Irish people want more public support for housing, finances in old age

The OECD’s new cross-national survey, *Risks That Matter*, examines people’s perceptions of social and economic risks and their views on how well government reacts to their concerns. The survey polled a representative sample of 22,000 adults in 21 OECD countries in 2018 in an effort to understand better what citizens want and need from social policy.

In the short run, Irish people worry about falling ill and making ends meet. 52% of the Irish list “becoming ill or disabled” as a top-three risk in the next year or two. Another top-three risk is worrying about meeting all expenses despite working. 50% of Irish people list this as a top-three risk, just above the cross-national average of 47%.

When looking beyond the next decade, pensions are by far the most common concern for Irish people. 70% of the Irish list “financial security in old age” as a top-three risk – in line with the cross-national average of 72% (Fig. 1). Social mobility, too, is a major concern. 49% of Irish people worry that they will not do as well as their parents did in life, and 48% worry that their children will not do as well as they have.*

Irish people are relatively satisfied with social protection when compared with respondents in other countries, but there is still room for improvement. Only 32% of Irish people feel they could easily access public benefits if they needed them – a low share, certainly, but a higher level of optimism than the cross-national average of 20%. About half of Irish people (51%) feel the government does not incorporate the views of people like them when designing/reforming public benefits; across countries, an average of 61% feel excluded.

When presented with a range of policy options, Irish people are most likely to identify better health care (61%), better pensions (46%), and more affordable housing (41%) as the public supports they need most to feel more economically secure.

Most Irish people are willing to pay for investments in these policy areas. 52% of Irish people agree that government should make housing more affordable, even if it means taxes rise and other programs may be cut. In these and other policy areas, the Irish are more likely than people in other countries to say that they are willing to pay more in taxes to receive better public services and benefits.

As in almost every other surveyed country, people in Ireland are counting on government to support them. 71% of Irish people say that they want government to do more to safeguard their economic and social security (Fig. 3).

*Values exceed 100% because respondents could select up to three answers.

Note: Distribution of responses to the question “Do you think the government should be doing less, more, or the same to ensure your economic and social security?”


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