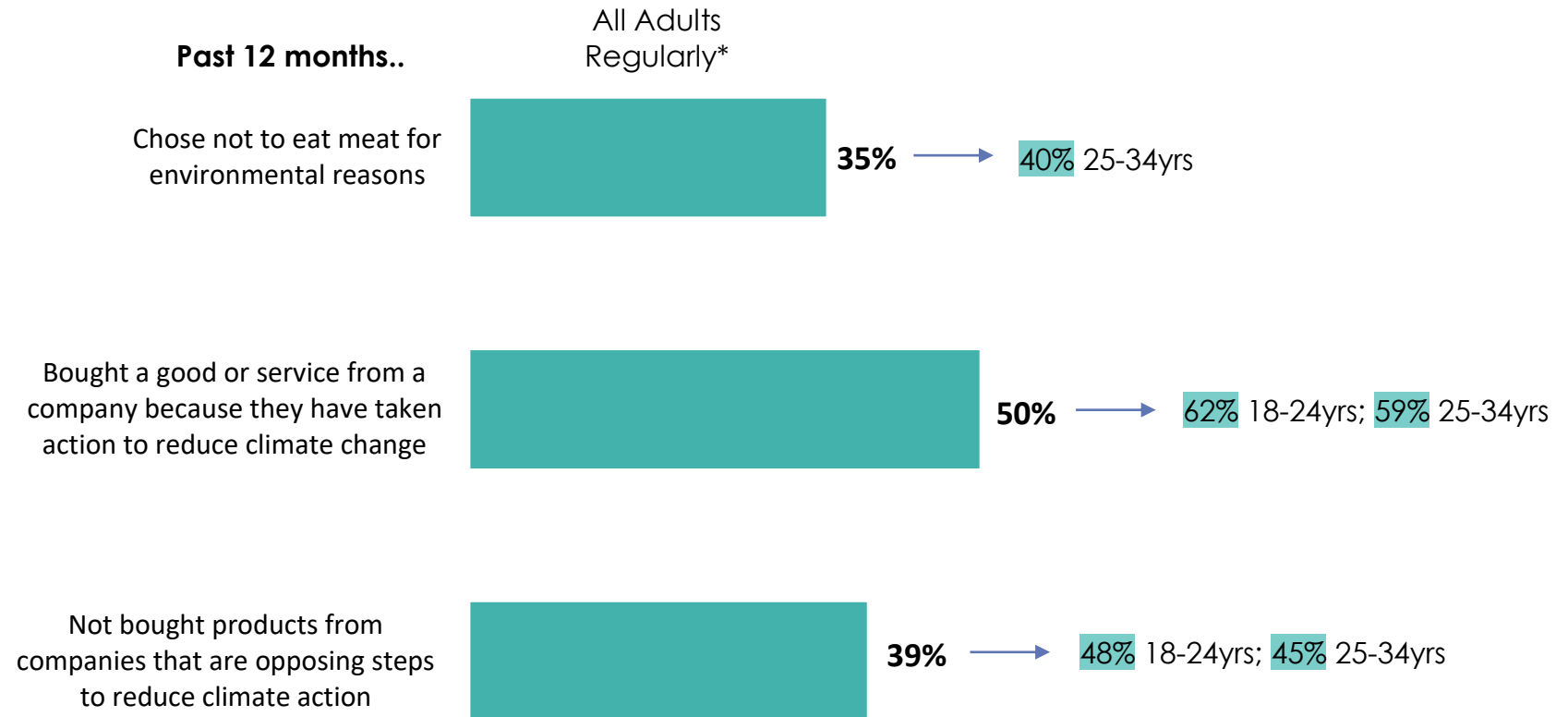


Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.14)
Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 4,000

Consumer behaviour in past 12 months also peaks younger

When a series of consumer behaviours in the past 12 months are reviewed, the strong incidences evident at a national level are significantly exceeded by the younger age groups.

Therefore, young adults exhibit a consistency between their attitudes and behaviours.



* Regularly defined as: Occasionally/often; or 'A few times' / 'service times' / 'many times'. 11

Intentions for next 12 months however show little age variation

Of note is the related intentions of young adults in the next 12 months conforms to the (strong) national average.

On one level, this may indicate young adults are relatively content with their current activity levels.

Over the next 12 months..

All Adults
'More frequently'

Intend to buy a good or service from a company because they have taken steps to reduce Climate Change



61%



63% 18-24yrs

Intend to not buy products from companies opposing steps to reduce Climate Change



50%



56% 18-24yrs

Young adults, especially those under 25, are ready to be more active

Intentions across a range of criteria ('..if a person you like and respected asked you to') show young adults, especially those under 25, are ready to be more active.

They may just need the right prompt: as per their responses to the risk perceptions module – they may need further information on the immediacy of the threat, from, as suggested by the question wording, trusted information sources and/ or inspiring role models.

Probably/ Definitely Would	Total	Age					Gender X Age	
		18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	18-24 Male	18-24 Female
	4,000	456	670	1,194	932	748	237	222
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Join a citizen campaign	58	67	63	59	55	49	60	74
Write letters, email, or phone government officials about climate change	52	59	54	51	52	46	52	66
Volunteer your time to an organization working on climate change	60	74	69	62	57	43	70	77
Donate money to an organization working on climate change	69	80	74	70	65	63	75	86
Meet with an elected official or their staff about climate change	54	54	57	54	54	51	52	57
Personally engage in non-violent civil disobedience	32	56	38	32	28	19	51	62

Key Learnings

The extent to which we feel 'others' are at a much greater threat from climate change is clearly evident in the national responses. This gap between the projected harmful effect on 'us' versus 'others' is also highly consistent by age.

When we review the responses to Risk Perceptions by demographics, clear patterns emerge by age. Youngest adults (18-24 years) consistently exhibit significantly higher levels of concern and risks perceptions – even much more than those 25-34 years.

When we delve further. It emerges it is young women within this age cohort who are disproportionately concerned about climate change.

However, the age group who are most concerned about climate change are also the least likely to perceive an immediate threat: in relation to 'when will climate change start to harm people in Ireland?', those responding 'they are being harmed now' is significantly lower among young adults.

When a series of consumer political behaviours and intentions are reviewed, young adults, especially those under 25, consistently appear ready to be more active when appropriately prompted.

Climate Change in the Irish Mind – Climate Risk Perceptions