

Understanding Immigration and Social Change

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Introduction

Until its mid-1990s boom the Republic of Ireland (hereafter ‘Ireland’) had a long history of large-scale emigration, punctuated by a few short periods during which some members of the Diaspora (former emigrants and descendants of emigrants) returned to live in Ireland. As the economy began to grow rapidly from the mid-1990s it became apparent that, left to themselves, the Irish abroad might not return in sufficient numbers to meet the demands of the Celtic Tiger labour market. The turn of the century witnessed pro-active efforts by the Irish state to encourage the return-migration of the 1980s generation of well-educated and highly-skilled emigrants. From 1999 to 2002 its Jobs-Ireland programme ran exhibitions in Britain, Europe, Australia, the United States and Newfoundland ‘to inform Irish people or people of Irish descent of the employment opportunities in Ireland with a view to encouraging them to return’ aimed at cherry-picking the Diaspora. When this pool became apparently fished out the Irish state actively fostered immigration as a means of extending the life of the Celtic Tiger (Hayward and Howard, 2007: 51).

When the EU enlarged in 2004 the Irish state decided to permit migrants from the ten new East European member states to live and work in Ireland without visas and in doing so immediately accelerated the pace of immigration. All other pre-2004 EU states except Sweden and the United Kingdom delayed doing so for several years. Between 1 May 2004 and 30 April 2005 some 85,114 workers from the new EU-10 were issued with Irish national insurance numbers. This amounted to more than 10 times the number of new work permits admitted to migrants from those countries in the preceding 12 months (National Economic and Social Council, 2006: 26). The 2006 Irish census identified 610,000 or 14.7 per cent of the total population as having been born outside the State and that about 10 percent of the population were non-Irish nationals. In Ireland immigrants are often referred to as ‘non-nationals,’ a term that replaced ‘alien’ in legislation and official discourse. Census data identified a rise in the non-Irish national population from 419,733 in 2006 to 544,357 in 2011. The 2011 census identified 122,585 Poles living in Ireland. Polish had overtaken Irish as the second most commonly spoken language in the state (www.cso.ie).

Every year from 1996 to 2009 more people migrated to the Republic of Ireland than had left (Figure 1). Emigration levels increased during the economic crisis but it this outflow occurred alongside further immigration. Some 259,900 migrants arrived in Ireland during the years 2007 and 2008 but from 2009 the number of newcomers went into steep decline. This bottomed out in 2010 at around 41,000 and rose somewhat in the years that followed. Unemployment levels during the boom averaged at around four per cent. By July 2008 the unemployment level had risen to 6.5 percent, by July 2012 to 14.8 percent. 2009 witnessed a huge rise in emigration. Out of a total of 72,000 almost three quarters (73.3%) were migrants and of those who left Ireland in 2009 just over a quarter (26.7%) were Irish citizens. This ratio soon changed. Of the 69,200 who left in 2009 some 41.8 percent were Irish. In both 2011 and 2012 more than half of those who emigrated (52.1% and 53.4%) were Irish citizens. In all some 358,100 departed from Ireland between 2008 and 2012. Of these around 149,700

were Irish, 20,900 of those who left had come from outside the EU and about 187,500 came from EU member states.

Figure 1: Gross and Net Migration Flows, 1987-2014

<i>Year (ending April)</i>	<i>Outward</i>	<i>Inward 1,000s</i>	<i>Net</i>
1987	40.2	17.2	-23.0
1988	61.1	19.2	-41.9
1989	70.6	26.7	-43.9
1990	56.3	33.3	-22.9
1991	35.3	33.3	-2.0
1992	33.4	40.7	7.4
1993	35.1	34.7	-0.4
1994	34.8	30.1	-4.7
1995	33.1	31.2	-1.9
1996	31.2	39.2	8.0
1997	25.3	44.5	19.2
1998	28.6	46.0	17.4
1999	31.5	48.9	17.3
2000	26.6	52.6	26.0
2001	26.2	59.0	32.8
2002	25.6	66.9	41.3
2003	29.3	60.0	30.7
2004	26.5	58.5	32.0
2005	29.4	84.6	55.1
2006	36.0	107.8	71.8
2007	46.3	151.1	104.8
2008	49.2	113.5	64.3
2009	72.0	73.7	1.6
2010	69.2	41.8	-27.5
2011	80.6	53.3	-27.4
2012	87.1	52.7	-34.4
2013	89.0	55.9	-33.1
2014	81.9	60.6	-21.4

Source: Central Statistics Office (various years), *Population and Migration Estimates* www.cso.ie. Table cited from O’Connell and Joyce, 2014)

The Politics of Immigration

Rising numbers of asylum seekers from the late-1990s resulted in the politicisation of immigration for the first time in the history of the Irish State. Ireland’s response to asylum seekers mirrored the wider EU ‘Fortress Europe’ one. Asylum seekers invoked rights under UN Conventions to seek refuge from their countries of origin. The barriers raised by

receiving countries, including Ireland, included not just laws against human trafficking but restrictions on the rights to work and social security. The policy of the Irish state, in effect, was to prevent asylum seekers from become embedded in Irish society. The asylum seeker issue was most heavily politicised in the Irish case between 1999 and 2004 by which time the numbers arriving per annum were in decline, due to the impact of a range of deliberately punitive policies. In 2000 asylum seekers were removed from the mainstream social protection system and most social policy responsibility for them was handed over to the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), the aim being that asylum seekers would be cordoned off from the rest of the population in terms of where they were required to live and in terms of the economic resources available to them. Because of the common travel area within the European Union there was something of a race to the bottom in the treatment of asylum seekers whereby countries competed to be the least attractive destination for migrants seeking protections they were entitled to under the UN Convention on the Rights of Refugees.

A second phase of immigration policy followed on from this focus on asylum seekers. It culminated in the 2004 Referendum on Citizenship. It began with a legal challenge to a 1987 High Court interpretation (*Fajouou v. Minister of Justice*) of the Constitution. The 1987 ruling had blocked the deportation of non-citizens who had an Irish citizen child. The ruling had subsequently allowed for the regularisation of a significant number of asylum seekers and other immigrants with Irish born children. A DJELR 'policy decision' was made to begin to refuse leave to remain to asylum seeker families in the knowledge that this would trigger a further test case. In April 2002 the 1987 ruling was overturned in the High Court (*Lobe v. Minister of Justice*). On 23 January 2003 the Supreme Court upheld this ruling, in essence holding that the Irish citizen child of non-citizens could be deported with its parents unless the non-citizen parent agreed to be deported without their child. This ruling was effectively superseded by the June 2004 Referendum on Citizenship that removed the existing birthright to citizenship from the Irish-born children of non-citizens. Until 2004 Irish responses to immigration were to a considerable extent dominated by security perspectives, specifically influenced by expanding remit of the DJELR for asylum policy, 'reception and integration' and 'immigration and naturalisation.'

In this context the near-simultaneous decision to remove visa requirements from the 10 EU Accession States, which hugely increased the number of immigrants coming to Ireland might seem surprising. Ireland had become radically open to immigration but at the same time made it considerably harder for migrants to become Irish citizens. A neo-liberal approach to immigration, which welcomed migrants able to participate in the labour market and which rejected asylum seekers who were not permitted to work, somehow co-existed with citizenship policies that deepened distinctions between 'nationals' and 'non-nationals.'

Within Irish responses to immigration two sets of rules of belonging might be identified. One has pertained to ethnicity and was institutionalised within citizenship - Irish citizens being predominately white, Catholic and members of the same ethnic group. 80 per cent of these voted in 2004 to remove the birth-right to Irish citizenship from the Irish born children of immigrants who were not of Irish extraction. The 2004 Referendum was portrayed by the government as a means to achieve 'common-sense citizenship', the idea being that Irish-born children had previously become Irish citizens at birth because of a loophole on the Constitution. Yet, at the same time, proposals to radically open Ireland to migrants from the new EU states, resulting in perhaps the greatest act of social engineering in since the seventeenth century plantations, provoked little or no political response. To understand why this was the case there is a need to distinguish between cultural and economic phases of nation-building and rise to dominance of the latter. Before and after independence Irish nationalism fostered cultural (Gaelic) and ethnic (Catholic) conceptions of

Irishness. However, the perception that cultural nationalism singularly failed to secure the economic welfare of Irish people after independence became deeply embedded and fostered a new economic nation-building project that was several decades underway before it reached its apotheosis during the years of the Celtic Tiger.

Immigration and the Pursuit of Economic Growth

After independence the dominant sense of what it was to be Irish drew heavily on a nineteenth century cultural 'revival. What is referred to as the 'Irish-Ireland' phase of political nation-building persisted for several decades after independence. The Irish Free State became increasingly isolationist. Its education system was preoccupied with the intergenerational reproduction of culture (Irish language) and religion (the Catholic faith). The post-colonial Ireland influenced by cultural nationalism was protectionist and isolationist. From the 1950s the 'Irish-Ireland' nation-building project became contested by a developmental national project that both fostered an open economy and the expansion of 'human capital' through education. Whilst the rhetoric of cultural nationalism persisted it no longer influenced economic policy. The national interest came to be defined principally in terms of economic growth. This shift in emphasis has been generally traced to the publication of *Economic Development* (1958), written by T.K. Whitaker, the civil servant in charge of the Department of Finance. The seminal Irish government/OECD report *Investment in Education* (1965) emphasized what Denis O'Sullivan referred to as a new 'mercantile' cultural trajectory (O'Sullivan, 2005: 272-4). *Investment in Education* made the case for educational reform to support the economic development objectives. The early developmentalists emphasised the need for individuals to internalise new rules of belonging. In 1964 Garret FitzGerald maintained that *Economic Development* and subsequent attempts at planning 'more than anything provided a psychological basis for economic recovery' insofar as it helped to radically alter the unconscious attitude of many influential people and to make Ireland a growth-orientated community (Fitzgerald, 16: 250). In influential academic accounts - exemplified by Tom Garvin's *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland so poor for so long?* - modernizers came to triumph over a history of economic failure, emigration and cultural stagnation (Gavin, 2005: 170). For critics of these, developmentalism proposed a simplistic and uncritical narrative of progress towards social liberalism, secularism, meritocracy and economic growth.

Investment in Education noted that some 82 per cent of Irish-born UK residents had left school aged 15 or earlier. Those who emigrated during the 1950s and early 1960s were predominantly young, from agricultural backgrounds and from unskilled or semi-skilled labouring families. Even in the mid-1960s over two thirds of recent male emigrants became manual workers. During the 1970s return migrants were predominantly aged between 30-44 years. Available evidence suggests that just 28 per cent of male returnees were unskilled manual workers (Rothman and O'Connell, 2003: 53). For those unable to improve their skills abroad emigration was most likely a one-way ticket. Emigration in a sense came to be presented as developmental. It afforded those without the skills needed to find employment in Ireland the opportunity to become eligible for return. As put in 1987 by the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Brian Lenihan:

We regard emigrants as part of our global generation of Irish people. We should be proud of them. The more they hone their skills and talents in another environment, the more they develop a work ethic in countries like Germany or the U.S, the better it can be applied to Ireland when they return (cited in McLoughlin, 2000: 332).

Such accounts presented migration as an expression of agency and enterprise, 'conceptualising the 'new wave' emigrant as a geographically mobile *homo economicus* logically moving between one labour market and the other, the embodiment of an Irish enterprise culture.' An apparent radical openness of Irish society to immigration became a two way street whereby both large-scale emigration and large-scale immigration could be simultaneously presented as in the national economic interest. Within policy documents and popular discourse the same developmental rules of belonging came to be applied to both immigrants and emigrants as Ireland became radically open to migration in both directions. These emphasised human capital and utilitarian criteria, such as being able to speak English, rather than ethnicity or culture.

In a 7 July 2005 interview in the *Irish Independent*, the chief executive of Oracle, one of the largest high tech American multinationals in Ireland, quipped that that Celtic Tiger prosperity and immigration went 'hand in paw.' Oracle reported \$600 million profits in Ireland in 2004 and sales out of Ireland of \$2.45 billion between May 2004 and May 2005. It employed around 920 people in North Dublin. Just 55 per cent of them were Irish, with 32 percent from the rest of the EU and 12 per cent non-EU citizens. The non-EU proportion of the workforce was reported as growing rapidly. The focus of the interview was on the need to recruit migrant workers with skills that were in short supply in Ireland. This business case for immigration was accepted by other social partners, including the trade unions. In 2006 the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), the social partnership think tank, published a cost-benefit analysis of immigration prepared on its behalf by the International Organisation on Migration (IOM). *Managing Migration in Ireland: A Social and Economic Analysis* was primarily focused on labour market policy. The report strongly advocated on-going immigration as a means of sustaining economic growth:

Immigration has been an important element in the economic and social development of Ireland... That migrant labour helped fuel and support the Celtic Tiger is indisputable (NESC, 2006: 6).

Immigration was not the cause of the Irish economic miracle, but it can help to sustain the Celtic Tiger's economic growth. As Ireland grapples with the 'problem' of managing migration on its journey to an uncertain destination, it is important to remember that immigration reflects Irish prosperity. Despite the problems associated with managing immigration and integration, there are likely few Irish who would want to go back to the 'old days' in which emigration rather than immigration was the dominant theme (NESC, 2006: 94)

Managing Migration argued that from the 1960s and 1970s government policies concerning trade liberalisation and foreign direct investment began to improve the domestic economic situation and hence, eventually, reversed the net loss of population due to migration. Weak economic performance during the 1980s was accompanied by a net outflow of migrants, a trend that was reversed in the mid-to-late 1990s. Economic growth during the 1990s saw the rapid expansion of the labour force from about 1.4 million in 1994 to just over 2 million in

2005. This increased labour demand was met initially by Irish nationals who had been previously unemployed or outside the labour market, the by returning Irish migrants and as these reduced as a proportion of in-migration by non-Irish migrants; by 2004 Irish returnees constituted less than 25 per cent of total immigrants. *Managing Migration* claimed that on-going immigration was likely to make Irish society more resilient and adaptive:

With Irish growth rates and employment projected in the near future to follow the impressive trend set during the last decade, migration will certainly remain a key feature allowing the labour market to react to changes in demand and further boosting Irish competitiveness. As such, Irish unemployment is expected to remain low, especially compared to other EU countries. This will be a significant advantage to Ireland in the expanded European Union (NESC, 2006: 93).

In effect, the report endorsed large-scale immigration whilst inferring that ‘in the unlikely event of economic downturn’ immigration levels could be controlled. However the kind of measures suggested (limiting work visas to areas of labour market shortage) could only ever apply to non-EU migrants (NESC, 2006: xx). With respect to these *Managing Migration* endorsed selection criteria based on education-levels and skills. The report argued that following the example of Canada and Australia in setting language and educational criteria for admission would result in significantly improved integration outcomes. Immigrants would be expected to ‘invest’ in these factors prior to applying to entry. This would ‘shift the burdens of settlement (i.e. the cost of public and private integration programmes) from the host country back to the would-be-immigrants, and shifts the locus of adjustment from the country of destination back to the country of origin (NESC, 2006: 14).’ In essence it was proposed to accept, where possible, only those migrants with the capabilities to adhere to developmental criteria.

Such responses to immigration expressed an institutional elite consensus (NESC was the policy organisation of social partnership) that defined the national interest primarily in terms of economic growth. The politicians and economists on Irish radio programmes who dominated debates on social policy sometimes referred to the Republic of Ireland as ‘Ireland PLC.’ In this context debates on immigration and on the integration of immigrants focused mostly on the economy. In effect a migrant was deemed to be integrated if she was in paid employment. But the same presumption held for Irish citizens. The expectation that those who became displaced from the economy should consider emigration applied to Irish citizens as much as to immigrants. Debates on the cultural implications of immigration attracted little interest outside academic and NGO circles. In Ireland culture, however defined, had long become relegated to the private sphere and the economy had in effect become the public sphere.

Legacies and Challenges

The immigrant population who arrived during the economic boom were better educated than the host population. Comparative data for 2001 found that just one OECD country (Canada) had a higher percentage than Ireland of migrants with third level qualifications (OECD, 2007, Figure. 2). An analysis of 2006 census data for Dublin found that migrants had increased overall educational levels in all electoral areas (Figure 3).

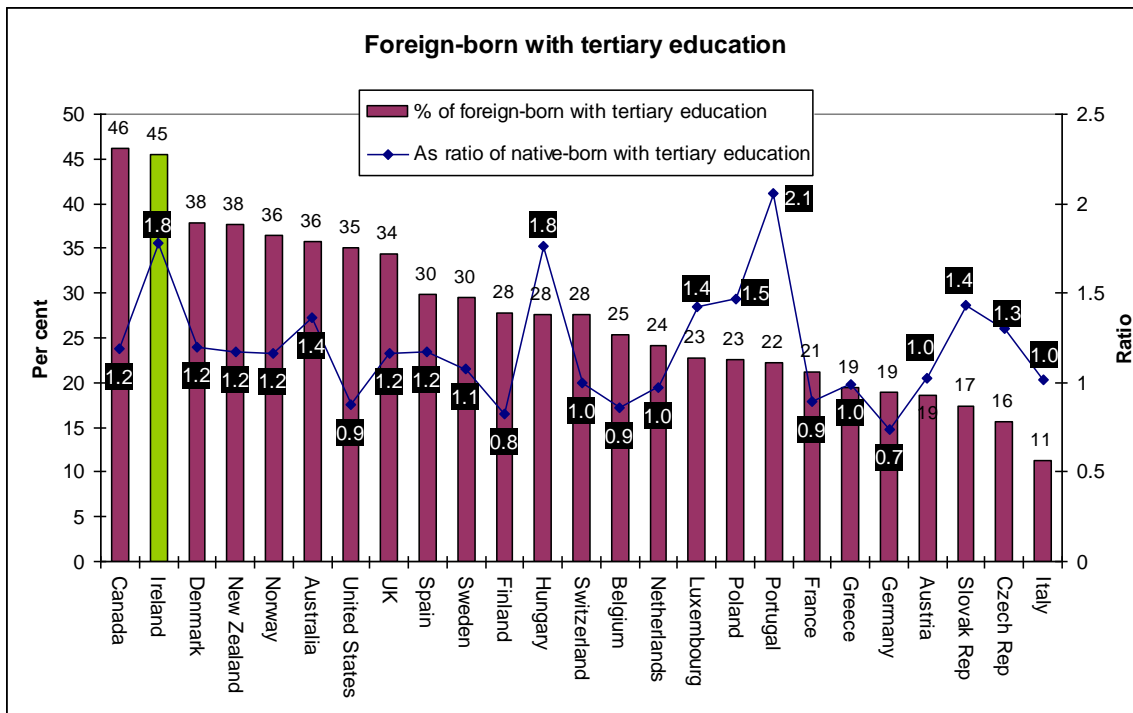


Figure 2. Educational qualifications of foreign-born in OECD countries around 2001 (Source: OECD 2007)

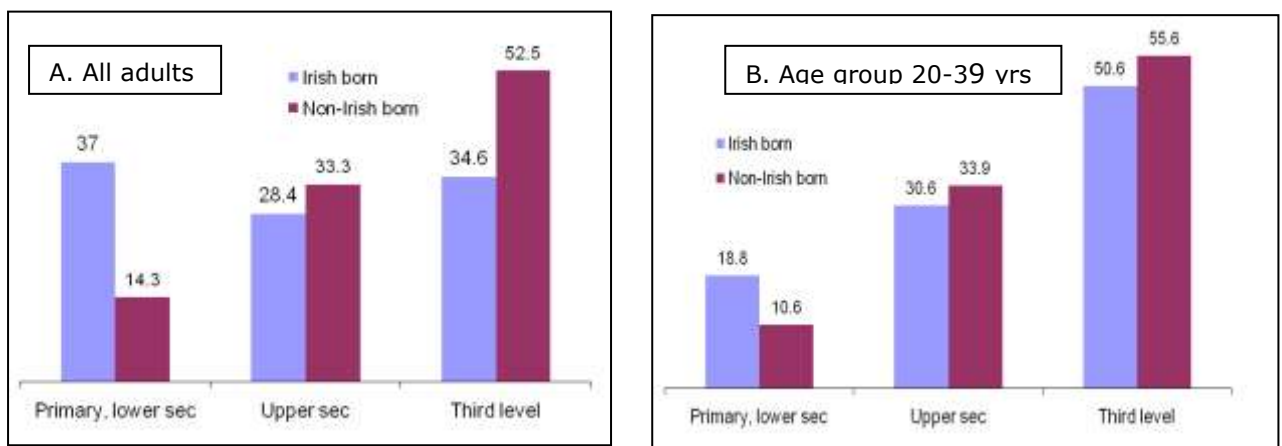


Figure 3. Educational profile of Irish/UK and non-Irish/UK born, Dublin 2006

Source: 2006 Census of Population 5% Sample of Anonymised Records (COPSAR). Source Fahey and Fanning (2010)

Yet, analyses of how migrants have fared in the Irish job market during the economic boom identified a tendency for migrants to obtain lower wages than similarly qualified members of the host population and disproportionately high rates of unemployment amongst black emigrants (Barrett, McGuinness and O'Brien, 2008). Explanations have emphasised racism in the case of black immigrants who at the height of the boom were several times more likely to be unemployed than white people living in Ireland.

An ESRI study of immigrants in the labour market drawing on 2004 (Quarterly National Household Survey and 2005 (a dedicated Survey of Migrant Experiences of Racism and Discrimination in Ireland) found far lower employment rates amongst black respondents than amongst Irish nationals. Unemployment rates amongst black respondents were found to be nine times higher than amongst Irish citizens (O'Connell and McGinnity, 2008:ix). The 2006 census found that that 41 per cent of Nigerian-born migrants were educated to degree level or higher.

A 2005 survey conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) of non-EU migrants' experiences of racism and discrimination in Ireland found that black Sub Saharan Africans (hereafter Africans) were more likely than any other respondents (35%) to experience harassment on the street, on public transport and public places. Findings are based on returned questionnaires from 345 work permit holders and from 430 asylum seekers. Amongst those with work permits 32 percent of African respondents had experienced insults or other forms of harassment at work. Africans also reported higher levels of discrimination in access to work (34.5%) than other respondents. The ESRI study was conducted on behalf of the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. It concluded that 'even after controlling for other factors like education, age and length of stay' black Africans experienced the most institutional racism as well as the most racism and discrimination in the work domain, in public places and in pubs and restaurants. Some 47.7 percent of African respondents had third level education; this was in keeping with the results of the 2006 census. Some 44 percent of asylum seeker respondents had a third level education. The ESRI findings were that highly educated respondents were significantly more likely to experience discrimination in employment than other respondents (McGinnity, O'Connell, Quinn and Williams, 2006).

A 2009 survey undertaken by GALLUP on behalf of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) found that 73 percent of Sub-Saharan African respondents in Ireland believed that discrimination based on ethnic or immigrant origin was widespread in the country. Ireland was also found to be amongst the worst five amongst the 27 EU member states where people of African origin had experienced racist crime or victimisation such as theft, assault or harassment (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2009). Research on experiences of racist violence, harassment and anti-social behaviour undertaken in 2011 by the Immigrant Council of Ireland vindicates these findings and suggests that responses to such racism by local government and the Gardaí have been inadequate (Fanning, Killoran and Ní Bhroin, 2011).

There has been little concerted effort by the Irish state to promote the integration of immigrants. Following the 2007 general election the Fianna Fáil and Green Party coalition government appointed a Minister of State for Integration policy who in 2008 launched a report *Migration Nation* outlining the government's integration vision. The report stated that Ireland had experienced large-scale immigration because of the strategy of developmental modernisation that had been followed since the 1960s (Government of Ireland, 2008: 8). His two successors before the 2011 election introduced no further initiatives and the Office of the Minister of State for Integration was, in effect, wound down. Irish approaches to the integration of immigrants can be best summarised as benign neglect. But a thin conception of integration has also applied to Irish citizens. *Migration Nation* drew heavily on EU common

basic principles of integration that emphasised economic participation and being able to speak the host country language.

In this context the most crucial measure of integration is citizenship. Most of Ireland's immigrant population have by now lived in the country for several years. Sometimes these are referred to as the 'new Irish' but given that only citizens can vote in general elections, change laws and alter the constitution, there is a case for making an analytical distinction between immigrants who have become Irish citizens and those who have not. The former, a relatively small but growing number, are empirically Irish – it says so on their passports. These mostly originate from countries outside the EU. The reason for this is that citizens of EU countries enjoy reciprocal rights to employment, social security benefits, rights to third level education and free movement and therefore are less motivated to naturalise than migrants from outside the EU whose status in Ireland has often been more precarious.

It is a matter of concern that most of Ireland's immigrant population are not likely to become Irish citizens. Several percent of the total population are likely to remain excluded from political representation and there will be little impetus to listen to or respond to their concerns. In recent years NGOs have campaigned to remove institutional barriers to the naturalisation of immigrants who had applied for Irish citizenship. In 2009 an estimated 47 percent of applications for citizenship were turned down when equivalent rates of refusal in the United Kingdom and Australia for the same period were just 9 per cent and in Canada just 3 per cent.

The Irish State has adopted a more proactive naturalisation policy since the 2011 election with the result that it proved much easier to become an Irish citizen during economic crisis than during the Celtic Tiger era. 63,900 applications for naturalisation were approved between 1 January 2009 and 31 May 2013, most of these following the 2011 change of government. 24,263 (97.6%) out of a total of 29,412 applications for naturalisation considered in 2013 were granted. Just 716 (2.4%) were refused. Of those who became Irish citizens that year 5,792 were immigrants from Nigeria, 3,009 were from India, 2,486 were from the Philippines, 1,807 were from Pakistan and 695 were from the Ukraine (O'Connell and Joyce, 2014).

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