



# Are We Ageist?

Findings of IrelandThinks Public Poll commissioned by Age Action



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



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## Methodology

Age Action wanted to find out the extent to which people in Ireland hold ageist opinions, in a context where the World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified that ageism is a global concern.

Age Action commissioned a public opinion poll, conducted by IrelandThinks ([www.irelandthinks.ie](http://www.irelandthinks.ie)). The sample size was 1,849, and the margin of error was 2.3%. A national panel was surveyed, and the data was weighted to match with the Census to ensure that it was representative of the wider population.

Survey respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with seven ageist opinions expressed as statements. The statements were based on international surveys for measuring ageism. While agreement with any one statement might not represent ageism, agreement with multiple ageist statements is an established way of predicting ageism. Respondents were also asked if they had personally experienced age discrimination.

## Findings

### 1.5 million people in Ireland hold ageist opinions

When presented with seven ageist opinions, more than a third of adults (37%) agreed with two or more of them.

### Most people in Irish society hold some ageist opinion

Most people (67%) agreed with at least one ageist opinion, although 1 in 3 (33%) did not agree with any.

More than a third of people (37%) agreed with two or more ageist opinions, which would represent 1.5 million people out of the adult population.

1 in 6 people (16%) agreed with three or more ageist opinions, which would represent around 625,000 people out of the adult population.

### Younger people are more likely to hold ageist opinions

People aged 18-34 were more than two and a half times as likely to agree with three or more ageist opinions (30% versus 12% for people aged 35+).

## Men are more likely to hold ageist opinions

Nearly half of men (47%) agreed with two or more ageist opinions, compared to a quarter (28%) of women.

Men (22%) were more than twice as likely to agree with three or more ageist opinions, compared to women (10%).

## Level of agreement with ageist opinions

**31% agree** that older persons prefer to socialise with people their own age.

**23% agree** that older persons get more than their fair share from public services. (Holding this opinion is the strongest predictor that a person will hold other ageist opinions).

**19% do not enjoy** the company of older people.

**18% disagree** with keeping the State Pension age at 66.

**18% agree** that older people should give up work to make way for younger workers.

**11% agree** that there is little we can do to improve our health once we reach older age.

**7% disagree** that older people should be encouraged to speak out politically.

## Experience of Age Discrimination

### 1 in 4 HAVE EXPERIENCED AGE DISCRIMINATION

Nearly one in four people have experienced discrimination on the grounds of age in recent years (23%).

The experience of discrimination is more common among those aged 55 or older (28%), compared to those aged 18-54 (19%).

Those aged 65+ were twice as likely to “strongly agree” that they had experienced age discrimination (10% versus 5% among those aged 18-64).

## People who are unemployed experience more age discrimination

People who were unemployed were more than twice as likely to experience age discrimination (48%) as people with any other work status (22%).

People unable to work (36%) also experienced age discrimination more often than average.

### People with lower incomes experience more age discrimination

People on lower incomes are more likely to experience age discrimination, while those on the highest incomes are the least likely.

For example, a third (34%) of those with incomes of €5-20,000 experienced age discrimination as did 28% of those with incomes of €20-30,000, compared to 17% of those with incomes of €50-80,000 and 13% of those with incomes of €80,000 or more.

### Self-directed ageism is common among older persons

Self-directed ageism is where people internalise ageist opinions that they have been repeatedly exposed to over their lives. Self-directed ageism can result in people conforming to their society's age stereotypes, which can affect their physical and mental health.

The survey found evidence of high levels of self-directed ageism among older persons. People aged 75+ are nearly three times as likely to hold ageist opinions as those aged 55-64.

1 in 5 (21%) of those aged 75+ held three or more ageist opinions compared to 1 in 8 (12%) of those aged 65-74 and 8% aged 55-64.

1 in 5 (19%) people aged 75+ agreed that older persons should give up work to make way for younger persons, compared to 1 in 8 (12%) of those aged 55-64.

1 in 4 (27%) people aged 75+ agreed that older persons get more than their fair share of public services, compared to 1 in 6 (16%) aged 55-64.

1 in 4 people aged 75+ (26%) do not enjoy the company of older people, compared to 1 in 6 (16%) aged 55-64.

### Older men are more likely to agree they can't improve their health

While most people (89%) disagreed that there is little we can do to improve our health once we reach older age, 1 in 9 (11%) agreed. Those already experiencing poor health were more likely to agree.

Men aged 65+ (21%) are twice as likely to agree that they can't improve their health as women the same age (11%).

### People on lower incomes are more likely to agree they can't improve their health

People on lower incomes were far more likely to agree than those on higher incomes that there was little we can do to improve our health in older age, with 19% of those on incomes of €5-20,000 and 12% of those on incomes of €20-30,000 agreeing with the statement, compared to 6% of those with incomes of €50,000 or higher.

A quarter of people who are unemployed (24%) or who are unable to work (24%) agree that there is little we can do to improve our health in older age, compared to 1 in 10 (10%) of those in full-time work.

Agreement with the statement by those on lower incomes supports the social determinants of health approach, which finds that environmental, societal or financial limitations can affect people's ability to improve their health.

### Most people want to keep the state pension age at 66

There is strong support for not raising the state pension age above 66, with three-quarters of people (75%) in agreement. This reflects that most people want older persons to retain the quality of life made possible by a State Pension from age 66.

80% of people who are unemployed and agree that the pension age should not be raised above 66, as do 91% of those unable to work.