



2025

The State of Human Connection

How Europeans understand online dating, safety-first innovation and the future of human connection.



Table of content

Introduction	4
Dating apps as a social good	6
Role of dating apps in combating loneliness	7
Supporting belonging, diversity, and social integration	7
Compatibility, shared intentions, and better matching	8
Meaningful connections still matter	8
Policy takeaways	9
Trust and safety	10
Safety as a fundamental requirement, not a feature	10
Europeans strongly endorse safety technologies and innovation	11
Dating apps outperform other platforms	11
Match Group’s proactive safety-by-design	12
Policy takeaways	13
AI as a positive tool to enhance safety and matching	14
AI for safety: Broad public approval	14
AI as a tool for better matching	15
AI for confidence, guidance, and support	15
Match Group’s AI leadership	15
Policy takeaways	16
Users want better partnerships between platforms and regulators	17
Safety and freedom as complementary values	17
A mandate for co-regulation	17
Expectations for social responsibility	18
Policy takeaways	18
Recommendations and Conclusion	19
Methodology	20

Introduction

Over the past decade, the way Europeans form and maintain relationships has undergone a profound transformation. Dating apps – once perceived as niche or unconventional – are now increasingly more embedded in Europe’s social fabric, supporting millions of people as they navigate loneliness, demographic shifts, and the growing role of digital technology in everyday life. Europeans today recognise that online dating is not simply a convenience: it is a form of essential social infrastructure. It enables meaningful connection, increases safety through verification and detection technologies, and broadens people’s horizons across cultures and communities.

At the European regulatory level, dating platforms sit within a complex and rapidly evolving environment:

- the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**, which aims to create a safer digital space in which the fundamental rights of all users of digital services are protected;
- the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, which lays down rules relating to the protection of persons with regard to the processing of their personal data and rules relating to the free movement of personal data;
- the **AI Act**, which sets out a risk-based rules system for AI developers and deployers regarding specific uses of AI and;
- emerging debates around the **Digital Fairness Act (DFA)** and the **Digital Omnibus** package, which influence consent, privacy, and fairness obligations.

Against this backdrop, this study was designed to explore what users expect from dating apps across key themes including safety, trust, verification, and responsible innovation. By analysing these insights, the report identifies where user expectations align or diverge from current regulatory approaches and offers targeted recommendations to help policymakers shape rules that reflect real needs and preferences.

Dating apps are not a cure-all, but respondents recognise their role in reducing loneliness and providing new avenues for safe and meaningful connection. Across Europe, respondents demonstrate mature and pragmatic expectations for safety, trust, and technological innovation. Rather than

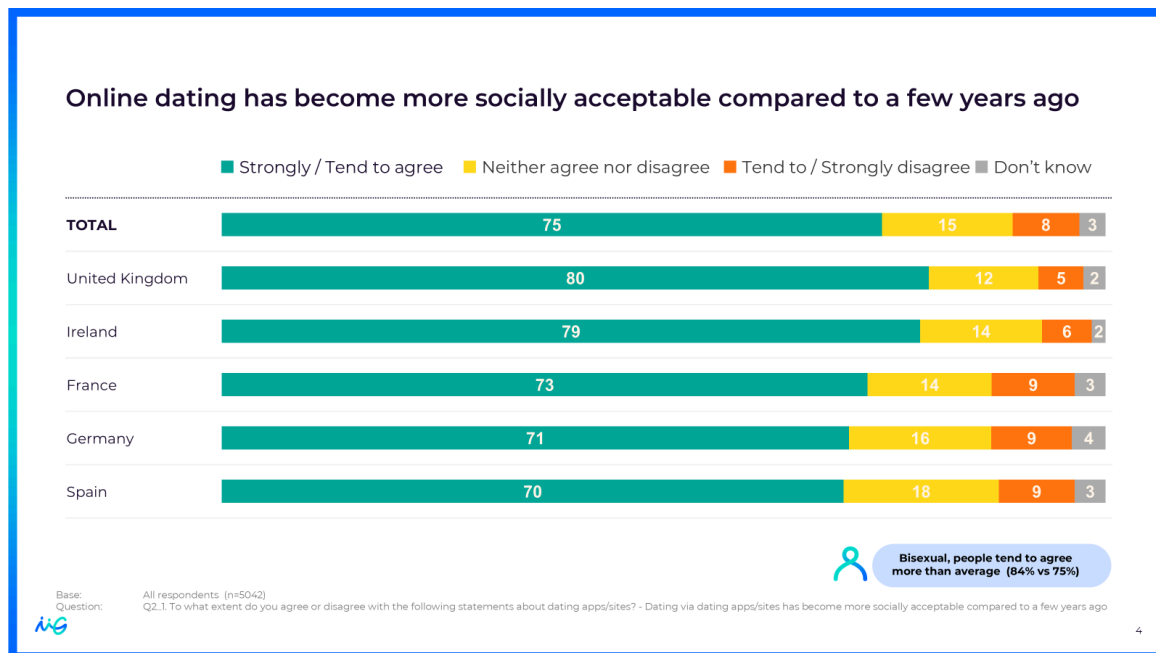
resisting technology, respondents want policymakers to enable the tools that demonstrably keep them safe.

Policymakers now have a timely opportunity to align rules with user expectations: enable responsible verification, allow low-risk safety AI, and pursue co-regulation that matches public preference.

Dating apps as a social good

Across Europe, dating apps have evolved from experimental products into established pillars of social life. Large majorities now recognise that dating apps provide social utility: they reduce loneliness, enable connections that would not otherwise occur, and normalise types of relationships that traditional social structures have not always supported.

The cultural shift is striking – **74.7%** of Europeans say online dating is more socially acceptable than before, with acceptance even higher among LGBTQ+ communities, where social acceptance registers as high as **84.4%** for bisexual respondents, as well as among women, with **77.5%** of women respondents believing dating apps have become more acceptable.



This marks a shift in norms and behaviours: digital connection is now a mainstream way to meet meaningful partners.

Role of dating apps in combating loneliness

Europe's loneliness problem is widely acknowledged. The European Commission has already placed loneliness on the policy agenda, framing it as a "serious public-health concern"¹ with tangible implications for mental health, productivity, and social cohesion. Loneliness affects young people as much as older adults, contradicting stereotypes that it is primarily an elderly issue². Across several Member States, 50-60% of young adults report moderate or significant loneliness³.

In this context, it is notable that **47.4%** of respondents say dating apps help combat loneliness. Younger adults (aged 18–39) are even more likely to cite loneliness reduction as a key benefit (**49.4%**). The figure rises further when specifically looking at dating app users (**52.5%**). This all reflects an important shift in how social support is found.

Younger Europeans are less likely to engage in community-based social structures (clubs, organised religion, neighbourhood organisations) compared to previous generations, and more likely to live alone, move for work, or remain single for longer^{4,5}. Dating apps therefore play a role far beyond romantic matchmaking; they serve as low-friction entry points of social discovery, helping users expand their circles and feel part of a broader community.

Supporting belonging, diversity, and social integration

Dating apps play a key role in normalising diverse relationships. **51.6%** of Europeans say dating apps help normalise and legitimise relationships that cross cultural, geographic, linguistic, and generational boundaries. Among LGBTQ+ respondents, that number rises significantly, reaching as high as **65.4%** for gay and **67.7%** for bisexual respondents, a reminder that digital

¹https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/monitoring-and-tackling-loneliness-europe-released-data-first-eu-wide-survey-2023-06-06_en

² <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC133351>

³<https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/next-generation-and-society/project-news/a-comparison-of-youth-loneliness-in-europe-in-2024>

⁴https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261653/youth_report_final.pdf/93e126eb-a18c-4864-ba67-0c0ffad361db

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/SEPDF/cache/29071.pdf>

spaces have long served as vital meeting grounds for communities whose offline opportunities for connection may be limited or unevenly distributed.

In a continent marked by migration, demographic imbalances, and increasingly multicultural cities, this normalising function is far from trivial. Dating platforms create safe, low-barrier environments where people can meet outside their immediate social and cultural circles. They facilitate intercultural couples, queer relationships, and friendships that challenge social divides. This is particularly important in Member States where LGBTQ+ acceptance varies significantly and where queer young adults often lack safe, offline spaces⁶.

Compatibility, shared intentions, and better matching

One of the strongest social benefits identified by Europeans lies in how dating apps help people find partners with compatible values, goals, and intentions. More than half of all dating app users say apps make it easier to find compatible people and people who share their dating intentions (**51.7%** and **55.4%** respectively). Interestingly the result for finding people with common dating intentions is significantly higher among LGBTQ+ users with the percentage rising up to **61.9%** for bisexual users. These numbers signal that digital dating does not inherently promote superficiality or randomness; instead, it provides for mindful and purposeful choices. Users value the ability to filter for shared relationship goals, whether they seek committed partnerships, casual connections, or friendships.

The narrative that dating apps encourage “disposable” interactions is not supported here. The data instead suggests that digital platforms help reduce ambiguity.

Meaningful connections still matter

When compared to dating that begins in person **59.5%** of respondents say it is the same or easier to build meaningful connections via dating apps. These findings show that dating apps are not understood as a replacement for in-person interaction but as the bridge that facilitates it. Many users see apps

⁶ LGBTQ+ people say they avoid certain locations or holding hands in public out of fear: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtiq-equality_en.pdf

as a first step: an efficient, low-pressure way to discover people who share their values before investing in a real-life meeting.

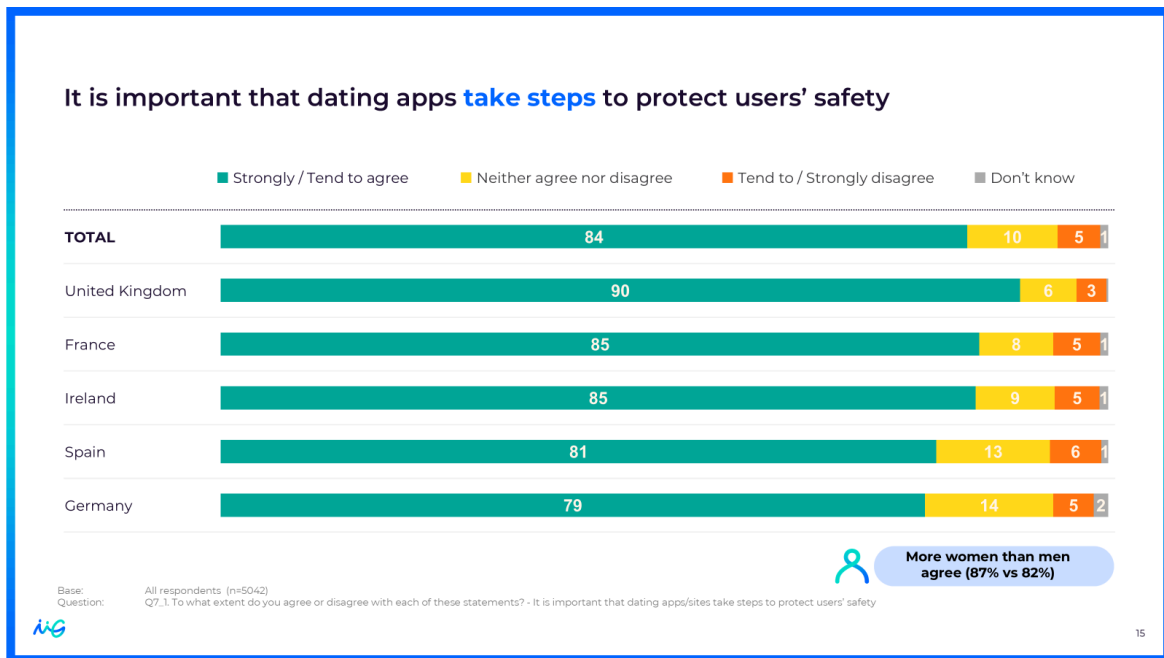
Policy takeaways

Recognising dating apps as part of Europe's social infrastructure means acknowledging their role in supporting wellbeing, integration, and belonging. Unlike other digital platforms that are designed to maximise engagement time, dating apps are fundamentally oriented towards facilitating real-world connection. Success for dating apps means digital matches translating to in-person interactions. Policymakers should not group dating apps alongside other digital platforms, and instead see them as part of Europe's social infrastructure, including as key supporters of loneliness initiatives, inclusion policies, and demographic objectives. Rules such as the Digital Fairness Act must avoid unintentionally limiting safe pathways to connection. Fragmentation or over-restriction would risk exacerbating social isolation. Conversely, policies that support safe, innovative digital connection – through verification, AI tools, and cross-border consistency – amplify these social benefits

Trust and safety

Safety as a fundamental requirement, not a feature

Safety emerges as the defining expectation Europeans bring to online dating. It is not considered by respondents as an optional feature or a secondary layer of protection, but the precondition for digital connection. When **84.1%** of Europeans say that safety steps are essential on dating apps, they are expressing a clear requirement that technology must create an environment where people feel protected, respected, and able to interact without fear of deception or harassment.



For many users, particularly women who face disproportionate exposure to online risks, safety includes an emotional dimension; **75%** say feeling comfortable is just as important as being protected from scams and fraud, with the figure going up to **77.9%** for women respondents. This broader

understanding of trust shows that safety now includes civility, fairness, and the emotional conditions that make connection possible.

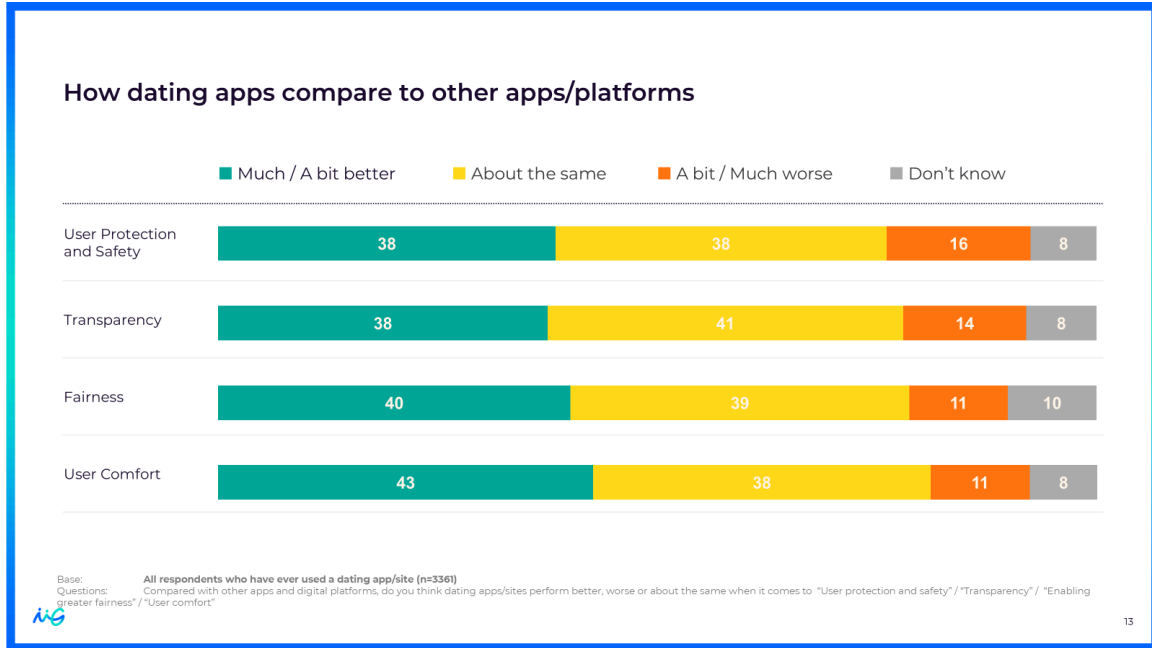
Europeans strongly endorse safety technologies and innovation

Survey respondents' support for safety-enhancing technologies is overwhelmingly positive, with a clear majority endorsing technologies focused on fake profile detection (**84.2%**). Far from rejecting technological interventions, users want platforms to deploy tools that proactively limit impersonation, catfishing, and criminal activity. This is especially true for women respondents, who endorse these technologies more strongly. For fake profile detection in particular, **87.1%** of women respondents support dating apps using such tools to improve user safety.

Biometrics are often contested in policy debates, but Europeans evaluate them pragmatically. The majority of respondents support biometric verification as the strongest protection to users. **64%** said biometrics strike a good balance between safety and convenience, and **65.2%** say biometrics increase trust.

Dating apps outperform other platforms

In recent years, public backlash against social media and technology platforms has dominated discourse about these technologies. Despite this backdrop, dating apps generally outperformed other platforms and technologies on key matters, with the largest share of respondents viewing dating apps as comparatively safe (**38.4%**), transparent (**37.5%**), enabling greater fairness (**40%**) and enabling user comfort (**42.7%**) when compared to other digital platforms (i.e. social media, messaging platforms, forums).



When specifically asked about safety measures **72.9%** of respondents believe safety measures on dating apps (such as reporting, moderation and verification) are the same or better than measures on other types of digital platforms. This figure is higher still among younger respondents at **75.1%**.

These findings further establish dating apps as a distinct category of digital platform – both in their objective and in how users experience them. The higher safety perception among younger respondents reinforces this idea, as younger users – who engage most actively with a range of platforms – are effectively “voting with experience”.

Match Group’s proactive safety-by-design

Match Group’s investments and operational model align closely with these public expectations. With more than \$550 million invested since 2022 in safety and over 350 dedicated trust-and-safety staff, the company deploys proactive moderation that removes over 80% of harmful content before it is reported. Strict user screening, expert-backed policies shaped by the Match Group Advisory Council, and partnerships with law enforcement help further prevent bad actors from joining or remaining on our platforms.

Our approach to safety begins with a strict prohibition against hate speech, harassment, abuse, prostitution, sex trafficking, solicitation, and fraudulent behaviour. Cross-platform banning – ensuring a user removed from one Match Group app cannot simply reappear on another – adds ecosystem-level accountability for severe harms. Partnerships with industry, NGOs and law enforcement complete a layered approach that combines technology, expert guidance, and public-sector cooperation to embed safety into every aspect of the user experience.

Match Group's verification products demonstrate the real-world impact of these measures. Match Group implements age assurance measures across services to keep minors off its platforms, only accessible to 18+ users. Match Group relies on technologies leveraging facial vectors to allow for Photo Verification on different services. Face Check, an innovative facial verification tool, has significantly improved user safety in launched markets (US, Canada, Australia, India), leading to a greater than 60% decrease in exposure to potential bad actors and a greater than 40% decrease in bad actor reports. These results show what can be achieved when safety-enhancing tools are permitted at scale.

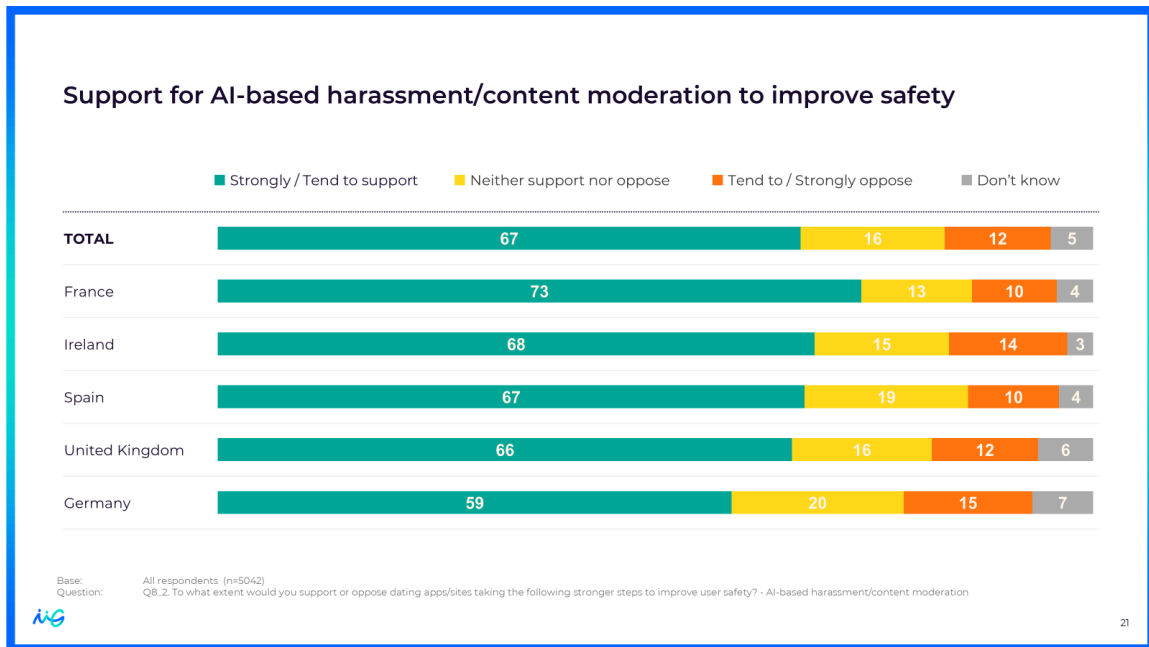
Policy takeaways

The policy conclusion is clear: Europeans want strong, proactive safety measures and expect platforms to use the tools that make them safer. Regulation that restricts verification or misclassifies low-risk safety AI as high-risk would contradict public expectations and weaken protections. The European Commission should ensure that frameworks such as the DSA, the DFA, GDPR and more should encourage rather than curtail safety-enhancing technologies such as biometrics for scam and fraud prevention and AI-powered features for moderation.

AI as a positive tool to enhance safety and matching

AI for safety: Broad public approval

Despite precautionary rhetoric in EU debates around AI, dating-app users offer a more pragmatic view: they support AI when it makes concrete improvements to safety and to user experience. The strongest consensus concerns AI's role in protection: **84.2%** support AI-powered fake profile detection (**87.1%** for women respondents), **66.6%** support AI harassment moderation (**71.4%** for women respondents), and **56.6%** support AI-powered facial recognition for photo verification (**59.5%** for women respondents).



These figures reflect a common-sense view that AI applied to detection and moderation reduces exposure to impersonation, fraud, and abuse.

AI as a tool for better matching

Beyond safety, Europeans recognise AI's capacity to improve the quality of matches and this is especially true for younger respondents. **55.1%** say AI helps them find more compatible matches based on intentions or goals (**58.2%** among 18-39s), **57.8%** say AI helps identify shared interests and values (**60.5%** among 18-39s), and **55%** say they would actively use AI-powered match recommendations (**59.1%** among 18-39s). Rather than seeing AI as a replacement for human judgment, respondents regard it as a filter and amplifier; helping them get to meaningful, compatible interactions more efficiently and with less friction.

AI for confidence, guidance, and support

AI also supports soft skills and confidence-building within apps. Conversation-assistance tools are widely appreciated – **82.2%** of users who have tried them find them helpful and **83.6%** who have tried AI-enhanced games within apps have found them beneficial. These features reduce anxiety for newcomers, help people returning to dating after life changes, and assist users who struggle with initiating interactions, thereby smoothing the pathway from online introductions to real-world meetings.

Match Group's AI leadership

In January 2024, Match Group launched a set of [AI Principles](#) to guide the responsible development and deployment of generative AI, covering authenticity, equity, explainability, accountability, safety, privacy, and integrity. Guided by these principles, Match Group has introduced AI tools that translate these values into practical, user-facing experiences. Features such as "Are You Sure?" and "Does This Bother You?" prevent harassment in real time (with 1 in 5 users actually changing their behaviour after an 'Are You Sure?' prompt); AI detection models surface suspicious behaviour patterns that humans might miss; compatibility scoring improves match quality; and profile-creation AI helps users present themselves more authentically. These principles and tools closely align with what users have expressed they value in dating apps: tools

that enhance safety, improve matching, support confidence, and remain transparent and fair.

Policy takeaways

As the EU looks to review frameworks such as the AI Act and GDPR through the Digital Omnibus, it is critical to preserve space for low-risk AI that supports safety, fraud detection, moderation, and matching. Europeans want AI that protects them and helps them form meaningful relationships; policy should emphasise enabling those outcomes.

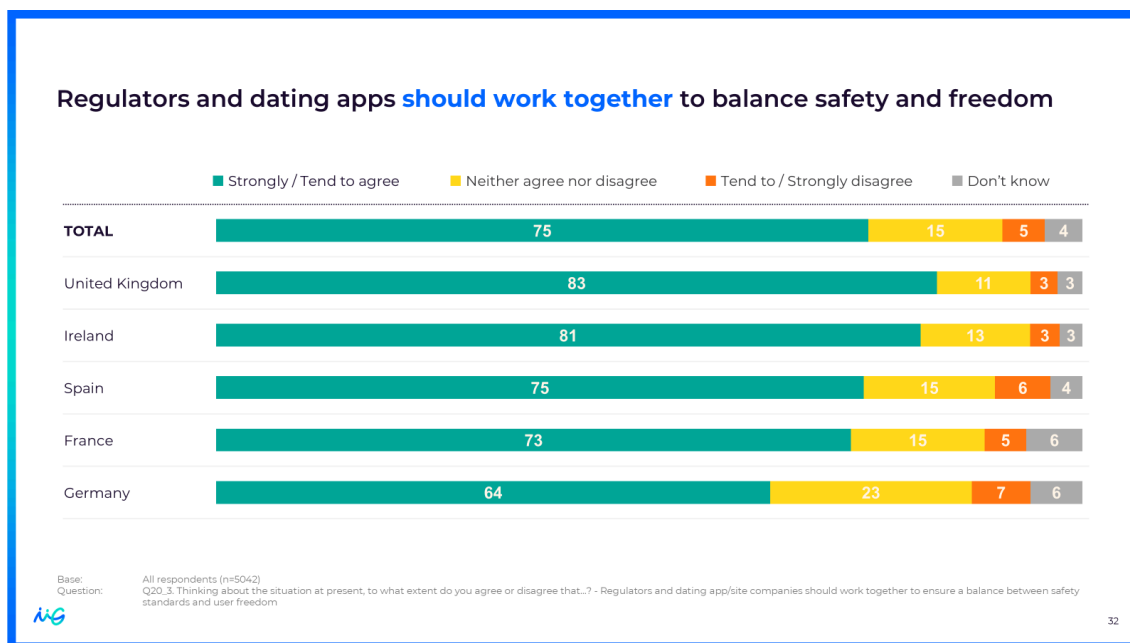
Users want better partnerships between platforms and regulators

Safety and freedom as complementary values

Europeans' views on the balance between safety and freedom are nuanced. **63.7%** say safety is at least as important as freedom with respect to dating apps. This does not signal a desire to curtail liberty; instead, it reflects the understanding that safety is the condition that makes autonomy meaningful. Women tend to prioritise safety more strongly: **66.1%** place safety at equal or higher importance when compared to freedom. In short, users see safety and freedom as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

A mandate for co-regulation

There is widespread appetite for collaboration between platforms and regulators. **75.3%** of Europeans believe regulators and dating apps should work together on safety and user freedom.



This preference underscores a desire for co-regulatory models that pair regulatory legitimacy with platforms' technical capabilities. Users reject both rigid, impractical top-down rules and total platform self-regulation; they favour pragmatic partnerships that yield concrete protections.

Expectations for social responsibility

Users also expect dating apps to contribute to wider social objectives. Respondents strongly support dating platforms addressing loneliness through corporate social responsibility programmes or partnership with governments (**62.4%**), framing dating apps as actors with wider social responsibilities. This is especially the case for younger respondents (18–39s) where **67.6%** of respondents were in favour. This positions platforms as part of Europe's social-inclusion ecosystem and suggests potential for partnerships that bring together public policy goals and platform resources. The same is the case in dating platforms improving safety through corporate social responsibility work or partnership with governments, where **86.4%** of all respondents see a clear role for dating platforms.

Policy takeaways

User preferences translate into several policy priorities: regulatory frameworks should avoid blocking essential safety tools such as ID verification, biometrics, and safety AI; Member State alignment should be pursued to avoid fragmented rules; co-regulation should be used to combine public oversight with technical know-how; and loneliness strategies should formally recognise dating apps as contributors to social connection. Taken together, these expectations form a clear mandate for cooperative, innovation-friendly governance.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations




- 1. Enable responsible verification tools.**
Harmonised and innovation-friendly verification frameworks would better support safety features respondents say they value.
- 2. Ensure space for low-risk safety AI.**
The implementation of the AI Act should allow continued use of AI systems that support detection, moderation, and compatibility features.
- 3. Recognise dating apps as a distinct category of platforms that contribute to EU social objectives.**
Dating platforms operate with different incentives when compared to other digital platforms and play a key role in supporting loneliness strategies, inclusion goals, and demographic resilience.
- 4. Pursue co-regulation.**
Platforms bring technical capability; regulators bring legitimacy. Respondents expect collaboration between both.
- 5. Avoid over-restriction and fragmentation.**
Safety-first innovation should not be hindered by fragmented or overly restrictive rules that reduce respondent choice or protection.


Conclusion

Dating apps today form a core part of Europe's digital and social infrastructure. Respondents value safety-by-design, verification, and responsible AI, and see these tools as foundational to meaningful connection. With proportionate, harmonised, innovation-friendly regulation, Europe can ensure digital connection remains safe, trustworthy, and human-centred.

Methodology

Methodology

<p>Target group </p> <p>The single population (defined as individuals not in a relationship), aged 18-59.</p> <p>In total, n=5042 singles participated.</p>	<p>Countries </p> <p>France, Germany, Spain, Ireland, the United Kingdom</p> <p>A sample size of at least n=1000 was obtained per country.</p>	<p>Timing </p> <p>The survey was conducted between 17 October and 31 October 2025 inclusive.</p>
<p>Survey mode</p> <p>Online interviews (CAWI) via Ipsos' online access panels.</p>	<p>Online daters</p> <p>Online daters fell out naturally from the target single population. Online daters were defined as singles who have ever used any online dating app or site.</p>	<p>Weighting</p> <p>Post-survey weighting on age (18-39, 40-59) and gender to ensure representative results.</p>

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