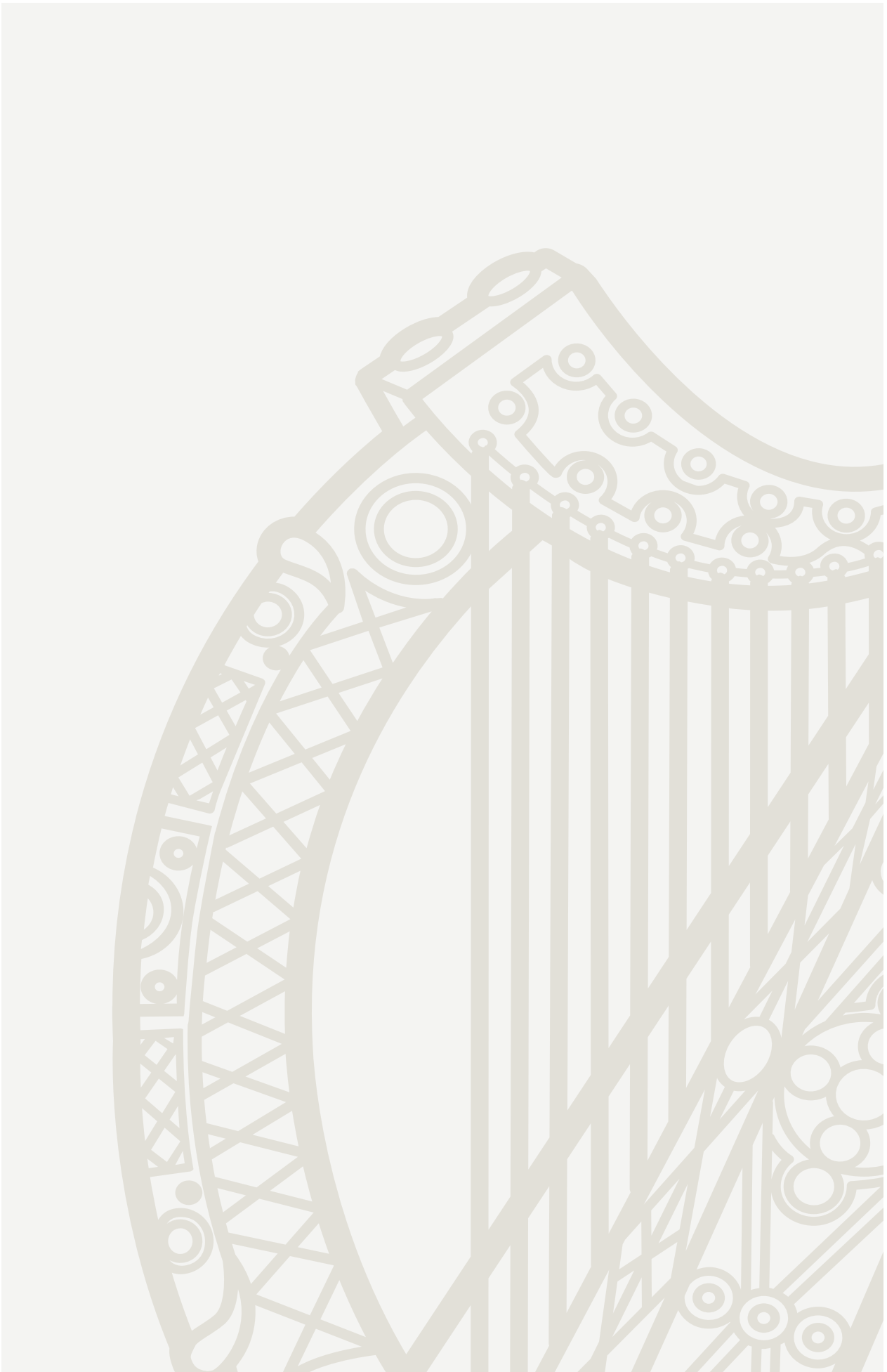




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

**Public Consultation on
the Development of the Priorities
and Policy Programme for Ireland's
Presidency of the Council of the
European Union 2026**

Summary Thematic Report



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Executive Summary

Ireland will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from July to December 2026 at a time of significant strategic, economic, and societal change across the EU. The Presidency will require Ireland to chair the work of the Council, steer legislative negotiations, and represent the Council in its engagement with other EU institutions. In preparation, the government undertook a public consultation to inform the development of Ireland's EU Presidency priorities and policy programme. The consultation sought to broaden engagement beyond traditional stakeholders and to capture a wide range of perspectives on how Ireland can add value through its Presidency role.

The consultation generated a high level of engagement, with 484 submissions received from individuals, civil society organisations, businesses, academics, and representative bodies, many of whom demonstrated a strong understanding of the EU decision-making processes and the honest-broker nature of the rotating EU Presidency role. While respondents approached the issues from diverse sectoral and geographical perspectives, a number of clear and consistent themes emerged.

Competitiveness and economic growth stood out as the most prominent priority for Ireland's EU Presidency for participants in the written consultation. Respondents consistently emphasised the need to strengthen the Single Market, reduce unnecessary regulatory complexity, and improve access to investment, particularly for SMEs. At the same time, many respondents stressed that competitiveness must be pursued in a way that supports social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and a just transition, rather than as an end in itself.

Values emerged as a closely related and strongly articulated priority for respondents. Many submissions called for a people-centred Irish EU Presidency that reinforces democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and social inclusion. Respondents highlighted the importance of cohesion within the EU, including reducing disparities in living standards, health outcomes, and opportunities across Member States and regions. Climate action was frequently framed not only as a policy objective but as a core European value.

Health and well-being featured prominently, reflecting both recent experience and future risks. Respondents urged a stronger EU focus on prevention, preparedness, and resilience in health systems, alongside action to address health inequalities. Digital health innovation and secure pharmaceutical supply chains were seen as areas where EU-level cooperation could deliver tangible benefits. While specific health concerns varied, there was a shared expectation that the EU should play a more visible role in protecting and improving public health.

Resilience was a recurring cross-cutting consideration, encompassing economic, social, environmental, and democratic dimensions. Many respondents argued for a shift towards more proactive and preventative approaches, whether in health, climate adaptation, skills development, or safeguarding democratic processes. In the area of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Security, submissions placed emphasis on upholding democratic values, peace, and the rule of law, with maritime and cybersecurity also identified as growing concerns.

Respondents were particularly focused on the practical impact of the EU Presidency for people, businesses, and communities. For individuals, this meant that EU action improves daily lives, protects rights in the digital age, supports affordable energy, and strengthens public services. For businesses, the general priority was a more integrated and predictable regulatory environment that supports innovation and growth. For communities, there was a strong emphasis on social protection, inclusion, and environmental stewardship, with repeated calls to ensure that EU policies do not leave people or places behind. Respondents also placed considerable importance on how Ireland communicates its EU Presidency and the wider benefits of EU membership.

In summary, the submissions point to a Presidency that should be focused on delivery and grounded in values. While expectations are ambitious, respondents are largely realistic about the role of the rotating EU Presidency and they underline the opportunity for Ireland to act as an effective, creditable, and values-driven honest broker.

Introduction

Ireland will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU Presidency) for the eighth time from July to December 2026. This will be an opportunity for Ireland to play an important role in shaping the EU's policy and legislative agenda in a way, which responds to the overall interests and needs of the Union and its Member States. Ensuring the delivery of a successful EU Presidency will be essential for Ireland's position and influence in the EU.

During the six-month EU Presidency period, Ireland will steer the agenda of the Council and its legislative and policy-making processes. Irish ministers and officials will chair meetings of the Council and its preparatory bodies, and Ireland will represent the Council in its interactions with other EU institutions.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to resource and deliver a successful EU Presidency in 2026. Planning for the Presidency is being led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in close cooperation with the Department of the Taoiseach, and with active engagement from all government departments.

Delivering a successful Presidency requires not only careful planning and execution by government, but also the active engagement and support of key stakeholders. Their involvement is essential to ensuring that Ireland's Presidency is understood, supported, and communicated effectively.

Ireland will publish its priorities and policy programme for the 2026 EU Presidency in June 2026, shortly before the Presidency commences. To

inform this process, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade undertook a public consultation on gov.ie to inform the development of the Presidency priorities and policy programme. The consultation was designed to provide an inclusive platform for non-traditional stakeholders and to capture a diverse range of viewpoints.

Through the public consultation, the government was seeking to gather observations, suggestions, and reflections on how Ireland can best fulfil its Presidency role; ensure the Presidency policy programme is informed by diverse perspectives from across Irish society; and identify EU-wide issues, themes, and policy areas that should be given particular attention during Ireland's Presidency.

Consultation design and accessibility

The public consultation was designed in line with the government's Public Consultation Principles and Guidance. It was compliant with data protection requirements and ensured accessibility in both English and Irish, including visual accessibility-compliant webpages and submission forms in each language. While respondents were asked to complete a standardised Word document submission form, in English or Irish, alternative and supplementary materials in other formats were also received and considered to ensure an inclusive approach.

The design of the consultation webpage and submission form was determined after undertaking a desktop review of similar public consultations on gov.ie, and after discussions with teams

who managed recent and similar public consultations. The public consultation was also timed to align with the planning process of the development of the priorities and policy programme.

The consultation launched on 5 November and closed on 12 December 2025, running for a total of five weeks and three days, though late submissions were accepted for several days after the deadline.

The launch of the consultation was announced by video messages in English and Irish by the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Harris TD, and the Minister of State for European Affairs and Defence, Thomas Byrne TD, on social media channels and on gov.ie, and by a press release published on gov.ie. Government departments also directly informed key sectoral stakeholder groups of the consultation launch.

The design of the submission form

A consultation submission form was designed with two components. First, respondents were provided with background information on the consultation process and the role of the EU Presidency. Second, respondents were asked to complete and return a standardised Word document submission form. The form consisted of four mandatory questions (name, organisation (if any), date of submission and agreement to the terms of the consultation process), followed by four additional optional questions, to assist with understanding the respondent profile.

Following this were five guiding questions, with respondents asked to limit their responses to each question to a maximum of 500 words. The questions were:

- » **Question 1** – What should Ireland choose as the high-level thematic priorities for its Presidency of the Council in 2026?
- » **Question 2** – Which particular policy areas and legislative proposals should be a focus of work for the Irish Presidency of the Council in 2026? What should the Irish Presidency aim to achieve in these areas?
- » **Question 3** – How can the work of the Council during the term of the Irish Presidency make the most substantial positive impact for people, businesses and communities across the EU?
- » **Question 4** – How can we best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership to its citizens and create a sense of ownership, amongst citizens, over Ireland’s Presidency of the Council of the EU?
- » **Question 5** – Any other comments? (where respondents provided additional information alongside their submission form, they were asked to provide a summary of those materials under this question).

Overview of consultation participation

During the formal consultation period of 5 November to 12 December 2025, the consultation webpage on gov.ie received 10,639 site visits, of which 9,129 were unique, averaging 280 site visits per day. At the conclusion of the consultation, 484 submissions were received. Approximately 51% of respondents submitted the consultation form in the original word document format, 46% in PDF format, 3% in email format, and one respondent submitted via a physical letter. Two Irish language submissions were received. 62% of all submissions were received on the final day of the consultation.

Respondent engagement

In terms of engagement, respondents tended towards following the format and structure of the submission form. A minority of respondents chose to submit a policy document or their own written response instead of completing the submission form.

The response rates for the guiding questions were highest for Questions 1 and 2 (94%), declining for Question 3 (85%) and Question 4 (77%). This pattern may be attributable to a combination of respondent fatigue and question design. The four questions were broad in nature and respondents may have felt their views were adequately reflected in the initial questions, and therefore had no additional information to provide in the later questions.

Respondents typically demonstrated a strong understanding of the role of the Council of the European Union, as well as the responsibilities and limitations of the rotating EU Presidency. Responses indicated that respondents had engaged with the supporting background materials and had framed their contributions in line with the EU's strategic agenda and the work of the Council. This understanding was reflected in responses to the guiding questions, which consistently recognised that the Presidency does not confer executive powers. In particular, respondents' language emphasised the facilitative, agenda-shaping functions and nature of the EU Presidency, with frequent use of terms such as *promote, prioritise, emphasises, support, strengthen, ensure, focus on, advance, implement, and progress* when describing where Ireland should focus its efforts during the upcoming Presidency.

Many respondents also followed the specific request to link, where possible, their response to the EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, the legislative programme of the Council, the planned legislative proposals included in the European Commission's 2026 work programme, or the work of a relevant Council configuration. Demonstrative of this fact is that approximately 68% of respondents mentioned or referred to at least one specific EU file, whether this was current EU legislation, proposed legislation, or an EU strategy. Further, approximately 21% of respondents made explicit reference to at least one Council configuration.

Respondent profile

Four optional questions were asked in the consultation form to help understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process. The questions and approximate response rates were

- » Respondent type (i.e. individual, NGO, business, academic, local authority, etc.) – 96%
- » What is your sector/area of work? – 96%
- » What is your connection to the issues you are providing feedback on? For example, are you an expert practitioner, person affected by a policy issue, member of the public with a general interest in the topics, etc.? – 91%
- » Describe your geographical focus in the context of your submission? For example, rural, urban, national or EU wide. – 88%

Respondent type

Respondents typically provided direct responses to this question, allowing the results to be readily quantifiable, as illustrated in Table 1 below. The largest cohort of submissions came from the **Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society, and Non-Profit** group at over 37%, while the **Business and Economic Actors** cohort represented just under 23% of submissions. The highest proportion of respondent types were **NGOs** (25.6%), **Businesses** (14.1%), and **Individuals** (11.5%).

Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society, and Non-Profit Sector (37.4% Overall)

NGO		25.6%
Non-Profit Organisation		6.2%
Charity		2.8%
Initiative		2.6%
Religious Community		0.2%

Business and Economic Actors (22.9% Overall)

Business		14.1%
Business, Trade, and Industry Associations		8.8%

Individuals (11.5% Overall)

Individuals		11.5%
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Academic and Research Sector (10% Overall)

Academic Individuals, Institutions, and Associations		9.8%
Think-Tank		0.2%

Labour Representation, Strategic Partnership Groups, and Broad Representative Interest Groups (11.1% Overall)

Representative Body		7.3%
Trade Union		1.7%
Strategic Consortium		1.3%
Association Network		0.9%

Public Sector, Government-Linked, and Intergovernmental Bodies (7% Overall)

Public Body		4.3%
Political Organisation		1.3%
Elected Representative		1.1%
Commercial Semi-State Body		0.2%
International Agency		0.2%

Table 1: Distribution of respondent type by respondent group

Respondents' sector/area of work

Responses to this questions were more broad and diverse, reflecting the wide range of professional and personal backgrounds represented among respondents. For reporting purposes, responses were grouped into broader sectoral categories to support analysis and presentation, as shown in Table 2 below.

Source/Area of Work	Proportion
Healthcare, Health Policy, and Pharmaceuticals	20.5%
Social Policy: Human Rights Promotion, Charity Work, Labour Affairs, Social Care, and Local Community Development	16.6%
Accounting, Banking, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Insurance, Legal, and Trade	10.2%
Environment: Animal Welfare, Climate Action, Sustainability, Horticulture	8.0%
Academia, Higher Education, and Research	6.1%
Information Technology, Telecommunications, Digital services, AI, Privacy, and Cybersecurity	5.6%
Broadcasting, Media, Creative Arts, Culture, and Sport	5.0%
International Affairs, Development, and Humanitarian Work	4.5%
Public Affairs and Administration	4.5%
Energy and Transition	3.9%
Transportation and Storage	3.2%
Agriculture, Farming, and Food Systems	2.8%
Education: Policy, Teaching, and Training	2.6%
Food and Drink, Hospitality, and Tourism	1.9%
General Manufacturing, Construction, and Engineering	1.9%
Retired	1.5%
Retail and Services Sector	1.1%

Table 2: Distribution of sectors/areas of work of respondents

Healthcare, Health Policy, and Pharmaceuticals represented the largest sector/area of work, accounting for 20.5% of respondents. This was followed by **Social Policy: Human Rights Promotion, Charity Work, Labour Affairs, Social Care, and Local Community Development** at 16.6% and **Accounting, Banking, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Insurance, Legal, and Trade** at 10.2%. All remaining sectors/areas of work each accounted for less than 10% of all respondents, indicating a broad range of sectoral backgrounds among respondents.

Respondents' connection to issues they provided feedback on

Responses to this question were wide-ranging, reflecting the broad mix of perspectives engaged through the consultation. Given the diversity of responses, it was not possible to categorise or quantify the responses to this question, and analysis is therefore qualitative. In most cases, respondents used this question to explain why they felt connected to the issues on which they were providing feedback. While responses varied, several common themes emerged.

Many respondents framed their response to this question from a personal perspective, often describing how particular policies affect them directly. Some respondents identified themselves as EU or Irish citizens or members of the public, while others referred to more personal circumstances, such as being a parent concerned about the future of their children.

A number of advocacy groups and representative bodies used this section to outline whom they were representing in their submission. These respondents often highlighted that they were speaking on behalf of a broader group or constituency, reinforcing their connection to the issues raised.

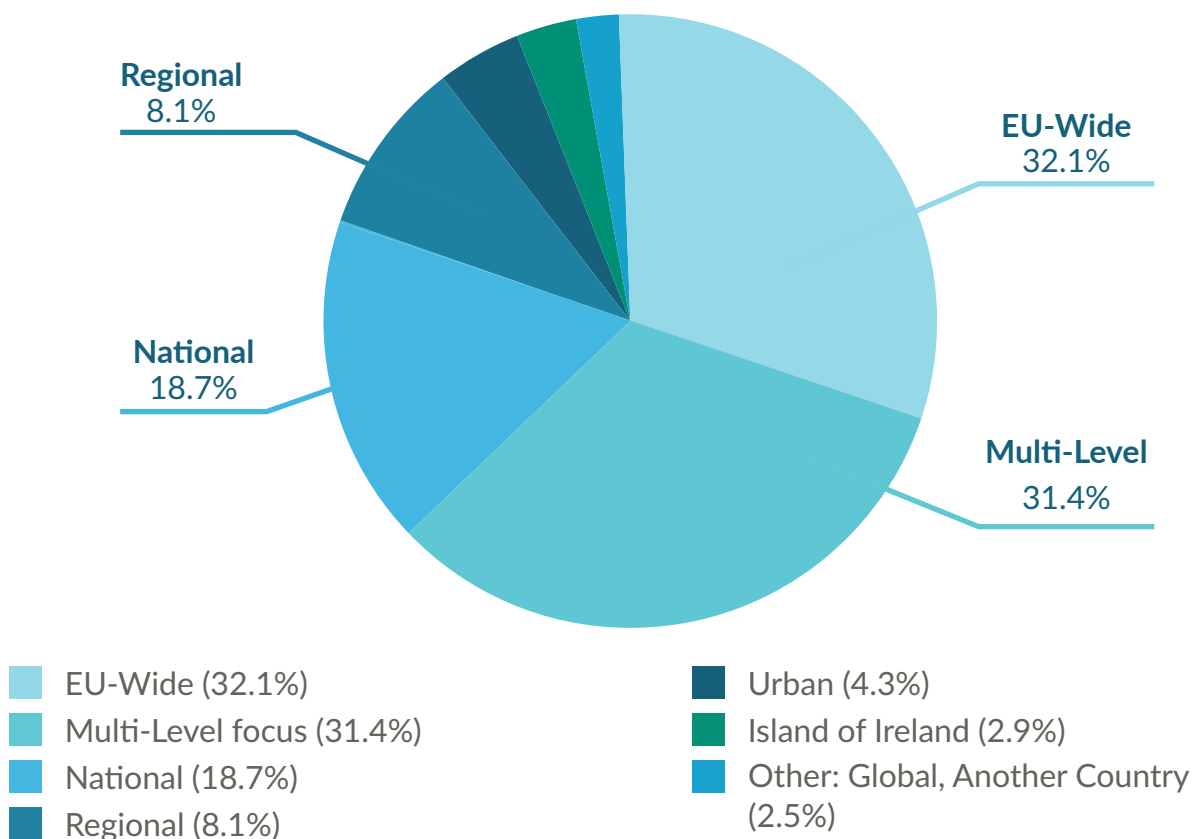
Other organisations, including charities, humanitarian organisations, groups representing minorities and disabilities, businesses, and environmental groups, described their work and its impact at national or at EU level, linking this directly to the issues addressed in their submission.

Respondents with academic, research, or EU policy backgrounds highlighted their subject-matter expertise and their ongoing engagement with EU policy-making, discussions, and debates.

Respondents' geographical focus

Respondents were asked to indicate the geographical focus of their submission, such as rural, urban, national, or EU-wide, offering insight into the perspective from which they approached the consultation. Most respondents identified a single focus, while those listing multiple scopes were classified as having a multi-level focus. This reflects the diversity of experience and scale of perspectives captured through the consultation. The results of this analysis are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by geographical focus



32.1% of respondents had an **EU-Wide** focus while 31.4% had a **Multi-Level** focus. Many organisations, businesses, and representative bodies who responded to the public consultation indicated that they had European level parent organisations or bodies, significant business and engagement at the EU level, or were themselves a European-level organisation responding to the public consultation. This demonstrates the significant level of interest beyond Ireland at the EU level of the upcoming Irish Presidency. This is also reinforced by the fact that the proportion with an exclusively **National** focus was lower at 18.7%. Local level geographical focuses were also represented. When combined, respondents who indicated their submission had a **Regional** or **Urban** focus made up around 12.4% of all submissions.

When examining geographical focus in more detail across the respondent groups, additional patterns emerge. Results for the three largest respondent groups are illustrated in Figure 2.

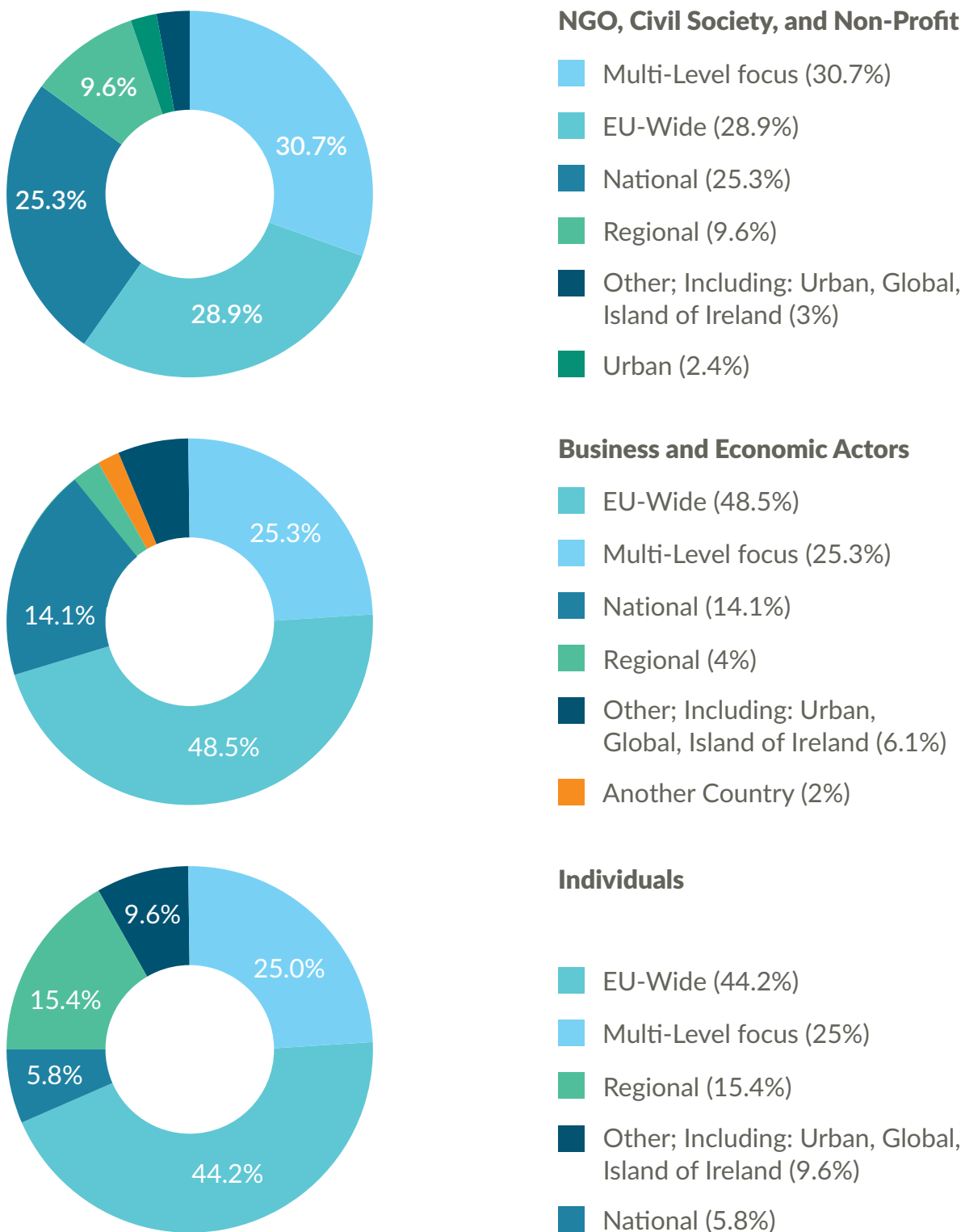


Figure 2: Respondent geographical focus area by most common respondent groups

Respondents from the **Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society, and Non-Profit** grouping indicated a larger focus on the **National** level compared with the overall sample (25.3% vs 18.7%). In contrast, the **Business and Economic Actors** and **Individual** groupings were more likely to report an **EU-Wide** focus, at 48.5% and 44.2% respectively. Respondents within the **Individual** grouping also recorded a low **National** level focus of just 5.8%. However, this may be explained by the fact that one quarter of all individual respondents indicated a **Regional** or **Urban** focus.

While issues relating to the island of Ireland were raised by a number of respondents, approximately 13 specifically indicated their submission as

having a geographical focus of the **Island of Ireland**. These respondents argued that the Irish EU Presidency is a prime opportunity to showcase the success of the Good Friday Agreement, cross border models of cooperation, as well as EU investment in Northern Ireland and border regions.

For respondents who indicated that their submissions had a geographical focus of **EU-Wide** (32%) and **Multi-Level** (31%), a significant proportion were non-Ireland based organisations. Many of these organisations were Brussels-based with a specific focus on EU affairs. Other organisations were based further afield, including US-based organisations, representative bodies, and enterprises, who also made submissions given their business presence in the Irish and broader EU market.

Substantive analysis and findings

All submissions received were carefully considered, including all additional materials respondents may have provided. The analysis and findings from the submissions are drawn from the responses provided to the four guiding questions, to Question 5, which allowed for any other comments or summaries of additional materials provided, and any additional materials respondents may have provided. A mixed qualitative and quantitative approach was taken to the analysis of the submissions.

Summaries of each response to each question were prepared, unless no response to a question was provided or the response was insufficiently detailed to write a summary. Additionally, up to three themes and three corresponding subthemes were assigned to each submission based on the responses provided under the guiding questions, primarily Question 1. Assigning themes and subthemes facilitated a quantitative view of the thematic priorities under Question 1 and a perspective on the key issues raised across all submissions. Not all submissions were assigned three themes and corresponding subthemes. On average, approximately 1.7 themes were assigned per submission. The following four sections discuss the findings based on each of these four mandatory questions.

Question 1

What should Ireland choose as the high-level thematic priorities for its Presidency of the Council in 2026?

Competitiveness and Growth was the most prominent theme among all submissions, appearing in many forms and cutting across numerous thematic areas.

Advancing and deepening the Single Market to achieve growth was frequently described by respondents as a priority area for the upcoming Irish Presidency. In particular, achieving freer movement of capital through the establishment of a Savings and Investment Union (SIU) was prominently raised.

The role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in achieving growth and innovation was mentioned by many respondents across a range of sectors and industries. Specific funding and support should be targeted towards these enterprises to contribute to the aims of the competitiveness agenda.

The digital transformation was widely discussed in tandem with competitiveness and growth. Investment and research into advanced technologies was highlighted as a necessity for advancing a competitive EU. Simplifying regulation surrounding AI was also frequently highlighted to support the establishment of digital businesses, which would in turn attract investment and boost EU

competitiveness. These calls for simplification and the opportunities for growth with AI were often balanced with calls for recognition of the challenges surrounding AI such as ethics, maintaining high standards of AI governance, and ensuring the protection of copyright material.

Industrial policy was widely spoken to in this discussion on growth. Respondents frequently highlighted the potential for growth of industries involved in net-zero technologies as well as defence and security. Respondents generally agreed that, alongside policy changes at the industry level, a competitive EU necessitates a competitive, futureproof workforce. An Irish Presidency should therefore push for a stronger promotion of skills and education in the context of the EU's competitiveness drive.

Respondents widely noted the importance of striking a balance between being highly competitive, while also enshrining a 'people-first' approach where societal challenges are also considered. The primary considerations in this regard were in achieving sustainable development, meeting climate targets, and that the twin digital and green transition would be a just transition that does not leave vulnerable groups behind.

Values was the second most prominent theme, with respondents highlighting a broad range of views relating to democracy, equality, and social cohesion.

The Irish EU Presidency should be

people-centred and should enshrine citizens' well-being, rights, and inclusion. The Presidency should commit to specific European values such as upholding and promoting peace, consolidating democracy and the rule of law, curbing inequality, and ensuring that human rights are protected and respected both within the EU and abroad. Many respondents additionally cited climate action and the pursuit of a just transition as not just EU policy objectives but as core values. Respondents emphasised that the Irish Presidency has a prime opportunity to push for a Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) that appropriately considers these core EU values.

EU cohesion should continue to be pursued to ensure that standards in health, housing, poverty reduction, and education converge across all EU Member States. Regional development should play a strong role in this process to ensure balanced growth across all Member States. Funding should be ring-fenced for this purpose in the MFF under the cohesion areas of investment.

Health and Wellbeing was the third most dominant theme. The priorities that were outlined within this theme were quite diverse and cross-cutting, however, most respondents highlighted the following areas:

Health policy should focus on prevention-focused public healthcare and strengthening health system preparedness, while health inequalities should be tackled at the EU level. Linking with Competitiveness and

Growth, digital health innovation and the strengthening of pharmaceutical supply chains should be promoted. Some more specific topics included brain health, cardiovascular health, mental health, and combatting anaphylaxis.

Resilience was a cross-cutting issue that transcended many themes. Some of the contexts in which discussions of resilience appeared are outlined here.

In its pursuit of competitiveness and growth, and in developing a future-proof workforce, the EU can demonstrate its economic resilience. An Irish Presidency should promote consideration and engagement of citizens in political and consultative processes to promote and maintain democratic resilience, while committing to EU values, promoting social cohesion, and preventing division will enhance the EU's social resilience.

Submissions from environmental stakeholders frequently framed their responses through the lens of environmental resilience, which can be achieved through pursuing ambitious climate action, protecting ecological habitats, and ensuring a just transition. Lastly, resilience was often spoken to in the context of proactive and preventative policies, shifting from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention. This was prominently

discussed in areas such as health preparedness and in a security context.

Foreign Affairs, Defence, Security, and Peace Promotion was raised in a number of submissions but not as frequently.

Respondents placed a strong emphasis on democratic values and the rule of law as guiding principles in foreign policy. An Irish Presidency, notwithstanding its limitations in regards to the areas of security and defence, should push for an EU that promotes peace through international diplomacy. Respondents' discussions concerning security were largely in the maritime and cyber contexts, however, to a lesser extent, some respondents advocated strengthening European security capabilities.

Quantitative assessment of responses

Reinforcing the qualitative assessment is the below quantitative mapping of themes in Table 3. The table illustrates the distribution of themes that were assigned to submissions, ranked by their frequency.

Overarching Themes Identified	Distribution of Identified Themes
1. Competitiveness	14.2%
2. Values	12.3%
3. Health	11.5%
4. Environment	10.0%
5. Social Policy	8.5%
6. Digital, Telecommunications, and Technology	7.9%
7. Foreign Affairs, Security, and Defence	6.3%
8. Employment and Labour Policy	4.9%
9. Justice	4.6%
10. Energy	4.5%
11. Agriculture	3.8%
12. Education and Youth Affairs	3.7%
13. Economy/Finance	3.1%
14. Culture and Sport	2.6%
15. Transport	1.2%
16. Consumer Affairs	0.7%
17. Enlargement	0.2%

Table 3: Overarching themes identified

Subthemes, more specific thematic focuses within each broad theme, were also assigned to submissions. Presented in Figure 3 below is the distribution of subthemes across the three most identified broad themes.

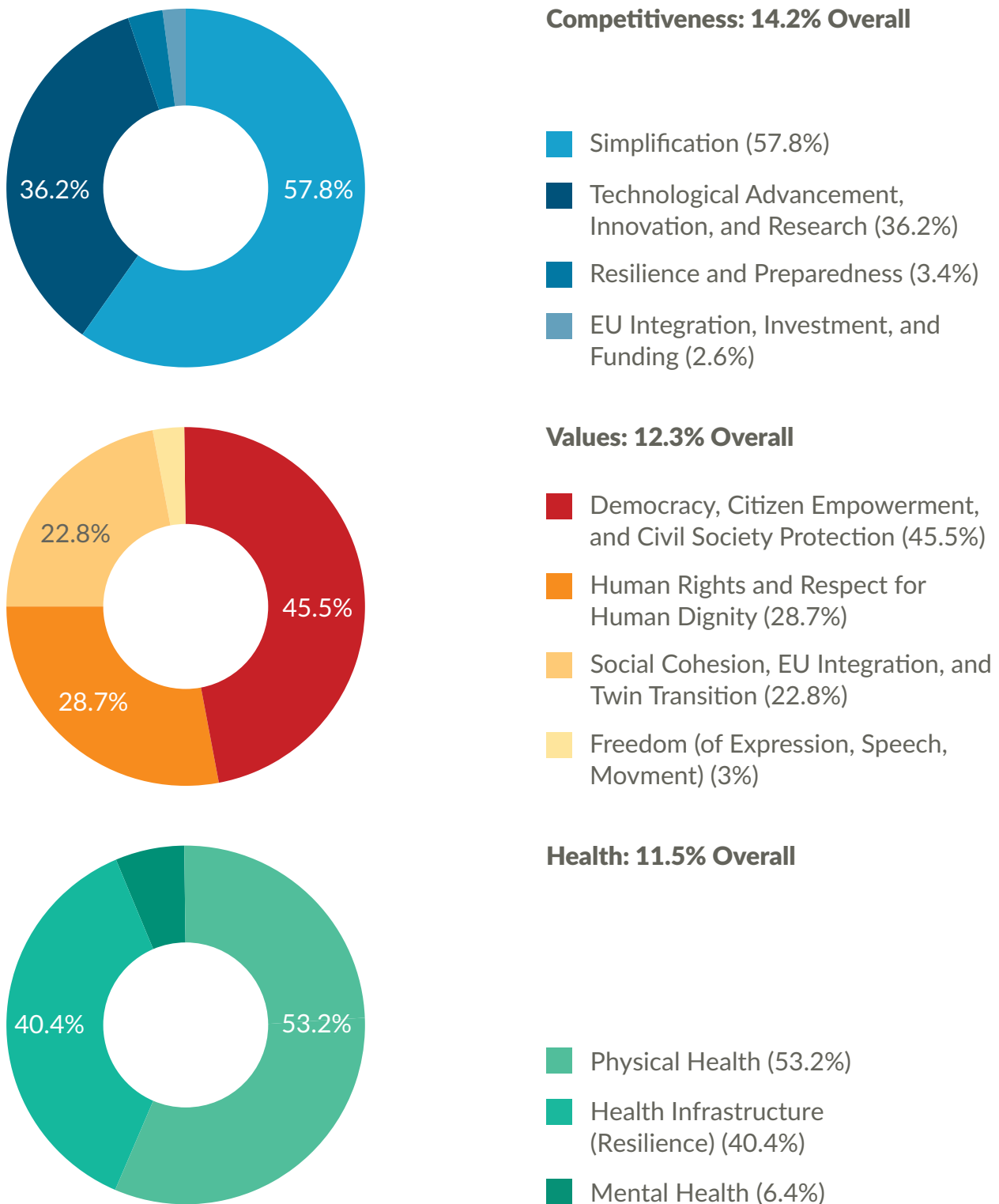


Figure 3: Distribution of subthemes among most prominent themes

For submissions that had **Competitiveness and Growth** as an overarching theme, the dominant subthemes were:

- » The Simplification Agenda, at 57%
- » Technological Advancement, Innovation, and Research, at 36%
- » Resilience and Preparedness, at 3.4%, and
- » EU Integration, Investment, and Funding, at 2.6%.

For submissions that had **Values** as an overarching theme, the dominant subthemes were:

- » Democracy, Citizen Empowerment, and Civil Society Protection, at 45.5%
- » Human Rights and Respect for Human Dignity, at 28.7% and
- » Social Cohesion, EU Integration, and Twin Transition, at 22.8%.

For submissions that had **Health** as an overarching theme, the dominant subthemes were:

- » Physical Health, at 53.2%
- » Health Infrastructure (Resilience), at 40.4%
- » Mental Health, at 6.4%.

A table featuring the full distribution of themes and subthemes can be found in Annex 1.

The quantitative analysis therefore reinforces many of the assessments made in the qualitative analysis, as does the range of policy areas and legislative proposals cited by respondents under Question 2 of the submission form.

Question 2

Which particular policy areas and legislative proposals should be a focus of work for the Irish Presidency of the Council in 2026? What should the Irish Presidency aim to achieve in these areas?

Respondents provided a high level of detail regarding the specific policy areas and legislative proposals that Ireland's EU Presidency should prioritise. Approximately 68% of respondents identified either specific legislation, EU strategies, or formal proposals as critical priorities. While these files generally aligned with the broader themes of the consultation, the depth of feedback suggests a high level of awareness and interest in the EU decision-making process, and how Ireland could steer the EU's legislative agenda.

The distribution of files was concentrated in a few key sectors. 25% of all referenced files related to the digital and technology sphere, with a recurring emphasis on enhancing competitiveness through investment and regulatory simplification. Health policy accounted for approximately 20% of the files referenced, while environmental policy represented 15%. This focus likely reflects the high volume of active legislation in these areas currently moving through the EU agenda, as well as a more targeted engagement from stakeholders in these highly regulated sectors.

From a substantive perspective on what specifically the Irish EU Presidency should hope to achieve, the following policy areas and legislative proposals were most frequently discussed across the submissions.

Economic competitiveness and growth

A dominant topic throughout the submissions was the need to strengthen the European economy. Respondents consistently urged the Irish EU Presidency to pursue the full implementation of the recommendations found in the Draghi report on competitiveness and the Letta report on the Single Market. There was a clear call to action regarding the simplification agenda, with respondents emphasising that the Irish EU Presidency should lead efforts to reduce bureaucracy, harmonise compatible regulations, and ensure the Single Market functions more efficiently for businesses and citizens alike. Respondents also emphasised that negotiations on the 2028-2034 MFF should work to align EU funding with competitiveness but also climate neutrality, resilience, and cohesion objectives.

Beyond broad economic goals, respondents highlighted specific industrial priorities. There was support for driving forward the Industrial Accelerator Act and increasing the EU's focus on cleantech manufacturing. Furthermore, ensuring the resilience of supply chains, particularly for semiconductors, and promoting dual-use innovation were framed as essential steps for Europe's long-term strategic autonomy.

Digital innovation

In the digital realm, respondents advised that the Irish Presidency should focus on a balanced approach to regulation and growth. This includes advancing the Digital Rulebook and ensuring a proportionate implementation of the EU AI Act to support the adoption of AI among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Respondents

also underscored the importance of streamlining the Digital Single Market and addressing the growing complexities of cybersecurity. The Irish Presidency was also noted as a significant opportunity to direct investment towards digital transformation through the MFF.

Democratic resilience

Closely linked to these digital concerns was the topic of democratic resilience. Many respondents highlighted the need to combat disinformation and protect media freedoms across the EU. Direct references were frequently made to the European Democracy Shield, with a view that Ireland should use its EU Presidency to strengthen the mechanisms that protect democratic institutions from internal and external threats.

Social policies

Social policy was another policy area of focus for numerous submissions. Respondents advocated for an enhanced EU-wide focus on housing, specifically through the EU Affordable Housing Plan and a formal Council resolution on homelessness. There were also strong calls for Ireland to champion the European Disability Strategy, ensuring that disability rights are mainstreamed and enforced across all EU policies. This was further supported by widespread mentions of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and a continued commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Security, defence, and foreign policy

Discussions on security, defence, and foreign policy tended to be more general. Feedback tended to focus on the EU's role in preventing conflict through diplomatic engagement and promoting a stable global order. Notably, the Cybersecurity Act was the primary technical file discussed in this context, bridging the gap between

digital policy and collective security. Overall, respondents expressed a hope that Ireland would foster strategic cooperation to enhance the security and stability of the EU during its term.

Agriculture, food systems, and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Agricultural policy across the EU was also prominently discussed by respondents. The demographic crisis among farmers was widely mentioned, warranting a generational renewal of the sector. Respondents emphasised that the Presidency should prioritise regenerative agriculture, policies to improve soil health, and mitigate the risk of price volatility. The post-2027 CAP reforms were frequently mentioned with respondents advocating that the budget should underpin farm incomes, rural employment, and investment in innovation and environmental schemes.

Question 3

How can the work of the Council during the term of the Irish Presidency make the most substantial positive impact for people, businesses, and communities across the EU?

In identifying how the Irish EU Presidency can deliver a tangible, positive impact, respondents consistently linked high-level policy goals to the lived experiences of people and the operational realities of businesses. Respondents generally spoke to the specific thematic priorities they selected in Question 1 and policy areas and legislative proposals they highlighted in Question 2.

The feedback suggests that the substantial positive impact envisioned by the public is rooted in a desire for an EU that is more integrated, responsive, and socially conscious.

Enhancing the lives of individuals

Many respondents urged for EU policy to translate into measurable improvements in health, safety, personal rights, and living and working conditions for EU citizens. A recurring topic was the need for social investment to drive equality and inclusivity. Many respondents also argued that by strengthening national health systems and ensuring equitable access to care the well-being of the European public would be strengthened.

The protection of citizens in the digital age was framed by many respondents as a high priority. These respondents urged the full implementation of the Digital Services Act and the AI Act, viewing them as essential tools for safeguarding individual rights, while still allowing for technological progress.

Furthermore, the transition to renewable energy was viewed not just as an environmental necessity but as a primary tool for social fairness, with the potential to provide more affordable energy to households across the Member States.

Empowering businesses

When discussing issues of relevance to the business community, respondents focused heavily on the removal of barriers to growth. Respondents frequently highlighted the simplification agenda and need to harmonise EU laws as the most effective way to reduce the bureaucratic burden on businesses. There was a strong consensus that a more integrated Single Market, which ensures the seamless free movement of goods, services, and people, would provide a significant boost to economic competitiveness.

Furthermore, respondents with a focus on businesses are hoping the Irish EU Presidency will support an environment of innovation through strategic investment. Accelerating the green transition was cited as a critical factor, with respondents noting that modernising energy grids and securing affordable, sustainable power is essential for future-proofing European industry and maintaining a strong global economic standing.

Strengthening communities and social cohesion

Respondents with a community focus mostly concentrated on the principle of leaving no one behind. There were calls to adhere strictly to the European Pillar of Social Rights, ensuring that vulnerable groups are protected during periods of economic or technological change. Many respondents argued that providing adequate funding for social cohesion initiatives is vital for maintaining the resilience of local communities and maximising public well-being.

Environmental stewardship was also framed as a community-level priority. By promoting sustainable resource management through a robust circular economy agenda, some respondents believe the EU can foster local cohesion while reducing costs and environmental damage. Finally, while mentioned less frequently, the sustainable funding of arts and sports was highlighted by some as a unique and powerful way to positively influence the social fabric of communities across the Member States.

Question 4

How can we best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership to its citizens and create a sense of ownership, amongst citizens, over Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU?

Respondents were generally more creative and offered strategic advice in their responses to this question, exhibited by the fact that the nature of the question relates more to communication strategies as opposed to policy. The responses to this question can be summarised into the three categories below.

Citizen engagement and public involvement

A central recommendation was a significant push for genuine citizen engagement. Respondents emphasised the importance of highlighting that citizens have a direct role in shaping EU policy, moving beyond one-way communication to an active, two-way dialogue.

A specific focus was placed on involving young people, with respondents suggesting dedicated initiatives like advisory panels and youth-focused campaigns. Collaborations with civil society organisations, community groups, influencers, and research institutions were also recommended to broaden outreach and ensure diverse

voices are heard. To reinforce trust and transparency, some respondents suggested opening up Council meetings and other official events to the public, utilising social media and online content to ensure maximum accessibility and reach for a wider audience. Fostering understanding between Member States and celebrating Europe's rich culture was also seen as a vital part of this engagement strategy.

Demonstrating the tangible benefits of EU membership

Many respondents argued that the most compelling way to promote the benefits of the EU is not through abstract descriptions, but through concrete actions and visible results that directly impact daily life. Suggestions included highlighting how the EU improves the daily lives of EU citizens in areas such as health, security, jobs, access to culture, and opportunities for youth.

The use of storytelling and personal narratives was strongly advocated as a powerful tool to illustrate the real-life impacts of EU policies in a relatable way. Economically, the emphasis was on showcasing EU support for SMEs and larger businesses through investment in innovation and job creation. Empowering young people through enhanced opportunities for mobility, education, and direct participation in EU decision-making was consistently seen as an impactful way to demonstrate the Union's value.

Aligning actions with core European values

Some respondents advised the Irish EU Presidency to pursue policies and actions that would align with core European values. This would effectively communicate the values behind the foundations of the EU as well as helping to reinforce a sense of shared ownership of the Union.

Key actions recommended by respondents involved upholding and promoting democracy, justice, the rule of law, equality, social inclusion, disability rights, and human rights through the Irish EU Presidency's work. Ensuring that all events and policies are accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities, was highlighted as a practical demonstration of inclusive values. Showcasing EU cooperation and solidarity was also seen as vital, particularly in addressing shared challenges such as health crises, climate change, economic instability, and protecting citizens from threats like invasions, terrorism, and cyberattacks.

Question 5

Any other comments? (where respondents provided additional information alongside their submission form, they were asked to provide a summary of those materials under this question).

Feedback provided under this question was analysed and incorporated under the first four guiding questions.

Annex 1:

Full distribution of themes and subthemes across all submissions

	Distribution Overall and Within-Theme	Distribution Overall	Count
Competitiveness	14.15%	14.15%	116
Simplification	57.76%	8.17%	67
Technological Advancement, Innovation, and Research	36.21%	5.12%	42
Resilience and Preparedness	3.45%	0.49%	4
EU Integration, Investment, and Funding	2.59%	0.37%	3
Values	12.32%	12.32%	101
Democracy, Citizen Empowerment, and Civil Society Protection	45.54%	5.61%	46
Human Rights and Respect for Human Dignity	28.71%	3.54%	29
Social Cohesion, EU Integration, and Twin Transition	22.77%	2.80%	23
Freedom (of Expression, Speech, Movement)	2.97%	0.37%	3
Health	11.46%	11.46%	94
Physical Health	53.19%	6.10%	50
Health Infrastructure (Resilience)	40.43%	4.63%	38
Mental Health	6.38%	0.73%	6
Environment	10.00%	10.00%	82
Climate Change Prevention and Promoting Sustainability	65.85%	6.59%	54
Ecological Protection, Biodiversity Loss, and Animal Welfare	25.61%	2.56%	21
Circular Economy	8.54%	0.85%	7
Social Policy	8.54%	8.54%	70
Equality, Social Care, and Disability Policy	61.43%	5.24%	43
Housing	30.00%	2.56%	21
Poverty	8.57%	0.73%	6

	Distribution Overall and Within-Theme	Distribution Overall	Count
Digital, Telecommunications, and Technology	7.93%	7.93%	65
Artificial Intelligence	50.77%	4.02%	33
Data Privacy, Protection, and Cybersecurity	26.15%	2.07%	17
Misinformation and Disinformation	12.31%	0.98%	8
Digital and Technological Infrastructure	10.77%	0.85%	7
Foreign Affairs and Defence	6.34%	6.34%	52
International Security, Defence, and Peace Promotion	73.08%	4.63%	38
International Aid	19.23%	1.22%	10
Crisis Management, and Resilience	3.85%	0.24%	2
Maritime Security	3.85%	0.24%	2
Employment and Labour Policy	4.88%	4.88%	40
Labour Market Access: Youth Employment, Disability Inclusion, Employment Mobility, and Skills Development	70.00%	3.41%	28
Wage Protection, Union Representation, Working Conditions, and Collective Bargaining (Industrial Relations)	30.00%	1.46%	12
Justice	4.63%	4.63%	38
Gender Dimensions of Justice	36.84%	1.71%	14
Asylum and Migration	31.58%	1.46%	12
Rule of Law	31.58%	1.46%	12
Energy	4.51%	4.51%	37
Clean Energy Investment and Research	62.16%	2.80%	23
Energy Security	37.84%	1.71%	14
Agriculture	3.78%	3.78%	31
Farming and Food Security	100.00%	3.78%	31
Education and Youth Affairs	3.66%	3.66%	30
Erasmus, Youth Mobility, Third-Level Education, Adult Education, and Opportunity	90.00%	3.29%	27
Early Schooling and Primary Level Education Policy	10.00%	0.37%	3

	Distribution Overall and Within-Theme	Distribution Overall	Count
Economy/Finance	3.05%	3.05%	25
Single Market, Capital Markets and Savings	68.00%	2.07%	17
Trade	32.00%	0.98%	8
Culture and Sport	2.56%	2.56%	21
Music, Copyright, Arts and Promotion	61.90%	1.59%	13
Multilingualism and Minority Languages	14.29%	0.37%	3
Sports: Investment, Promotion, and Funding	14.29%	0.37%	3
Tourism	9.52%	0.24%	2
Transport	1.22%	1.22%	10
Transport Investment	90.00%	1.10%	9
Transport Safety	10.00%	0.12%	1
Consumer Affairs	0.73%	0.73%	6
Consumer Protection	100.00%	0.73%	6
Enlargement	0.24%	0.24%	2
Accession Policy and Preparedness	100.00%	0.24%	2



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