



Electing for Business

A Stronger Europe,
Stronger Ireland Initiative

2024 is a critical year for Ireland and Europe. A year of transition as landmark EU green, digital and social legislation enters into force. A year of implementation as the EU seeks to strengthen competitiveness without lessening ambition. A year of challenge as geopolitical tensions continue. A year of change with up to half of the world's population facing elections in Europe, the USA and elsewhere.

In the first half of 2024, this European Commission and Parliament will be key to meeting these challenges. Following the European Parliament elections in June and the appointment of the next Commission, the new political cycle must focus on strengthening the EU for business and citizens.

How? By putting competitiveness at the forefront. The strength of the European economy and its ability to deliver for its people depends on the success of businesses, large and small. This will determine our ability to grow and prosper, attract investment, provide job opportunities, enhance living standards and generate the resources needed to improve public services and infrastructure.

Our vision to deliver this is an EU that is focussed on its strengths and competitiveness, that leads an inclusive and innovative digital decade, that puts sustainability at the heart of our prosperity, and that is open for trade and investment.

This year of change is an opportunity to strengthen our influence in the EU and to set out a vision for a more competitive, innovative, sustainable and open EU. To avail of this opportunity Ireland and Irish business must ensure its voice is heard at EU level and Irish citizens must exercise their right to vote in European elections. Never has it been more important to show the strength of democratic action.

From 2019-2024, this EU political cycle has introduced significant new policies and regulations including on; climate and environment, through the European Green Deal and Fit for 55 package; digital, through new rules on data and AI; social, through legislation on minimum wages; and trade and international relations, through summits, trade agreements and enhanced sustainability rules. All of these, among many more, have and will impact on business and society.

The next European Commission will play a central role as the EU institution that will develop and propose policies and legislation for 2024-2029. While the next European Parliament, together with the EU member states and the Council, will have significant power to amend, approve or reject these proposals.

The positive impact of EU membership is clear, helping Ireland on its journey from an inward-looking, protectionist economy to a highly competitive, innovative and globalised hub. The Irish business community has played its part in this transformation.

The European single market and an outward-looking approach have provided greater opportunities to trade, attract investment and foster a skilled and flexible workforce. A strong EU has helped shape a strong Ireland with economic and societal benefits flowing both ways.

The EU is central to our future success. The 2024 European Parliament elections are an opportunity to help shape that future. An opportunity to put strong Irish voices into one of Europe's key institutions.

93% 
think Ireland has benefited from being an EU member¹

88% 
support EU membership²

1 Irish respondents to the latest [Eurobarometer survey](#) (December 2023)

2 Respondents to the latest [European Movement Ireland survey](#) (July 2023)

The EU is Ireland's most important trading partner followed by the USA and UK

Exports:

EU27: 38.7%

USA: 30.3%

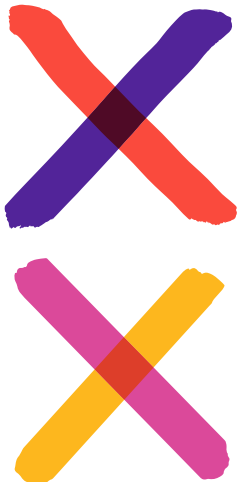
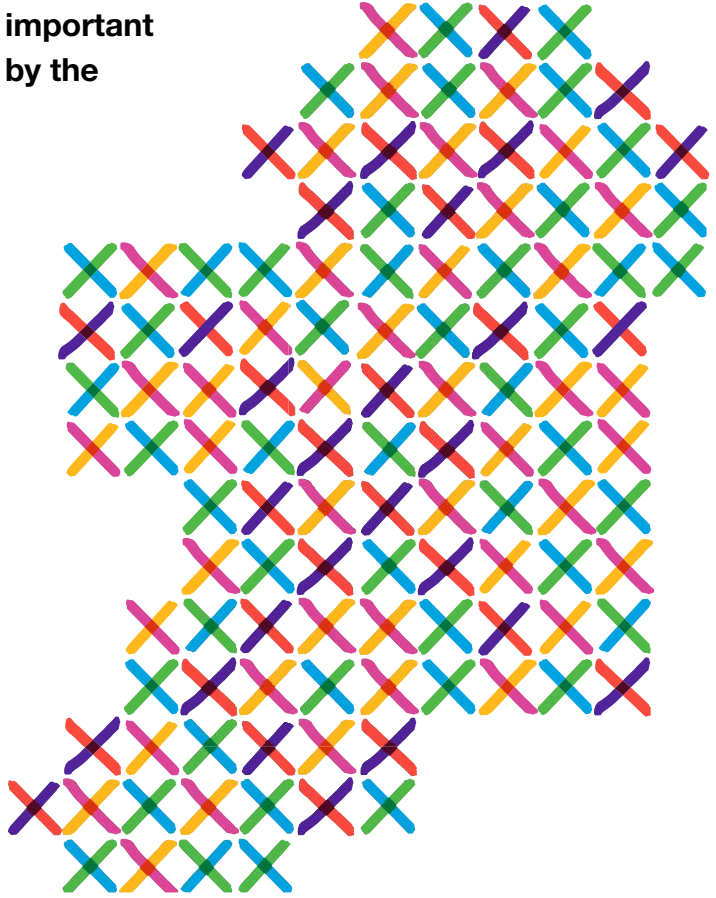
UK: 10.6%

Imports:

EU27: 30.3%

USA: 21%

UK: 15.5%



The benefits and potential of the EU single market are huge:

Access is estimated to be worth **€30 billion** to Ireland annually.

The world's largest single market³ - **447 million** consumers and **23 million** companies employing nearly **128 million** people⁴.

The benefits of completing the single market could be up to **€713 billion** by 2029⁵.

3 [European Commission \(2020\)](#)

4 [European Commission \(2023\)](#)

5 [European Parliament Study \(2019\)](#)



1 ■ An EU that is focused on its strengths and competitiveness

The establishment of the EU single market transformed the economic opportunities for open economies such as Ireland, removing barriers to the free movement of goods, services, labour and capital.

As a work in progress, it's important that Ireland's voice is heard in reinforcing the single market as a key source of economic strength and in boosting the EU's long-term competitiveness.

To unlock further potential for goods, the EU must remove remaining barriers, enforce existing rules, create a regulatory environment that drives innovation and allow time to implement new rules.

The EU should complete the single market for services with a concentration on digital and data: Take an open approach to international partnerships, emphasize regulatory cooperation and collaborate with business.

It is vital to develop a true Capital Markets Union and Banking Union to foster competition and provide greater access to finance. We need to carefully design State Aid Rules along with robust fiscal capacity to support the twin transition.

To tackle skills gaps and labour shortages, we must invest in tailored education and training and attracting talent while removing barriers to internal mobility.



2: An EU that leads an inclusive and innovative digital decade

Digital readiness is essential in ensuring our economic strength, resilience and societal well-being. Digital trade is increasingly important for Ireland and the EU, in 2020 it represented 25% of global trade⁶, and is intricately linked to Europe's transition to climate neutrality.

Digital policy, alongside the European Green Deal, has been a central focus of the EU political cycle from 2019-2024 with the introduction of significant new legislation on digital markets, digital services, data and AI, among others.

In the next EU political cycle, the EU needs to allow time for these new rules to be implemented. To build on progress, the EU should promote an open and ambitious digital trade agenda and seek to deepen existing relationships with like-minded partners and establish new ones at multilateral, bilateral and local levels.

In the EU and with like-minded partners, regulatory harmonisation is necessary to streamline free and trusted cross-border data flows necessary for enterprise competitiveness and innovation.

To support digital competitiveness, innovation and resilience, the EU should strengthen enabling capacities and conditions: Boost skills, infrastructure and connectivity, cybersecurity and resilience, research and innovation, and public and private adoption.



3. An EU that puts sustainability at the heart of our prosperity

From 2019-2024, this EU political cycle introduced comprehensive, landmark climate and environment legislation through the European Green Deal. Most significantly, the Fit for 55 package sets out the detail for actualising the ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% in 2030 towards climate neutrality in 2050.

Business is fully committed to greening our economy and reaching the EU's climate neutrality ambitions. In the next political cycle, the EU needs to support the implementation, harmonisation and adaptation to new regulations. To meet our climate ambitions, we need to support companies to ensure they can deliver on the transition.

Through a comprehensive policy approach with an emphasis on economic incentives and fostering investment, competitiveness and sustainability ambitions can go hand-in-hand. In tandem, the EU must strive to bring international partners along with its ambition to meaningfully address climate change and to improve global environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards.

The EU can enable the European Green Deal to become a growth strategy that delivers on 2030 climate goals while strengthening competitiveness by flanking it with a real industrial strategy. This strategy can address tangible issues across the EU such as permitting bottlenecks and the need to improve investment conditions.



4. An EU that is open for trade and investment

Trade and the ability to attract investment are among Ireland and the EU's most powerful assets, and at the core of economic prosperity and competitiveness. In this era of global change, Ireland and the EU must safeguard an open, competitive and sustainable trade environment.

Ireland benefits from EU membership as it makes us more attractive for investment, strengthens our economy and provides access to lucrative global trade agreements.

Our EU membership brings collective benefits and a stronger voice in relations with global trading partners. The EU must work to reform the WTO, develop a better and more stable trading relationship with the UK and implement the Windsor Framework, and jointly identify risks, develop opportunities and set standards in our transatlantic partnership with the US.

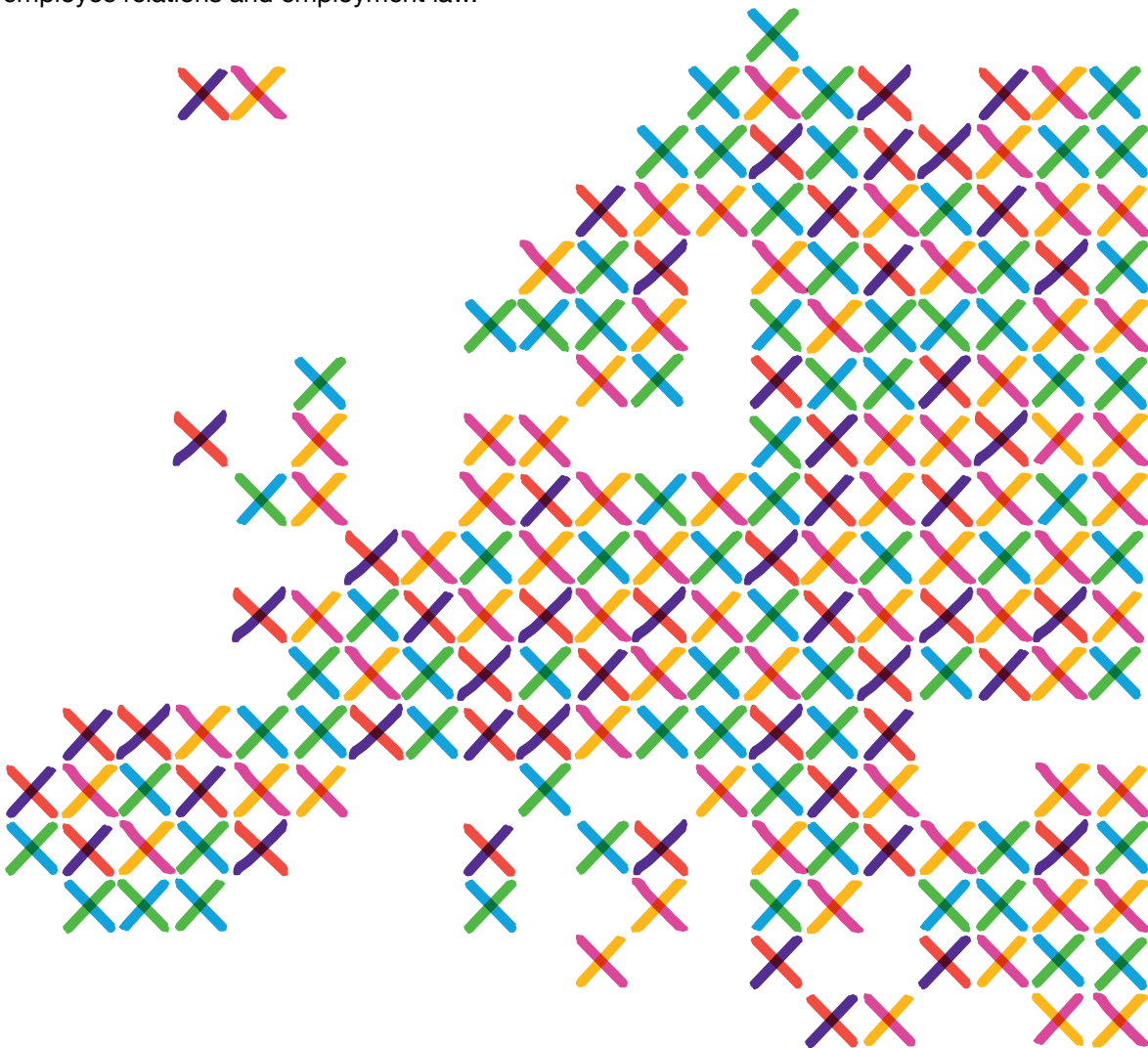
The EU single market guarantees Ireland's participation in lucrative and diversified bilateral trade agreements with third countries, which should be flexible to adjust to the twin transitions. Diversification of import and export markets is crucial to secure resilient and sustainable global value chains.

About us

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby and business representative group. Our purpose is to help build a better, sustainable future by influencing, supporting and delivering for business success. With over 280 employees, Ibec engages with key stakeholders in Ireland and internationally through our six regional offices and our Brussels office, along with an extensive international network in the UK and US.

Ibec positions are shaped by our diverse membership, which range from small to large, domestic to multinational and our 39 trade associations cover a wide range of industry sectors.

As well as lobbying, Ibec provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.



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