

DECEMBER 2018

IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE PROTECTION IN IRELAND

An Analysis of public attitudes



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Irish research into public attitudes towards immigration and refugee protection was commissioned by The Social Change Initiative to inform policy-makers and support the work of civil society organisations working on these issues. It is one of a suite of reports that were undertaken in France, Germany, Italy and Greece by More in Common, in partnership with The Social Change Initiative. The programme was funded by the Human Dignity Foundation (Ireland), with support also being made available for similar research in The Netherlands. As such, this research forms part of a larger initiative to support effective communications for individual activists and organisations with an interest in immigration and refugee protection issues. But it will also be of interest to those who are committed to address the threats to open and inclusive societies.



In Ireland the study benefited from the guidance and advice of NGO practitioners, while the methodology was adapted by Martha Fanning Research and Bricolage to complete both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the work. The Social Change Initiative is grateful for the interest and expertise of the Irish advisers and experts. This report provides insight into Irish opinions about their country, its perceived prospects and place in the world as well as attitudes to immigration and refugee protection policies. It recognises the already established link between the state of the Irish economy and a country that essentially sees itself as welcome and open. Ireland has not experienced the rise in xenophobic nationalism and nativism that has occurred in many other European countries, but equally it has not been to the forefront in accepting large numbers of people seeking refuge, or indeed putting systems in place to appropriately support non-Irish born refugees and migrants. Thus, any sense of complacency is misplaced.

Across Europe extremist politicians have exploited dissatisfaction with aspects of the status quo to augment their electoral prospects. The issue of immigration, closely aligned with Islamophobia, has been adopted as a signifier in this new wave of reactionary momentum. Thankfully this has not happened in Ireland where there is widespread support for the European Union and for policies that are more open to the world. However, this is not to ignore the concerns that people express about the nature of politics and whether they feel that they have a voice. The public attitude study carried out offers findings that are nuanced and, at times, contradictory, with many people being unsure of their feelings and positions on a range of very important questions. It is, nevertheless, encouraging that while some Irish people are sceptical about the impact of immigration, most still demonstrate feelings of solidarity and empathy towards newcomers and are prepared to offer them a welcome. It is hoped that this study can highlight both the hopes and concerns that impact on attitudes to immigration and diversity in Ireland. As a recent ESRI report confirmed (McGinnity, F., Grotti, R., Russell, H. & Fahey, E. (2018) Attitudes to Diversity in Ireland: Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission & ESRI – <http://www.esri.ie>) an Irish welcome cannot be taken for granted and needs to be underpinned by accurate information, opportunities for positive contact experience and supportive policies managed in a timely and effective manner.



The Social Change Initiative was established in 2015 and is an international charity. Based in Belfast (Northern Ireland), our team draws together people with deep experience of grassroots activism, peacebuilding, advocacy and strategic philanthropy. We work both globally and locally to secure progressive social change, so that communities become more inclusive, fairer and peaceful.

thesocialchangeinitiative.org

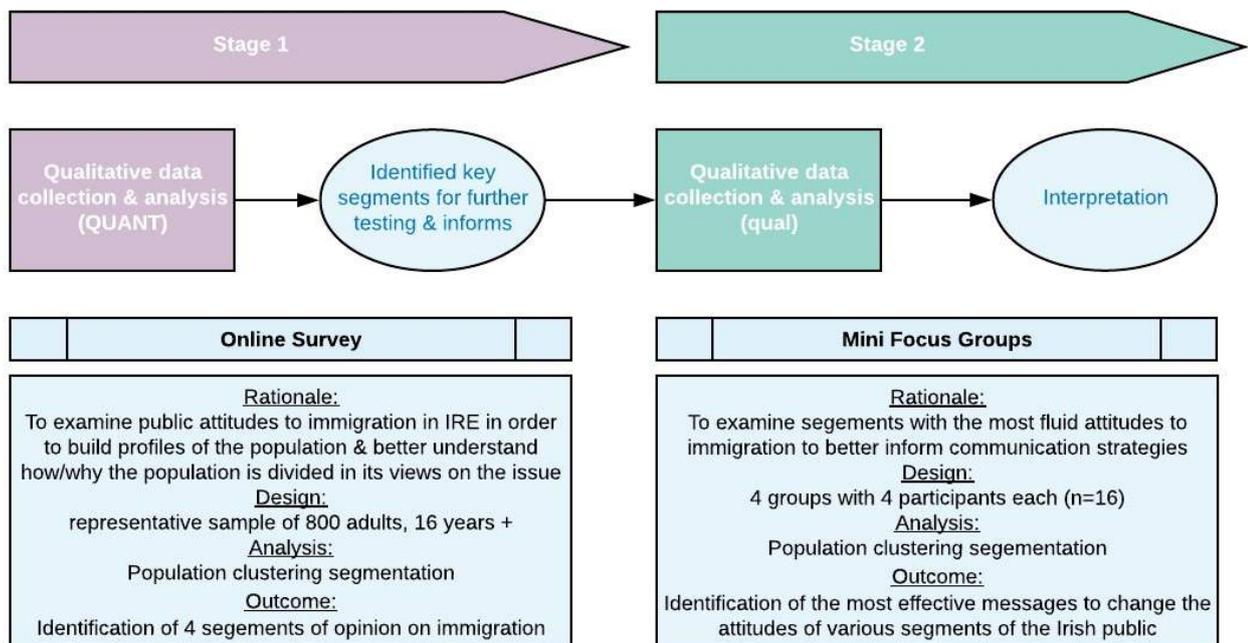
METHODOLOGY

This study employs a population segmentation analysis method that draws on a range of attitudinal characteristics of the Irish public. This form of segmentation provides a rich composite picture of how the population is divided in its views, going beyond basic demographic factors to show how networks of attitudes and opinions are connected.

The research was conducted by Martha Fanning Research in Ireland and consisted of online surveys with a representative sample of 800 adults.

Respondents answered demographic questions as well as questions reflecting their areas of greatest concern, their political views, familiarity with refugee and immigration issues and their understanding of related terminology, their personal experience with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their responses to different policy approaches and messages.

The quantitative phase was completed by Bricolage with four focus group discussions (conducted in Thurles and Dublin) with members of two of the Irish 'middle' segments (the Questioning Hopefuls and the Uncertain Sceptics) to probe their attitudes to a number of pertinent questions.



GENERAL FINDINGS

1. There is a general openness to immigration and a welcome for refugees in Ireland, with 35% of the population being very open, an additional 44% of the population that are open but express certain concerns and anxieties, and 17% who hold negative attitudes to immigration. The attitudes expressed are closely linked with people's overall perception of their status and prospects within the Irish economy and society. Those who feel that their circumstances are improving are more open and welcoming, whilst people who feel 'left behind' and marginalised are more likely to see new communities as a threat.

2. The Irish describe their country as welcoming, optimistic, tolerant and open, although some also view it as 'naïve'. This sense of optimism is in marked contrast to the responses received in other countries where parallel surveys were carried out. In the French, German and Italian studies words such as 'worried', 'angry', 'fearful' and 'weak' predominated. Ireland still seems at comfort with itself.

3. When asked about the issues that seen as currently facing Ireland today, the main focus was on the state of the healthcare system (47%), homelessness (41%), followed by the housing market (25%), crime and violence (21%) and the implications of Brexit (20%). Only 9% of the Irish responses mentioned immigration as an issue, again in marked contrast to other European countries where similar work had been carried out.

4. There is continuing strong support for the European Union, with only 11% of respondents strongly supporting the statement that 'Ireland should distance itself from the EU and the euro'. However, on the home front, some 68% of people felt (either strongly or moderately) that the 'Irish economy is rigged to advance the rich and powerful' and that 'Traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me' (65% in strong or moderate agreement).

5. Sense of place and identity remains strong in Ireland and there are concerns if either were under threat. There is also strong support for values such as 'fairness' and 'compassion'. The application to these values to different groups within the country varies, with 33% and 32% expressing a sense of warmth towards migrants and refugees respectively (48% and 46% were correspondingly indifferent), this figure dropping to 26% expressing warmth towards Muslims (47% - indifferent) and 23% towards Irish Travellers (46% indifferent).

6. Despite certain anxieties being expressed about the impact of immigration, many Irish recognise the importance of embracing greater diversity and remaining a welcoming country:

- Only 23% of people questioned whether increasing diversity, due to immigration, created increased opportunities for everyone living in Ireland. While 31% were uncertain, 43% felt that diversity was an important benefit. Similar responses were received in response to the proposition that 'Refugees coming to Ireland enrich our culture and society'.

- There is a feeling of solidarity with refugees seeking protection, with 70% agreeing with the statement 'If I were from another country and fleeing terrible circumstances, I would want Ireland to offer me protection'. Only 7% disagreed with this statement.

- There was general agreement that people who are immigrants often do jobs that Irish people don't want to do (67% agreed) and are often prepared to work for lower pay than Irish workers (69%). There were some concerns that immigrants have made it harder for Irish people to get jobs (39% agreed) and organisations working with migrants have expressed concerns that they may be exploited in terms of certain sectors of low-wage employment.

- The main concerns expressed were that immigrants might be a drain on public resources that could otherwise be spent within local communities (49%) felt that this might be an issue, particularly if the Irish economy experienced a downturn.

7. There is overwhelming agreement that no child should grow up in Ireland undocumented. Only 5% disagreed with this proposition which received strong support from 74% of respondents. It is accepted, however, that there is pressure on schools and strong support (80%) that refugee and asylum-seeking children should be provided with English language support and have equal access to education and training as an Irish child.

8. There is strong support for measures to promote the inclusion/integration of people who are refugees and long-term immigrants into Irish society. While this is a two-way process, learning the language is seen as important as is a knowledge of Irish values and culture. There were three key ingredients to seeing immigration in a positive light – (i) celebrate your culture and share it with us; (ii) make an active contribution to the workforce; and (iii) integrate into our cultural traditions.

9. There is support (60% agreement with only 15% disagreement) that people who had lived in Ireland for a long time as migrants and refugees should be able to become Irish citizens. There is also support that undocumented Irish people in the USA should be able to regularise their position in the immigration system.

10. In comparison to other Europeans – with the exception of Italians – Irish people feel confident in speaking their mind about controversial issues. There were mixed attitudes expressed on themes of belonging, community and inclusion, but only a minority of people felt that it is not acceptable for them to express themselves on subjects like immigration. Those that expressed specific anxieties about aspects of immigration and refugee protection strongly dissociated themselves from the label of racism.

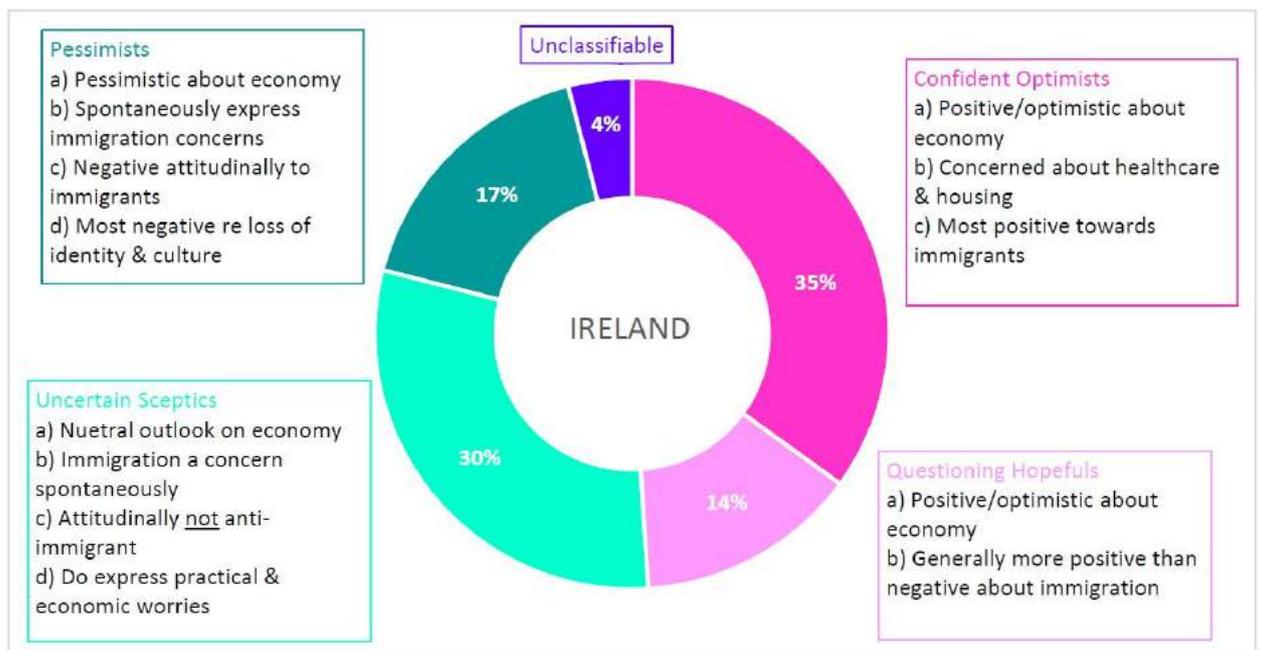
THE IRISH SEGMENTS

This study groups people into different population segments according to their beliefs and values around perception of economic and social circumstances, issues of identity and belonging and the Irish relationship to the outside world. These groups are placed on a spectrum between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ values. Those in the ‘closed’ group tend to have experienced economic depression and social marginalisation themselves, leaving them more distrustful of the Irish political system and negative towards immigration for fear that the impact will further disadvantage prospects for themselves and their families.

Those in the ‘open’ segment are more international in their outlook and favour Ireland as an open society that welcomes people who are migrants and refugees. They tend to be more optimistic and self-confident.

The two middle segments are marked by mixed (and fluid) attitudes, but while having some specific concerns are generally open to being more positive, rather than negative, about immigration and attitudinally are not anti-immigrant or refugee.





1. Confident Optimists (35%)

Who are positive and optimistic about the economy and about their own circumstances. Of all the segments they are the most positive about the impact of immigration, welcoming greater diversity in Ireland. The demographic composition of this cluster is in line with the overall Irish population in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, dependent children and social class (in marked contrast with Germany and France where this segment tends to be urban and more highly educated). The Confident Optimists are the most likely to donate to NGOs and charities that are working with people who are refugees. They are the least likely to believe negative 'myths' about immigration and their main concerns are about the state of healthcare and homelessness.

2. Questioning Hopefuls (14%)

This segment is composed of mainly younger men (under 35 years), often young fathers. While being in line with Irish demography in terms of social class, they tend to have a higher than average third level educational attainment. They are broadly positive about the Irish economy and society, although still have concerns about the economic future, church/state relations; education and racism. . This is a group who feel that the impact of globalisation has been reasonably positive for Ireland (41% with 44% unsure) and they are generally more positive than negative about immigration.

Many of their responses fell into the categories of 'unsure' or 'tending to agree/disagree' suggesting that they are open to persuasion on policy options and positions. Despite their positivity, 57% feel that Irish society is structured to benefit the well-networked and powerful.

3. Uncertain Sceptics (30%)

This segment expresses spontaneous concern over immigration but are not overly anti-immigrant in sentiment. Like others, their main anxieties focus on healthcare and homelessness in Ireland, although they also raise concerns about a perceived increase in crime and violence, as well as poverty and social inequality. The segment features many middle-aged women who are acutely aware of the pressures facing their growing children. Apart from this, the demographics of the segment are in line with the general population in terms of social class, educational attainment and having responsibility for children. The Uncertain Sceptic segment does not necessarily identify with any one political party. As a group, this segment of public opinion is more pessimistic about prospects for the Irish economy and society, expressing specific concerns about pressure on public services that they fear immigration might be exacerbating. As with the Questioning Hopefuls many are uncertain in their views on immigration policies. They tend to agree (although not emphatically) that immigration could harbour negative consequences for the Irish economy, society and culture if not properly managed, but are open to discussion about this. This segment is particularly important as communicators of what is seen as 'common sense' knowledge and positions.

4. Pessimists (17%)

The Pessimists, as their name reflects, are exceptionally pessimistic about the state of the Irish economy and society, as well as their personal and family prospects. 62% of this segment feel that they are worse off now than in previous years (compared to 14% of the population as a whole), and 68% think that the situation will only worsen over the next five years. In addition, most of this segment express fears that Irish identity and culture is under threat, and 88% believe that Irish society is in a worse state now than previously (as compared to 33% of the overall population). While sharing concerns over healthcare and homelessness with the other segments, 16% feel that immigration is an issue (compared to 9% of the population as a whole) and they are inclined to believe that people who are refugees and immigrants are given preference in the welfare and employment systems. They feel that immigration brings adverse consequences in terms of Irish culture and the economy and believe that many refugees are not genuine in their claim for protection.

Although the Pessimists are in line with Irish demography in terms of gender, age and dependent children, they include a significantly higher number of people in the C2DEs socio-economic categories that continue to feel the bite of austerity measures and deprivation. They also tend to have lower educational attainment levels than the other segments. Often termed 'the left behind', they feel that they have little or no say in Ireland today which they see as being rigged for the benefit of the rich and powerful (77% agree). However, unlike the Identitarian Nationalists in France, the Hostile Nationalists in Italy and the Radical Opponents in Germany (See reports at thesocialchangeinitiative.org), Irish Pessimists do not relate to extreme right-wing political positions but are more likely to be associated with a protest vote.

The two segments cited as the Questioning Hopefuls and the Uncertain Sceptics comprise what has been termed in other studies 'the anxious middle' – people whose views are not fixed but that are open to receiving accurate information and effective communication about immigration policy and practice. Opportunities for positive contact between people in these segments and people who are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are also important.

KEY FINDINGS: IRELAND'S FOUR SEGMENTS

1. The Irish understand the difference between people who are migrants and refugees, showing marginal preference for economic migrants. The Irish experience of emigration may well influence this slight preference for economic migrants notwithstanding that 70% of people accept the importance of solidarity with people fleeing from war and other circumstances. Only 10% of respondents failed to distinguish refugees from migrants and a minority (18%) disagreed with the proposition that Ireland should do more to offer safety to people fleeing persecution. Greater scepticism was displayed about how genuine claims for asylum and refugee status are. Many view refugees as actually economic migrants who are seeking to avail of the Irish welfare system. On this question the main contrast is between the Optimist (70%) segment and the Uncertain Sceptics (33%) in distinguishing refugees from migrants, with 52% of

the Questioning Hopefuls and 46% of Pessimists also making the distinction. Only 18% of overall respondents disagreed with the proposition that Ireland should do more to offer safety to people fleeing persecution (38% being unsure).

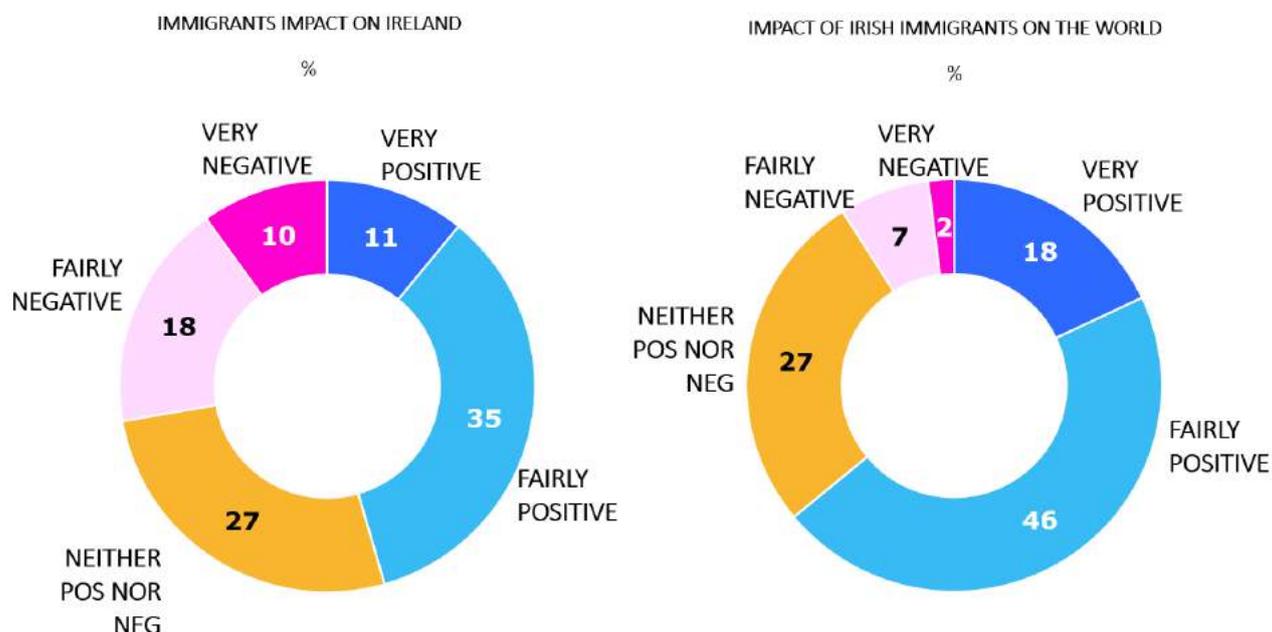


2. The 'open' segment views the impact of immigration positively, the Questioning Hopefuls are more positive than negative about immigration, the Uncertain Sceptics express uncertainty about the pros and cons of the impact of immigration and the Pessimists are negative. While both the two 'middle' segments have a large number who are simply unsure about their position on various questions, the Uncertain Hopefuls are particularly enthusiastic about the positive impact that immigration has on Irish cultural life, making Ireland a more vibrant and exciting place to live (53%); they are also open to the suggestion (but hesitant) that immigration is good for the Irish economy bringing new skills, new opportunities and the drive to succeed. The Questioning Sceptics, on the other hand, are more likely to feel that immigration is draining resources that could be better spent on Irish people and are somewhat less convinced about the positive economic impact. The Pessimists view immigration through the lens of their own economic insecurity, seeing people who are refugees and migrants as unfair

competitors in the labour market. Amongst Optimists, 62% welcomed the new skills that migrants can bring.

Impact of immigrants on Ireland and Irish immigrants on the world

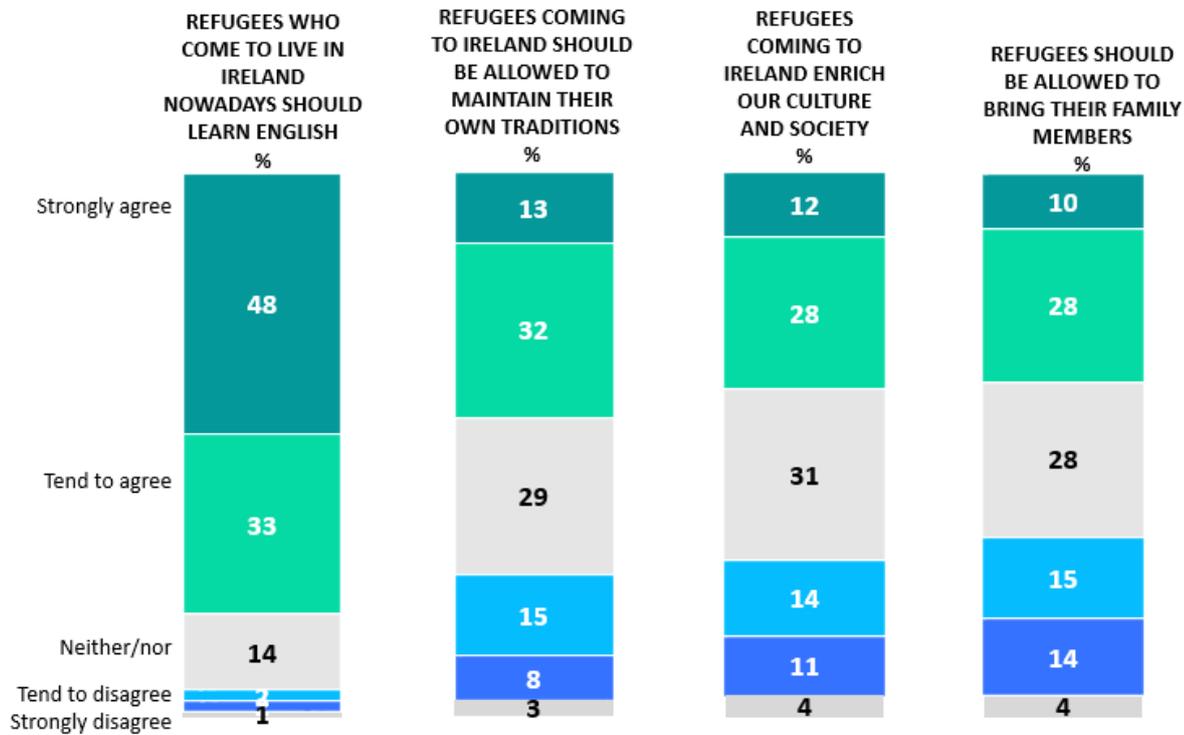
All adults 16+: 803



3. Integration/inclusion of people from refugee and migration backgrounds is felt to be important, although there is acceptance that people coming to Ireland should also be allowed to maintain, and share, their own traditions as a means of contributing to a more vibrant and diverse culture in Ireland. The importance of effective measures for the integration and inclusion of new community members was emphasised in the 2018 ESRI Report on immigration. This emerged as a strong concern for the two 'middle' segments who also argued that the ability to speak English is a priority for integration (81%). It is, however, recognised that social inclusion is a two-way process and that initiatives to actively welcome newcomers are important. Sporting and cultural organisations are seen to have a role to play in this process and adequate support needs to be made available to local community-based groups across the country. Some concern was expressed that people who are immigrants are not seen as making sufficient efforts to integrate into Irish society; a view that was more associated with the Uncertain Sceptics and the Pessimists. Evidence from other countries suggests that access to employment is a key factor in integration.

Refugees + Tradition (Culture and family)

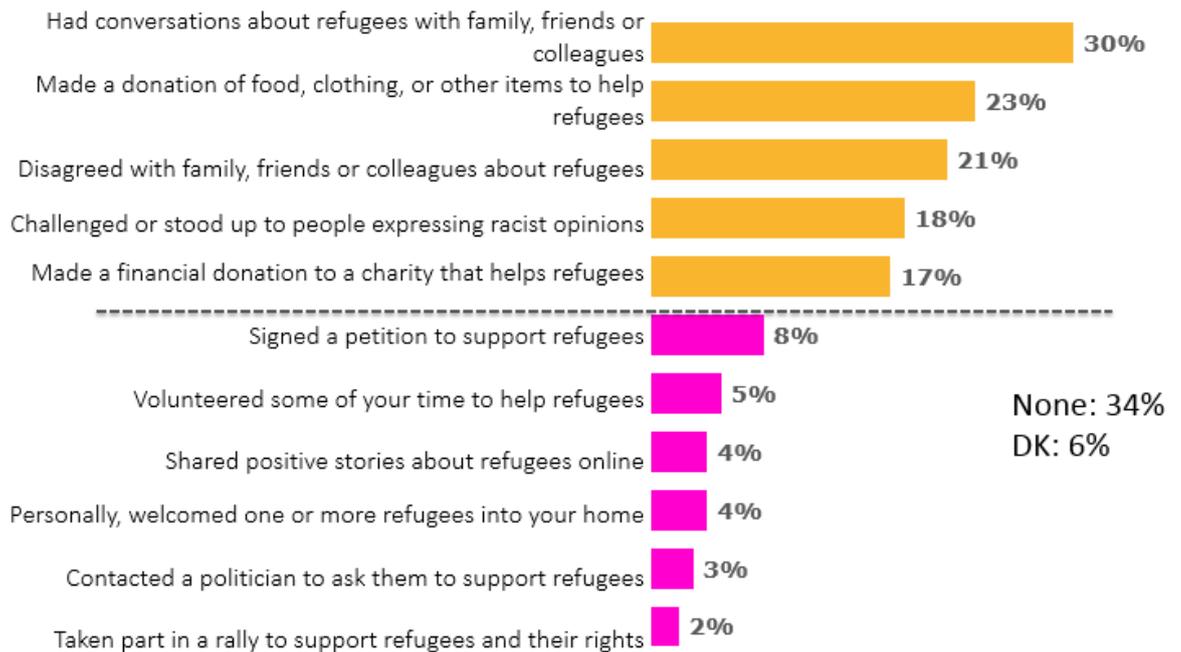
All adults 16+: 803



4. Opportunities for personal contact with people who are refugees or immigrants is important in facilitating both understanding and social inclusion. The survey results show that large numbers of people in Ireland have little or no contact with refugees. Only 27% of people indicated that they were aware of the Direct Provision centres across the country, with well over half of respondents being unaware of current policies and practice. A mere 11% of respondents reported that they knew anyone who was a refugee, as compared to 28% who know a person who is a migrant. Of the relatively small number of people who have had direct experience with people who are refugees, 30% noted that this tended to be an indirect contact that had resulted in conversations with family members, friends and colleagues.

Experience of refugees

All adults 16+: 803



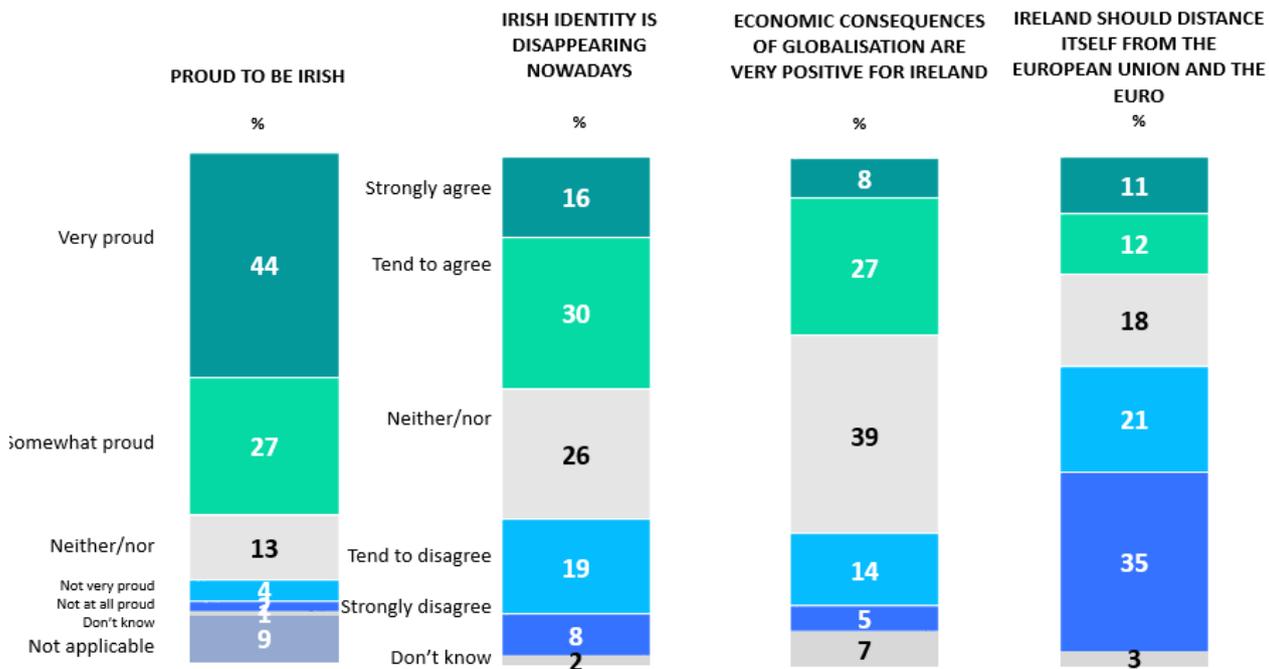
On average those with any contact/experience (i.e. excluding None and DK) had 2.3 experiences

5. There is strong agreement (74% as opposed to 5% disagreement) with the statement that ‘No child in Ireland should grow up undocumented’. There is also strong support for access to education for refugee children, alongside a general sense that children and their families should be prioritised by State policies. This support was demonstrated by all four segments, with investment of resources in the protection and integration of children recognised as important. There was less agreement as to whether refugees should be allowed to bring their family members or whether they should remain in Ireland in the long-term if the situation in their home country improves. As noted above, there was acknowledgement that people living in Ireland over an extended period should be able to become Irish citizens (60%) – rising to 72% of the Optimist segment; 52% of the Questioning Hopefuls; 60% of the Uncertain Sceptics and falling to 36% of the Pessimists.

All adults 16+: 803



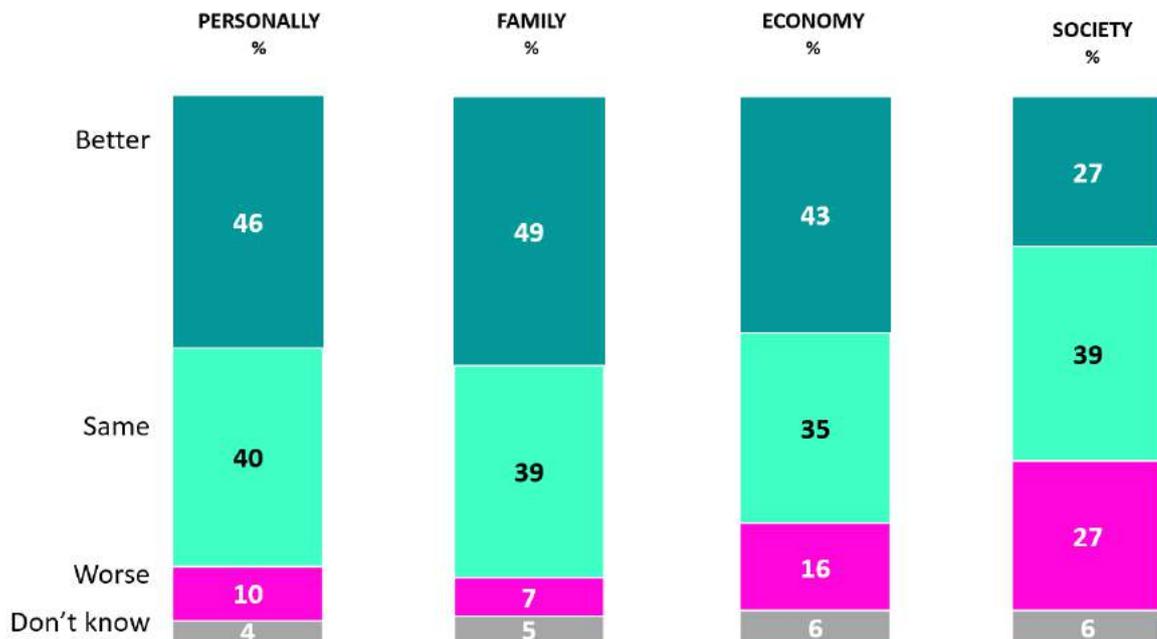
6. Unlike many other European countries, Irish people are not responsive to authoritarian populism or extreme positions although there is a danger that there is a certain disillusionment with politics and society. While there was a general feeling that economic prospects were improving (except for the Pessimist segment who felt the situation had gotten worse) concerns about the state of society were reflected across all four segments. The specific societal concerns felt by the survey respondents are unclear, although the Uncertain Sceptics referred to the rapid pace of change that is in danger of putting community bonds under pressure. This sense of connection to local community and neighbourhood is still valued as is Irish identity. Any weakening of these identities would be a matter of concern with only 3% saying that they were not proud to be Irish. The solidity of Irish identity means that there is a more open attitude, than that reflected in some other European countries, to the benefits of the European Union. While there is also an openness to the economic consequences of globalisation, more people expressed reservations about this, whilst an additional 39% are uncertain.



7. It is clear from a number of studies carried out (Denny, L. & Ó Gráda, C. (2013) Irish Attitudes to Immigration during and after the Boom: UCD Geary Institute Discussion Paper Series and ESRI (2018) Attitudes to Diversity in Ireland – Op. Cit.) in Ireland, that public perception of the state of the economy and society impacts on perceptions about immigration. Consequently, it is important to consider public attitudes to refugees and migrants in the context of how people see their own (and their family) circumstances over the next five years. There are major differences between the views expressed by the Optimist segment (64% feel that their prospects will improve over the next 5 years) and the Pessimists (only 24% think that things will improve). The Questioning Hopefuls are reasonably optimistic, with 51% being positive over future developments, although 49% of the Uncertain Sceptics feel that things are likely to remain the same. It is interesting to note that the Optimist and Questioning Hopefuls segments are the most positive in their attitudes to immigration which reflects their view of a more dynamic economy. Given their reserved position, the Uncertain Sceptics need to be convinced of the contribution of new residents and reassured that they will not be privileged over their family members who may be struggling. It is important to take such anxieties seriously and engage with them through the provision of accurate and accessible information, but also through messages and conversation. The next graph shows responses to the question as to how individuals see their position in five years' time as compared to their current circumstances. Greater anxieties are expressed about the state of society in the future than the Irish economy.

Crystal ball: Now versus five years time

All adults 16+: 803



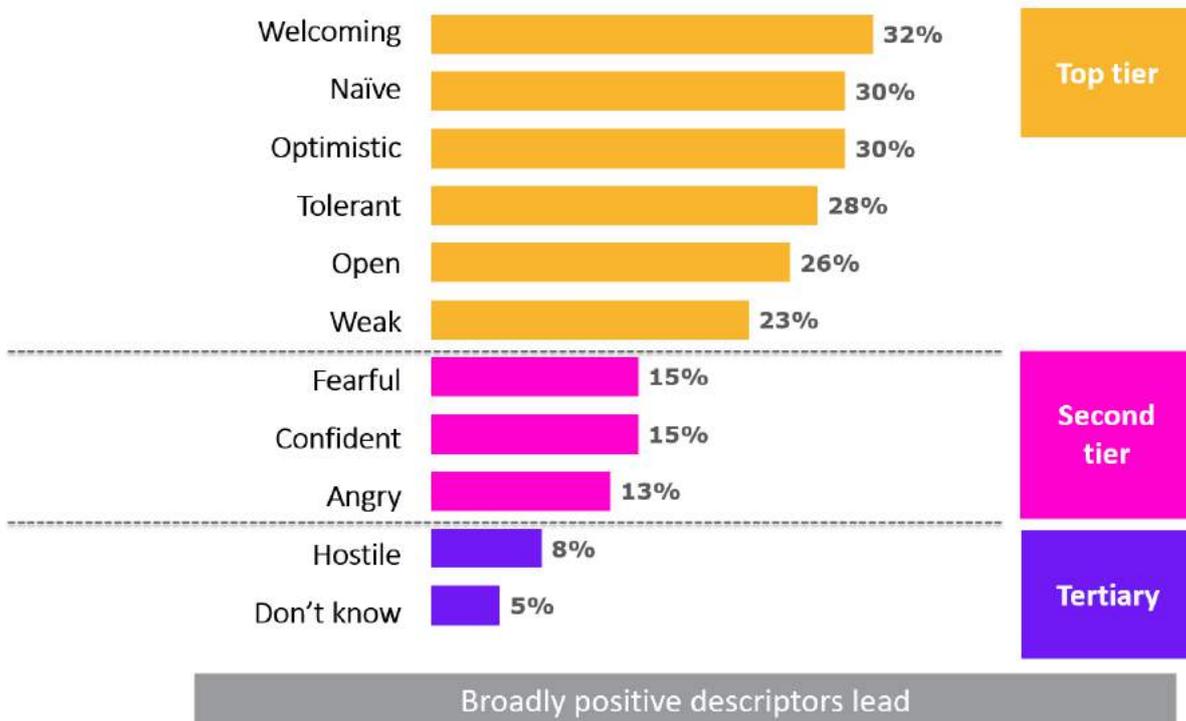
8. Finally, reference has been made as to how the public attitude study respondents describe Ireland through a series of terms suggested. The general positivity displayed offers a context that should encourage government policy-makers to develop strategies and practices on immigration and refugee protection that are welcoming and effective. It is clear, however, that there is a need for leadership to be shown in this area given the range of anxieties and uncertainties expressed by the two 'middle' segments. These should not be dismissed but instead should be discussed and addressed in winning support for policy development. Fluidity of opinion means that the message that resonates best is that of Mutual Compact:

'For years, now, people have come to Ireland from different backgrounds with different beliefs. So long as they work hard and contribute to society, there is room, and a welcome, for them here'.

The challenge and opportunity is to translate this inclusive message into policies and good practice.

Words and phrases which describe Ireland today

All adults 16+: 803



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The key conclusions and recommendations from this report are:

1. While there are 49% of people who are positive and optimistic about the Irish economy and society, there is another 47% that are either pessimistic or have serious questions about what the future may bring. This needs to be kept in mind given the proven link between the Irish experience of the impact of economic recession and public attitudes to immigration. It is also a matter of concern that 68% of respondents feel that the Irish economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful and 65% believe that traditional political parties and politicians don't care about them. This drift towards alienation and disillusionment needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

2. The Irish describe their country as welcoming, tolerant and open. This is in marked contrast to many other European countries but needs to be built on and supported with specific examples of this culture of welcome in practice. Positive stories of inclusion are important and are particularly impactful when shared by established and respected networks – cultural, sporting, faith-based and community. New initiatives such as community sponsorship of refugees can also

extend the range of people involved in projects that foster greater contact and understanding.

3. There are major concerns in Ireland about homelessness, housing and healthcare. While only 9% cite immigration as a matter of concern, it is important to disentangle policy-making in relation to homelessness, housing and healthcare from issues of immigration and refugee protection given the danger that a conflation of these issues might resonate with concerns expressed about the perceived pressure on scarce national resources.

4. The Irish have a long history of emigration and direct experience of being undocumented themselves. This offers a link to the experience of people who are non-Irish nationals in Ireland. The findings show that there is a general view that the impact of Irish immigration has been positive for other countries and there is support for undocumented Irish being given a path into regularising their status – particularly in the USA. While offering a link to the position of non-nationals in Ireland, Irish policy might benefit from examining the Portuguese Migration Strategy which works in an integrated fashion on immigration and emigration.

5. The clear statement that no child should grow up undocumented in Ireland is welcome and needs to be acted upon. There is support (74%) for this as there is support for educational and other opportunities to be given to children to ensure effective life-chances and successful integration into Irish society.

6. The concerns expressed (43%) that people who are migrants and refugees get preferential treatment and access to benefits and resources needs to be addressed. This is an important area where accurate and accessible information is essential and should be made available as a matter of urgency.

7. Integration/inclusion of both immigrants and refugees is important. It is a matter of concern that a sizeable number of respondents feel that there are issues around integration/inclusion. The fact that integration/inclusion is a two-way process needs to be recognised. It is important that effective policies are in place at community, local authority and national levels to support integration. A key element of integration/inclusion is the ability of people to gain employment. Current government restrictions on asylum-seekers access to employment (although these have been softened) are still a barrier.

8. The public support for the proposition that people living in Ireland for a long time should be able to become Irish citizens – only 15% disagreeing – is welcome. This is in line with the view that Ireland is a welcoming and open society.

9. The Irish are proud of Irish identity and history, but the fact that 46% expressed anxiety that this sense of identity might be under threat should be noted. While the nature of this threat is not specified, the strong perception that ‘fairness’ and ‘compassion’ are Irish values is welcome. Again, there is little room for complacency as lack of knowledge, information or prejudice can still marginalise groups that are viewed as ‘the other’ or ‘outsiders’, including people on the basis of skin colour, Muslims or Irish Travellers. There needs to be anti-racism legislation put in place to underpin the perceived Irish value base.

10. Like people in many other countries in Europe, Irish people generally do not feel a strong sense of connection with the Muslim community. Anxieties expressed about the building of mosques not only raise concerns about freedom to worship but also highlight the need for greater contact and information. This needs to be addressed as a two-way process.

11. Analysis of the research findings show that 44% fall into the ‘conflicted middle’ groups – Questioning Hopefuls and the Uncertain Sceptics. Communication needs to specifically focus these groups and avoid either dismissal of their views or negative categorisation. It is particularly important to take anxieties expressed seriously and to encourage contact and communication with the people in these clusters, in a manner that is credible and trusted.

12. Positive contact with people who are immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers remains important. Efforts should be made to increase opportunities for contact and engagement with refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. The research highlights the fact that at present only 11% of people know a person who is a refugee and 28% know a person who is a migrant in Ireland. This reduces the possibility of positive contact.