

Quality of life improving in Ireland but challenges remain

Quality of life is improving in Ireland, particularly in relation to social cohesion, with the country recording some of the highest levels of optimism in the EU and lowest reported levels of tension between racial and ethnic groups. However, a number of challenges remain, notably in public transport, childcare services, and social housing – all of which were rated below EU averages by respondents in a Europe-wide survey.

The findings, based on the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey, were presented by Eurofound to a special Citizens' Dialogue on '*Quality of life in Europe – How does Ireland measure up?*' organised by the European Commission Representation in Ireland and Eurofound in Dublin this afternoon. Mairead McGuinness MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament, Tadas Leončikas, Eurofound Senior Research Manager, and Dr Shana Cohen, Director of TASC, were panelists at the town hall style meeting. The event will be opened by Gerard Kiely, Head of the Commission Representation in Ireland.

Nearly 37,000 people in 33 European countries were interviewed in the last quarter of 2016 for the fourth wave of the European Quality of Life Survey. Findings show that each EU Member State exhibits certain strengths in particular aspects of well-being, but multiple disadvantages are still more pronounced in some societies than in others; and in all countries significant social inequalities persist. Overall, it showed increased satisfaction in quality of life in Ireland compared to previous surveys, as well as a work-life balance that is close to, or above EU averages.

Some of the most positive findings for Ireland were in relation to quality of society, and in particular relatively low socio-economic and racial and ethnic tensions in society. There has been a significant decrease in reported tensions between rich and poor in Ireland since 2011: 19% reported a tension between rich and poor in 2016, down from 28% in 2011. This brings Ireland well under the EU average of 29%.

The data presented by Eurofound's shows that Ireland now ranks as one of the countries in Europe with the lowest reported tensions between different racial and ethnic groups. Reported tensions in Ireland have been decreasing consistently since 2003 and now stand at 21%, significantly below the EU average of 41%. This has occurred during a general increase in tensions in Europe, with a marked increase in some countries. Although reported quality of life in Ireland was better in 2016 than the previous survey in 2011, results on quality of public services remained mixed. Satisfaction rates are still below EU averages in a number of areas: most notably in health services, childcare, public transport, and social housing. The issue of affordability of childcare received particular focus, as respondents in Ireland were significantly more likely to indicate difficulty in affording the cost of childcare than people elsewhere in the EU.

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