

INTERACT – RESEARCHING THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS’ INTEGRATION AS A THREE-WAY PROCESS - IMMIGRANTS, COUNTRIES OF EMIGRATION AND COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION AS ACTORS OF INTEGRATION

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An Overview of Ireland’s Integration Policies

Irial Glynn

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Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of
Integration

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An Overview of Ireland's Integration Policies

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INTERACT - Researching Third Country Nationals' Integration as a Three-way Process - Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of Integration

Around 25 million persons born in a third country (TCNs) are currently living in the European Union (EU), representing 5% of its total population. Integrating immigrants, i.e. allowing them to participate in the host society at the same level as natives, is an active, not a passive, process that involves two parties, the host society and the immigrants, working together to build a cohesive society.

Policy-making on integration is commonly regarded as primarily a matter of concern for the receiving state, with general disregard for the role of the sending state. However, migrants belong to two places: first, where they come and second, where they now live. While integration takes place in the latter, migrants maintain a variety of links with the former. New means of communication facilitating contact between migrants and their homes, globalisation bringing greater cultural diversity to host countries, and nation-building in source countries seeing expatriate nationals as a strategic resource have all transformed the way migrants interact with their home country.

INTERACT project looks at the ways governments and non-governmental institutions in origin countries, including the media, make transnational bonds a reality, and have developed tools that operate economically (to boost financial transfers and investments); culturally (to maintain or revive cultural heritage); politically (to expand the constituency); legally (to support their rights).

INTERACT project explores several important questions: To what extent do policies pursued by EU member states to integrate immigrants, and policies pursued by governments and non-state actors in origin countries regarding expatriates, complement or contradict each other? What effective contribution do they make to the successful integration of migrants and what obstacles do they put in their way?

A considerable amount of high-quality research on the integration of migrants has been produced in the EU. Building on existing research to investigate the impact of origin countries on the integration of migrants in the host country remains to be done.

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Abstract

Ireland has undergone a remarkable demographic transition in the last twenty years. In the early 1990s, it was a largely homogenous state. By 2011, however, some 12 percent of the Irish population were nationals of other countries. This paper provides a concise summary of the Irish state's attempts to integrate its sizeable but relatively recent immigrant population. It first examines how the state reacted to the significant rise in asylum seekers that occurred in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. It then turns its attention towards the state's response to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of economic migrants, particularly after the enlargement of the EU in 2004. The state initiated several positive strategies in the 2000s but few resources have been dedicated to integration since late 2008, when Ireland experienced a serious economic recession. The impetus for integration has, instead, been left to local authorities and NGOs. Yet they have also suffered from severe state cuts to their budgets as a result of the crisis. Consequently, the outlook for the integration of Ireland's extensive immigration community remains uncertain.

Key words: integration, Ireland, asylum seekers, immigrants

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Table of contents

Introduction 7

State integration policies and asylum seekers 8

Integration of Third Country Nationals and their families 9

Local authority funding for integration 13

NGO funding..... 14

Conclusion..... 14

References 15

Introduction

“[T]he Government needs to name integration as an important objective of its economic and social policies, rather than deferring dialogue until such a time as large-scale problems evolve.”

(Annual Monitoring Report on Integration 2012)

Prior to the mid-1990s, immigration to Ireland consisted mostly of Irish emigrants returning home. With no ‘mother-country’ ties to former colonies and no pressing need for foreign workers due to a stagnant economy, Ireland never had to deal with significant numbers of immigrants. Since the mid-1990s, however, Ireland has undergone a remarkable turnaround. Asylum seekers dominated immigration debates from the mid-1990s to early 2000s after annual applications for refugee status rocketed. Labour migration became the main focus from the early 2000s onwards as the country experienced massive immigration in the wake of sustained and unprecedented economic growth. Over a very short period of time, Ireland came to contain a larger proportion of immigrants than many Western European countries that had experienced immigration for fifty years or more. By 2011, 17 percent of the population had been born abroad and 12 percent were nationals of other states (CSO 2012). According to Anthony Messina (2009: 14), this kind of rapid transition was “virtually unprecedented in Western Europe”.

Despite the momentous change in the composition of Ireland’s population, integration has rarely featured in public or political debates. On the rare occasions that governing or opposition political parties have dealt with the topic, they placed much of the emphasis for the incorporation of immigrants on the perceived benefits that these newcomers brought to the country’s labour market and the economy more generally (NESC 2006: xii; Fanning 2011: 25). In the wake of the 2008 economic crisis and 2010 Troika bailout, however, integration has featured even less prominently in political discussions, despite rising anti-immigrant sentiment (McGinnity *et al.* 2013: 61-66). Instead, most of the impetus for integration measures has come from the NGO sector and certain local authorities. One notable exception is the most recent coalition government’s focus, since it came in to office in early 2011, on facilitating citizenship for those seeking naturalisation.

Immigration spanning little more than a decade has transformed Ireland from a largely homogeneous Catholic society to an ethnically, racially and religiously diverse society. In contrast to many other European states, immigrants in Ireland have come from an enormous variety of states and have settled throughout the country and not just in the cities. But how have these ‘new Irish’ been ‘integrated’? ‘Integration’ is understood here to be the degree to which immigrants have been allowed to participate in Irish society at the same level as natives (Unterreiner and Weinar 2014: 1). The Interact project analyses the integration by immigrants’ access to and participation in several key areas of society (labor market, education, political participation, civic participation, social interactions, access to nationality, language, religion, and residential integration). It does so by surveying prominent and migrant-led NGOs. The purpose of this paper, however, is to provide an overview of how the Irish state has reacted to its increasingly multicultural composition since the 1990s.

There are three main categories of immigrants in Ireland: 1) asylum seekers who apply to attain refugee status; 2) non-EU nationals who enter on work, family or student visas and 3) EU migrants who do not require any visa to enter and stay in the country. Most immigrants in Ireland come from EU countries but since the Interact project’s focus is on Third Country Nationals currently living in the EU and their children, this paper will focus on the first two categories. Some discussion will be devoted to examining the role played by local authorities and NGOs towards the end of the paper.

State integration policies and asylum seekers

Initially, asylum seekers attracted a lot of political, media and public attention because of the huge rise that occurred in annual applications and because of the responsibility that the state had towards these people. In the late 1990s asylum applications actually outnumbered the amount of new work permits provided. As a result of their increased size, asylum seekers became the main target groups in initial policy discourse on immigration and integration. Almost 90,000 people applied for asylum in Ireland from 1992 to 2012. Considering that most applicants hailed from outside the EU, former and current asylum seekers and their family members now make up a significant proportion of non-EU migrants resident in the state. While the country only had to contend with thirty-nine applications for asylum from people in 1992, annual entries had increased to nearly 4,000 by 1997, and again to over 10,000 by 2000. Asylum seekers came from a variety of countries. The top-five countries of origin in the 1990s were, in order, Romania, Nigeria, DR Congo, Algeria and Poland. Romania and Nigeria, especially, remained prominent countries of origin throughout the 2000s, but applications from other former European Soviet bloc states decreased, especially after the accession of twelve new countries into the EU in 2004 and 2007.

Asylum seekers were barred from employment pending the outcome of their applications apart from one short period in 1999. Consequently, the onus fell on the state to provide them with accommodation and welfare. A huge backlog of asylum applications began to build up as a result of the lack of state infrastructure to process applications. This led to the introduction of a much more organised but parsimonious system called ‘direct provision’ in 2000, whereby the state placed new applicants in accommodation centres, akin to hostels, across the country and provided them with food and a negligible weekly allowance that has not increased since its introduction thirteen years ago (€ 19.10 a week for each adult and € 9.60 for each child). Asylum seekers had, until then, converged mainly around Ireland’s largest cities but because of direct provision began to appear in suburbs, towns and villages around the country – to the chagrin of some, due mainly to the lack of consultation before selecting the locations. The move met with considerable opposition from trade unions and NGOs representing asylum seekers. One NGO, the National Federation of Campaigns against Racism considered the system akin to “sticking a yellow star on asylum-seekers to set them apart from Irish citizens. ... It is discriminatory, unconstitutional and demeaning in that it would mark them out in a very public way. It will effectively introduce a form of apartheid in Irish society”. The President of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions considered the new strategy to be “a defensive denial of rights”; while one union leader claimed that it symbolised the beginning of institutional racism.

Somewhat ironically, the first state report on integration appeared in the same year as the introduction of direct provision (Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland 2000). Unfortunately, the report only dealt with the integration of those who had attained refugee status or the right to remain. The reality was that the overwhelming majority of asylum seekers remained in state accommodation for several years because of delays in processing applications. Yet, these people were not subject to any integration measures as the state felt that their stay may have been temporary – despite extremely low deportation figures.

In response to a rise in anti-asylum sentiments in public and political debates in the late 1990s and early 2000s, an initiative was introduced to combat the growth of racism. In early 2001 the government established a three-year IR£ 4.5m (€ 5.71m) public awareness programme to address racism and to promote a more inclusive society. Moreover, the government launched the National Action Plan Against Racism in September 2001. In February 2002 all the major Irish parliamentary parties agreed to sign an anti-racism election protocol, which forbade the use of racist material or remarks by candidates and party workers and demanded sensitivity when discussing race-related issues. This initiative was led by the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

A huge number of asylum seekers managed to stay in Ireland because of the country's liberal citizenship laws before 2004. In contrast to other EU countries, children born in Ireland were entitled to Irish citizenship from birth (*ius soli*). Due to the right of the child to belong to a family, as enshrined in the Constitution, the Supreme Court ruled that the foreign parents of an Irish child were "entitled, on their children's behalf, to choose the place of residence of their minor children. As the children themselves are entitled to remain in the country of their nationality, so too may the parents lawfully choose such residence on the children's behalf". Asylum seekers, international students, migrant workers and undocumented migrants who had children in Ireland all benefitted from this legal loophole. In 2001 and 2002, almost 13,000 asylum seekers applied to remain in Ireland on such a basis. The state successfully challenged this interpretation in a January 2003 Supreme Court case but a perceived ambiguity in that ruling caused the state to put a referendum to the public in June 2004 on the matter. The Citizenship Referendum proposed that a person born on the island of Ireland to non-Irish nationals was only entitled to citizenship if one of his parents had legally resided in the country for three of the previous four years (Handoll 2006). Almost 80 percent of the Irish electorate voted in favour of the changes. The government decided to grant permission to remain to all the parents of children born in Ireland before 1 January 2005. Consequently, nearly 16,700 former asylum seekers remained on this basis.

The signing of the anti-racism protocol by all of the main political parties in 2002 and the simultaneous decline in numbers seeking asylum applications has meant that the subject of asylum seekers has rarely made its way into political discussions since then. Nonetheless, direct provision remains in place today, with most asylum seekers spending several years in state-sponsored hostel-type accommodation before their application is fully processed. Various organisations and prominent experts have questioned the validity of the system and have highlighted the integration problems that arise from the continuation of such practices. The Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC) sternly criticised the practice in a report entitled *Direct Discrimination*. It found that direct provision left "asylum seekers bored, isolated, socially excluded, impoverished, deprived of services, unaware of their entitlements, demoralised, deskilled and institutionalised" (FLAC 2003: 40-1). According to the sociologist Steve Loyal (2003: 79), asylum seekers placed in direct provision under the government dispersal programme constituted Ireland's most disempowered social group, "since they lack the right to work and their access to education and training is severely limited. Their presence marks the nadir of the putative values of the Celtic Tiger: they are marginalised, excluded, poor and, in many respects, they lack freedom". One legal expert has argued that Ireland's treatment of asylum seekers contravenes international and European law (Breen 2008). In 2013, the Irish Ombudsman, who has since become the European Ombudsman, wrote that direct provision was "damaging to the health, welfare and life-chances" of those who were subject to it (O'Reilly 2013). The Irish Refugee Council has led a long but so far unsuccessful campaign to end Direct Provision.

Integration of Third Country Nationals and their families

Asylum became less prominent throughout the 2000s – partly as a consequence of decreasing annual asylum applications, but mostly because of the incredible volume of economic immigration that took place throughout the decade, which effectively dwarfed asylum figures. In a similar fashion to what had occurred in various Western European states during the 1950s and 1960s, Ireland's enormous intake of immigrants occurred mostly as a direct response to an acute shortage of labour generated by rapid domestic economic growth (Messina 2009). Sustained economic growth from the mid-1990s to 2007 resulted in the amount of people in employment rising from approximately 1.5 million in 1996 to over 2 million just ten years later (Bielenberg and Ryan 2012: 177). Unemployment dropped from over 15 percent in 1993 to under 5 percent for most of the 2000s.

Until 2003, labour immigration was controlled mostly by employers, who could essentially recruit as many non-European Economic Area (EEA) workers as they wished, from whatever countries they wanted, and for any job, regardless of the skill level required (Ruhs 2005: xii). Ireland received

migrants from an enormous variety of countries. Nonetheless, Europeans from non-EU countries initially dominated. The top seven countries for work permits in 2002, for instance, consisted of, in order of arrivals, Latvia, Lithuania, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, South Africa and Ukraine. The number of work permits issued annually – some of which were renewals – rose steadily until 2003, when they approached 50,000. Approximately three out of four work permits were for low-skilled and low paid jobs (Ruhs 2005: xii). The services sector, particularly catering, dominated the figures. Permits for the agriculture industry also featured prominently. Healthcare workers, many of whom came in the form of nurses and carers from the Philippines, comprised a smaller but significant part of the breakdown.

Due to the perceived need for more labour, Ireland, along with only Sweden and the UK from the ‘old’ EU15 member states, imposed no restrictions on people from the accession states entering the labour market after the expansion of the EU in 2004. While Sweden received modest inward migration from accession states due to its demand for a small amount of skilled migrant workers, the UK and Ireland, in particular, played host to sustained and sizeable immigration from new EU states (Devitt 2011: 588). In 2002, only approximately 8,000 nationals from the ten countries due to join the EU in 2004 resided in Ireland (CSO 2012: 7). What occurred following the accession of these states on 1 April 2004 marked the most remarkable demographic transformation in the modern history of the state. Incredibly, between 2004 and 2007, almost 400,000 people from the EU10 registered to work in Ireland (CSO 2011: 4). Many arrived with the goal of earning and saving money for better futures for themselves and their families at home (Kropiwiec 2006: 33), but a substantial number remained, with resident immigrants in the state almost doubling between 2002 and 2006, from fewer than 225,000 to nearly 420,000. Migrants from Poland, the largest new EU member state, featured most prominently amongst newcomers. Whilst immigration from EU15 countries rose in the same period, it was miniscule compared to the scale of the arrival from accession states. By 2006, for example, roughly the same amount of Lithuanians lived in Ireland as Germans, French and Italians combined – the three EU15 countries that had the largest immigrant populations in Ireland at the time, apart from the UK. Indeed, the UK immigrant population rose by less than 9 percent during the same period, whilst the number of Poles increased almost thirty-fold. By 2011, Ireland was home to over 122,000 Poles (who overtook UK citizens as the largest immigrant group in the country), 36,000 Lithuanians, 20,000 Latvians and 10,000 Slovaks (CSO 2012: 7). Although Ireland did not open up its labour market to Romania and Bulgaria on their accession to the EU in 2007, by 2011 Ireland was home to over 17,000 Romanians.

Due to Ireland’s liberal labour policy for citizens of the EU10, its work permit scheme became more selective from 2003 onward. Various occupational categories became ineligible for permits, including a lot of construction-related jobs, and employers were encouraged to give preference to migrant workers from the accession states (Ruhs and Quinn 2009). While some countries saw a drop in permits, such as South Africa and European countries outside the EU, others saw notable rises, such as Brazil and especially India, the latter of which became the top non-European country for work permits, ahead of the Philippines. Nonetheless, significant numbers came in other forms, such as migrants on student visas. Additionally, in a similar manner to what occurred with those from the EU10, migrants from outside the EU began to put down roots in Ireland when their families moved to live with them. The onset of the economic recession in late 2008 encouraged some migrants to return home but, in a similar vein to what occurred with immigrants in Western European countries in the 1970s following the oil price shocks, most immigrants chose to remain in the country.

Immigrants spread far and wide across Irish cities, towns and villages, comprising over ten percent of the population in the vast majority of counties. Almost one in five inhabitants of some cities, such as Galway and Dublin, are immigrants. But in over 25 towns around the country, immigrants make up more than one in four residents (CSO 2012: 10-11). Immigration has therefore touched almost all areas of Irish society.

Fittingly, one of the first state references to immigration policy (other than that relating to asylum) underlined the centrality of immigrants' contribution to the Irish labour market. The 2000-2003 social partnership agreement – a consensus arrangement formed regularly between the state, national unions and employers – stated that “Immigration policy will be developed, as appropriate, to address the needs of the labour market” (quoted in Ní Chiosáin 2011: 66). The subsequent social partnership agreement for 2003-2005 gave more prominence to the issue of integrating Ireland's rising immigrant population by noting that social partners would be consulted about “economic migration and the labour market, integration issues, racism and interculturalism” (quoted in Ní Chiosáin 2011: 66). In 2005, discussion of policy proposals relating to a comprehensive Immigration and Residence Bill began. In the same year, the government of the day launched the National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR), which evolved as a result of commitments given at the UN World Conference Against Racism in South Africa in 2001. The four-year programme was designed to provide strategic direction to combat racism and to develop a more inclusive and intercultural society in Ireland. Under the plan, support was provided towards the development of a number of national and local strategies promoting greater integration in workplaces, in the police service, the health service, in the education system, in the arts and within local authorities. One year later, the first major official state publication that examined the effects of immigration on Ireland was released (NESC 2006). It noted that there had been, until then, “relatively little discussion of distributional issues relating to the impact of migration” (NESC 2006: xii). The report argued that “the main role of national or state governments in respect of integration should be to exercise policy leadership” (NESC 2006: 173). It provided five critical guidelines to help improve Ireland's integration policies. It advised the state:

- To create a compelling rationale for immigration in order to mobilise interests “across the board”.
- To establish a collection of complementary policies that are “directly and indirectly implicated in migration integration”.
- To expand the capacity of local government agencies and NGOs to “plan, organise and deliver integration services”.
- To privilege social interaction over common values through adequate citizenship, multicultural and intercultural policies, as well as anti-discrimination and human rights policies.
- To focus on the long-term by imagining “a future state and to investigate the capacities that would be needed to sustain it” (NESC 2006: 171-3).

Following general elections in May 2007, a new ‘Programme for Government’ document contained a number of commitments related to the suggestions put forward in the 2006 NESC report and incorporated the Common Basic Principles of Integration agreed at EU level. These included plans to develop a national integration policy and to establish a junior ministry in charge of integration. In 2008, the recently established Ministry of State for Integration launched an important report that discussed in detail a “key challenge facing both Government and Irish society”: “the imperative to integrate people of much different culture, ethnicity, language and religion so that they become the new Irish citizens of the 21st century” (Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 8). Migration Nation represented a clear commitment to the state's belief that an interculturalist approach was the best approach to take to achieve successful integration (Ní Chiosáin 2011: 68).

No civic courses or diversity enforcement instruments were proposed in the report. With regard to language training, twelve not-for-profit Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) centres had previously been established to help children and adults from diverse cultural and education backgrounds improve their language skills and increase their information about living in Ireland, but these closed in the same year that the report was released. Furthermore, these centres were mainly limited to people with refugee status and, occasionally, people with long-term residency. Despite this, the report encouraged targeted support for dealing with diversity in schools, especially language support, and mentioned an increase in the number of English language support teachers in the near

future. The report did not deal in any real detail with asylum seekers but instead focused on ‘legally resident immigrants’. No specific nationalities were examined.

Migration Nation advocated that a “partnership approach between the Government and nongovernmental organisations, as well as civil society bodies” was required to deepen and enhance the opportunities for integration. Furthermore, it argued that a “strong link between integration policy and wider state social inclusion measures” was needed, as was “a mainstream approach to service delivery” that would “align services to migrants with those for indigenous communities” (Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 9-10). It also envisaged, amongst other aims, the establishment of:

- 1) a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship for qualified applicants (contingent on English-language proficiency);
- 2) funding to support diversity strategies for Local Authorities, political parties, sporting bodies and faith-based groups;
- 3) enhanced institutional and legislative measures to tackle exploitation or discrimination in the workplace;
- 4) new structures to promote integration, such as a standing Commission on Integration made up of appointed members of the public, which would regularly review the progress of integration measures with the Minister for Justice; and
- 5) more targeted support for dealing with diversity in schools, especially language support (Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 9).

Unfortunately, many of these plans have not yet been put in place.

Massive debts incurred after the introduction of a state bank guarantee in late 2008 and several enormous budget deficits resulted in Ireland seeking a bailout from the Troika (the EU Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), in late 2010. Unemployment trebled during roughly the same period. As the state grappled to cope with the fallout from the various economic and social problems resulting from the effects of the crisis, many of the suggested integration proposals were abandoned. The Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, for which work began in 2001, was published in early 2008 with the explicit intention of replacing “all of the present legislation on immigration, some of which dates back to 1935, and put[ting] in place an integrated statutory framework for the development and implementation of Government immigration policies into the future”. Yet, the bill has remained on the shelf, and with it measures related to establishing permanent residency for immigrants and clearer rules for family reunification. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism was closed in late 2008. The Cross-Departmental Group on Migrant Integration, established in early 2008 and comprising senior civil servants, has met only three times since its inception, with the last meeting having taken place in early January 2011. The new government that came to power in February 2011 abolished the state ministry for integration and in its place founded the ‘Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration’. That office is attached to the Department of Justice and Equality but has a “cross-departmental mandate to develop, lead and co-ordinate migrant integration policy across other Government Departments, agencies and services”.

The only notable change in integration policy that has occurred in recent years is the marked increase in non-EU nationals attaining Irish citizenship through naturalisation. In 2012, the number of people who attained citizenship through naturalisation reached over 23,000 – over four times the number in 2010 (McGinnity *et al.* 2013: 1). Ireland does receive significant praise for its active citizenship policy in the latest annual Integration Monitor. However, under the other three core indicators used to assess integration in the EU, as set out in the Zaragoza Declaration, Ireland scores poorly. In relation to employment, non-Irish national employment fell by 23 percent from 2008 to 2012, compared to 13 percent for Irish nationals. With regard to social inclusion, the Integration

Monitor found that non-EU nationals were far more disadvantaged than other groups in Irish society. Ireland also struggled when it came to education. Despite one-third of migrant pupils in secondary schools receiving the lowest scores possible in reading, the Integration Monitor pointed out that money spent on English language support for children decreased by almost one-fifth in 2012 alone (McGinnity *et al.* 2013: 1). The report recommended that the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration “should be funded and empowered to play a more active role in the co-ordination of integration in Ireland” (McGinnity *et al.* 2013: 2). Yet, that same office has suffered substantial cuts in funding in 2011 and 2012. Nevertheless, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill (2014) aims to expand the mandate of the Office to promote intercultural dialogue and migrant inclusion. Two other calls for submissions on improving Ireland’s integration policy have come from the government since 2013 so it will be interesting to see what developments, if any, these will lead to in the near future.

Local authority funding for integration

Since the release of the Migration Nation report in 2008, most local Irish authorities have published integration strategies. Indeed, several local authorities with extensive experience of immigration had already examined the issue of integration in detail in response to the 2005-2009 National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR). Understandably, anti-racism and discrimination were to the fore of these earlier publications. In contrast to the various national studies produced at a national level, local studies were able to consult a wide range of actors and communities in the locality through public meetings, consultations and questionnaires.

Over time, local authority strategies began to focus less on anti-racism and discrimination and more on trying to provide adequate training, information, resources and help to ensure integration took place. As a consequence of extensive consultation, often through various community and ethnic focus groups, much more emphasis began to be placed on providing language training, access to employment, education and healthcare, and to put in place strategies that would result in joint community participation between immigrants and Irish people and groups. The authors of the various integration strategies also began to change, with local authorities sometimes taking more of a backseat than previously. One plan for a large region in the south of the country was even written by a newly established immigration association. Similarly, one prominent NGO, the Integration Centre, has played a central role in a number of more recent local authority plans. Of particular note is the fact that most recent strategies are based primarily around the Zaragoza indicators, which demonstrates that despite a notable lack of guidance from the Irish state regarding integration measures, important actors are looking to Europe for leadership. Most strikingly, the four local authorities representing the wider Dublin region published a guide on integration for the benefit of other Irish local authorities, based on their joint experiences. To the fore of the guide was the importance of establishing an Integration Forum in order to aid the implementation of pro-active integration policies. Having trained volunteer integration liaison officers was, the report argued, also key to the imposition of successful integration measures.

Despite state bodies’ support for local action on integration, local authorities have been hit hard by substantial decreases in state funding for integration measures since the onset of the recession. In 2010, local authorities received over € 1.2 million, but this fell dramatically in 2011 to just over € 180,000 and then to less than € 160,000 the following year. NGOs have faced a similar funding predicament.

NGO funding

A 1993 OECD study completed in conjunction with the UNHCR (1993: 395-6) listed only ten NGOs that were involved with human rights, refugees, migrants and development in Ireland. By the late 1990s, however, a group calling itself the Asylum Rights Alliance consisted of fifty-two NGOs from around the country. Since then, the number of NGOs has grown considerably. Most prominent amongst these NGOs in relation to integration are the Immigrant Council of Ireland, the Integration Centre, the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, the Irish Refugee Council, Doras Luimní and Irish Immigrant Support Centre (NASC). There are also a number of migrant-led organisations, such as the New Communities Partnership and the African and Migrant Women Network (AkiDwA), Africa Centre and Forum Polonia, among others (see Mutwarasibo 2010 for more details). Nonetheless, the NESC report noted in 2006 that although NGOs had shown themselves to be adept at advocacy, “their capacity to deliver assistance and services to migrants is still weak, especially outside Dublin and other major urban centres” (NESC 2006: 164). In Migration Nation, state authorities felt that there was “an underlying issue around new community representation by ‘Irish’ NGOs” but nonetheless acknowledged that the state needed NGOs and faith-based groups to engage on the ground with immigrants (Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 17).

To enable NGOs to expand their role in integration strategies, funding is required. However, state funding for migrant-related NGOs has diminished significantly in recent years, going from €2.8 million in 2008 to less than €1 million in 2012. Similarly, the amount of state funding provided for sports bodies, whose importance was continually underlined in Migration Nation, has fallen from over half a million in 2008 to €175,000 in 2012. Simultaneously, a number of prominent philanthropic organisations, most notably Atlantic Philanthropies and the One Foundation, are also slowly pulling out of the sector after years of extremely generous support.

Conclusion

In a similar vein to what occurred with immigrants in Western European countries in the 1970s following the oil price shocks, many immigrants resident in Ireland have chosen to remain in the country despite the onset of severe economic recession. Indeed, immigrants have continued to arrive in Ireland, albeit in considerably fewer numbers than during the boom years. With a combined national unemployment and underemployment rate of 23 percent in April 2013 (IMF 2013: 26), mounting public dissatisfaction with the state, and enormous national debts causing uncertainty about what the future holds, it is becoming increasingly difficult to associate the required incorporation of Ireland’s immigrants with the country’s economic requirements. As NESC (2006: 139) point out, “host society attitudes towards non-nationals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds can change under the influence of economic recession and international or domestic events that create new feelings of vulnerability”. Unfortunately, the state has largely deferred dialogue on real integration measures until such a time as large-scale problems evolve.

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