

Ireland: from Emigration to Immigration

Ireland: A history of Emigration

The history of Ireland since the 1800s has largely been one of emigration. The extent of Irish emigration is reflected in a few broad statistics.



- There are approximately 60 million people worldwide who claim Irish descent.
- The population of the island of Ireland fell from 8.5 million in 1841 to 4.3 million in 1921. A staggering 4.5 million Irish men, women and children emigrated during this period.
- In the years 1851-60, 1.2 million left the country.
- The period 1861-70 saw a further 818,000 people emigrate.
- This exodus continued at a slower pace in the twentieth century, yet up to 1971 the net migration figure was 1.5 million.

Nineteenth century Irish migration was largely to the 'New World'. From 1861 to 1921 it is estimated that as many as 60% of all Irish emigrants went to the United States. During the same period, Canada and Australia respectively took 12% and 5% of Irish emigrants. From the 1920s onwards, Irish emigration was largely to Great Britain. Irish emigration to the UK peaked in the 1940s and 1950s.



By 1961 the population of the Irish Republic had declined to an all-time low of 2.8 million. While the Irish Famine 1845-48 accounted for significant population decline, later emigration was driven by Ireland's lagging economic development. It was only in 1996 that Ireland reached its migration 'turning point', making it the last EU Member State to become a country of net immigration.

Recent Emigration from Ireland to the United States

Over the course of the 1980s it is estimated that somewhere in the region of 150,000 Irish people went to live and work illegally in the US. High unemployment and a weak economy at home forced thousands of young Irish people to Ireland in search of work in both the UK and the US. Many Irish emigrants to the US travelled on holiday visas and stayed on to work in the 'black economy' when their visas expired. Such was the concern in Ireland at the plight of these Irish 'illegals' in America that many Irish politicians, including Government Ministers, lobbied the US authorities for these undocumented Irish immigrants to be given legal residency.

This lobbying proved very successful and resulted in approximately 48,000 residency permits going to Irish people many of whom had been living and working illegally in the US.

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Some people interviewed called ing."

Amnesty call for our 70,000 illegal U.S. emigrants


By JOHN WALSH

THE GOVERNMENT should seek an "amnesty" for the estimated 70,000 young Irish who have illegally emigrated to the United States since 1980, Fianna Fail front bencher Bertie Ahern urged last night.

Although official sources strongly deny the figure is anything approaching 70,000, deputy Ahern said the Government was playing down the number supposedly because it did not want to draw attention to the Irish illegal.

"But everyone knows they are there, including the American immigration authorities," said the Opposition spokesman on labour and public service who has just returned from the United States.

The real reason for not admitting to the problem, suggested Deputy Ahern, was because it would mean admitting that Government economic and job creation policies had failed.



Bertie Ahern . . . back from US visit.

As well as seeking an amnesty for those already there Ireland should also campaign for legal entitlement to more emigrants, he suggested.

At present we are officially entitled to 20,000 emigrant places each

itled to 20,000 places, last year only 1,223 were allocated to Irish applicants. The year before the legal allowance was 1,102 and only 946 in 1982.

But it is not only the Irish who have suffered as a result of the quota system introduced in 1965 with its restrictive clauses. From that year to 1981 there was a massive decrease of 680 p.c. in Europeans legally emigrating to the States.

This contrasts sharply with the increased numbers coming into the States from Asia and Latin America, many of them refugees.

Organisations such as the Ancient Order of

Since the economic downturn in 2007/8 emigration has once again become a feature of life in Ireland, and Irish Ministers are once again campaigning on behalf of Irish ‘illegals’ in the US. However, all calls for similar measures for undocumented migrants in Ireland have been continually ignored by the Irish Government who continue to rigidly apply Irish immigration rules to foreign nationals in Ireland.

Asylum-Seekers in Ireland: Creating a ‘Suspect Community’

By the mid-1990s the Republic of Ireland saw a significant rise in the numbers of people seeking asylum here. Up to this stage the level of asylum applications in this State was less than 100 per year. The table below gives an indication of asylum applications across some of the EU States during 1989-2001:

Country	1989	1992	1995	1999	2001
Austria	21,882	16,238	5,919	20,130	30,135
Belgium	8,112	17,647	11,420	35,777	24,549
Denmark	5,282	20,071	10,055	6,530	12,512
France	61,422	28,872	20,170	30,833	47,263
Germany	121,318	438,191	127,937	95,113	88,363
Ireland	N/A	39	424	7,724	10,324
Holland	13,900	20,346	29,258	39,300	32,579
Spain	4,077	11,708	5,678	8,405	9,219
Sweden	30,335	84,018	9,047	11,231	23,513
UK	14,920	19,130	56,360	91,200	88,200
EU Total	286,701	668,472	280,156	387,097	374,129

Despite the relative low numbers of asylum-seekers in Ireland there was considerable unease generated by sections of the Irish media, and by statements made by some Irish politicians including Government Ministers. Public opinion was shaped by a cluster of beliefs which viewed Ireland as experiencing a flood of ‘bogus refugees’ who were here to exploit the Irish welfare system. In the Irish print media the ‘flood’ metaphor developed over a considerable period of time and was used extensively in many newspapers in both broadsheet and tabloid formats. Articles linking the rising levels of asylum applications with the housing shortage, and with increased pressures on Irish maternity hospitals contributed to the dispersal of the ‘flood’ metaphor. The process of criminalising asylum-seekers was also evident in numerous sensationalist reports on asylum-seeker involvement in criminal activity.

Although not explicitly stated, that many of those seeking asylum were ‘bogus refugees’ was implicit in much of the print media coverage from 1997 onwards and created an attitude of suspicion around asylum-seekers. The then Minister for Justice, John O’Donoghue, was quoted as saying (Irish Times 15/4/1998) that ‘international experience showed that at most 10 per cent of asylum-seekers would be found to be refugees when their cases were

examined’. Such statements, in advance of the applications being processed, suggested a very prejudicial mindset within the Department of Justice in Ireland. It is difficult to avoid concluding that the overriding contribution of the Irish media in the debate on asylum was to create a climate of fear and suspicion. In these circumstances, the open expression of hostility towards asylum-seekers was at the very least made easier. It may also have been encouraged.

Asylum Applications in Ireland 1999-2011

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
7724	10938	10325	11634	7900	4766	4323	4314	3985	3866	2689	1939	1250

It is interesting to note that many of the newspaper reports on Irish emigrants at the time were to use terminology like ‘floods’ and ‘tides’. However, these terms were generally used in a manner sympathetic to these Irish migrants. These same terms would later be used in Ireland in relation to the increased numbers of asylum-seekers arriving in Ireland in the later 1990s. However, when this terminology was used about asylum-seekers it served to generate public concern and antipathy at their arrival here. Despite our history, it seems that being a nation of emigrants did not generate empathy with people seeking refuge or a better life here. It could be argued that sections of the Irish media, Irish politicians (including Government Ministers) effectively made asylum-seekers a ‘suspect community’ in the minds of many ordinary Irish people. In fact, the term ‘economic migrant’ was frequently used to disparage asylum-seekers. The fact that virtually all Irish emigrants to the UK and the US were also economic migrants was conveniently forgotten in the anti-asylum-seeker vitriol of the time. Unlike many other EU countries, Ireland refused to permit asylum-seekers the right to work if their case had not been processed after six months.

Direct Provision

Since 2000, all people seeking asylum in Ireland are housed in special accommodation centres. Up to then asylum-seekers usually lived in rented accommodation, primarily in Dublin, and received the same social welfare as Irish people. In 2000 the Irish Government introduced adopted a policy of *Dispersion* and *Direct Provision*. Under these new arrangements, asylum-seekers were dispersed around the country to live in designated *Direct Provision Centres*. There is great variation in the type of accommodation provided in these Centres, which include mobile homes (Athlone), chalets (Mosney), and former hotels/hostels. Meals are provided and asylum-seekers receive €19.10 ‘pocketmoney’ each week (or half that for a child).

Direct Provision has been the focus of criticism by many NGOs working with asylum-seekers. As people in the asylum-system are not allowed to work or study the regime is one of enforced idleness. Asylum-seekers have virtually no control over any aspect of their lives

and cannot, for example, choose what, when or where to eat. Living space is cramped with families living in one small room. Unmarried asylum-seekers are usually obliged to share their small bedrooms with up to three others who may not even speak the same language. There is also a great fear among residents that complaints will result in their being removed to another part of the country or that it will have an adverse effect on the application for asylum. Not surprisingly, the levels of depression or other mental health issues are high among asylum-seekers.

The cost of keeping an asylum-seeker in *Direct Provision* is approximately €70,000 per annum. Despite the fact that it would be far cheaper to provide rent allowance and social welfare the Irish Government refuses to consider changing the system. In effect, *Direct Provision* is designed to act as a deterrent to others who might consider seeking asylum in Ireland.

Having created an aura of suspicion around asylum-seekers, the Irish State has incarcerated them in what can only be described as open prisons. Most asylum-seekers will spend at least several years in *Direct Provision Centres*, and there are many who have been there for more than seven years. A number of asylum-seekers have been had their lives 'on-hold' in this way for between 9-12 years, effectively making them institutionalised.

Ireland's Refugee Recognition Rate

Ireland has the lowest refugee recognition rate across the twenty-seven EU States. The recognition rate in Ireland is now less than 1.5%. This very low recognition rate has drawn the criticism of organisations like the UNHCR.

Irish Emigrants to the UK in the 1980s/90s

Thousands of Irish people continued to emigrate to the UK in search of work in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Some of these emigrants arrived in the UK with very little money and were often obliged to get rent allowance and a range of social welfare benefits in order to survive. The free travel arrangements meant that Irish migrants could travel to the UK without being subject to immigration controls and were entitled to the same welfare benefits as British citizens. The large numbers of Irish people living on social welfare in the UK was not always welcomed by some British newspapers.



Inward Migration

It was only in the later 1990s that Ireland began to experience significant immigration. Comparing the Republic of Ireland to other EU countries underlines the dramatic changes that occurred in Irish society over a relatively short period. Until the late 1990s the Irish Republic was an almost mono-cultural society. By 2006 the diversity of this country matched that of other European countries. This dramatic change occurred within 10-15 years. In effect this demographic change was 'telescoped' into a much shorter timeframe.

From 1990 to 1994, the Republic was the only Member State with a negative net migration rate according to the EU statistical agency Eurostat. By 2007, the Irish Republic had the third highest migration rate across the 27 EU Member States – 14.5 migrants per 1,000 inhabitants – surpassed only by Spain and Cyprus.

The Irish Republic experienced dramatic increases in immigration flows (which includes returning Irish citizens) from the mid-1990s but most markedly after the 2004 EU enlargement. Flows peaked in 2006-07 at well over 100,000 immigrants per year, before dropping off in 2008.

Among the various categories of non-EU nationals coming to Ireland in the past decade, the great majority have been workers (about 280,000 work permits were issued in the period

1998-2008), followed by asylum-seekers (74,000 applications were made between 1998 and 2008), and students and dependents.



The number of foreign-born persons living in the Republic of Ireland rose from 6% in 1991 to over 10% in 2006. In Dublin, over 15% of residents were foreign nationals in 2006.

Given its geographical location, without any land borders with migrant-sending nations, the level of undocumented migration to the Republic of Ireland is likely to be fairly low.

The foreign student population has also grown rapidly in recent years. During 2008, just under 45,000 immigration (registration) stamps were issued to students from outside European Economic Area (EEA), which includes Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Lichtenstein in addition to EU Member States.

2011 Census

The 2011 Census showed that foreign-born persons made up 17% of the population.

The number of people born outside the Republic of Ireland but living here increased by 25% to 766,770 in the period 2006-2011. This occurred despite the decline in the economy and confirmed the Irish Republic as a destination of choice for people from a wide range of countries.

Polish nationals (122,585) overtook those from the UK (112,259) as the largest non-Irish group living in the State. Overall, 544,357 non-Irish nationals were living here at the time of the 2011 census.

The sharpest percentage increases in non-Irish-born residents were among Romanians (up by 110%), with the population more than doubling from 8,566 to 17,995, following EU accession in 2007. This figure, however, does not differentiate between non-Roma Romanians and those of Romani extraction. The next largest percentage increase was that of people from India, where the community living here grew by 91% to 17,856.

Unsurprisingly, the largest rise in overall terms was among the Polish-born community which grew from 63,090 to 115,193 (up 83%) in the period.