

Ireland - North & South comparison

SCI commissioned studies on Public Attitudes to Refugee Protection and Immigration in Ireland (Republic) and Northern Ireland in the pre-Pandemic period. These studies interviewed a random selection of people, whose responses were analysed on the basis of their values and beliefs, allowing segmentation of attitudinal clusters. This provides the findings with a longer-term validity than standard opinion polls.

Introduction

People in both Ireland (Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland feel that their country/region is welcoming, tolerant and optimistic. They express a strong sense of compassion and generally avoid xenophobic political discourse, but there is still evidence that Irish attitudes to people who are refugees or migrants is influenced by issues of race and/or religion. Overall, people do not see immigration as a priority issue as compared to concerns about healthcare, housing, crime/violence, and in Northern Ireland, the implications of Brexit.

Analysis of the responses highlights major differences in the attitudes of clusters of people who hold various views about the impact of immigration and refugee protection. 17% in the Republic and 16% in the North express their opposition to immigration although arguably motivated by different reasons.

There is a sizeable sceptical cluster, both North and South, that query the allocation of perceived scarce public

resources and who can shift to either a closed or open position on immigration issues. Then there are the 45% of people in Northern Ireland and 49% in the Republic that are either very welcoming or are open to immigration, although may have some questions on the subject.

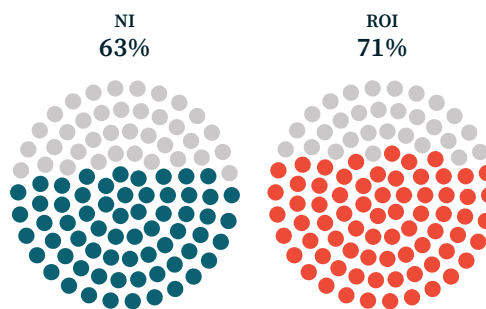
The study concludes that:

- Views about migrants and refugees are often based on received information and/or misinformation rather than on human contact. Engagement to address misinformation remains important as do opportunities to increase contact
- There is particular openness to both accept and care for children and unaccompanied minors.
- There is overall agreement that there should be a welcome for people who come to Ireland/Northern Ireland, learn the language, work hard and contribute to society.

How do people feel about themselves?

Pride in their identity

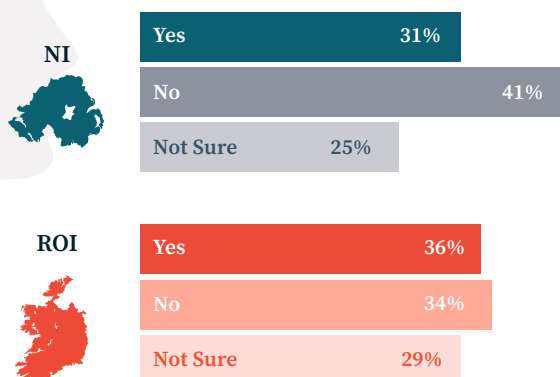
How people feel about themselves influences how they feel about others. In the Republic of Ireland, 71% are proud to be Irish, although 46% expressed the view that they can 'feel like a stranger in their own country' at times. The issue of identity in Northern Ireland is more complex, although 63% said they are proud of their identity, with just over one-third expressing the view that they can 'feel like a stranger in their own country'.



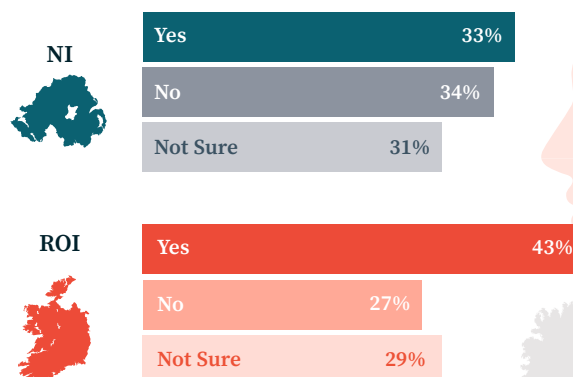
Views on ability to contribute to society

A wide range of different views are held as to whether people feel that they have a say in politics or society and whether they believe that it is increasingly difficult for them to do well in Ireland/Northern Ireland.

Feel they have a say

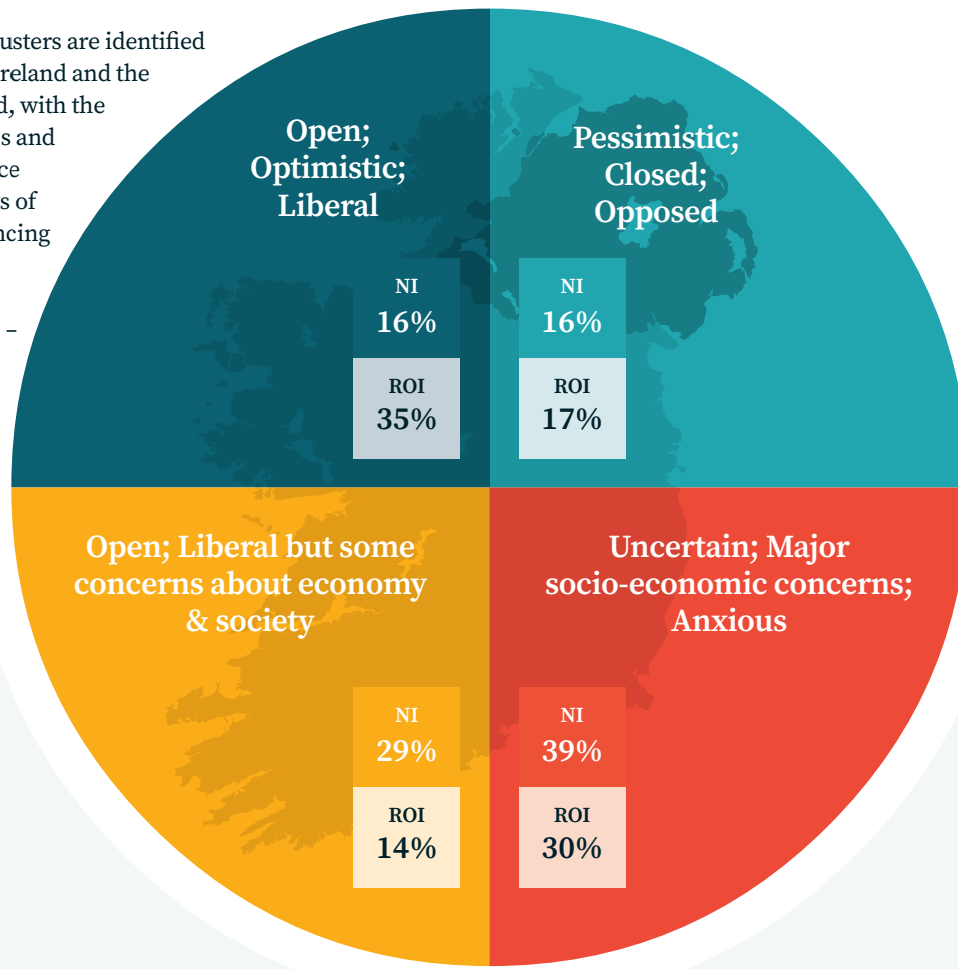


It is increasingly difficult for someone like me to do well?



Population Clusters

Four population clusters are identified in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the hopes, fears, values and personal experience shaping their views of society and influencing their attitudes to immigration and refugee protection –



‘Open’ clusters, both North and South, are optimistic and welcoming to refugees and migrants, valuing the cultural diversity that they bring. In the Republic they reflect the demographic composition of the population as a whole in terms of gender, age, educational attainment and social class. There is a grouping – ‘**Uncertain Hopefuls**’ (14%), mainly men with young families, that are liberal but express some concerns about the future of the economy, the educational system and church/state relations. In Northern Ireland the most open group are ‘**Confident Modernists**’ (16%) who are mainly younger women. Their priorities include women’s and LGBTQ rights and they are worried about racism and discrimination. The ‘**Uncertain Pragmatist**’ cluster in Northern Ireland (29%) are older and more established middle class. They have concerns about community division and the future of the economy. Both the ‘**Confident Modernists**’ and the ‘**Uncertain Pragmatists**’ are positive about migration, but express deep concerns about the impact of Brexit.

The ‘Closed’ cluster in both parts of the island is very critical of immigration and refugee protection for different reasons. In the North, the ‘**Concerned Traditionalists**’ (16%) tend to be older men from the Unionist tradition who are concerned about change and are likely to identify with conservative politics and politics. Those most fearful about immigration in the South are more likely to be people with poor educational attainment and that are feeling the brunt of economic marginalisation (17%). They are exceptionally pessimistic about the Irish economy and society and fear loss of identity. Politically they are more likely to cast a protest vote than necessarily adopting a right-wing position.

The ‘**Sceptics**’ (30%) in the Republic and the ‘**Socially Concerned**’ (39%) in Northern Ireland form a group collectively known as the **anxious middle**. They lie between the Open and Closed segments, tending to spontaneously express concerns about the impact of migration but are not overly racist or anti-immigration in sentiment. Their worries are whether there is enough public services to provide for everyone and whether they and their families might lose out. They also question whether increased diversity is resulting in a loss of traditional identity. In Northern Ireland, this segment is largely working class and middle aged, with lower educational attainment. In the Republic, those that express these views are more in line with the general population in terms of social class and educational attainment. The **anxious middle** is predominantly female in both parts of the island and is open to misinformation about the entitlement of refugees and migrants. Given their focus on social and economic issues, this is important.

What values are important to people?



Compassion:

54% in Northern Ireland believe compassion to be an important virtue (16% disagreed). Comparative figures for the Republic is that 46% believe this to be a virtue, with 17% disagreeing.



Fairness:

Fair treatment for all is important in law-making - 66% agreed both North and South (11% disagreed).



Offering Refuge:

70% in the Republic of Ireland and 66% in Northern Ireland say that if they were from another country and fleeing terrible circumstances, they would want Ireland/Northern Ireland to offer protection (7% in the South and 6% in the North disagreed).



Care of Children:

74% of people in both Northern Ireland and the Republic say that no child should grow up undocumented (5% in the North and 6% in the South disagree).



Other:

Only 6% in the Republic and 4% in Northern Ireland identify racism as being a priority issue, although 22% of the younger 'Confident Modernist' cluster in the North express major concerns about racism and discrimination.

What do people fear?

Top three issues facing Ireland (pre Covid-19 pandemic)



Healthcare



Homelessness/
Housing



Crime &
Violence

Top three issues facing Northern Ireland (pre Covid 19 pandemic)



Implications of
Brexit



Healthcare



Threat of
Terrorism

Do they trust institutions?

There are signs that trust in systems and institutions is limited

Rates for people who 'strongly' feel -

- Traditional political parties/politicians don't care about them: 30% (Republic); 35% (Northern Ireland)
- The mainstream media is more interested in making money than telling the truth: 26% (Republic); 30% (Northern Ireland)
- The economy is rigged in the interests of the rich and powerful - 33% (Republic) and 21% (Northern Ireland).

General thoughts on migration

One of the striking findings from the Public Attitude studies was the relatively high levels of people saying that they were 'unsure' or 'did not know' in answer to questions posed. Again, this highlights the importance of accurate and accessible information.



42% thought that the impact of immigrants on Northern Ireland was positive; 46% responding in positive terms in the South. In contrast, 27% in the North and 28% in the Republic saw it as negative, with 27% in the South and 31% in the North being unsure.



When asked about the impact of immigration on the economy, 48% in the Republic felt it was positive, as did 49% in Northern Ireland. 25% (North) and 23% (South) disagreed; and 34% in Northern Ireland/37% in the Republic were unsure.



On the question as to whether immigration is good for cultural life, making society more vibrant, 48% North and South agreed. In Northern Ireland, 24% disagreed, as did 23% in the Republic, whilst 30% in the South and 28% in the North were unsure.



Asked whether immigration is seen as a drain on the welfare state, 39% in Northern Ireland and 42% in the South felt that it is, although 30% both North and South, disagreed. Those that were unsure were 29% in the North and 28% in the South, respectively.

Who do people have strong connections to?

Although many people did not express an opinion on this, across all segments, the strongest connections were first to-

Northern Ireland
57%



Ireland
59%



My Community

NI
57%

ROI
50%

My Workplace

NI
42%

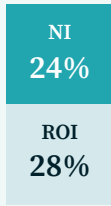
ROI
42%

My favourite
Sports Team

NI
35%

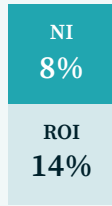
ROI
29%

Views on migration - Connecting with migrants and refugees



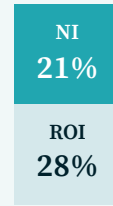
Similarities

It was more likely that people see migrants as being different from themselves (33% expressed this view in the Republic and 38% in Northern Ireland) than being similar – the view expressed by 28% in the Republic and 24% in Northern Ireland.



Family

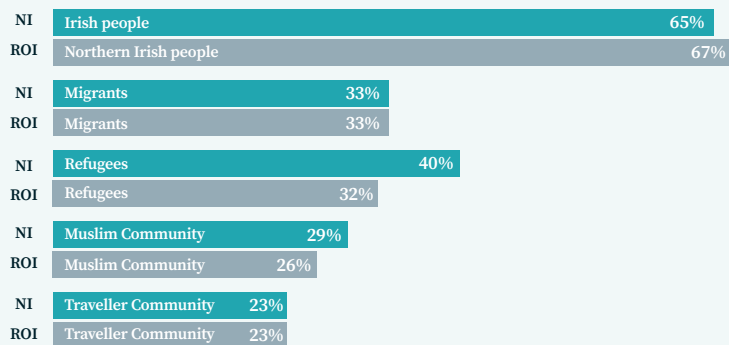
14% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland have a refugee or a migrant as a family member, only 8% in Northern Ireland did.



Friends and Acquaintances

28% of people in the Republic know someone who is a migrant and 11% know a person who is a refugee. Figures in Northern Ireland are 21% of those who know a migrant and 7% who reported knowing a person who is a refugee.

Sense of Warmth towards different communities

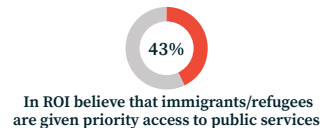
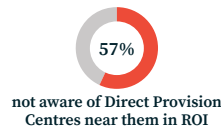
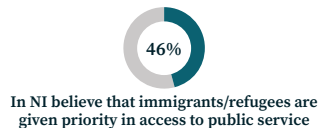
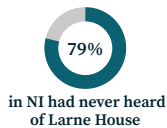


Asked about their sense of warmth towards different categories of people, 67% of Irish people and 65% of Northern Irish expressed a feeling of warmth towards other Irish/Northern Irish people. 33% in both jurisdictions feel warmth towards migrants (with 48% feeling indifferent). In the North, 40% of people feel warm towards refugees, as compared to 32% in the South (46% feel indifferent). In both areas, there is a noticeable cooling of feeling towards members of the Muslim community, with 26% in the Republic and 29% in Northern Ireland expressing warmth and 47% being indifferent. The less warmth of feeling is towards members of the Traveller community, where only 23% of people in both Northern Ireland and the Republic express warmth (45% indifferent).

What are people's thoughts on migration policies?

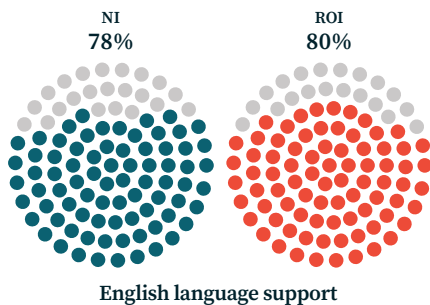
Awareness

There is limited awareness of aspects of the current policies and systems in place to manage migration and refugee protection. 79% in Northern Ireland had never heard of Larne House Detention Centre (Home Office) and 46% believe that immigrants are given priority over other people to access welfare benefits, housing and public services. In the Republic, 57% say they are not aware of Direct Provision Centres near them; whilst 43% feel that immigrants are given priority in access to public services. One in four of those interviewed reject this perception.



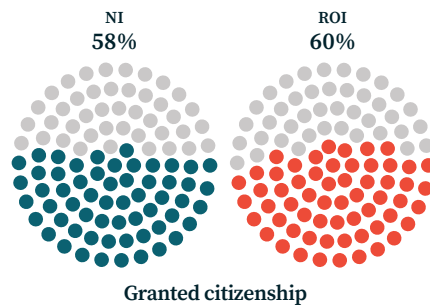
Integration

The importance of learning and speaking English is noted both North and South. 80% in the Republic and 78% in Northern Ireland believe that children who are immigrants or refugees should be provided with English language support.



Citizenship

In the Republic of Ireland 60% agree that people living in Ireland for an extended period of time should be able to become Irish citizens (15% disagreed). In Northern Ireland 58% agreed with this proposition (14% disagreed).



Fact

Compared to other European countries immigration is not seen as such a major or divisive issue in Ireland, but policies and measures to promote effective inclusion and integration still require ongoing attention (Eurobarometer 2018/19). Immigration policies in Northern Ireland remain with the UK Home Office, although policies to promote inclusion and integration fall to the Northern Ireland Executive. Devolved administrations such as Scotland offer a good example of the importance of adopting proactive measures for integration, race equality and dealing effectively with hate crime.

