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Increased entrepreneurialism and uncertainty amongst Ireland's youth - new AIB research finds

Strong entrepreneurial ambition as number of young people selling goods online grows

- **Substantial gains in Youth Economic wellbeing since 2022**
- **34% of young people have two or more income sources**
- **Financially confident young people three times as likely to save and five times as likely to invest**
- **38% say home ownership in the next decade is a main priority**
- **88% made at least one values-based spending action in the last year**

An inaugural report published by AIB showcases the financial perspectives of Ireland's 630,000 16 to 24 year olds entering adulthood during one of the country's biggest ever demographic, technological and economic transitions.

'The Youth Economy, Decoded' is an in-depth exploration and examination of Ireland's Youth Economy, led by AIB's Chief Economist David McNamara, in conjunction with Ipsos and The Youth Lab at THINKHOUSE.

Youth Economy Index

The report includes AIB's 'Youth Economy Index', which for the first time ever measures economic conditions for 16 to 24 year olds across learning, earning and spending. It shows strong improvements in economic wellbeing from 2022 to 2024, followed by a plateau and modest decline through 2026. This recent weakening reflects rising youth unemployment (12.5% in September 2026) and slower growth in youth spending amid higher inflation. With 2025 set as the base year (100), the index fell slightly to **98.9 in 2026**, from a peak of **100.4 in 2024**, but remains significantly above its 2022 level of **90.8**, reflecting the substantial gains in youth economic wellbeing.

Financial Confidence

The report shows that financial confidence and saving habits go hand in hand. Young people with the highest financial confidence are nearly three times as likely to save regularly as those with the lowest financial confidence (**49% Vs 17%**), and more than five times as likely to invest (**22% Vs 4%**). **36%** of 16 to 24 year olds who are saving have savings of €1,000 or more, while 19% have €5,000 or more saved.

The Life They're After

Young people are actively looking to secure the life they're after, with **41%** of Ireland's 16 to 24 year olds seeking 'financial security' and 'a career I love' before looking towards more traditional life goals, such as home ownership **(38%)**.

Entrepreneurship

The report found that **68% of 16 to 24s** in Ireland say they have entrepreneurial intent, through running a business, 'side hustles' or aiming to start a business. **34%** have two or more income sources and **25%** have an alternative income stream through selling online, freelance work, creator income or gig work.

However, the AIB report also found that young women aged 16 to 24 are more likely than men to say starting a business feels out of reach for them **(40% Vs 29%)**.

Speaking about The Youth Economy, Decoded and the report's findings, **AIB Chief Economist, David McNamara** said: *"Young people in Ireland have had to build resilience in the face of many challenges. Despite those challenges, the next generation is remarkably ambitious. Young people haven't inherited the same financial playbook their parents did. They've inherited a world with more financial decisions and more uncertainty. However, they are already shaping the economy through how they learn, earn, spend, save, build businesses and adopt new financial technologies. AIB has an important role in supporting their ability to participate in and contribute to Ireland's economy."*

Independent Approach

The Youth Economy, Decoded also shows that prosperity among 16 to 24 year olds is becoming more personalised. They believe financial security may require more than one income stream or one career and the rapid technology change has expanded their imagination of how wealth can be created.

*"Young people in Ireland are building their own financial ecosystems. Selling goods or services online in this age group increased from **16% last year to 27%**, the highest increase of any age group. Demographic change in a rapidly ageing Ireland means we will increasingly depend on young people's productivity, innovation and entrepreneurship. Having the right support structures in place is essential for Ireland to realise its own long-term potential."* added David McNamara.

Prioritising Values

Personal values are a priority for 16 to 24 year olds, with **88%** taking at least one values-based spending action in the past year – including buying second-hand, supporting ethical brands or checking provenance. 16 to 24s who are selling online are also more likely to buy second-hand, showing active participation in the circular economy.

Launching the report, **Orlaith Ryan, Chief Customer Officer, AIB** said: *"AIB is committed to empowering all people to build a sustainable future. We recognise the unprecedented challenges and opportunities young people face today, which require renewed focus and meaningful support. This report gives us a*

clear sense of what young people need and informs AIB's ambitious plans to support the next generation over a number of years."

Download AIB's 'The Youth Economy, Decoded' here.

Ends